

FOLLOWING JESUS'

PATHWAY

CONFESSION & SELF EXAMEN

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SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES HANDBOOK BY ADELE AHLBERG CALHOUN

“The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.”

Augustine of Hippo

What is Confession?

Confession embraces Christ’s gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change.

What does scripture say about confession?

Psalms 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Psalms 32:1-2 “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered. Bless is the man whose sin does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that may be healed.”

Digging Deeper into Confession & Self-Examen

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does your confession tend to be along the lines of “Forgive my sins, dear Lord” rather than specifically naming your sins one by one before the face of God?
2. What experiences have affected your ability to give and receive forgiveness? Talk to God about what this means.
3. When have you tasted the joy of a good confession? What was that like for you?
4. What is it like for you to confess your sins before a friend or confessor?
5. Which of your sins hurts those closest to you?

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. 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 as a guide, journal 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.
2. 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, anger, and so on?
 - 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 relationships back on track.

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3. Make a life confession – alone or to a trusted friend or confessor.

- Dividing your life into seven-year segments, reflect on the sins particular to each segment.
- Confess your sins aloud. Receive the freedom that comes in knowing you stand completely in the clear before a holy God.

4. Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, “What do I do that hurts you?” “How could I better love you?” “What is it like to be with me?” “Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself?” Let their answer guide you in a time of confession.

5. 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 and the community of faith for help.

6. Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God.

- How does God meet you in these confessions of David?

7. 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, envy, anger, pretense, avoidance of responsibility. • What do you see about 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.

8. Begin to notice your strong emotions. When do you feel yourself getting hot, defensive, angry, withdrawn? What is motivating your emotion? What behavior stems from your strong emotional response.

- As you attend to this internal world, ask God to make you alert to what triggers strong emotional reactions. Confess any sin relating to these reactions.
- Practice noticing your internal world, and begin to develop a habit of immediate confession.

(Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2015, p.101-104.)

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Preparation: Spend a few moments in silence, allowing yourself to be still and know how much God loves you. Use a favorite Scripture, prayer, or other spiritual reading as needed in order to settle into the assurance of God’s love in the present moment. Hear God say to you, “I have loved you with an everlasting love...”

Invitation: Invite God to go with you and in your search for evidence of his presence throughout your day and in your search for self-knowledge.

Review the Day: Identify the major events of the day (or the week, if you are doing the examen weekly), including your spiritual practices, meals, appointments, interactions with others, significant events at work. Reflect on each of the events, noticing where God seemed to be loving you, speaking to you, guiding you or showing you something new about himself.

Give Thanks: Thank God for each part of your day, for his presence with you in the midst of it, for those moments when you sensed a growing freedom from sin and a greater capacity to love God and others. If there are any unresolved issues or questions pertaining to the events of the day, express these to God as well, and allow yourself to experience gratitude for God’s presence with you even in places that feel dark or confusing.

Confess: Using Psalm 139:23-24 as your prayer, invite God to bring to mind attitudes, actions, or moments when you fell short of

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exhibiting the character of Christ or the fruit of the Spirit. As God brings different areas to mind, reflect on what contributed to the situation and what might enable you to respond differently in the future.

Ask Forgiveness: Also express your willingness to take any concrete steps needed to allow Christ's character to be more fully formed in you. Be assured of God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and his power to continue leading you into the transformation you desire. Ask God if there is anything you need to do to make things right relative to the situation you have confessed.

Seek Out Spiritual Friendship: Seek out a spiritual friend and tell them what you are discovering about yourself, your confession and your resolve to pursue transformation in this area.

(Ruth Haley Barton, Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2006, pgs. 108-109)

EVENING RITUAL:

Before going to bed each night, begin a practice of praying, seeking, and journaling each of the questions below.

1. Where did you see/sense God's presence today? How did you respond?
2. Give thanks for what God did do in the day?
3. Confess – Using Psalms 139:23-24, reflect upon what you need to confess from today.
4. Seek forgiveness – Using 1 John 1:9 spend time seeking forgiveness from the day and if there is anyone with whom you need to seek forgiveness?
5. How did the fruit of the Spirit specifically reveal itself through you today?
6. What drained your energy today? Can you describe it in a word? How can you deal with that emotion right now so as to not take it into tomorrow? What was the silver lining of this experience?
7. What attributes is God speaking over you or calling out to you? Spend the remainder of your time listening to the goodness which God is speaking over you?

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(Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2015, p.154, 160, 163, 176, 179, 200, 311-317.)