

Lesson 13

Admit

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

This week we are going to focus on confessing (admitting) our sins, all the dark secrets of our past, to another person.

We have all heard that the wages of sin is death, but you may not have heard that the wages of sin are never frozen or that they are never subject to income taxes. One of the main reasons for that is because most of the wages of sin go unreported! And, by the way, if the wages of sin is death, shouldn't you quit before payday?

Why Admit My Wrongs?

All joking aside, this part of Principle 4 is often difficult for people. I am often asked, “Why do I have to admit my wrongs to another?”

Many of us have been keeping secrets almost all of our lives. Every day those secrets take a toll on us. The toll we pay is loss of self-respect and energy and bondage to old codependent habits. Admitting—out loud—those secrets strips them of their power. They lose much of their hold on us when they are spoken.

Still, we are afraid to reveal our secrets to another person, even someone we trust. We

somehow feel like we have everything to lose and nothing to gain. I want you to hear the truth tonight. Do you know what we *really* have to lose by telling our secrets and sins to another?

1. *We lose our sense of isolation.* Somebody is going to come down into that well we talked about two weeks ago and be alongside us. Our sense of aloneness will begin to vanish.

2. *We will begin to lose our unwillingness to forgive.* When people accept and forgive us, we start to see that we can forgive others.

3. *We will lose our inflated, false pride.* As we see and accept who we are, we begin to gain true humility, which involves seeing ourselves as we really are and seeing God as He really is.

4. *We will lose our sense of denial.* Being truthful with another person will tear away our denial. We begin to feel clean and honest.

Now that you know what you have to *lose* when you admit your wrongs to another, let me tell you three benefits you will *gain*.

1. *We gain healing that the Bible promises.* Look at James 5:16 again: “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” The key word here is *healed*. The verse doesn’t say, “Confess your sins to one another and you will be forgiven.” God *forgave* you when you confessed your sins to *Him*. Now He says you will begin the healing process when you confess your sins to *another*.

2. *We gain freedom.* Our secrets have kept us in chains—bound, frozen, unable to move forward in any of our relationships with God and others. Admitting our sins *snaps* the chains so God’s healing power can start. “They cried to the Lord in their troubles, and he rescued them! He led them from the darkness and the shadow of death and snapped their chains” (Psalm 107:13–14, TLB).

Unconfessed sin, however, will fester. In Psalm 32:3–4 (GNB) David tells us what happened to him when he tried to hide his sins: “When I did not confess my sins, I was worn out from crying all day long.... My strength was completely drained.” Remember, “Openness is to wholeness as secrets are to sickness.” My grandpa used to say, “If you want to clear the stream, you need to get the hog out of the spring.” Admit and turn from your sins. Remember that the only sin God can’t forgive is the one that is not confessed.

3. We gain support. When you share your inventory with another person, you get support! The person can keep you focused and provide feedback. When your old friend “denial” surfaces and you hear Satan’s list of excuses—“It’s really not that bad”; “They deserved it”; “It really wasn’t my fault”—your support person can be there to challenge you with the truth. But most of all, you need another person simply to listen to you and hear what you have to say.

How Do I Choose Someone?

Unlike little Jessica, the little girl trapped in the well, whom we talked about in Lesson 12, you can choose the person to come down into your well with you, so choose carefully! You don’t want someone to say, “You did what?” or “You shouldn’t have done that.” You don’t need a judge and jury. We already talked about the verdict. Remember Romans 3:23–24 (TLB): “All have sinned; ... yet now God declares us ‘not guilty’ ... if we trust in Jesus Christ, who ... freely takes away our sins” and 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and he will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”?

You just need someone to listen. I find that it works best to choose someone who is a growing Christian and is familiar with the eight principles or the 12 Steps.

1. Choose someone of the same sex as you whom you trust and respect. Enough said!

2. *Ask your sponsor or accountability partner. Just be sure they have completed Principle 4 or Steps 4 and 5.* The process should go more smoothly if the person is familiar with what you are doing. He or she will also have a sense of empathy, and if the person can share personal experiences, you will have a healthy exchange.

3. *Set an appointment with the person, a time without interruptions!* Get away from the telephones, kids, all interruptions for at least two hours. I have heard of some inventories that have taken eight hours to share. That's perhaps a little dramatic.

Guidelines for Your Meeting

1. Start with prayer. Ask for courage, humility, and honesty. Here is a sample prayer for you to consider:

God, I ask that You fill me with Your peace and strength during my sharing of my inventory. I know that You have forgiven me for my past wrongs, my sins. Thank You for sending Your Son to pay the price for me, so my sins can be forgiven. During this meeting help me be humble and completely honest. Thank You for providing me with this program and _____ (the name of the person with whom you are sharing your inventory). Thank You for allowing the chains of my past to be snapped. In my Savior's name I pray, Amen.

2. Read the Principle 4 verses found on page XX in Participant's Guide 3, *Getting Right with God, Yourself, and Others*.

3. Keep your sharing balanced—weaknesses and strengths!

4. End in prayer. Thank God for the tools He has given to you and for the complete forgiveness found in Christ!

Principle 4 Testimony

My name is John, a believer and a recovering alcoholic who has identified Jesus Christ as my Higher Power. I will not bore you with the details of my twenty-nine-and-a-half years of compulsive and uncontrollable drinking; the damage can be summarized as follows:

- 0 self-worth
- 1 broken and abandoned family
- 2 divorces
- 3 502s or DUIs
- 4 trips to jail
- 5 years without filing income tax
- 6 emergency trips to the hospital
- countless attempts to *control* my drinking
- blood pressure of 190/165!
- 265 pounds of cheap vodka and Valium

Worse than all this, I was spiritually and morally bankrupt and had lost the “game of life.” On January 7, 1976, after a very drunken holiday season and an emotional encounter with my mother and other members of my family, my “moment of clarity” revealed that I could no longer go on, and I called AA.

Unknown to me, the great spiritual journey had begun. I did not know, nor could I understand the words of Ephesians 2:10: “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

For the next fifteen years, I prospered financially and physically with my secular AA

program. When I did my 4th Step, that is “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself,” I just started writing and writing and writing. What came out of three notebooks full was the following:

1. Expectations were catastrophic to me, a real fear of failure and not meeting what I perceived to be the expectations of others was with me from earliest childhood. My dad died when I was three. He was a prominent physician, just getting started during the Great Depression, the pride of the whole family, and from the earliest days I can remember the family talk: “Look at John’s hands, won’t he make a wonderful surgeon, just like his father.” Or, “John has been pre-admitted to medical school at his father’s alma mater; he’ll be just like his father.”

All this responsibility placed on me by others turned into *guilt* and *resentment*, which I buried and carried with me for years.

2. Loneliness or fear of rejection was a companion of my fear of not meeting the expectations of others; although I wanted validation, I felt alone and isolated because I was an only child. Even though I was always in a crowd or part of group, my 4th Step made me aware that I was alone. I had pushed away the people I was seeking approval from. One by one, I had lost those that were important to me and I was a master at putting the blame on others.

3. I can conclude my 4th Step comments by mentioning that woven in through all of this was a fear of losing control. But with enough alcohol, a “charming personality,” and a certain amount of hard work, you would never know that all this was going on inside me. Talk about beating myself up! I was committing suicide on the installment plan, with twenty-nine-and-a-half years of daily drinking.

With a 4th Step, plus much more that filled those notebooks, my writing revealed that I was able to see things as they really were, to accept the reality of my life, and to accept the

responsibility (ownership) for all the damage I had done.

Soon, I took the 5th Step and admitted the exact nature of my wrongs to myself and to another human being. Now, as you all know, the 5th Step says that we admit the exact nature of our wrongs to *God*, to ourselves, and to another human being. I did not have, nor did I want, God in my life at that time, so I left God out of the loop. I never was able to forgive myself or accept God's forgiveness for my sins against those I hurt. As I said, I had been sober fifteen years and working a good 12-Step program, involved with H & I and other 12th-Step work, but there was an emptiness that tormented me. I would cry out, "Is this all there is to sobriety? There must be more to life than this!" You see, there is one thing I haven't told you—I belonged to the CIA!

Yes, the CIA: Catholic, Irish, and Alcoholic. I thought the Catholic religion was rigid and unforgiving and that God had abandoned me. This was not true. All Irish, as you know, are stubborn, opinionated, and basically "full of blarney." This could possibly be true. As a recovering alcoholic, I was still in denial and I denied that I needed God in my life. I was wrong, of course. Some big unknown piece was missing and I was miserable. I could no longer deny that I needed God in my life; I had to find a church.

And now we get to the miracle!

About a week after I had decided to find a church, I found a flyer on my doorstep announcing the 1991 Easter service at Saddleback. I have since learned that this is the only year that Saddleback did a mailing to the Capistrano Valley area about twenty-five miles away. Is this a coincidence? I think not!

At the 1991 Easter service, I heard this message:

Trust God—the past is forgiven.

Trust God—the present is manageable.

Trust God—the future is secure.

I broke down and cried throughout the sermon. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit welcoming me home, and my loneliness and fear were gone.

I ran home and told my wife what had happened, and she could see the joy, peace, and presence of God's Holy Spirit. The rest is history.

I took all the classes at Saddleback for membership, maturity, and ministry. I was baptized in September of 1991. In my ministry interview, Pastor Steve packed me off to Pastor John Baker in Celebrate Recovery, and I began setting up the chairs on Friday night and helping in any other way that I could.

I was asked to be a small group leader for a group of chemically dependent men, all new to recovery. Our first ninety-day program is now in its third year, and I have had the privilege of leading dozens of men through the first three principles in the Celebrate Recovery participant's guides.

My daily life is now greatly involved with the Christian recovering brothers, working a Christ-centered 12-Step program, still helping out wherever I can, and seeing, in so many ways, the healing, restored relationships, and miracles that only a relationship with Jesus Christ can provide.

In working my own Christ-centered 12-Step program, I was finally able to complete Step 5, and accept God's forgiveness and love, through Christ's work on the cross. My sins were forgiven, my guilt and fears were removed. I can clearly see God's plan and purpose for my life.

In closing, let me reference one verse that I can now truly understand and accept, 2 Corinthians 5:17 (TLB): "When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!"

Thank you for letting me share a small miracle with you.