

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: Confession
SERIES: Whoever Hears These Words
SCRIPTURES: Matthew 6:5-15
SPEAKER: Shaun Kipe
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**Credit to Richard Foster, Ken Bailey, Scot McKnight & John Ortberg for valuable insights/Illustrations/Applications regarding this message!*

Well good morning, it is so great to worship with you.

We're right in the middle of our series called, "whoever hears these words" (**SERIES TITLE SLIDE**)...

We're taking several weeks to look at the words of Jesus in his sermon on the mount. We've been working our way through the "**The Lord's Prayer**" together.

Our Father, in Heaven. Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. This morning...

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

It's always amazing to me. Just two sentences but way more here than we have time to work through. So much about my life, your life in those two sentences.

This morning I want us to focus on just that first phrase...Forgive us our debts...

Now this is one of those places in the Lord's prayer where you'll notice several different words get used depending on the translation. Sometimes you see **debts**...sometimes **trespasses**...sometimes **sins**. And you might think, so which one is right? And the answer is. Yep.

In Aramaic there is one word that refers to both debts/trespasses/sins. In Greek as in English, there is more than one word which is express similar ideas. So when this word was translated into Greek the authors of the Bible had to select which word they felt best expressed the Aramaic word, same as it translated into English. In the end, it doesn't really matter. Thought the words have slightly different meanings, in prayer we ask for forgiveness for failing to fulfill what God requires of us (debts – not doing what we should) and for failure to do the right thing when we do act (trespassing – doing what we know we shouldn't).

This morning we want to talk about learning the art of asking for forgiveness...in prayer we openly admit our failures and short-comings to God. Now there's a church word we use for this concept. It's called

I. Confession

Admitting my failure.

A few years ago, Jenny and I decided we were gonna buy an Ipad (**PIC OF IPAD**). So we went to the store to pick one out, and of course there are several different versions, different features and you have to pick the one that suits you the best. And the newest model was also the nicest and the most expensive.

The salesman was asking what we plan to use the Ipad for. We both love to read, and Jenny likes keeping up on social media. But most importantly Jenny teaches English to Chinese kids through video and we needed something high quality, better

than our old laptop for that. Then I also started explaining to the salesman, that we have three children all under the age of 10, who may use it to play games.

When I said that, his ears perked up. I think these tech guys can be a little protective of their tech stuff, even over-protective. He's thinking really "you're gonna let your kids put their grubby little hands on this pristine piece of technology." And he immediately started encouraging us to one of the older models.

My thought was, *"Who does this guy think he is? Does he think I don't know how to parent and handle three young children?"* So almost of out of spite, I said, *"Why don't you give us the newest one?"*

As we got home, I began to think myself. I need to keep this Ipad nice. So I sat the three kids down for orientation regarding the Ipad. I explained to them very clearly, this Ipad is so valuable, rule number 1 is, you may never touch the Ipad. Don't play the Ipad, don't eat around the Ipad, don't go near the Ipad. In fact, don't look at the Ipad, or breath around the Ipad, don't even think about this Ipad. Does everyone understand?

It was kind of like the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Don't touch it. There are plenty of games and toys in this house which you may freely enjoy, but don't go near the Ipad or you shall surely die!

Then one day, it happened. I heard Jenny wailing from the bedroom. There was a scratch on the Ipad screen. The kind that couldn't be overlooked or ignored or wiped away. So Jenny lined up our children. "Do you see this?" she said. "That's a scratch. That's a scratch on our Ipad. It wasn't there before. And it will never go away. Do you know how long never is? Whoever did this is never going to get up from the time out chair? Now which one of you did this?"

The kids stared in dismay at the mark and then at Jenny, no one budged. They looked at each other, they were not going to confess.

I also knew they were not going to confess because, truth is, none of them were responsible for the scratch, I was. And I wasn't about to tell Jenny what happened. Not to her face. Maybe in a sermon illustration many years later...I'm just kidding. This story is intended with some sarcasm and exaggeration.

(This story adapted from John Ortberg – The Life You've Always Wanted)

It's to help give you a picture though. You get the idea, we all have moments where, "I know I've done something I shouldn't do." You are going to mess up. You are going to fall short. What is the appropriate response in those situations?

And so you're gonna need something to fall back on in those moments when you are not who you were intended to be.

What is the appropriate response to our failures or short-comings in life? Is there anything that offers us healing, change? Jesus answer found in the Lord's prayer is... **Father forgive us our debts...**

Confession, at the right time, in the right manner, is good for your soul. It's healing, it's cleansing. Confession is all about how I begin to work through my own failure in an appropriate manner.

By the way quick clarification here, next week we'll be talking about **forgiveness**...that's more about how we deal with someone else's failure, because other people aren't perfect either. And so you'll need forgiveness to help you deal with other people's failures.

But this morning, confession, is about how I begin to work through my own failure.

I just want to say right from the start, this word or even concept, CONFESSION can often feel a little bit outdated, makes a lot of people feel uncomfortable. It is not necessarily pleasant to admit my failures. We live in a culture that has a hard time owning up to mistakes, apologizing, admitting.

Not many examples in our world of individuals that are willing to fess up to mistakes, “I got something wrong.” Even within church circles confession has kind of this negative stigma. It has been used at times to take advantage of and humiliate individuals. And when that happens, it is wrong.

But this concept, confession, is something that you find throughout Scripture. It’s not just in Jesus prayer...

The OT prophets for example were regularly imploring the God’s people “repent and turn from your wicked way.” Part of repentance, involves this idea of confession. Admitting my failure, “I recognize, that I’ve done something wrong and I need to change.”

John the Baptist. His primary message, in preparing the way for Jesus... “repent...for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” Again, admitting my failure. “I recognize, that I’ve done something wrong and I need to change.”

Jesus actually tells about the concept of confession in

Luke 18 – ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.

If you don't like the idea of confession there is another option. Just be perfect. Never make a mistake, never let anyone down, never act dishonestly or let an impure thought enter your mind. Then you won't have to worry about this confession deal. You can just pray the prayer of the Pharisee: “Thank you God that I'm not like other people. Thank you that I don't mess up. Thank you that I never snap at my children or grumble at others. I have a perfect home. Perfect life. Perfectly obedient.”

If that's the standard, perfection, we are all doomed. So everyone else in here, which I suspect is all of us, we're all gonna buckle down and learn from Jesus prayer the alternative to perfection, is the prayer of confession. “God, forgive me my debts...my failures...those moments when I am not the person you created me to be.” Now that is something I can do.

So a few thoughts on confession, how we do it, what it means...

A. Confession starts before God.

Notice in Jesus prayer...he is speaking with the Father. His prayer is directed to God, when he says... “Forgive us our debts...”

King David says in **Psalm 51:4 – Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.**

Our failures/debts/trespasses as humans are always failures in relation to the Creator. God made us. He knows best how we were created to live. But when we don't live that way, we are behaving, acting, living outside of our intended design.

Every time I cheat on my taxes. It's not just failure to comply with the rules of our society. At a deeper level it's dishonesty and that breaks God's intended design for my life.

Every time I gossip. I am using the tongue that was created by God for worshipping and encouraging to tear down and destroy. It's an offense against God.

Every time I am easily angered and snap at my kids, I dishonored one of God's precious children.

Every time I treat my finances as if they belong to me rather than as a gift from God. Every time I believe that my value comes from my physical appearance or my bank account, or my occupation. I have stopped believing what God says is actually true about me.

So confession is always before God. *"I have not lived according to your intended design."*

B. Confession makes you aware of your failures.

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

Confession is in many ways a self-examination with God. It means getting real and honest with God about who I am. It means taking responsibility for my wrong.

Otherwise we will not be hard enough on ourselves (we'll let ourselves off the hook). "We will call evil, good and good, evil." (Isaiah) We make excuses for our behavior. (Foster 29-30)

Well, I was having a bad day. I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. I was up late and didn't get enough sleep. I didn't get a good meal, and so I'm just hangry. You

know the excuse that is just becoming common, it's just my personality type. God actually made me this way, it's in my genes. So really I can't help it.

See how that happens.

And many of those things may be factors. But confession means saying somewhere in the mix of all of those complicated things, there was a choice, and I made that choice, a wrong choice and that choice does not need an explanation or excuses, it needs forgiven. (Ortberg 130)

There's a story in the OT where King David, has a man killed and steals his wife. The rich, powerful King, already married, steals the wife of a countryman. It's a pretty egregious sin, failure on David's part and yet it's almost as if David doesn't even realize his wrong-doing. It's not until the prophet Nathan comes to his home and tells the story of how a rich man, with flocks and herds of sheep, who steals and kills his poor neighbors sheep, that David realizes his own wrong.

When Nathan shares the story of this rich man, David is furious.

⁵ David burned with anger against the rich man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this (who stole that poor mans sheep) must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Nathan replies, "You are that man. You stole another mans wife."

Blinded to his own sin. Perhaps excused, overlooked, justified but letting himself off the hook.

You need to practice confession before God, so that you become aware of your failures.

This is why...it's always good to

1. Be as specific as possible in confession.

Rather than praying, "I'm sure I lied today." You think back through your day and recall the specific situation, the place where it happened, the people involved, the words you said.

Here's a really simple, yet practical way to try specific confession. Try it this week, it's in your bulletin as well. As you go to God in prayer:

WHERE was I today? Think back on of all the places you visited. And in those places...

WHO were you with? Think of the people involved.

WHAT did you **SAY/THINK/DO** in that situation.

And as you go through your day, ask the Holy Spirit as the Psalmist says to "Search me..."

Were there words, thoughts, actions of: **pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, laziness, gluttony.**

Confess them to God. It is this specific confession that makes you less likely to let it slip by tomorrow.

Again, the purpose is honest self-reflection that can lead to self-awareness and ultimately changed behavior. (Foster 34)

This leads to a third important understanding regarding confession, and really why confession starts before God.

C. Don't be too hard on yourself

As you start becoming aware of your short-comings and failures it would be easy to be too hard on ourselves!

Failure to live up to certain standards or rules. This constant feeling of "I'm not good enough." Or guilt over not living out the Christian life perfectly. I don't pray enough. I don't read my Bible enough etc. Begin thinking, "I am a failure. I am worthless."

Can't tell you how many Christians live self-condemning lives. Because of a misunderstanding about their failures. This is called self-condemnation. It is not true, it is not Biblical.

So I want to be real clear, the purpose of confession is not to make you feel bad about yourself. Yes, you must become aware of your failures, and deal honestly with them, but not to beat yourself up.

Confession starts with God, because He knows you most fully (all of your failures and short-comings), and yet loves you most dearly.

One of my favorite stories is Jesus story of a **prodigal son**. A young man who leaves home, humiliates and embarrasses his father. Essentially wishes his father dead. He lives outside of his fathers' intended will. He returns home, to confess his failure. Expecting rejection. **"I am no longer worthy to be called your son."**

In fact, in the ancient Jewish world they had a tradition that anyone who squandered money among foreigners and then tried to return home was ceremonially banished from the community. **Kezazah** is a Hebrew word that literally means, "cutting off".

The community would take a clay pot, they would meet the rebellious individual at the edge of the village and smash it at the feet of the guilty one as a symbol that the community rejects him forever. Their relationship has been shattered by this failure.

If you disgrace your father, if you fail him, take advantage of him, if you don't live up to the standards. Then you get kezazah.

The prodigal knows that returning home, confession, will most likely mean banishment. But at some point he is so desperate, he wonders, "I am no longer worthy...I don't deserve to be called a son, but maybe there is the slightest chance, they will take me back as another servant."

And so this lost little boy, begins his journey home to confess his failure.

What this boy does not realize, is that his father is not like other fathers in the village. What he does not yet know, is that every night since he left home to squander his life, his father sits on the porch staring into the distance hoping that someday his little boy will come back; confess.

And as the boy approaches the village, this father runs...runs, which is undignified behavior for a man of respect in that world. But runs because his love for his son far outweighs his social obligations. Runs to throw his arms around the boy who has been gone so long. Runs so that he can beat the villagers to his son, and show them that there will be no kezazah here. (Martin Saunders – Christianity Today article)

Such is the response of our father in heaven...when we confess our sins. He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.

As we confess...we do so before the prodigal's father...a God who is rushing to forgive us in love and compassion. Confession before God is safe, it can be sincere, deep, specific, and intimate. Because this is what our daddy is like.

We need not be afraid of rejection before God. He knows us most fully and loves us most deeply.

D. May include confessing to others.

It would be easy, in some ways to leave the concept of confession right there. Confession to God. Confess in our personal quiet times or in silent prayer and that allows us to keep things private. We like it that way.

And there may be some things that are confessed in private just between you and God.

But Jesus always calls his followers to something much deeper than just individual faith pursuits. The two greatest commands love God (right relationship with God) and love others (right relationship with others).

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, first go and be reconciled to them. Then come and offer your gift.

When our sin or failure is in relation to another human being, the healing process often involves confessing our failure to them.

James 5:16 - ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

That's the whole idea behind the church family. Your faith isn't something you do on your own, between you and God. A few weeks ago we said one of the core value of the Brethren in Christ church is "Belonging to the community of faith."

In fact, next week we'll be holding **baptism** and **membership**. The whole idea behind membership is committing myself to a community of people. I'm not doing this on my own, I'm part of a group, a family...we're doing this together. Not saying you need to stand in church and publicly confess all of your failures to this room.

But it does mean that confession may include confessing to others. James says, so that you may be healed. The act of confessing is healing or may be part of the healing process with others.

Following Jesus means a sense of belonging to one another. The people you volunteer with here at this church are imperfect, flawed people. It means the person sitting beside you or preaching messages or leading worship or serving in the café or greeting you at the door imperfect, flawed.

Confession to other people is often hard because we never know how other people will respond. This will not be easy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it like this: **“Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy...He who is alone with his sins, is utterly alone.”** (Ortberg 127)

Maybe you lived in a home where admitting or confessing your failure always came with rejection, embarrassment, shame, perhaps even harsh, cruel or abusive responses. You and me, in our world we have been trained to fear confession. We have work to do... “hear these words and put them into practice.”

Ultimately your confession may not result in a healed relationship. You can't know or determine how someone else may respond. *“As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

But one of the other healing effects of confession is liberation from guilt. That feeling you get when you know you've done something wrong, that eats at you, that keeps you up at night...confession begins the process of eliminating that feeling. You don't have to live with that. If that's been you. Start with confession before God and then with others.

Father, forgive us our sins...on the journey to know and love and follow you!

Kezazah -

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/six-amazing-things-you-might-not-know-about-the-prodigal-son/102788.htm>