



BUILD CHARACTER

REPENTANCE & CONFESSION

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Regularly engages in honest and humble admission of sin to both God and other mature believers and actively turns away from that sin.

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DESCRIBED

The most dangerous problems in life are the hidden and unknown. Cancer is a problem, but it is a much more significant problem when it grows undetected. Disloyalty in an organization is a problem, but it creates an even bigger problem when that disloyalty quietly sows seeds of doubt in others and spreads the disease. Faulty engineering is a problem, but the defective design of a bridge is most dangerous when cars continue to use that bridge while nobody is aware of the issue.

Known problems can be dealt with and addressed, especially when detected early. It's when a problem festers and spreads that the problem really becomes a problem and may have dangerous consequences. Confession of sin is not a one-and-done thing when one comes to faith in Jesus, but an on-going practice and lifestyle in the Christian's life. Why is this such an important discipline? Because it's vital to growing in our relationship with Christ. He came to free us not just from the penalty of our sin, but from its power. If we continue to live in unconfessed sin, it rules over us and creates distance with Jesus and others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his small, but powerful book called, *Life Together*, elaborates on the value of confession in the life of a believer:

In confession there takes place a breakthrough to community. Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of what is left unsaid sin poisons the whole being of a person (110).

Confession is God's gracious gift that enables us to turn from our sin and follow Christ more fully and freely. It is the bringing of spiritual cancer out into the open so that it can be dealt with and healed. God is longing for us to agree with Him on matters of sin so that we can walk in freedom and intimacy with Him. He's not waiting with crossed arms for us to come sheepishly in shame so He can layer on more shame and guilt, but as a loving Father (already knowing the truth) who is wanting to welcome us with the embrace that we see the prodigal son receive upon his return. For, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Continual repentance and confession is a vivid sign that we are growing more and more into the character and likeness of Christ. And, it is the invitation we have through the gospel to step more fully and joyfully into fellowship with Christ and His people.

*"To confess your sins to God is not to tell Him anything He doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge."
- Frederick Buechner*

EVIDENCE OF THIS SPIRITUAL OUTCOME IN A PERSON'S LIFE

- Has a regular practice of freely and openly confessing and repenting to God.
- Has no known areas of life that are “hidden” from God.
- Has a trusted and mature Christian community where full transparency, accountability, and confession are practiced.
- Experiences a growing intimacy and joy in relationship with Christ.

GUIDANCE

Read each passage multiple times. Then write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

1 KINGS 8:33-34

Observations:

Discernment Question: What are you currently holding onto that you are hiding from God or resistant to submit to Him?

2 CHRONICLES 26:16-23, PROVERBS 16:18

Observations:

Discernment Question: Do you struggle with arrogance or pride? If so, how is it keeping you from listening to God or to the people around you?

PSALM 32:1-7

Observations:

Discernment Question: What evidence of unconfessed sin have you seen, or are do you currently see, in your own life (restlessness, anxiety, sleeplessness, bitterness, anger, etc.)?

PROVERBS 28:13

Observations:

Discernment Question: As you read these passages, what areas of your life come to mind that you need to address? What has kept you from addressing them in your life?

EZEKIEL 18:30-32

Observations:

Discernment Question: Where are you powerless to change and need to cry out for God's help?

LUKE 13:11-32

Observations:

Discernment Question: One thing Jesus is trying to teach in this passage is about God's posture toward us. God's heart is to run to us when we turn back to Him to restore our union with Him. When you think about owning your sin and confessing it, is your knee-jerk reaction to run to God or away from Him? Do you primarily view God as cross-armed or reaching for an embrace? How does Jesus' description here inform your understanding?

JAMES 5:16

Observations:

Discernment Question: Do you regularly confess to those you trust and who know you best? If not, what keeps you from doing this?

1 JOHN 1:5-10

Observations:

Discernment Question: To what extent are you worshiping God externally but internally rebelling against Him? What keeps you from being fully honest before God and others?

NEXT STEPS

What are practical next steps you will do based on what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture about repentance and confession? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life, as well.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

James 5:16, NIV

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1 John 1:9, NIV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.



BUILD CHARACTER REPENTANCE & CONFESSION

LIFE APPS: CONFESSION APPS BY ANDY STANLEY

After listening to Confession Apps, use the following outline to take notes:

Application makes all the difference:

James- listening is nothing, doing is everything:

Confession is not about guilt relief:

Genuine confession serves as a first step toward something different:

Genuine confession leads to genuine change:

Confession in the OT:

Zacchaeus:

Confess your sins to each other:

Secret sins are like splinters:

Category 1, I have a secret routine with God:

Category 2, I'm not going to change:

Be willing to pray honestly:

Tell the person you've offended:

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ON LIFE APPS: CONFESSION APPS

Which do you fear more, the consequences of confession or the consequences of concealment. why?

What's in your box?

What do you need to tell?

Whom do you need to tell?



BUILD CHARACTER

REPENTANCE & CONFESSION

An Exercise in Proactive Repentance By: Kelly Needham

Repentance is the act of agreeing with God about our sin, turning from it and rejoicing in what God has done for us in Jesus. Most of our repentance is reactive. We repent primarily for the sins that are staring us in the face or the ones that others point out. And honestly, even then, sometimes we delay dealing with our sin.

But what if we weren't just reactive in dealing with our sin, but proactive? This is a trait we see in many of the godly men and women of the Bible: Josiah (2 Chron. 34), Daniel (Dan 9), and David (Psalm 139:23-24) to name a few.

Why Should Repentance Be Proactive?

But why should we be proactive in repentance? Don't we only need to repent when God shows us something we've done wrong? Why in the world, when everything seems good, would it be beneficial to proactively search for sin to repent of?

John the Baptist said: "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance." (Luke 3:8) Consider also 1 John 1:8-10: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

The goal is not to be perfect and sinless... only Jesus fits in that category. But rather to live a lifestyle of repentance, facing our sinful hearts with boldness, confessing the sin that's there, and believing the Gospel again and again for those areas of brokenness. It is in that broken place of repentance where the Spirit of God begins to change us.

A Spring Cleaning for Your Soul: I encourage you to set aside 2 hours to do this exercise in proactive repentance. Think of this like a "spring cleaning" for your soul. The majority of my house may look clean and tidy but that doesn't mean there isn't dirt and grime in hidden places. Every now and then it's good to pull the couches back from the wall and vacuum, clean out the hall closets and garage, and get to those places I don't look at every day.

This exercise is a time to ask God to shine light on those dark and dusty corners of your heart. It is a time to expose sinful tendencies that you rarely think of or are even aware of. After staring those sins in the face, talking to God about them, confessing them, you then get to seek God and His Word for what true repentance looks like in your life through your actions.

Over the years I have often taken between 7-10 days to seek God by prayer and fasting to do this very thing; asking Him to show me where there is unrepentant sin that I need to deal with. Oh how refreshing to my soul those times have been! And also how surprised I always am to see the sins creeping into my life in hidden ways I have not yet noticed. This is just a small practice of such a thing.

The Assignment:

So set aside two hours, get your Bible out and work through the following tasks. Please take your time as you work through this because being rushed will defeat the effectiveness of this exercise.

1. Read Psalm 139. In your journal, write out verses 23-24. Write them out 2 more times. As you are copying these verses, pray them over yourself.

2. Give yourself 20 minutes to quiet your heart and write down any sins or sinful thought patterns that God brings to mind. Set a timer on your phone to help you commit to 20 minutes. Don't answer texts or emails during this time. If your mind wanders, just reread verses 23-24 again. Use those verses to reign in your thoughts. Listening for God's still small voice is a discipline. It takes focus and work.

3. Take some time to process with God any sins He has exposed. Look up verses that come to mind that relate to those things. Ask God to break your heart over those sins. Ask Him what repentance looks like. If you have a journal, you might write those verses down that you looked up or write out a prayer.

Please don't rush! Take as much time here as you need! Sometimes parts 2 & 3 take me a whole hour. Once you feel ready to move on, go on to part 4.

4. Read Daniel 9:1-19. Read through it a second time with the awareness that Daniel was a good man, not outwardly sinning, not in willful rebellion against God or others. He was proactively seeking God. As you read through this second time, think about why a good, decent man might pray this way. Read through a 3rd time, this time make a list with 2 columns in your journal or in the space below. Label the first column: GOD. Label the second column: US. Read Daniel's prayer and list all the things He says about God in the first column and all he says about "we" or "I" in the second column.

Daniel identifies himself with the sinful people around him. He doesn't point the finger at the sin around him. He sees the same seed of those sins in himself. Is this something missing in your life? Are you quick to point the finger at others and yet never search your own heart?

5. Make a list of the sins you see in other people that bother you the most. Don't be shy or surface-y. Be brutally honest. What in other believers or nonbelievers drives you crazy?

6. Spend 10 minutes asking God to show you where the seed of that same sin is present in your heart. Again, set a timer on your phone to make sure you commit to 10 minutes.

7. Through the process of reading through Daniel 9, has God revealed any other sins to repent of? Take some time to write those down and process them with God as you did in part 3. Consider reading David's famous prayer of repentance found in Psalm 51 to give you an example of a repentant heart.

8. Finally, before you leave where you are, answer the following questions.

- Was this an uncomfortable process for you? Why or why not?

- Was there any fear in shining the light in the dark corners of your heart? Were you afraid of what you might find?

- Did God reveal anything in your heart that surprised you? (Ex: Envy when you were certain you aren't an envious person.) Write down up to 3 specific sins or sinful thought patterns God revealed to you in this time.

- In your own words, answer the question “what is repentance?” (Feel free to do some research in your Bible to answer this well.)

- What does "bearing fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8) look like in regards to those specific sins you listed earlier? Give some very practical steps/examples of what this will look like for you to walk in repentance from what God has exposed. Remember, exposing sin is always so that through repentance we will change! Not just so that we will know.

- Please write down any other thoughts you have about this process and your experience.

- Lastly, write out a prayer of repentance in regards to these things.

Share With Someone Else

I highly encourage you to share your answers to these questions with someone: maybe your spouse or a close friend. While we are commanded to confess our sins to God and repent, He also asked us to “confess our sins to one another and pray for one another that we might be healed.” Community is an important element of how God changes us. We cannot seek God in isolation. Sharing these things with someone else and asking them to pray for you is a crucial element in this process.

I hope you have been blessed by walking through this exercise, and I challenge you to consider setting aside time once a year to do a “spring cleaning” for your soul! Next time, you might consider setting aside an hour or two every day for a week to seek God and be proactively repentant!

“For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it’ You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” –Psalm 51:16-17