

Lesson 12

Confess

Principle 4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

“Happy are the pure in heart.” (Matthew 5:8)

Step 5: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

(James 5:16)

Introduction

The following illustration is part of a message I heard at Willow Creek Church, and it is undoubtedly the best illustration that I have found to represent this principle.

Does the name Jessica McClure trip any memory bells in your mind? She was the eighteen-month-old girl from Midland, Texas, who fell in a deep, abandoned well-pipe several years ago. About four hundred people took part in her fifty-eight-hour rescue attempt, which was spurred on by her cries of anguish that could be clearly heard at ground level through the pipe.

Now, I found it fascinating that, at one point, a critical decision was made. The rescuers decided that the rescue would have two phases: Phase one was to simply get somebody down there, next to her, as soon as possible; phase two was actually extracting her from the well.

Phase one was driven by the knowledge that people tend to do and think strange things when they are trapped alone in a dark scary place for long periods of time. They get disorientated and their fears get blown out of proportion. Their minds play tricks on them. Sometimes they start doing self-destructive things. Sometimes they just give up! So the rescue experts decided that they needed to get a person down there to be with her as soon as possible. Then they would turn their attention on how they were going to get her out of the well. The plan worked, and eventually Jessica was rescued.

Now, how does the rescue of Jessica McClure relate to Step 5?

When people like us get serious about recovery, about spiritual growth, when we go on the 12-

Step spiritual adventure, when we take that first step, we admit that we have some problems that make our lives unmanageable. When we turn to God and say, “God, I need help with those problems,” then we might feel as though we are free falling. In a sense we are. We are out of control in a way. We can no longer live the way we are so used to living. The old ways just don’t work anymore.

To complicate matters, on the way down, you find that the problem that you admitted in Step 1 is really being driven by a whole collection of character defects, which have been growing five feet under the surface of your life. And you have to identify those defects. You have to inventory them, as we have talked about for the last two months. You have to list them, admit them, and own them. You need to take responsibility for your pride, anger, envy, lust, greed, gluttony, and sloth. You know, “the big seven.”

So, during the last couple of months, if you worked Step 4 honestly and thoroughly, you might be feeling as if *you* are trapped at the bottom of a deep, dark well. If you stay there long enough you can become disoriented and wonder why you took this recovery journey to begin with. You might feel like you want to bail out at this point.

You might start making statements like these: “You know that I am a royally messed up man.” “The truth about me is that I’m a royally messed up woman.” “No one’s collection of sins and character defects is as bad as mine.” “If anyone ever found out the truth about me, they would never have anything to do with me for the rest of their life.”

Some of you get to that point and you say, “Why don’t I just bail out of this program? Why don’t I just go back to projecting an image of adequacy to everybody and not deal with all this unsettling truth about myself?”

It’s at this critical point in the process that we need to get another human being to come alongside of us in that well as soon as possible. You need to get someone next to you before you give up and get back into denial. In a way, the 5th Step says that you can only grow so far alone; then you reach the point that continued growth and healing is going to require assistance from someone else.

We are right at that critical juncture tonight. We are at the point where we are being asked to come clean by telling another human being the truth about who we really are. But how?

Confess

The first step is to CONFESS my wrongs. Tonight's acrostic will show you just how to do that.

Confess your shortcomings, resentments, and sins

Obey God's direction

No more guilt

Face the truth

Ease the pain

Stop the blame

Start accepting God

The *C* in confess is CONFESS your shortcomings, resentments, and sins. God wants us to *come clean* and admit that wrong is wrong, that we're "guilty as charged." We need to "own up" to the sins we discovered in our inventory.

For the person who confesses, shame is over and realities have begun. Proverbs 28:13 tells us, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Confession is necessary for fellowship. Our sins have built a barrier between us and God.

The *O* in confess stands for OBEY God's direction.

Confession means that we agree with God regarding our sins. Confession restores our fellowship.

Principle 4 sums up how to obey God's direction in confessing our sins. First, we confessed (admitted) our faults to ourselves, to God, and to someone we trust. "'As surely as I am the living God, says the Lord, everyone will kneel before me, and everyone will confess that I am God.' Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:11–12, GNB).

Then we do what we are instructed to do in James 5:16: "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

The next letter is *N*: No more guilt.

This principle can restore our confidence, our relationships, and allow us to move on from our "rear-view mirror" way of living that kept us looking back and second-guessing ourselves and others.

In Romans 8:1 (GNB) we are assured that "There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus." The verdict is in! "All have sinned; ... yet God declares us 'not guilty' ... if we trust in Jesus Christ, who freely takes away our sins" (Romans 3:23–24, TLB).

So that's the "C-O-N" of confess. The "con" is over! We have followed God's directions on how to confess our wrongs.

After we "fess" up, we will have four positive changes in our lives. The first is that we will be able to FACE the truth. It has been said that "man occasionally stumbles over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on." Recovery doesn't work like that. Recovery *requires* honesty! Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Have you ever noticed that a person who speaks the truth is always at ease? The next positive change that confession brings is to EASE the pain.

We are only as sick as our secrets! When we share our deepest secrets, we begin to divide the pain and the shame. A healthy self-worth develops that is no longer based on the world's standards but on the truth of Jesus Christ!

Pain is inevitable for all of us, but misery is optional. Psalm 32:3–5 (TLB) says, “There was a time when I wouldn’t admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration.... My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, ‘I will confess them to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”

The first *S* in confess reminds us that we can now STOP the blame.

It has been said that people who can smile when something goes wrong probably just thought of somebody they can blame it on. But the truth is, we cannot find peace and serenity if we continue to blame ourselves or others. Our secrets have isolated us from each other long enough! They have prevented intimacy in all of our important relationships.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:3 (PH): “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and fail to see the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me get the speck out of your eye,’ when there is a plank in your own? ... Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you can see clearly enough to remove your brother’s speck of dust.”

Finally, the last *S* shows us that it is time to START accepting God’s forgiveness. Once we accept God’s forgiveness we are able to look others in the eye. We see ourselves and our actions in a new light. We are ready to find the humility to exchange our shortcomings in Principle 5.

“For God was in Christ, restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men’s sins against them but blotting them out” (2 Corinthians 5:19, TLB).

If you asked me to sum up the benefits of Principle 4 in one sentence it would be this: In confession we open our lives to the healing, reconciling, restoring, uplifting grace of Jesus Christ who loves us in spite of ourselves.

First John 1:9 (NCV) reminds us that “if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done.”

Wrap-up

Maybe you came tonight a little fearful of having to think about sharing your inventory. I hope you have been encouraged, and I trust you have been able to see the benefits of this task before you. Next time we will discuss the how-tos of finding a person with whom you can share your inventory. Let's close in prayer.

Dear God, thank You for your promise that if we confess, You will hear us and cleanse us, easing our pain and guilt. Thank You that You always do what is right. In Jesus' name, Amen.