

The Lost Art of Confession

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Prayer: Hungry For God Series

Psalm 51

A number of years ago my family and I were camping in Maine and we decided to take a ferry trip to Nova Scotia. We had to buy the ferry tickets one day and get on the ferry the next day. There were four of us and there was a sign that said, "Children under five free." So I said to the woman who was selling the tickets, "We'll take three tickets." My wife, Marlene, immediately said, "Richie, we'll need four. Sharon is five years old." I said, "Shhh, be quiet." I looked at the ticket agent and said, "We'll take three tickets." Marlene said, "No, no." I said, "Be quiet." I bought the three tickets. Afterwards, Marlene spoke to me and said, "That sign said, 'children under five free.' Sharon is five." I said, "Oh no, they mean five and under."

She kept correcting me and as I walked back to the car, I felt worse and worse about what I had done. The kids got into the car. I put my key into the ignition and turned on the engine and immediately water and steam began pouring out of my radiator. As I sat there watching steam blow out of my radiator, I felt the Holy Spirit say, "I'm not going to allow you, son, to be a liar."

I felt horrible. I was so angry that I didn't talk to Marlene the rest of the day. Instead, I had to spend the day going around this little town in Maine to locate a new thermostat for my car because the old one got stuck. I think it cost me about \$150 to repair my car. And that was instead of paying about \$6 for my daughter's ticket. I was angry about having to spend

so much money. I was upset with Marlene for no reason. I was upset with God. And most of all, I was really angry with myself. It took me several days to finally say to Marlene and also to God that what I did was wrong.

Most people are not very good at confessing wrong doing. I remember back several years ago when Senator Bob Packwood resigned from the US Senate rather than be forced out on sexual harassment charges. The Senate Ethics Committee, collecting more than 10,000 pages of evidence against him, found 17 women who were willing to come forward to tell the world that Senator Packwood had lewdly groped them, or pushed them against the wall and tried to kiss them, or tear their clothes off.

Senator Packwood, in a rambling address to the Senate, never apologized. He never admitted the charges that he was so clearly guilty of. Instead, he cited his efforts to achieve abortion rights for women, his work on environmental protection, his passage of an aid to Israel bill, and a tax reform bill. The closest thing he ever said that came to an acknowledgement was a statement that went something like, "If I did anything which could have been interpreted as an unwanted advance, then I'm sorry for that. Anyway, I suffer from the disease of alcoholism." In other words, if someone was so stupid to interpret one of my innocent gestures as inappropriate, well then, I apologize for their stupidity. Besides, I have a "get out of jail free card – my alcoholism."

In the last few months there was a public confession by the New Jersey governor, James McGreevey. He confessed that he was having a homosexual affair with a state employee that he had appointed. James McGreevey did admit to the affair and took responsibility, but

in the course of his admission, he used the occasion as an opportunity to come out of the closet and declare himself to be gay. Here is part of what former governor James McGreevey said,

“Also, thinking that I was doing the right thing, I forced what I thought was an accepted reality onto myself...a reality which is layered and layered with all the ‘good’ things and all the ‘right’ things of typical adolescent and adult behavior. Yet at my most reflective, maybe even spiritual level, there were points in my life when I began to question what an acceptable reality really meant for me. Were there realities from which I was running? Which master was I trying to serve? I do not believe that God tortures any person simply for its own sake, I believe that God enables all things to work for the greater good! At a point in every person’s life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one’s soul and decide one’s own unique truth in the world, not as we may want to see it, or hope to see it, but as it is. So my unique truth is that I am a gay American.”

We’re not very good at confession. We deflect blame, or we use confession as an occasion for a political statement. We justify ourselves. However, we do have a profound need to confess. There is a website called www.dailyconfession.com that has printed over 250,000 confessions in the past few years. People confess anonymously to the world and the world is reading about it because this website gets 8.5 million hits a week! There is such a voyeuristic interest in reading the confessions of others. I’ve been told that the 900 number in which people around America called to confess their sins to a voicemail recording made the originators of this confession hotline a small fortune.

I've been doing a series on prayer. Over the last several weeks, we've begun to talk about how we pray. I've given you a little acronym, ACTS, to lay out for you a track that you can run on in your prayers.

SLIDE

A = Adoration.

C = Confession

T = Thanksgiving

S = Supplication (or petitions)

A is for adoration. We begin our prayer with the worship of God, or by reading a Psalm or singing a worship song, or just taking time to praise God for who he is.

C is for confession. That's our subject today.

T is for thanksgiving.

S is for supplication, or petition.

Today, we're going to look at one of the best examples of how a person should confess their sins. I've called today's talk, "The Lost of Art of Confession." Let's pray.

You know, everyone wants the world to be better than it is. We want people to be honest and not to cheat in business as I did when I cheated the ferry company out of the money for

their ferry ticket. We want to see a reduction in crime whether committed by thugs in the city, who break into your car, or corporate thugs who steal tens of millions of dollars through accounting fraud, or insider trading. We all want to live in a better world. We want to live in a world where our kids are safe when they ride their bikes, go to school, or join the boy scouts. We want safe, orderly schools without bullies or gangs. We want safe adults who don't molest other people, or sell drugs.

We all want to live in a world where we don't have to watch our backs constantly, where we don't always have to live in fear, where we don't need an army of lawyers to handle every business transaction. We want to live in a world where people's word is their bond. We want justice to prevail in court, not money. We want honest judges, and honest building contractors, and honest car mechanics, and honest pastors. We want athletes who don't cheat by using steroids, or beat their girlfriends up, or act like total jerks on and off the field. We want to live in a world without chaos, without companies burying data about unsafe products. We want to live in a world where people are faithful to their marriage vows. We want a safe world, a healthy world.

But if we're going to live in this better world, one of the things we need to do is learn what I am calling today the Lost Art of Confession. We have to deal with this issue in our life called sin. And perhaps there's no better place to learn the lost art of confession than Psalm 51.

SLIDE

^{Ps 51:1} Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;

according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

^{Ps 51:2} Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

^{Ps 51:3} For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

^{Ps 51:4} Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

^{Ps 51:5} Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

^{Ps 51:6} Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

^{Ps 51:7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

^{Ps 51:8} Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

^{Ps 51:9} Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

^{Ps 51:10} Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

^{Ps 51:11} Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

^{Ps 51:12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Let me give you a little background the writing of Psalm 51. This Psalm was written by King David following his sin with Bathsheba. The Old Testament King David was the second King of Israel. He was a great warrior and he was the one who slayed the giant Goliath. As a general, he defeated huge armies and his lieutenants captured Jerusalem for the Jewish people nearly 3000 years ago. David was a musician. He was a poet, a lover of God. He was humble, incredibly generous, magnanimous to his enemies, faithful to his friends. And with Bathsheba, King David revealed that he was also an adulterer, a deceiver, and ultimately a murderer.

David had sex with another man's wife, a woman named Bathsheba. When she became pregnant from their adulterous affair, he tried to cover his tracks. When that didn't work, he had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, murdered. For a year he kept his sin hidden until the Lord confronted him through the prophet Nathan. Here are Nathan's words to King David:

SLIDE – 2 Samuel 12:7-9

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.

^{2Sa 12:8} I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.

^{2Sa 12:9} Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Psalm 51 is David's response to this confrontation by the prophet Nathan. Psalm 51 is one of seven so-called penitential psalms. These are psalms of confession and repentance. The seven penitential psalms are Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143.

How do we recover the lost art of confession? First of all, we need to quit rationalizing away our sin. There are a lot of other ways to deal with a guilty conscience other than to deal with confession. David could have rationalized his behavior. When David was confronted by the prophet Nathan, who said, "Hey, David, you've ignored what God has said. God commanded us not to murder. God commanded us not to commit adultery. God commanded us not to lie. God commanded us not to take what doesn't belong to us, and that includes your neighbor's spouse. You've done all these things!" David could have rationalized away his sin by saying, "But everyone is doing it. I have lots of friends who

have had sex outside of marriage. What's so bad about sex between two consenting adults? Don't we have a right to happiness? We love each other." David could have anesthetized his conscience.

We do that all the time. We're constantly putting chloroform on our consciences. We have lists of reasons why we don't have to go along with what God commands us to do, why what we've done really isn't wrong.

- I never said I was perfect.
- Hey, after all, we all make mistakes.

But Jesus commands perfection in Matthew 5:48,

SLIDE

^{Mt 5:48} Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We say, "After all, I'm just human." Yes, you are human, but that doesn't mean you are free to sin!

"But I can't help it." Yes, you can help it. You just don't want to change.

"But the situation just happened." No situation forces you to sin. You choose to sin. You weren't walking innocently along the path until you fell into a hole. People talk about falling into an affair. You chose to sin.

“I’ve got a right to be happy.” But you don’t have a right to disobey God in your pursuit of happiness. You don’t have a right to lie or hurt other people, or break your marriage vows in your pursuit of happiness.

“But I’m a nice person. I work hard. I try. I’m a good mom. I’m a good friend.” This isn’t a balancing act. Sin is sin and it is not canceled out by the good things you do. A lie is still a lie even if you do give to charity.

This thing is so small in the scheme of things. Your little sin, my little sin, caused Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be stripped, beaten, mocked, and nailed to a cross. Your little sin, and my little sin, are acts of profound ingratitude to God our Father, who has only ever been good to us and who desires freedom, spiritual life, and blessing to come to us.

When we repeatedly sin, friends, and we rationalize away our sin by some reasoning process, we deaden our consciences. We anesthetize them; we chloroform our consciences. When we sin and lose the art of confession, we put our consciences to sleep. I remember reading a story of a man who became addicted to pornography. He said the first time he went into an adult bookstore, he couldn’t even pick up one of the magazines. He was trembling. He was so embarrassed. He was afraid someone might see him. He walked in, looked at some of the magazine covers, and immediately walked out. He was really shaken by the incident and felt horrible afterwards.

The second time he went in, he was able to pick up the magazine and actually purchase it. But he was still shaking afterwards. He said by the tenth time he went into that adult store,

he was able to casually walk up, thumb through the magazines in public, chat with the clerk, and walk out. His conscience had been put to sleep.

Friends, do you see an area of your life where you have chloroformed your conscience? Have you put your conscience to sleep in the area of sex? Have you deadened your conscience in the area of gossip or slander? I mean, after all, everyone does it. And this other person really hurt you. Are you addicted to tooting your own horn, or getting your own way?

CS Lewis, the great English author once said, *“As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”*

Have you put your conscience to sleep in the area of your own pride and self-will? Do you skimp on your tithe thereby stealing from God and justify it somehow in your own mind? Do you dress or act seductively and justify it by saying, “Hey, I work out. I have a nice body. Why not show it off?” Do you sometimes explode in anger? Get into screaming matches? Do you get physical, punch walls, curse, push or hit someone? Is there some area of your life, friend, that the Holy Spirit might right now speak to you and say, “here is a place where you have put your conscience to sleep?”

How can we wake up a sleepy conscience? How can we make alive a conscience that’s been chloroformed? Here is where we engage in the lost art of confession. To waken your

conscience up, to soften your hard heart, to cut through a lifetime of rationalization in an area in which you've never felt bad about, you have to begin your confession with God.

SLIDE - Psalm 51:1 and 4

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

Ps 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

Our conscience is awakened when we begin to employ the standard of God's Word to our behavior and to our hearts. If you have your Bible, I would like you to underline these four words in v. 4:

SLIDE

Ps 51:4 **Against you, you only,** have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

We wake our consciences up when we compare our behavior and our attitudes to the absolute standard of God and his Word. You've heard of the Theory of Relativity? Well, here is how it was born. A scientist was standing on a railway platform and a train was passing by him at 30 mph. Aboard the train a man was walking in the same direction that the train was going at the rate of 3 mph. The scientist began to think about the man walking and he asked himself the question: How fast is that man walking? Was he walking at 3 mph

when he passed me in a train traveling at 30 mph? You can't walk at 30 mph, but was he walking at 33 mph?

This is how the theory of relativity was born. Relative to a person sitting on the train, the man was traveling at 3 mph. Relative to a man standing on the railroad platform, he was traveling at 33 mph. In other words, what the man was doing depended on what it was related to.

And this gets really confusing until you derelativize your sin by lining yourself up with the absolute standard of God's Word. People justify their sin all the time by relativizing their behavior. They say:

- Well, you've never been in my situation.
- You don't understand.
- There's no way I can reconcile my marriage.
- I've tried harder than most people I know to make this work.
- Compared to lots other people, I fought very hard.

But here's the deal, friends. The Word of God derelativizes our behavior. Don't try to relate your behavior to what someone else understands, or what someone else has done. Don't try to compare your behavior to your own internal standards, what you think is right and wrong. The way to wake up your conscience and become a spiritually healthy and mature adult is to relate your behavior to God's Word. God says, "compare what you've done, compare what you think, compare your current attitude with what I command in my

Word. I will tell you what's right and I will tell you what's wrong. I will define for you what is evil and what is good.”

The reason why we would engage in this process with God, the reason why we would bring our stuff to God, and not to some anonymous dailyconfession.com or speak to some voicemail, is because of who God is.

SLIDE – Psalm 51:1

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

It's unfailing love that causes David to be able to pray, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.” That literally means God's covenant love.

The Hebrew word is *chesed*. It is his commitment to stay with us, to continue to be our Father in a persevering way even when we repeatedly blow it. God is a God of covenant love, whose love you cannot quench, even by your sin.

And David prays:

SLIDE

...According to your **great compassion** blot out my transgressions.

This phrase, great compassion, is a beautiful word in Hebrew. The word compassion is related to the Hebrew word, “womb.” It is the feeling of a mother for the child of her

womb. When you come to God and begin comparing your behavior with God's Word, the reason you can do that with some degree of security is because of God's Fatherly covenant love, his commitment to persevere with you regardless, and God's motherly tender mercy. God loves you the way a mother loves the child of her womb.

So how do we confess? We begin with God and before God, who is both absolutely just and absolutely merciful, we take personal responsibility for our behaviors and our attitudes.

SLIDE

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

Ps 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

Ps 51:3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

Ps 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.

Ps 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Notice how many times David used the first person, personal pronoun "I" or "me" or "my."

SLIDE

v. 1 – Blot out **my** transgressions.

v. 2 – Wash away all **my** iniquity and cleanse **me** from **my** sin.

v. 3 – For I know **my** transgressions, **my** sin is always before me.

v. 4 – Against you, you only, have **I** sinned.

v. 5 – Surely, **I** was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived **me**.

Contemporary society has a million scapegoats that deny people's personal responsibilities for the choices we make and the attitudes we have. There is a whole smorgasbord of scapegoats. Just pick up a Psychology Today, or go into counseling to a counselor who does not have a strong biblical base. Your behavior will be blamed on everything from your genetics, your chemistry, your hormones, your inherited temperament, your parent's failure, your early childhood traumas, your education, your social environment, ADD. Now, all these things are factors – all these things, genetics, hormones, environment, upbringing, trauma, all these things partially explain our behavior. All these things may partially diminish responsibility. But no factor, no matter what's happened to you or me, or what kind of parents we've had, no factor can completely destroy our personal responsibility. To confess, we need to use the personal pronoun "I."

- I did it.
- I take responsibility.

One of the best confessions I've heard recently was offered by a man who was not always a very good confessor, the former President Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton was on 60 Minutes a few months ago, perhaps some of you saw the interview. He was pitching his new autobiography. Mike Wallace was interviewing President Clinton about his life. He had a very tragic childhood. His father was killed in an automobile accident a few months before he was born. His father was thrown from a truck and drowned in a pool of water before Bill Clinton was born.

His stepfather, from which he took the name Clinton, was a violent man, horribly abusive. He saw his mother beaten. His stepfather actually shot a shotgun at her in the house. There was lots of violence and alcohol abuse. It was a very destructive home environment.

Then Mike Wallace turned to the Monica Lewinsky affair. He said, “Do you think that your early childhood experiences created this hole in you that you’ve looked to women to meet some need that was unmet in childhood?”

Do you know what Bill Clinton said? He said, “You know, I’ve been to counselors. I’ve been to therapy. I’m sure that some of that is true. But I did what I did with Monica Lewinsky for the worst of all reasons, because I could. I’m responsible for what I did.”

“I did what I did for the worst of all reasons, because I could.”

You know, far from being compassionate when we explain away someone’s behavior, we actually give dignity to an individual when we say, “You are responsible.” It is not mean. It is not judgmental. There is dignity, real dignity, to own responsibility. To call someone a sinner, you are implying that the person can choose to behave differently than they did. To say someone did evil suggests that within some limits, we are free agents. We’re able to make up our own minds, decide our own actions.

When we deny sin because of some misguided humanitarian effort at compassion, or because we have been so therapeutized, we no longer say you are responsible, when we do that we are actually dehumanizing another human being, or dehumanizing ourselves. CS

Lewis called this whole process of taking away moral responsibility from people the abolition of man. And he wrote a book with that title, *The Abolition of Man*.

In essence, what it means to be a human being is the power to choose for or against sin, the power to choose for or against God. Confession begins with God. We bring our stuff to God. And we cut through all the rationalizations and all the reasons why we were predisposed and set up and we say, “I did it. I’m responsible. I chose this.”

And then to learn the art of confession, we must call sin what it is. We have to call a spade a spade. The word confession in the original Greek is ‘homologeō.’ Homo means same, like homosexual – having a relationship with someone of the same sex. Logeo means to say. Homologeō literally means to say the same thing as another person. In other words, to come into agreement with what God says. We are not confessing unless we name our behavior what God names it. You have to say the same thing as God does about your behavior and your attitudes.

So, we’re not confessing when we call something a white lie, a mistake, a problem, our coping mechanism, our response to pain, or I’m just being authentic, I’m coming out of the closet, I’m just being me. You are not confessing unless you say the same thing that God says. David uses three words to describe his behavior.

SLIDE

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

Ps 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

First of all, he calls his behavior transgressions.

SLIDE

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

He doesn't call his adultery a midlife crisis, or exploring his sexuality. He calls it a transgression. Transgression literally means to revolt, to rebel against God's authority. Have you ever said to yourself, "I know that God forbids this, but I'm going to do it anyway. I'm going to push past the 'no trespassing' signs. I'm going to choose to cross the line. I will deal with the consequences later. I want what I want now."

Or, "I know what God wants, but I don't care. I'm not going to do it."

When I was in college I got engaged to the woman who is now my wife, Marlene. A couple of months before we were married, her roommate went away for the weekend. I was in Marlene's room late one night and I said to her, "What do you say I spend the night? Your roommate is gone."

She said, "Well, I don't think that would be right."

As you can tell from my stories, Marlene has a much better developed conscience than I do. That's really true. So I began to rationalize and said to her, "You know, Marlene, we're going to be married in two months. We're in love." And then in a very arrogant way, I said, "Well, let's see what God says about this." I picked up a Bible and I stuck my finger into the Bible. And do you know what verse I hit? Galatians 6:7,

SLIDE

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Gal 6:8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;

I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I didn't tell Marlene what I had read, but I said, "You know, this really isn't a good idea" and I left.

Transgression. I know what God says, but I'm going to do it anyway. Friend, do you see yourself as a rebel in any area of your life? Is there any place that you keep saying, "I will not submit to God's authority over this." Are you at all aware of your self-will rising in defiance and saying to your Creator, "I will not surrender to you?"

David calls his adultery what it is – flat out rebellion. It is revolt. It defies the authority of God. David uses a second word to describe his behavior. He calls it iniquity.

SLIDE

Ps 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

Iniquity means to twist something, to bend it. I know what God says. I know what God wants. But I'm going to twist it and bend it into the shape I want it to have. Let's twist

God's Word and call evil good and good evil. I saw a car commercial the other day and it took the Seven Deadly Sins – envy, lust, pride, greed, and tried to make them attractive by splashing them over this great looking car. Iniquity – twisting God's Word out of shape. It is not adultery. After all, I've been separated for a year and my divorce is almost final. It will be final in a couple of months. So, if I sleep with a person who is not my spouse, it is not adultery. It is not fornication because we're very much in love. I'm going to twist God's words so that sex doesn't have to be within the context of marriage, it is now all a matter of love.

I'm not proud. I just have a healthy ego strength. What is a tithe? 6% really is 10% of my income. We bend God's Word to make it fit what we want it to do. I'm not being unforgiving, I just have firm boundaries. That way I never have to open myself up to this other human being. Iniquity. Let's redefine the Word of God.

And the third word that David uses in his confession is sin.

SLIDE

Ps 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

Ps 51:3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

Sin literally means “missing the mark,” or “missing the target.” The center of a target is dead straight in front of you and your bullet goes to the left or the right. Sin means missing the point, missing the goal, veering off of God's purposes. That's what sin is. God has a purpose for everything he's created. We sin when we miss the purpose. It is interesting

when you think about it, modern advertising is almost entirely based on persuading people that the purpose of life is not what God says it is. God tells us what our lives are supposed to be about. God tells us what the purpose of life is. God says the purpose of life is to know and love God and to love other people. That is the purpose of life. To develop you and me into great lovers.

Over the last several weeks, I've spent a lot of time in hospitals and funeral homes.

Whenever someone is sick; comes close to death, or whenever someone dies, we see that the most important thing is relationships. God tells us that there is nothing more important than relationships. Relationship with him and relationship with other people, everything else takes second place. But advertising never says, "Remember the purpose of life? It is to know and love God and to love other people." Advertising says, "remember the purpose of life is to acquire more stuff." Advertising says that the purpose of life is to indulge your appetites, to try to make yourself as secure as possible in this world. Advertising tells you the purpose of your life is to make yourself insanely comfortable. Life is not about relationships. It is about accumulation.

The other day I saw a guy in Westerville driving his Mercedes. His license plate read:

GOT3BNZ – Got three Benz's, that's what he's saying on his license plate. I thought to myself, "You've missed God's purpose for your money, friend. God hasn't blessed you so that you could acquire three Benz's and try to create envy in other people. He blessed you so that you could bless others."

How often do you and I miss the purpose for which God created something? We miss the purpose of sex. The purpose of sex is not self-gratification. Sex is designed to unite you in love and self-giving to the person who is your spouse. It is designed to create union between a husband and a wife.

The purpose of speech is not to tear someone else down, or to make yourself look good, or to toot your own horn. The purpose of speech is to encourage other people, to instruct, to thank God, to bless, to bring truth.

The purpose of work is not to establish an identity for yourself. It is to participate in God's great work of reclaiming this earth. Work is all about participating in the new creation.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. Are you missing the target? As you look at yourself and your life, would you say, "I have been missing the point?" For some here, you may be missing the point over all. You are missing the big purpose of why you exist. You exist to be in relationship with God, through his Son Jesus Christ, and to be in love relationships with other people. Are you in a relationship with God through his Son Jesus? Are you in loving, self-giving relationships with other people?

So, we stop rationalizing. We wake up our consciences by bringing our stuff to God and allowing ourselves to be confronted by God's absolute standards, and God's mercy. We take responsibility. We say, "I have done this. I am responsible." We call sin what it is and say this behavior, this attitude is transgressions, is iniquity, it is sin.

And finally, our goal in confession is to seek freedom from the presence and power of sin, not just to obtain pardon.

SLIDE

^{Ps 51:7} Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

^{Ps 51:8} Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

^{Ps 51:9} Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

^{Ps 51:10} Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

^{Ps 51:11} Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

^{Ps 51:12} Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

David here wants cleansing. He wants restored communion with God. He doesn't simply want to escape the consequences for his sin.

The reason why we don't experience the kind of liberty and freedom that God wants to give us through this gift of confession, the reason why many of us don't enjoy confession, instead we think of it as a dreadful thing, is because all we're really looking for is pardon. God, don't punish me because of my sin. Protect me from the consequences of my sin. That kind of prayer will never liberate you. That kind of confession will never release you from the jail, the slavery, the bondage you are in. There's got to be more. It has to be, "I want the sin out of my life."

Do you pray this way? Does your confession sound like: “I want the power of this sin broken. I want you to pull up this weed all the way down to the roots. All of the attitudes, all of the ways that it affects me and others, dig it out, God. I want a new heart.”

I’ll close with v. 10,

SLIDE

^{Ps 51:10} Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

That word “create” is very unusual in the Bible. It is used only of God’s activity in the world. Creation is not something that men and women do. The biblical writers never spoke of men and women as being creative. We could be talented, we could be gifted, we could be artistic, but creation, fashioning something out of nothing, was an activity attributed only to God. To create, the word is “bara” in Hebrew, means to bring into existence something entirely new. Bring into existence something that has never been seen before.

When you confess, what you are saying to God is, “God, I’m not only going to acknowledge my sin to you, I’m not only going to agree with you about what I’ve done, but I want to agree with you about the kind of person you want me to be. I’m going to pray for your great purpose to be fulfilled in my life. You want me to look like Jesus. You want me to have a pure heart. You want me to have a clean mind. You want me to use my mouth in an encouraging way. You want me to look at certain things and not at other things. You want my money devoted for this or that purpose. Bring into existence in my life something that has never been there before.”

Friend, how deep does your confession go? Does it go beyond the consequences of your sin all the way to cleansing, communion with God, and a new creation for you? Imagine what your life would be like if you learn the art of confession. Imagine what this world would be like, if the world learned the art of confession. Let's pray.

The Lost Art of Confession

Rich Nathan

November 13-14, 2004

Prayer: Hungry For God Series

Psalm 51

- I. Bad Confessions

- II. Good Confessions
 - A. Quit Rationalizing
 - B. Wake Up Your Conscience
 - C. Begin With God
 - i. God's Absolutes (Ps. 51:4)
 - ii. God's Mercy (Ps. 51:1)
 - D. Take Responsibility (Ps. 51:1-5)
 - E. Call It What It Is (Ps. 51:1, 2)
 - i. Transgression
 - ii. Iniquity
 - iii. Sin
 - F. Pursue Freedom From The Presence And Power Of Sin, Not Just Pardon (Ps. 51:7-12)