

Operation 180

Session 4: The power of confession

Home Group Edition

Session 3 review

- ❖ Daily meditations
 - Did any of the readings stand out to you?
- ❖ Sin acknowledgment worksheet
 - Any issues? Any praise reports?

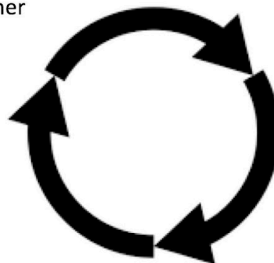
Series overview

As we mark the halfway point of this series, let's take a moment to take stock of all that you have accomplished so far.

We began in session 1 with the "Spiritual Cycle of the Psalms" chart:

Spiritual Cycle of the Psalms
God's action in creation, our experience, our season

- 1) Creation
- 2) Thriving
- 3) Summer



- 4) De-creation
- 5) Surviving
- 6) Fall/Winter

- 7) Re-creation
- 8) Reviving
- 9) Spring

In this chart, we saw how the Psalmists documented the Israelites experiencing God through a variety of emotions, in good times and bad. We see the Israelites moving through *thriving, surviving, and reviving* cycles. We, too, go through such cycles in our own seasons of life.

A key aspect of hope in the Psalms is that God is still present, even when we distance ourselves from Him through our own sin. We noted that nothing in the Garden has changed *except for Adam and Eve's mental state*. They have gone from *shalom to shame*. God is still where He was, moving like the evening breeze. Adam and Eve's sin have caused *them* to separate from each other and from God, not the other way around. We saw when we feel *unsafe*, we end up in *despair*, the feeling that everything is wrong and nothing will turn out well. Feeling unsafe, we are unwilling to take any risk and choose to remain in the dark.

As a result of sin, God's creation was not as intended because the *connectedness* designed into creation by God had been severed. Connectedness is an essential part of creation and a key factor in feeling safe. The breaking of connections, like a married couple getting divorced, is an actual piece of creation being severed. As a result of the Fall, creation has been *de-created or uncreated*. Adam and Eve are now *surviving* as separated beings, apart from each other and God. They no longer feel safe. *They are no longer feeling felt by God*.

This lack of *feeling felt* is a fundamental part of our experience when we move from *thriving* to *surviving*. When we feel alone, we naturally feel unsafe.

God wired us to be connected, to experience life *in a community*. God never intended us to experience the up and downs of life all alone.

In fact, the first "not good" statement God makes is directly on this point:

"Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." (Genesis 2:18)

Reflection: As you now look back over your life, can you see seasons where you felt all alone? Can you recall seasons where you were not feeling felt, either by God or others? How did that make you feel?

In session 2, you completed an overview of your life, noting the most memorable positive moments along with the negative moments. You then plotted these moments on a timeline. Take a moment to review your timeline as you engage in the following reflections.

Reflection: Looking back over the timeline, can you see cycles or patterns appearing and/or reappearing over the course of your life?

Reflection: When you place your timeline alongside the Psalms cycle, can you see patterns in common between the two? Does one help highlight the other?

Finally, in session 3, you did the hard work of completing the Sin Acknowledgment Worksheet. Where the Psalms cycle and timeline charts look at your life from a 35,000-foot view, the Sin Acknowledgment Worksheet is down at ground level, looking at the details. Take a moment to examine all three together as you engage in the following reflections.

Reflection: As you documented your sins by acknowledging sin as a physical transgression and mental iniquity, what insights did the Holy Spirit give you? Were you able to look at your past thoughts and actions with new clarity?

All this hard work is to prepare you for the next step of your recovery - confession.

Confession

Step 5 reads

Step 5: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Starting with the last clause first, we are asked to admit *the exact nature of our wrongs*. In doing the work up to this point, you are now ready to confess the *exact nature of your wrongs* because you are prepared to acknowledge both the physical and mental aspects of your wrongs, just as David instructed us to do.

Additionally, you are prepared to acknowledge your sins in the context of your life timeline. This is important for your healing.

Confession as healing

Our brains are wired to constantly try and put events in the broader context of our life story. We search for meaning in all events - both good and bad. The Step 5 confession is a great opportunity to do just that. Confessing your wrongs in the context of the seasons of your life story can provide immediate freedom as you *reframe* those events in the healing covering of forgiveness. When we *reframe* our memories, we *transform* our memories. Recall this saying

| Whatever is not transformed is transferred.

Confession is God's way of stopping the transference of unresolved resentments and unforgiveness down the line. There is powerful healing in confession. Let's look at some examples.

Modern science shows that confession has substantial effects on physical, psychological, and spiritual health. Confession has a liberating and guilt-relieving effect. It allows the addict to relieve tension, experience acceptance and reconciliation, resolve guilt, and take responsibility for self-improvement.

Studies have found that forgiveness has a positive impact on your health. Forgiveness can have measurable benefits, including lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Many people report the feeling of releasing an enormous physical burden after their confession experience.

Chronic anger from holding long-term grudges can leave you in a state of hypervigilance where your brain is locked in a constant fight-or-flight mode. The long-term health implications of living in such a state include numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and immune response. Those changes increase the risk of depression, heart disease, and diabetes, among other conditions.

Forgiveness, however, releases a different set of hormones, which calms stress levels, leading to improved health and overall *peace*.

The impact of sin on our life and health

David, as much as any Biblical figure, knew a thing or two about the impact of sin on his life and the benefits of confession.

Let's take a look at David describing his emotions and experiences living in sin:

Psalms 38:3–12 (NRSV)

*3 There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.*

*4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.*

5 *My wounds grow foul and fester
because of my foolishness;*
6 *I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all day long I go around mourning.*
7 *For my loins are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.*
8 *I am utterly spent and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.*

9 *O Lord, all my longing is known to you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.*
10 *My heart throbs, my strength fails me;
as for the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.*
11 *My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction,
and my neighbors stand far off.*

12 *Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin,
and meditate treachery all day long.*

Meditate on this Psalm slowly, taking in the heartbreaking imagery of David suffering under the weight of his own sin and resulting guilt. Can you see yourself in this imagery? How many examples apply to you and your life?

The Biblical truth declared by David in Psalm 38 is that guilt and iniquities *make us sick*. The old saying that holding onto resentments “is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die” is actually true.

Another truth revealed is that our sin *results in separation from those around us*. We experience a slow and steady separation from family and friends as we slide deeper and deeper into addiction. Our *friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and our neighbors stand far off*, David says in verse 11. In verse 12, everyone seems to turn against us. Whatever your particular sin looks like, all sin leads us to loneliness. We feel like perpetual victims, and we believe that everything and everyone is against us. Feeling unsafe, we withdraw from life further and further.

Psalm 38, therefore, confirms what we have been discussing in the three previous sessions - *sin as separation* because *sin is separation*. And when we end up separated from God and others, we end up in despair.

The consequences of sin surround us. Sin ultimately separates us from friends and family.

All self-destructive behaviors, no matter what they are, lead us to a place of *the misery of soul*, spiritual death, and our biblical bottom. Remember the Prodigal son, all alone in his pig field, far from home, and no one would help him. We end up alone, in despair, just like him.

But we have a way out. Like the Prodigal son, we can confess and unload ourselves from this terrible burden.

The benefits of confession

David is also well acquainted with the benefits of confession and relates these to us in Psalm 103. Here he lists the many benefits and asks us *not to forget them*. Let's look at the benefits of confession and the resulting forgiveness.

Psalm 103:2–12 (NRSV)

- 2 *Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—*
- 3 *who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,*
- 4 *who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*
- 5 *who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

- 6 *The LORD works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.*
- 7 *He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.*
- 8 *The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*
- 9 *He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.*
- 10 *He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*
- 11 *For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*
- 12 *as far as the east is from the west,*

so far he removes our transgressions from us.

Mediate slowly on God's promises and blessings related to confession in this Psalm. How many can you count? Remember the hope of the Old Testament that we discussed in session 1 - God will do what he said that He would. What promises are you counting on?

Are you ready to confess?

Let's return briefly to Psalm 38. Here we see David ready to confess. He declares:

Psalm 38:17–18 (NRSV)

*17 For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.*

*18 I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.*

David says his *pain is ever with him*. David is *sick and tired of being sick and tired*. Are you *sick and tired of being sick and tired*?

Are you ready to confess your iniquity? Are you ready for the opportunity to express to God, yourself, and another human being the sorrow of your sins?

Then let's get to work.

How do we confess?

How do we ask? What do we ask for?

David gives us great insight into his process in Psalm 51, the Scripture at the center of Christian confessional practice for centuries:

Psalm 51:1–10 (NRSV)

*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 alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.*

5 *Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.*

6 *You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

7 *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

8 *Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*

9 *Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

Psalm 51 is a song of purity, expressing the hope of being made clean again. It shows that confession is to be *celebrated* as a moment of *new beginnings*. Confession is the moment when we move from a dark season of *surviving* to a new season of *reviving*.

Refreshed with new *wisdom* (v. 8), we can move into a new season and purpose that God has for us. We experience the new freedom through the *new and right spirit* that God *places within us* when we confess our sins.

The freedom we experience through confession and forgiveness is the work of Holy Spirit in our lives. Recall that Paul expresses the hope and freedom that is provided by the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, this way:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17)

There is hope in freedom. Freedom from our addictions, freedom to come out of the darkness into the light, freedom from despair. Freedom to reconnect with family and friends.

Freedom is the freedom to hope, and the freedom to move in our faith.

Freedom is the freedom to take risks and move into the next chapter that God has planned for us. To be revived in a new season of walking the light. To walk as a *new creation in Christ*.

But we have to *ask*.

Jesus asks us to ask Him:

“If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:14)

Meditate slowly on David’ action steps, and pay particular attention to what he is asking God for. How many “asks” do you see? As you prepare for your confession session, what do you want to ask Jesus?

Confession as healing for the community

Confession is the point at which we step out of the darkness, and back into community. Step 5 asks us to confess *to another human being*. This is because the act of confession heals not only the person offering the confession, but also those receiving the confession. Confession, therefore, heals communities. James puts it this way

“The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.” (James 5:15–16)

A community that confesses, forgives, and prays for one another is a *healing* community.

Confession is risky, so we must move in our faith.

Jesus tells us that it is *our faith that heals us*. Here are two examples from Luke’s gospel:

*“And he told him, “Get up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.”
(Luke 17:19)*

“Receive your sight,” Jesus told him. “Your faith has saved you.” (Luke 18:42)

Remember:

Faith = risk + direction

Now is the time to move in faith.

Recall that Paul says the time is now:

“Working together with him, we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain.” For he says: At an acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you. See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!” (2 Corinthians 6:1–2)

The waiting is over, *now is the time to believe in the power of confession and be healed!*

Remember the hope of the New Testament from session 2, the hope of Jesus as Lord and Messiah, sent to save you. *Your waiting is over!*

God did what He said He would do. And He did it in and through the person of Jesus. And He did it to save people *just like you* being held captive by their addictions, people being oppressed by their fear and shame. He came to *set free the oppressed.*

Whatever you are being held captive by, whatever self-destructive behavior has you in chains, Jesus is here to release you!

As we noted above, where the Spirit of Jesus is, there is freedom. I pray that you experience the freedom and healing of a Spirit-filled confession.

Daily Meditations

Theme: The Seven Penitential Psalms. The Seven Penitential Psalms are traditionally regarded as David's lamentations of repentance for his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, and for his other sins. Many see that they form a kind of spiritual ladder. For example, some ancient church fathers see the Penitential Psalms in this way: fear of punishment (Psalm 6), sorrow for sin, then confession and remission (Psalm 32), hope of grace, then more fear, followed by hope again (Psalm 38), love of purity, mercy bestowed (Psalm 51), longing for heaven (Psalm 102), distrust of your own strength and confidence in divine mercy (Psalm 130), and joy (Psalm 143).

It is traditional that these Psalms are prayed during the days of Lent, a season of reflection and repentance. I pray that these Psalms may be equally valuable for you as you prepare this week for your confession. May you experience the power of praying through the Penitential Psalms as others have for centuries.

Day 1 - Psalm 6

Notes: _____

Day 2 - Psalm 32

Notes: _____

Day 3 - Psalm 38

Notes: _____

Day 4 - Psalm 51

Notes: _____

Day 5 - Psalm 102

Notes: _____

Day 6 - Psalm 130

Notes: _____

Day 7 - Psalm 143

Notes: _____

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