

## Confession: The Second Hardest Thing To Say

Psalm 51:1-12  
1 John 1:1-10

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Faith Community

Way back a thousand years ago or so, my crowd of buddies included an Italian kid. He was first generation American, and his parents spoke very limited English. Wonderfully strange smells filled his house, and we never understood a word when his family talked with each other, so there was a great cloud of mystery that surrounded Joe and his lineage.

Along with his ancestry, Joe was Roman Catholic, which made him all the more special. One day he said something about going to confession. Well, we Protestant kids knew precious little about that, so we asked him.

He told us about the tiny little room he went into, with a little curtain on one side and someone called a priest on the other. What do you do in there? *Well, I tell him about the bad things I've done.*

Really? What do you tell him, Joe? We may have only been third or fourth graders, but we still knew when something exciting might be headed our way.

*Oh, I stole a penny, stuff like that.* Oh....OK. So we moved on to more important stuff like which girl had the most cooties. But I still remember that conversation. And while it seemed a bit strange, there was something about it that felt right.

Today's sermon is entitled "Confession: The Second Hardest Thing To Say." The second hardest thing to say is, I think, "I'm sorry." That's why confession is so important.

Just as it takes incredible courage to say, "I love you," saying "I'm sorry" is a very big deal. Some might actually reverse the two.

The Boston Globe says that only 2% of American Catholics go to confession regularly, and 74% never go, or do so less than once a year.<sup>1</sup> And yet there's an innate need in us for the sense of relief that comes when we own up to the messes of our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/02/16/catholic-confession-steep-price/NbMVFFyYjv26Gcphu17yPJ/story.html>

This goes beyond Catholicism. I Googled “online confession” this past week and got 33,500,000 possible hits.

It can be as simple as Dailyconfession.com or Confessionpost.com. There’s also Group Hug.us, Notproud.com, Online confession with Father Net, and Comeclean.com.

We supposedly enlightened Protestants. We can confess on our own, no human help is needed, thank you very much. I’m old enough to know, however, that more often than not, it doesn’t happen at all, or we limit ourselves to a pre packaged prayer that we say as a group on Sunday mornings. And in the process we’re missing something very precious and important.

Friends, God wired us to have a healthy balance in our lives, and sometimes we miss that balance because we cannot or will not own up to the realities of life. Your life. My life. In some ways the prayer of confession is the ultimate reality check.

If the Bible says, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”** that must include me, which is why I need to say, “I’m sorry.” I need the prayer of confession for my own well-being. So do you. Entire communities need it as well. Otherwise it’s like a sore that won’t heal or some kind of self destructive behavior that we know isn’t healthy, but we do it anyway; we can’t help ourselves.

Maybe Scripture has a point after all.

Listen to this from Psalm 32:

***When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night  
your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, “I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD.”  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.*** (Psalm 32:3-5)

Friends, that's downright clinical. It's the story of everyone who's ever struggled with unresolved guilt and found healing through confession.

King David had sinned big time. Marriages were destroyed and at least two people died because of what he had done. Someone loved God and loved David enough to confront him, at great personal cost, and what was David going to do? Not only his life but also the fate of a nation hung in the balance.

Read Psalm 51, a Psalm of David.

***<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.***

***<sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.***

***<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.***

***<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.***

***<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.***

Friends, as horribly painful as it was, David confessed and God restored him. The consequences of what he had done were still very real, but I'm convinced this was the only way he and his country were able to survive.

David understood a foundational principle:

The closer you come to God, the more unworthy you know yourself to be. The more unworthy you know yourself to be, the more grateful you become. And the more profound your joy. Later in Psalm 51 David wrote this:

***<sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.***

***<sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise.***

During an especially dark time in my life I read that and wrote next to the line about a broken spirit, "I've got that." That marked a milestone for me, and I relive it regularly. What do you do with your broken spirit?

Friends, yes there is darkness. There is darkness in us. In you. In me. We can pretend it doesn't exist. We can cover it over with good intentions. We can outright deny it. We can self-medicate with endless possibilities. None of that changes the reality of life. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But here's the good news:

***In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** (John 1:4,5 TNIV)

This is the wonderful blessing of the prayer of confession. To be that real, that honest, that vulnerable, is the sure path to cleansing and restoration. It's the key to healing, renewal, and hope.