



Confession - March 22, 2020

OPEN

Tim Keller writes, "Prayer is a nourishing friendship." Keller goes on to say that, "Nothing but prayer will ever reveal you to yourself, because only before God can you see and become your true self...Prayer is learning who you are before God and giving him your essence. Prayer means knowing yourself as well as God." (*Prayer: Experiencing Awe And Intimacy With God*, Penguin, 2014, 29,30)

Do you think about prayer as tool for self awareness? Of course, prayer is not a self-centered pursuit. Prayer is designed to increase our intimacy with God. But as we grow closer to Him, we will be increasingly aware of how un-like Him we are. And that raises the need for confession, as we learn from the Lord's Prayer.

We have been learning that our prayer journey must be empowered by God. In the last two sermons we made a shift from what we say *to God* in prayer to how we receive *from God*.

- **Contemplation** - moving from the outside to the inside - Robert Foster suggests in his book on prayer that "We now have the dubious distinction of being able to communicate more and say less than any civilization in history." (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, HarperOne, 1992, 155).
- **Listening** - moving from talking to hearing - We wrestled with the fact that whereas we should expect God to answer, we don't always hear His voice. But we must remember that hearing Him is much more dependant upon His grace to speak than our ability to listen.

DIG

This term "confession" may elicit different religious experiences or understandings. You might equate "confession" with "creed" – it is often used in that way. But in much the same way as contemplation and listening, prayer as confession is concerned with the posture of our *hearts*, not just the words we repeat.

In his book on prayer Robert Foster refers to a "prayer of examen" in which we evaluate our *consciousness* of God's presence and our *conscience* in light of God's holiness. As a result, the Holy Spirit will help us see the ways in which we need to confess and seek God's forgiveness.

When it comes to confession, we are talking about acknowledging to God our faults and failures. Please remember that confession is not just beating ourselves up with the rod of regret!

Confession is much better understood as an agreement with God's revelation that we have fallen short or missed the mark of His righteous standard – a condition that is common to all humanity – see **Romans 3:21-23**.

Read **Matthew 6:12** (part of the prayer) and **13-14** (which appears to be a postscript). What we are reading is a plea for pardon from a debt. So you will see translations that use "debts, sins, trespasses". However we translate it, we are talking about the request to be forgiven.

And this highlights two premises for the prayer of confession. Confession only makes sense because cleansing is both *possible* and *essential*. In I John 1:5-9 we learn that there is a vital linkage between standing clean before God and in good fellowship with one another.



What is the basis or reason that God can bring us into a new relationship with Himself? And with others?

Let's consider the tale of two sinners which is only found in Luke 18:9-14 will help us. Why did Luke include this parable? Notice what we read in verse 9:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable...

Jesus didn't tell this story only to challenge the sinful people of society. He also came to help the "I don't need to confess my sins" crowd.

The prayer of the pharisee - vv. 9-12

First, let's notice the prayer of the pharisee. Can you picture his physical posture? What he displayed on the outside provided a window into his heart – though only God can fully know our hearts. Did he make a confession or agreement with God's assessment of him?

No – he believed he was without fault because of his religious accomplishments. Let's not be too hard on first Century pharisees. The pride which comes from “performance based religion” is very seductive and common today.



In what ways can Christians base their relationship with Jesus on acts of religious performance?

The prayer of the publican - vv. 13-14

Next, we read the prayer offered by the publican, which is another name for “tax collector”. Both his words and his posture conveyed humility, authenticity, and confession. Jewish society treated these men with great anger and resentment because they collaborated with the Roman occupation.

Why did this tax collector approach God with such humility? Somewhere and somehow he had encountered the truth of who God is, and the truth about his own evil heart in light of God's holiness. As a result, he agreed with God and confessed his sins.



What are some reasons that keep a person from confessing their sins to God? According to verse 14, what happens when they do confess?

REFLECT

These contrasting characters remind us of the two brothers in Jesus' story about a father, a hardworking son, and another son whom we commonly call the prodigal.

However, in his book *The Prodigal God* (Penguin, 2011), Timothy Keller reminds us that “prodigal” can be applied to the father, because he represents the extravagant grace and lavish love of our Heavenly Father.

Further, it was actually *both* sons who needed to be rescued – one from his *self*-righteousness, and the other from his *un*-righteousness.

And let's be careful to allow God to be our gracious examiner and the One who restores us!

If we are the lone examiners of our heart, a thousand justifications will arise to declare our innocence....At the other end of our the spectrum is our tendency for self-flagellation....too much introspection can harm more than help. Madame Guyon was us of “depending on the diligence of our own scrutiny rather than on God for the discovery and knowledge of our sin.” If the examination is solely as *self*-examination, we will always end up with excessive praise or blame. But under the searchlight of the great Physician we can expect only good always.

(Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster, HarperOne, 1992, 29-30)

Indeed, the Gospel is for everyone, for everyday, whether you are already a follower of Jesus or not. Why? We need God's rescue and grace in our everyday, not just once!

Evangelist Luis Palau put it this way, “God is not disillusioned with us. He never had any illusions to begin with.” (***Servant***, Fall 2019, 9)

Here are some further steps of reflection as you consider the prayer of confession:

- Pray the prayer of confession found **Psalm 51:1-19**.
- Take some time to listen to Don Moen's inspirational song “[Our Father](#)”
- Though there is no specific session on “confession” you are invited to listen to the helpful sessions of [Prayer Course](#)