

Transform Practices: Confession (Freedom)

Here is some guidance on how to adopt the practice of confession into your discipleship to Jesus. These are helpful principles rather than strict steps to follow. The key is to find what works for you; a practice of confession that helps you to walk in freedom from sin.

PRACTICE 1 – JOIN / FORM A DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

If you are not in a discipleship group, we would strongly encourage you to seek one to join or form a new one with two or three other people at a similar stage of the discipleship journey. Confession before God is a helpful regular practice, but the scriptures also encourage us to confess our sins to one another (see James 5:16).

Confession in the context of safe, trusted companions helps us to grow in humility and provides accountability and support. Confession in community also helps to foster deep, trusting, nourishing relationships with one another.

If you would like to join / form a discipleship group, but don't know how to start, speak to one of the elders.

PRACTICE 2 – HOW TO CONFESS

Follow these 5 steps either privately before God or with trusted friends¹

1 EXAMINATION

'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' (Psalm 139:23-24)

Confession begins by taking time to examine our hearts, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to show you where you have sinned, gone your own way, or listened to lies. As things come to mind, you can either name them before God saying, 'Lord I confess my sin of...', or you may find it easier to jot them down and then name them at the end.

If you're finding it hard to identify sin in your heart, look at Appendix A and prayerfully read through the list.

2 SORROW

'As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief...For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death' (2 Cor. 7:9-10)

As you name your sins before God, pause and take a moment to express your sorrow and grief over the offences. The sorrow expressed in confession is not primarily an emotion, though emotion may be involved. Rather it is the decided abhorrence towards the sin and the regret at having offended your Heavenly Father.

3 RECEIVE FORGIVENESS

'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9)

Jesus has done everything needed on the cross to wash away all of your sins. Once you have confessed your sin, receive the promised forgiveness of the Father by faith and rejoice in his amazing grace. To help you do this, you may want to read aloud or reflect on one of the following scriptures: Psalm 32:5, Psalm 103:8-12, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:13-14.

4 REPENTANCE

'...the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'

Once we have confessed our sin and received forgiveness, we must make a determined decision to avoid sin. That decision is called repentance. It is an act of will, a decision of the mind and heart, to turn away from sin and deception and turn towards Jesus.

¹ Adapted from 'Council in the giving of confession' in A Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster.

5	<p>ACCOUNTABILITY</p> <p>‘Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.’</p> <p>When we confess our sins to trusted friends, not only do we break the dominance of that sin over us by bringing it into the light, but we also place ourselves in a more secure place, by asking others to keep us accountable for not returning to sinful thoughts and actions. They can support us by asking us how we’re doing but also by praying for us for healing and freedom.</p>
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PRACTICE 3 – TIPS ON RECEIVING CONFESSION	
The following are some helpful principles for receiving / listening to some confessing their sins ²	
1	<p>Pray for discernment before hearing someone’s confession.</p> <p>Once someone has confessed we want to be able to minister to pray for them and minister to them effectively, by perceiving the real healing needed in their heart.</p>
2	<p>Discipline yourself to be quiet when they are confessing.</p> <p>Don’t try to relieve the tension by making an offhanded comment or a joke, as it’s distracting and even destructive to the sacredness of the moment.</p>
3	<p>Don’t try to pry out more details than necessary.</p> <p>If you feel they are holding something back due to fear or embarrassment, it’s best to wait silently and prayerfully.</p>
4	<p>Pray for them inwardly.</p> <p>send prayers of love and forgiveness toward them. Pray that they will share the “key” that will reveal any area needing the healing touch of Christ.</p>
5	<p>Once they have confessed, pray for them out loud.</p> <p>As you pray declare that the forgiveness that is in Jesus is now real and effective for them. Ask God to heal their heart and mind from any wounds the sin has caused.</p>

APPENDIX A – HELP TO EXAMINE YOUR HEART			
Consider the following list taken from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas A Kempis of what he calls ‘the misery of our passions.’ Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which currently abide in you. WARNING: They are pretty brutal!			
Full of bodily lusts	Unguarded in your outward perceptions	Engrossed in trivial fantasies	
Absorbed in mundane matters	Unconcerned about spiritual matters	Negligent of sorrow and penitence	
Keen for comfort and self-indulgence	Averse to commitment and self-discipline	Reluctant to appreciate humble and simple things	
Greedy for many possessions	Reluctant to give generously	Persistent in possessing	
Unguarded in speaking	Reluctant to remain silent	Disruptive in matters	
Greedy for food	Deaf to the word of God	Alert to gossip	
Hurried in your prayers	Rambling in concentration	Apathetic to the cross	
Lacking in devotion	Easily distracted	Rarely fully attentive	
Suddenly stirred to anger	Quick to take offence	Ready to judge others	
Severe in reprimanding	Only cheerful when all is well	Weak when things go wrong	

² Adapted from ‘Council in the receiving of confession’, Ibid.