



# Confession

*Know it...Find it...Live it*

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned....”

“Confession involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit.

“ – Richard Foster

## **Confession: An Introduction to this Series...**

*A series written by Jodie Swee (Northwest Twin Cities Area Director – Young Life)*

This is what pops into my head when I begin to think about confession. I quickly conjure up a scene from a movie in a quiet church, where a man steps into a confessional. The priest opens the divider, and says, “Yes, my child?” The man then proceeds to lay out all his sins as the priest quietly listens, and then the priest tells the man that his sins are forgiven, and tells him to do a few “Hail Mary’s” and a couple of “Our Fathers”, and the man steps out of the confessional...into the real world...and walks out whistling with a carefree look on his face. This image always leaves me feeling flat.

Somehow I am sure that is not all confession is supposed to be (nor what the founding fathers of the Catholic Church intended their practice of it to be). Yet that seems to be the prevalent idea of confession in our churches, our culture, in the movies, on YouTube, and even on websites. I like to call it the “Dump and Run” confession.

Type “anonymous confessions” into Google, and you will be amazed at what pops up. There are actual websites where people confess their deepest and darkest secrets. I wondered if, after they post these things, the authors close down their computer and walk off whistling and carefree?

**This “Dump and Run” manner of confession leaves me feeling flat because it misses the good part. Our conscience might be momentarily cleared, but have we been changed?**

God is the Master Storyteller, and in His story....which is also your story...people are transformed! In “Celebration of Discipline,” author Richard Foster says that confession “involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming the inner spirit. “

Confession is more than clearing our conscience; it is making ourselves right with the Lord and allowing that relationship to transform us and transform our relationships with others. This study is meant to give students a place to begin to approach the discipline of Confession.

First, you and your students will take a look at why Christians need confession. Secondly, you will spend time learning how to prepare for confession through the act of “examen” or examining our hearts. Finally, you and your students will spend some time in confession and learn how it can transform our relationships with each other.

This topic should be approached carefully and with sensitivity, as all of us have sin that shames us and hinders our relationship with the Lord. However, it is my hope and prayer that there would also be the boldness of Christ’s truth of redemption and healing. Walk softly, but firmly, over this ground of confession. I pray that freedom and transformation abound in the light of His grace.

## **Confession: “Know It”**

Jodie Swee’s Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

In 2005, a man named Frank Warren created a blog entitled “PostSecret”. He invited completely anonymous people to create a postcard and share a secret that they had never previously revealed. According to Time magazine, “No restrictions are made on the content of the secret; only that it must be completely truthful and must never have been spoken before. Entries range from admissions of sexual misconduct and criminal activity to confessions of secret desires, embarrassing habits, hopes and dreams.” Since 2005, tens of thousands of people have anonymously sent in their secrets, which have since been put into multiple books, art exhibits, and The All-American Rejects used the postcards for the video of their song, “Dirty Little Secrets”.

Watching the “Dirty Little Secrets” video or the PostSecret YouTube video is painful. The majority of confessions seem to be “dirty little secrets”: crimes committed, hearts broken, identities in crisis, undeclared love...so many people with secret burdens. Yet I find something hopeful within, and wonder if there isn’t something for Christ-followers to learn from it.

Within those postcards is an acknowledgement of the daily hurts and sins that we, as Christ Followers, can so easily gloss over by our Confession of Christ. To confess Christ is to admit that we have sinned and turned our backs on God, and that we believe that Christ paid the price for our sins so that we might be in right relationship with the Father once more.

It is easy to view this as just a one-time event of salvation where all our past and present sins are covered, but there is so much more to it. “Salvation as the Bible speaks of it refers to far more than who come to faith in Christ or who gets to heaven. The Bible views salvation as both an event and a process,” says Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*. In Philippians (2:12) Paul tells believers they need to work it out. How can that be done? Through the daily confession of sins, which allows us to continually experience the power of the grace of the cross. And let me tell you, being continually reminded of that grace is life-changing. Which is what Jesus wants for us. “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full,” he says in John 10:10. He doesn’t say “so that you may have life when you die and get to heaven,” he’s talking about now! So let’s begin!

In this first study, let’s lead students to their need for confession and how it impacts our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

**GOAL:** (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

**INTRODUCTION:** Tonight we will begin talking about the spiritual discipline of confession. We will talk about what it is and why we need to engage in it.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, please be with us tonight. Help us understand our need for You, and begin to open our hearts to where we need to let you in.

**MEDIA/ACTIVITY/INTERACTION:**

Watch the All-American Rejects video, "Dirty Little Secrets" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ikv7TI87io&feature=related>)

1. What is confession?
2. Why do people confess?
3. What's the point?
4. Is there anything missing from these types of confessions we saw in the video?
5. Can you remember a time when you had to confess? What was the outcome?

**TRANSITION:** Confession is typically done in a "dump and run" way. But, as Christians, confession is supposed to be a way of life. It changes our relationships with others and with God.

**SCRIPTURE:**

Read 1 John 1:5-10  
(v5-8)

1. What is "darkness"?
2. If we are already in relationship with Jesus, why do we have "darkness" (sin) in our lives?
3. What does it look like to "stumble around in the dark" within this context? How does it impact your relationship with God?

(v9)

1. What does confession do?

Read Psalm 32

1. How did David's confession affect his relationship with God?

**TAKE AWAY:**

1. What does this mean for me?
2. Do I want to go deeper with Him? Am I willing?

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Sometimes we're afraid of your Light, Father. It's easier to just close our eyes, and stay in the dark. Give us the courage to open our eyes, and seek the freedom and life that comes when we give you our darkness.

## **Confession: “Find It”**

Jodie Swee’s Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

If the discipline of Confession truly means stepping back into a right relationship with the Lord, than it would be impossible to do so without first looking at how we have stepped out. This is a specific and definite process where we are brought face to face with what we have done. Tony Stark would never have transformed into “Ironman”, if he hadn’t first been brought face to face with the consequences of his choices.

St. Alphonsus Liguori wrote, “For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin.” I think we’ll come back to that last one in the next section, but for now let’s snuggle in with the first two.

We begin with what has historically been called “examen”, or self-examination. God has built into us a conscience, which begins to squirm, when we have done wrong. Our natural inclination is to ignore it, excuse it, or try to run far, far away from it.... but God is calling us to turn around and face it. Not just face it, but open ourselves up to it and lay our sin bare before His scrutiny. “Search me, O God, and know my heart!” cries David in Psalm 139, offering us an example of the intimacy and vulnerability that led to him being called “a man after God’s own heart”. The discoveries of our examen should bring us to sorrow.... but this is a very different kind of sorrow. It is godly sorrow.

Worldly sorrow causes us to feel bad for causing hurt to ourselves or others, while godly sorrow causes us grieve how it has separated us from God. If only we could experience a teaspoons worth of God’s hatred of sin and what it does to our relationship with Him, we would fall to our knees in horror and weep. When Nathan confronts David about his adultery with Bathsheba, David doesn’t go running to Bathsheba or her husband to beg forgiveness, he falls to his knees (probably) and said to His Heavenly Father, “Against you, *you only*, have I sinned.” (Psalm 51: David’s words, my italics) In Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster says that this sorrow “is an abhorrence at having committed the sin, a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.”

God hates what keeps us from Him! He hates the sin in our lives that keep us from knowing Him fully, and experiencing who He has created us to be. The only way to make it right is to lay our selves bare before His light and experience the sorrow of our sins, as it is only then that we can experience the sheer joy and freedom of His mercy...and the life that comes with it.

As I write this, I feel a little like that scary old man that stands on the street corner yelling “Repent!” to anyone who comes near. Without the context of a relationship, I feel like the truth and intensity of that crazy old man’s words is lost, but here in your group, you have an opportunity to bring it to life in a way that might change your students’ lives.

In the evangelical world, we have become used to our grace. I think it is time to find what the Puritans call “the gift of tears.” We need to spend time and effort examining the ways we continue to cause sorrow to God and ourselves.

I offer a word of caution at this point. My hope and prayer is for students to spend some time in examination and godly sorrow, but not set up shop here. We can easily get stuck on how much we fail, and how fully we have fallen short.... but that is not how the story ends and we know it. “Confession begins in sorrow, but ends in joy,” says Foster.

**GOAL:** (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

**\*\*\*LEADERS: BRING BLANK POSTCARDS FOR EACH STUDENT**

**INTRODUCTION:** If the discipline of Confession is truly a means of stepping back into a right relationship with the Lord, than it would be impossible to do so without first looking at how we have stepped out. To do so we must do some self-examination, and experience our findings through God's eyes.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, please be our guide through tonight's study. Help us to understand, and give us the conviction and courage to ask you to search our hearts and show us what you find.

**MEDIA/ACTIVITY/INTERACTION:**

Watch the clip from "Ironman".

1. Why does Tony Stark become Ironman? What changes him?
2. Do you have an example from your life where you came face to face with a choice you made, and it changed you?

**TRANSITION:** We make choices every day, and each one has it's own consequence. Like Tony Stark, every once in awhile we come face to face with the results of our choices. But how often do we face our choices through God's perspective?

**SCRIPTURE:**

Read Psalm 139:23-24

1. How does David's prayer lead to a confession of sin?
2. What role does God play in David's confession?

Read Psalm 51:1-6

1. What do we know about David?
2. Why did he write this Psalm?
3. Who is his confession directed to? Why?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10

1. What is the difference between a godly sorrow differs from worldly sorrow?
2. Can you give an example?

**TAKE AWAY:**

1. Take a postcard (or two or three) home with you.
2. Spend some time in Examen, and write down the things that God reveals to you. Feel free to decorate your postcard.
3. Bring them back next week (you will not have to share if you don't want to).

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Father, You are so big and mysterious. It seems crazy to even try to know Your thoughts, but I know that You long to free me from any sin that is separating us. Please help us find the space this week for self-examination. Lead us to your sorrow, and help us walk through it.

## **Confession: “Live It”**

Jodie Swee’s Blog (some thoughts to help you lead this conversation with your students)

Christians are hypocrites. At least that is my understanding of what the majority of the secular world thinks of Christians (especially high school students). I totally get where they are coming from. Bless our broken hearts, we think that to do justice to Jesus, we need to show everyone a perfectly redeemed life.... because that means Jesus works! It’s the “Shamwow!” of Christianity.

We are redeemed, but living that out is a process of transformation that is brought to completion only by our earthly death. In the same way that those miracle products on infomercials never live up to our expectations, if Christ-followers pretend that our lives our honky-dory all the time because Jesus is in our hearts, and yet continue to sin against our neighbors and ourselves...well, we become the “Shamwow!” Of Christianity. The product isn’t as good as it’s commercial....and that is a dang shame because Jesus is WAY better than the commercial.

We will never be able to perfectly represent Christ, but Scripture offers an example of a great way to move in that direction through the act of confessing our sins to one another ....which is the last stop of this study.

Scripture encourages us to confess to one another, and I think this can be an important part in our transformation. We are humans and sometimes need a feel-able, touchable response... and while the gift of forgiveness is made possible ONLY through Jesus, believers are given an opportunity to stand in Christ’s stead and offer it to one another. Think about what that means for our students! If they are free to admit their sins, and experience forgiveness, they will learn to be vulnerable and humble. Which makes them approachable and relatable to all the broken people in their lives who don’t know that they can be freed by the blood of Jesus! It’s a brilliant and powerful testimony of Christ that we can teach our students (and maybe remind ourselves).

It is my hope that tonight’s lesson while be interactive. Spend some time looking at James 5:16, but then put it into practice. Hopefully at the end of the last study you sent students home with postcards on which they could express their sins through art and word. (If you didn’t, hand them out at this one, turn on some mood music, and give them ten to fifteen minutes to do so).

After everyone has their sins “in hand”, it is my hope that you will allow the Light to shine upon them through sharing. This is where it turns into a Choose –Your- Own- Adventure kind of small group. As the leader, please determine what would be the safest and most meaningful environment in which to confess and receive forgiveness. For example, you can have students share with the whole group or break into smaller groups or share only one thing from their card vs. the whole card. Whichever you chose, please make sure to have an adult leader available for each group. Once everyone has shared, it is time to give the sins to the Lord and accept forgiveness. It’s time to destroy the cards ☺. You can rip them up for each other, or if there is a fireplace handy you can burn them. Whatever you choose to do tonight, choose to let the Lord move in and through you, and don’t forget to receive His grace for yourself as well!

**GOAL:** (everyone's will be a little different, write yours here to remind you of what you are leading your group toward)

**INTRODUCTION:** In our modern American culture, there is this idea that we need to look like we have it all together. Jesus is calling us to something different. Tonight, we are going to talk about confessing our sins to one another and how it impacts our relationship with God and each other.

**PRAYER:** Jesus, it is so hard to be vulnerable. Please make this a safe place for each of us, where we can share what's really going on in our hearts and discover what you meant for us to learn about your forgiveness experienced through the voice of another.

**MEDIA/INTERACTION/ACTIVITY:**

Watch "Shamwow!" infomercial DVD.

1. Have you or a member of your family ever ordered a product from an infomercial? How did it work?
2. What do you think people's overall impression of infomercial products is?

**TRANSITION:** In the same way that those miracle products on infomercials never live up to our expectations, if Christ-followers pretend that our lives our honky-dory all the time because Jesus is in our hearts, and yet continue to sin against ourselves and our neighbors...well, we become the "Shamwow!" of Christianity. The product isn't as good as its commercial....and that is a dang shame because Jesus is WAY better than the commercial. We will never be able to perfectly represent Christ, but Scripture offers an example of a great way to move in that direction through the act of confessing our sins to one another.

**SCRIPTURE:**

Read James 5:13-16

1. What three life situations does James deal with here? What does James call the believer in each situation to do? (v.13-14)
2. What is the result of this prayer? (v. 15)
3. Why would we confess our sins and pray for each other? (v16)
4. Who is righteous? (See Corinthians 5:21)

**TAKEAWAY:**

We are humans and sometimes need a feel-able, touchable response... and while the gift of forgiveness is made possible ONLY through Jesus, believers (the "righteous") are given an opportunity to stand in Christ's stead and offer it to one another. This benefit of this is two-fold: we are freed from our sins and we no longer have to pretend that we are perfect or that we have it all together.

Share what's on the postcards.

Have a leader read 1 John 1:5-9.

Repeat 1 John 1:9 as you destroy each other's cards.

**CLOSING PRAYER:**

Jesus, on the cross you said, "It is finished." Let it be so with the sins on the cards that we just destroyed. Help us move forward, and not repeat the same mistakes we have in the past. But if we do, give us the strength to keep coming to you for forgiveness and direction to be fully freed from it. Help us to be vulnerable with each other, and with others, and live out a life in progress under the grace of Christ.

