

6

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION



*What makes it so hard to say,
"I'm sorry"?*

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

God forgives when we come to Him in repentance.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

He told me he hadn't sinned in seven years.

While sharing the gospel, I asked a man the simple question, "Have you ever committed a sin?" I've asked that question hundreds of times. Almost everyone readily admits they have. But I didn't expect this man's answer: "Yes, I have sinned, but not in seven years."

Culture likes to rank sins and continually redefines what is a sin—and what is not. On an individual level, we do this too. Many of us even try to rationalize away our sin, coming up with a way to justify what we do as if to say it's okay.

The fact is all of us have sinned, and we all need forgiveness. More than anyone who has ever lived, Jesus understands the depth of our sins. He willingly died to set us free from those very sins. In the Model Prayer Jesus taught us, He gave us the privilege of praying a prayer of confession. Jesus let His followers know we can come to Him anytime for forgiveness and renewal.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 6:12-13

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We should not be surprised to learn confession of sin is a part of the Model Prayer; but we might be surprised it's not the first thing on the list! The psalmist acknowledged that, if he held on to unconfessed sin, all his other prayers would be invalidated. "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18).

As we've already seen, the Model Prayer begins with a focus on God and a desire to honor Him and live in line with His lordship and kingdom. (See Matt. 6:9-10.) When we focus on God, any unconfessed sin can also come into focus. As we turn to His lordship over us, we also turn from our sin. Prayer without regular confession could barely be considered true prayer.

Jesus never implied the act of prayer alone could atone for our sin. Our confession is not in any way comparable to Jesus' death on the cross where He paid our penalty for sin once and for all. Confession is coming in repentance to the One who can atone for our sins.

The prayer of confession means we accept personal accountability for what we have done. When we come to God in prayer we're not attempting to hide behind "fig leaves" (Gen. 3:7) as Adam and Eve did when they realized they'd done wrong and tried to cover themselves. Instead, we pray transparently, admitting our need for forgiveness.

What are the benefits of forgiving others?

QUESTION #2

In the original language, the form of the verb translated *forgive* urges immediate action. It's as if Jesus was urging us to pray, "Forgive us *now!*" We have a need to confess our sins without delay. The verb also indicates a completed action, which communicates that we desire forgiveness that is thorough. We never need to deal with the sin again because God's forgiveness is final and complete.

Thankfully, God does forgive us in Christ once and for all, but we still face temptation and struggle with sin. Therefore, Jesus called us not just to pray for forgiveness, but also to pray: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We should ask God to help us avoid future sins by keeping us away from the areas of our most persistent temptations. We should ask God to lead us away from the things and places that tempt us. For sure, that does not imply God would ever lead us into temptation in the first place. Instead, we are honest in prayer by admitting we need God's help to avoid the circumstances where we could be most compromised.

"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

Psalm 51:1-7

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

What are the benefits of confessing specific sins?

QUESTION #3

GOOD FOR THE SOUL

*Confession of sin is good for us and our relationship with God.
Spend a few minutes considering the importance of confession and then
complete this acrostic to describe the importance of confession.*

C -

O -

N -

F -

E -

S -

S -

"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

God described David as “a man after my heart” (1 Sam. 13:14); yet, a dark period in David’s life would be described today as a major scandal. (See 2 Sam. 11–12.) A reporter might present this as a story of a bored king who summoned one of his female citizens, engaged in an adulterous one-night stand, and then sent her home.

In due time Bathsheba sent word to the king she was pregnant with his child. What began as a private indiscretion escalated quickly into a much bigger problem. David’s sin would lead to a string of others, ultimately ending in murder. David then married the widow Bathsheba, convinced he had concealed the matter.

But God knew—and David knew. David had covered his sin from everyone but God and his own conscience. As he tried to suppress his guilt, his spiritual life dried up. When Nathan the prophet confronted David, the king responded by confessing, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam. 12:13).

David documented his confession in Psalm 51. It’s been said that “sin thrills and then it kills”—even if the only victim is the conscience of the sinner. If you extend the feeling of a dead conscience out across an entire culture, everyone becomes far from God and indifferent toward each other. *Victimless sins do not exist.*

Jesus called us to do what David did: confess. To remedy the guilt and that feeling of always being unclean, Jesus told us to cry out to God in prayer, “Forgive us” (Luke 11:4). God wants us to acknowledge sin, confess it, turn from it, and be forgiven!



Psalm 51:10-12

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

When King David committed adultery and murder, his life certainly went off course spiritually—and we can veer off God’s path for us in much the same way. Though we may not be guilty of the same sins as David, all of us have strayed from the path. The good news is God allows us to start over. We can begin again. That’s what happened for King David. He sought the Lord in prayer to find restoration.

David had a guilty conscience and he wanted a clean heart. He recognized the core of his problem was his heart. A new spiritual beginning always starts with an inward change.

David knew the change he needed was beyond his ability. Notice in verses 10-12 that all the things David mentioned are actions only God can do. Time with God in prayer teaches us to rely on Him for what He alone can do. Only God can cleanse and restore. In fact, nothing in the Christian life is done through “self-help.” We are to be faithful and obedient, but we are not to rely upon our own strength.

David also prayed for the Spirit’s continued ministry and presence in his life. He knew he would readily fail again without the Holy Spirit’s ongoing help. David was a leader, and perhaps his moral failure was magnified by the sense that he “should have known better.” Leaders need the Holy Spirit’s help just as much as everyone else. All of us are subject to temptation, and if we do not seek God and His supernatural help, we will fall.

So what made David a man after God’s own heart? It certainly wasn’t his sins and failures. It was his spirit and desire afterwards. David turned back to God wholeheartedly. He sought more than freedom from sin; he sought the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. David *desired* a heart like God’s.

A heart like God’s can also be ours as we pray, “Forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12a).

When have you experienced a clean heart and renewed spirit?

QUESTION #4

What role should confession play in our group?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Confession and repentance are needed steps to maintain our fellowship with God. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Confess sin.** Each time you pray, ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin. As God reveals things to you, turn from them, seek His forgiveness, and thank Him for His cleansing.
- ▶ **Read.** Read and pray through Psalm 51. Ask God to give you a renewed dependence upon Him.
- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** If others have been hurt by some sin you've committed, confess that sin to him and/or her and ask for forgiveness.

Prayer is the natural path to travel as we confess, repent, and seek God's renewal. Let God's forgiveness lead you to be a person after His own heart.

My thoughts

