

LIVING THE STORY

The Lost Art of Confession

Small Group Study Notes by Rev. Matt Bruns

READ James 5:13 - 16

“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Confession and forgiveness for me are two things that go hand in hand in the Christian life. Every time we create space to admit how we have missed the mark of God’s love and truth; we open ourselves to the mending work of the cross. This is the shocking reality that confession can reveal to us. We learn to live into the truth of being God’s new creation. The old gets put away so that the new can come.

Theologian Trish Warren says that “When we confess together, we are reminded that none of our pathologies, neuroses, or sins, no matter how small or secret only affect us. We are a church, a community, a family. We are not simply individuals with our pet sins and private brokenness. We are people who need each other if we are to seek Christ and walk in repentance.”

Adelle Calhoun says the freeing thing about creating a regular habit of confession is, “We don’t pretend to be other than we are. We seek to tell it like it is without rationalisation, denial or blame to the only person in the universe who will unconditionally love us when we trip up or act poorly. We hand over the pretence, imagine management, manipulation, control and self-obsession. We lay down our own ability to change by the power of self.”

QUESTIONS

1. What are the advantages of letting others and God see us as we really are?
2. What gets in the way of doing this?
3. How might you create a regular practice of confession in your day-to-day life and with whom?

Keeping short accounts with God and others must find its way into the small moments in our days. In those daily moments of losing patience, snapping at those I love, cursing that person behind the wheel on my car, feeling annoyed with others at work, I can respond with self-condemnation, self-justification or repentance.

Trish Warren again notes that when we respond by bringing these daily aggravations to God, they're no longer meaningless interruptions, sheer failure or brokenness. They're potential moments of redemption and remembering, moments to grow bit by bit in trusting Jesus' work on my behalf. We learn to look to God for the cracks of our day, to notice what these moments of failure reveal about who we are – our false hopes and false gods. These moments are an opportunity for formation, for sanctification.

Underneath my overreactions, and aggravations are my true fears like not being able to care for myself or those around me, fear of failure, or feeling incompetent. They reveal my worries about money, exposes my idolatry of ease, my false hope in comfort and convenience, my misplaced reliance's. When the day is sunny and everything is going according to plan I can look like a pretty good person. But the little things gone wrong and interrupted plans reveal who I really am. My cracks show and I see that I am profoundly in need of grace.

What do the cracks in your day reveal about you and where you need God's grace?

PRACTICES - adapted from *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*

1. Enter into an accountability group or relationship with trusted person or people where you can't hide. Tell the truth about who you are and ask those in that group to pray for you and help you change.
2. Set aside some time for self-examination. Close your eyes. Imagine you are in a safe place surrounded by love of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you. Remember he see you absolutely and with total love. Ask God's light to pierce your defences. Then ask yourself, who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger and so on? As the Holy Spirit brings people or situations to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you, and if needed to give you grace to forgive them.

Then make an apology, or a phone call or talk in person to put the relationship back on track.

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus thank you that you know what is good and best for us and what will free us. It's incredibly challenging to live out your call to be agents of forgiveness and reconciliation, and let you search our lives and show us where we need to grow and change. Give us wisdom how to respond and what practical steps we need to put in place to move forward, so that as we confess your sins to each other and pray for each other we may be healed. Give us your strength and insight because we can't do this on our own. In Jesus' name, Amen.

RESOURCES ON FORGIVENESS

Ted Talk - https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_montana_why_forgiveness_is_worth_it?language=en

Book -The Art of forgiveness by Lewis Smedes

