

Prayer Guide – Week 6

CONFESSION & SELF-EXAMINATION

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

Confession may be good for the soul, but it can be very hard to do. We are invested in looking like good moral people. After all, appearing good is one way of dealing with the notion that something is wrong with us. We haven't murdered anyone or robbed a bank. Furthermore, when we do wrong, we try to fix it and make it better. We can put a great deal of energy into maintaining the image that we are good moral people. But this very appearance of goodness can be a way we defend ourselves against our sin. For when we can't see our sin we have nothing to confess.

The truth is that we all sin. Sin is anything that breaks relationship. Jesus is totally realistic about broken relationships. He experienced them. He was put to death by them. Yet Jesus taught that the damage done through sin was not the last word on life. Sin could be confessed. Sin could be forgiven. And sinful people could be set free.

True repentance means we open the bad in our lives to God. We invite him to come right in and look at our sin with us. We don't hide behind being good, moral people or indulge in neurotic self-recriminations. We don't pretend to be other than we are. We don't disguise the truth by carting out all the disciplines we practice. We tell it like it is – without rationalization, denial or blame – to the only person in the universe who will unconditionally love us when we are bad. We hand over the pretense, image management, manipulation, control and self-obsession. In the presence of the Holy One, we give up on appearing good and fixing our sin. We lay down our ability to change by the power of the self. We turn to Jesus and seek forgiveness.

Jesus, the only Son of God, died a violent, unspeakable death so we could know what freedom from sin tastes like. Jesus laid his power down, suffered and became sin so that we would not be condemned. Every time we confess how we have missed the mark of God's love and truth, we open ourselves up to the mending work of the cross. Jesus' wounds hold true life-changing power. This is the shocking reality that confession can open up to us. Through confession and forgiveness, we live into the truth of being God's new creation! The old is gone. The new has come.

Prayer Invitations

These exercises are suggestions to help you to pray through confession and self-examination. Remember to write your prayers and the place them in your prayer box.

- 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 (*Exodus 20:2-7, Deuteronomy 5:6-12*) as a guide, list 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. Then write a prayer telling Jesus about your experience of burning your sins. Dear Jesus...
- 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 and anger? 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. Tell Jesus about it in prayer. 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 this person. Confess where you need to change. Ask God for help. Dear Jesus...
- Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use these psalms as a way of bringing your own sins before God. How does God meet you in these confessions of David? Dear Jesus...
- How in touch do you feel with your own sin? If you feel out of touch with your sin, honestly consider where some of the following sins show up in your life: envy, lust, greed, gluttony, deceit, lying, exaggerating, anger, pretense, avoidance or responsibility. What do you see in yourself? How do you want to talk to God about these things? Confess where you have fallen short of God's expectations and receive his forgiveness. Dear Jesus...

Prayer Advice

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 divine love so I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change.

Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson

Spirit Windows: A Handbook of Spiritual Growth Resources for Leaders by Ann Z. Kulp

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives by Dallas Willard