

# PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION AND SELF-EXAMINATION:

Adapted from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us  
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Read for further understanding about the practice of confession and spend time answering the reflection questions. The challenge this week is to try one of the spiritual exercises.

## DEFINITION:

Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change. Self-Examination is a process whereby the Holy Spirit opens my heart to what is true about me. This is not the same thing as a neurotic, shame-inducing inventory. Instead, it is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of his love, so I can authentically seek transformation.

## GOD-GIVEN FRUIT OF CONFESSION:

- keeping company with Jesus as he helps you with how much or how little you change
- being transformed into Christlikeness
- thinking of yourself with sober judgment, awareness of your blind spots
- gaining insight into your temptations and God's work in your life
- having compassion toward others in their faults
- seeing yourself as God's loved and forgiven child no matter what you have done
- living in thankfulness for God's work in your life
- savoring the gift of salvation

## SOME HELPFUL SCRIPTURES:

Psalm 32 & Psalm 51

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

-Psalm 139:23-24

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit."

-Psalm 32:1-2

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

-James 5:16

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Does your confession tend to be along the lines of “Forgive my sins, dear Lord” rather than specifically naming your sins one by one before the face of God? What does the lack of specific confession do to self-awareness?
2. What experiences have affected your ability to give and receive forgiveness? Talk to God about these things.
3. When have you tasted the joy of forgiveness? What was that like for you?
4. Have you ever confessed your sins before a friend or trusted mentor? What might that be like for you?
5. Which of your sins hurts those closest to you?

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES: (choose one to try this week)

1. Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God. How does God meet you in these confessions of David?
2. Imagine you are in a safe place, surrounded by the love of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you. Remember he sees you absolutely and with love. Using the Ten Commandments as a guide, journal your sins. When you have finished, go through each commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. Then burn your list in a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.
3. Set aside some time for confession and self-examination. In the presence of God, ask for light to pierce your defenses. Then ask yourself, “Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger, and so on?” As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be, to give you grace to forgive them. Write an apology, make a phone call, or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.
4. Imagine the kind of person you would like to become in your old age. Then look at your life and assess whether or not the way you live now is preparing you to become that person. Confess where you need to change. Ask God and perhaps a trusted member of your community of faith to help you in this.
5. Begin to notice your strong emotions. When do you feel yourself getting hot, defensive, angry, withdrawn? What is motivating your emotion? What behavior stems from your emotion? As you attend to this internal world, ask God to make you alert to what triggers strong, emotional reactions. Confess any sin relating to these reactions. Practice noticing your internal world, and begin to develop a habit of immediate confession.
6. Ask some of your family or close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, “What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you” What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself?” Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.