

Psalms: Disciplines of Grace

Dr. Tim Keller

Confession

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one who is forgiven!

A MASKIL OF DAVID

¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man against whom the LORD
counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of
summer. *Selah*

⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the
LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may
be found;

surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Selah

⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way
you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹Be not like a horse or a mule,
without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one
who trusts in the LORD.

¹¹Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

*We lay before Him what is in us,
not what ought to be in us.*

C.S. LEWIS

We're looking at the book of Psalms, and we're looking each week at another spiritual discipline – a practical spiritual competency – you must engage in if you're going to grow into the person God wants you to be.

The psalm that was just read brings us to a spiritual discipline that every branch of Christianity, every tradition of Christianity, understands as a basic spiritual competency. That is the spiritual competency of confession and forgiveness.

Verse 5 says, "... I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions ...'" That's what this is about.

Now I'm going to use the words *repent* and *confess* as synonyms, but generally speaking, the word *repent* doesn't show up, the word *confess* is in here, and we're talking about confession. Let me give it to you in non-technical terms. When you know you've screwed up, when you know you've failed, when you know it's your fault, *how do you get up again after you've fallen in such a way that you have more joy and power than before? How do you get up not broken and crippled and actually in worse shape than before but better? How do you do that?*

So let's take a look at what this passage says about the discipline of confession. We'll see what this very well-known psalm says about *the need for*

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confession, the way of confession, and the secret basis of confession. It's a secret only because most of us don't know about it. That's why I still call it the secret, because it's such a crucial missing piece in most people's thinking.

The Need for Confession

We can't ignore this. It's easy to run too fast into the middle of the psalm and ignore the first part. "Blessed is the one who's forgiven."

Blessed in English just means inspired or lifted up, but in both the Hebrew word that's rendered *blessed* and the Greek word that's rendered *blessed* in the Bible there's something much more profound.

To be *blessed* means complete wellness of being, profound fulfillment.

We say that all the time. But look who it comes to. *Who's it for?* The forgiven. What this means is **David is saying the most fulfilled life belongs to people who have been deeply forgiven.** Jesus talks about this. Jesus says one of the most remarkable things in the Bible, I think. It's one of the most remarkable because it's so counterintuitive.

In Luke 7, he meets a religious leader, Simon, who's very cordial but kind of distant and remote, and then he meets in the same place a woman of the street who is filled with passion and compassion and washes Jesus' feet with her tears and her hair.

Simon, the religious leader, of course, is very taken aback by the unseemliness of this emotional display, and Jesus, in one of the great rebukes in world history, turns to him and says, "Simon, can I tell you why she is a more passionate and compassionate and loving person than you?"

He says, "The one who is forgiven little loves little." What he's saying is the most loving people, the most compassionate people (and what David here is saying is the happiest, most blessed and fulfilled people), are the people who have been the most forgiven. I'll put it this way. There are three kinds of people in the world according to the

Bible, according to this text here. There are the people who feel they're too good to need to be deeply forgiven. They say, "I'm not perfect. You know, I occasionally need to be forgiven."

1. **There are some people who feel they're too good to be deeply forgiven, and**
2. **There are other people who feel they're too bad to be deeply forgiven, and then**
3. **There are those who know they need it and they have it.** If you know you need it *and* you have it, you are the happiest people in the world. Love, Jesus says, is just a function of knowing you need it and have gotten it.

If you have too high a view of yourself, as it were, to think you really need to be deeply forgiven, or if you have too low a view of yourself to really think you can *be* deeply forgiven, Jesus says you're not going to be filled with passion and compassion. The one who is forgiven little loves little. If you don't love much, if you're not a passionate, happy, compassionate, loving, giving person, you haven't been forgiven enough. It's a remarkable thing.

So blessed is the one....

The happiest people in the world are the ones who not only know they need to be deeply forgiven, but they have it.

Now some people, of course, right away might say, "Isn't all this talk about guilt and confession obsolete? Here you're coming to us, New York City, telling us how to confess our sins so we can get rid of our guilt, when everybody I know...."

A lot of people would say this to me and *do* say this. "Guilt is not the problem it was for your generation." *Why?* Because in traditional society, more traditional cultures, morality was put *on* people. You said, "Now you have to live up." Your role was given *to* you, and you said, "Now this is where you have to fit in and you have to live up."

"Of course societies like that are filled with guilt, people who aren't living up to this or that role, but today is different. Today everyone gets to choose who they want to be. You create your own

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identity. You're the one who decides what's right or wrong for you. We're not going to have the same problems with guilt." But it's not that simple.

Notice verse 1 says not only "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven," but also "whose sin is covered." When the psalmist (who is David) talks about the need for covering, he is deliberately making a reference to Genesis 3, to that original account. Here's what we read in Genesis 3. *Remember?* The man and the woman, Adam and Eve, were naked and unashamed.

Then we read, "And when they ate of the tree...." When they violated God's word and will, "When they ate of the tree, they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves."

There is a deep need – from the very beginning, the Bible says – for covering. We need to be covered. We cannot stand to be uncovered. It's endemic to all generations, all cultures everywhere.

There's nobody who has proven this better, I think, than Jean-Paul Sartre in his work *Being and Nothingness*, where he has this very famous illustration of the unviewed viewer. I'll get it out again. He says imagine yourself in a room, and you see a keyhole, and you see light through the keyhole. When you get down and look through the keyhole, you see people doing things, and they don't know you're watching.

Wow. There's nothing more empowering and satisfying than to be the unviewed viewer, to be able to see everything and they don't know you're watching. You can see them; they can't see you. Or a one-way mirror. You can see them; they can't see you. Now you have power. You're in the driver's seat.

Suddenly, in this illustration, as you're looking through the keyhole and feeling really good, you hear a noise and you look behind you. You see another keyhole, and you see a little eye through that keyhole. You realize your unviewed viewing is being viewed by an unviewed viewer. You are now

the object, not the subject. You're dehumanized, and it's unbearable. *Why?*

What Sartre says is there's nothing more dehumanizing than to be out of control with what people see of you. **We need to control how people see us. We need to control *what* people see. For someone to have access, for it to be uncovered, for someone to have complete access to what you're thinking and what you're doing and how you're living without you knowing it or being in control of it is utterly dehumanizing. We cannot bear it. *Why?***

That's an interesting illustration, isn't it? Of course, Sartre is an existentialist. Sartre of course does not believe in moral absolutes. Of course he doesn't believe we're supposed to live up to somebody else's standards for us. Of course not. Yet he says it is absolutely endemic to every human being to desperately want to be covered. We do not want people to see who we are. We don't want people to see what we do, how we think. *Why?*

What Sartre is saying is if anybody has that kind of access to us, they will see things of which we are ashamed. *We will* do things, *we will* say things, *we will* think things of which we are deeply ashamed, and we cannot bear to have other people looking at it, to be able to look inside, to catch us. *Why would that be?* It's stupid, frankly. It's stupid to say, "Well, you traditional people have problems with guilt and shame, but you see, we create our own standards."

What Sartre is pointing out is we don't live up to our own standards either.

Sure, here's a traditional society, and they say, "The meaning in life is to live according to the given standards." Here is our modern Western society, and they say, "The meaning in life is for you to work out your own standards," but you don't live up to your own standards either. **You're never the person you say you want to be. You're never the person you aspire to be. You're never the person you claim to be. Never.**

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That means everybody has a problem with guilt and shame. Everybody desperately needs to be covered. Everybody desperately *wants* to be covered, *has* to be covered, has to keep people from seeing who we really are. When we are exposed, we're filled with guilt and shame. That's true no matter who you are. It doesn't matter what your century. It doesn't matter what your culture.

That's why Franz Kafka says, "The state we find ourselves in today is we feel sinful quite independent of guilt." That's in his diaries. All of the commentators say it was a brilliant thing. What he's saying is we don't have the concept of guilt. We're sophisticated. We laugh at this whole idea of guilt, yet we still sense there's something wrong with us.

You may laugh. "I don't believe in heaven or hell or the moral law. I don't believe in sin." Yet you know in yourself, your own heart, there's a voice that's always there calling you an idiot, calling you a fool, calling you a failure.

Now you see why this is such an enormous promise. *Why is it we're always spinning? Why is it we're always putting up a front? Why is it we can't take criticism?*

As gently as I can say this, *why are some of you almost killing yourself with work because you really want to be successful, or why are some of you almost killing yourself by not eating because you desperately want to be thin?*

You're covering. It's cover. It's a way of hiding. It's a way of trying to cover yourself and deal with the fact that deep down all of us know there's something wrong with us. All of us. It doesn't matter what the culture or the century is.

Therefore, don't you see how wonderful it would be to be the kind of person who says, "Blessed is the one who God has covered; I don't have to cover myself anymore?"

Wouldn't it be amazing? Wouldn't it be incredible rest? Wouldn't it be incredible peace if you knew you didn't have to do any more covering? You didn't have to defend yourself. You didn't

have to spin. You didn't have to overwork. You didn't have to under-eat. You didn't have to worry about what the mirror said.

You didn't have to work so incredibly hard so people thought you were as sophisticated, as savvy, as suave, and as together as you'd like them to think, but you're not. You wouldn't be scared about being exposed. *Wouldn't it be great if God could cover you? What does that mean?* Well let's go on. To be forgiven, to have God cover you, to be accepted by him. That would be a life. That would be blessedness.

The Way of Confession

There are four basic things you have to do if you're going to confess and if you're going to get anywhere near this life of blessedness that is held out for people who know how to confess when they've done something wrong. How to deal with guilt, how to deal with shame, how to deal with the sense you've failed.

By the way, these four things I'm going to talk about are mainly thinking about God, but especially as I get near the end of them ... You also have sometimes to confess a sin, something you've done wrong, to somebody else.

Basically, what I'm about to tell you really fits both confessing to God and confessing to others, and occasionally I'll go back and forth between them. You'll see they fit for both kinds of confession. The four things you have to do....

1. Confession will not work (you're not going to get blessedness) unless first you can *distinguish between true guilt and false guilt.*

The first thing you have to do with guilt is decide if it's true, if it's false, or to what degree it's true or false. You can't function in the world without the ability to tell the difference.

See verse 5: "I acknowledged my sin to you ..." In Psalm 51:4 David, the psalmist, says to God, "Against you and you only have I sinned." That

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raises a lot of eyebrows, because people say, “He killed somebody and stole his wife, and he’s saying to God ‘Only against you have I sinned?’” The point is David has found the way to judge between true guilt and false guilt, which is the mind of God, the heart of God, the will of God disclosed in the Scripture.

I think it’s unreasonable for anybody to insist, on the one hand, that all guilt is true guilt. We all know people who get unnecessarily disproportionately guilty over every little thing. We all know not all guilt is true guilt. There’s some guilt you need to try to resist, you need to try to get rid of, you need to try to say, “I’m not going to give in to it.” There’s some guilt you need to kick, because there’s some guilt that’s false guilt.

But it’s just as unreasonable to insist all guilt is false guilt. It’s unreasonable to imagine all guilt feelings are true (because we know plenty of people who overdo it), but it’s also unreasonable to think all guilt feelings are false. Oh, I know there are people who are very glib. In a place like New York there are people who are always saying, “Well now look. Basically everybody has to decide what’s right or wrong for you. There really are no true guilt feelings, because everybody has to decide what’s right or wrong for you.”

Of course, that’s too glib. That’s too pat of an answer. *Would you say that to Hitler?* You know, “Hitler just felt this was the right thing to do. Yeah, to kill millions of people, but a thousand years from now it’ll be a better world. Maybe he sincerely believed that. Maybe he had a few guilt feelings.” Well, he should have given in to those guilt feelings. He should have felt those guilt feelings. In other words, everybody knows there are some guilt feelings that are true. They’re right. And other guilt feelings are wrong. They’re false. *How are you going to tell the difference?*

What I cannot figure out is how anybody can get through life without a straightedge. There has to be a standard by which, if I bring my guilt feelings to this straightedge and I see there’s nothing in there that says this is wrong, I kick it. I

don’t care what my parents say. I don’t care what my culture says. I don’t care what my friends say. I’m not guilty because the straightedge says I’m not.

But if I bring my guilt feelings to the straightedge and it says yes I *am* guilty, I don’t care what my parents say, I don’t care what my friends say, then I *am*. You have to have that. A lot of people say, “Well you have to make up your mind in your own heart what’s right or wrong for you.” *What are you going to do when your conscience is killing you then?* Jiminy Cricket says, “Always let your conscience be your guide.” There are a lot of people in mental institutions who are there because they have.

The Bible has an answer for that. First John: “If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.” You have to have a straightedge, and David has it. He says, “I acknowledge my sin as sin to *you*. I don’t look to any other standard.” So the first thing you have to do in confession is have the intellectual discernment to go to the Scripture ...

This is not a pat answer because it’s not always easy. It takes all of your intellectual and communal ... you have to do it with friends. You have to do it with people who are students. You have to talk to pastors, scholars, and other people. It’s not an easy thing. But the first thing you have to do is go to the Scripture to find out whether or to what degree your guilt feelings are true or false.

2. You must distinguish between grief and self-pity.

Oh my, my. I cannot tell you how many people think they have confessed and confessed, and they don’t change. They’ve repented and they’ve repented, and there’s no freedom. They say, “But I feel so bad about my sin.” There’s a difference between grief (which is real confession and repentance) and self-pity. *What do I mean?* Look here.

At the end of verse 5 it says, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” *What did he confess and what does he get forgiveness for?* “For the

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iniquity of my sin.” Look at that. *Isn’t that kind of redundant? Isn’t iniquity sin? Isn’t sin iniquity? Isn’t transgression sin? What is he saying?* It says, “I confessed the ‘sinness’ of my sin.” *That’s just redundant, isn’t it? Isn’t that kind of unnecessary?* No. It’s an important point. Here’s why. Look down a little farther.

After the confession is over and it’s successful, he senses God saying something to him. God says down in verses 8–9, “I will now guide you. I will counsel you with my eye upon you.” That doesn’t just mean he’s looking at him. God is saying, “I want to counsel you eye to eye, face to face. I want to guide you personally. I don’t want you to act like a horse or a mule without understanding, which must be curbed with a bit and bridle or it will not stay near you.”

THE MULE

Think about this. The mule. He’s moving along, and he wants to go left. Next thing he gets a kick. *Ouch*. All right, so he veers this way. But he’d really like to go left again because there’s stuff over there he’d like to eat. So he goes left. Kick. *Ouch*. All right. So he moves back. Well, you know what? He still would like to get over here. Finally he gets a really bad kick and the bit comes up in his mouth. “I got the picture.” He doesn’t go left anymore. *Why?*

You see, he’s sorry for the pain of his sin. He’s sorry for the kick from his sin. He’s sorry for the consequence of his sin, because he’s a mule. He’s a horse. He doesn’t understand the heart of the master. See, he’s changed, but it’s not because he sees the “sinness” of the sin, the grievousness of the sin. He only sees the consequences of the sin. He changes out of self-pity. Yet it won’t be long before he’ll be going left again. Because your memory starts to fade.

When I first started counseling as a young minister I ran into several of these situations, so I’ll just put them all together into one guy, even though I’m thinking of one in particular. There were a whole bunch of husbands, by the way, who never wanted to talk to their wives about their

relationship. They never wanted to go to counseling and talk about it. They never wanted to work on their relationship communication (“Oh, cut that out”) until their wives said, “I’m about to leave you.” The next thing you know I get a phone call. “Preacher, we need counseling.”

So in they come. *What’s the problem?* “Well,” the wife says, “he’s cold and indifferent.” Of course, everybody in the church knew he was cold and indifferent. We knew he had a harshness about him. There was a kind of selfishness about him, a haughtiness about him, and so on. So he says, “Oh, I’m really sorry. I’m really sorry. Please don’t leave me. What do you want me to do?” “Well,” she says, “if you would start doing this and this and this, that would be better. Then you wouldn’t be so cold and indifferent, if you could talk to me like this, if you did this.” “Absolutely I will.”

For six months things went well until he began to realize she probably wasn’t going to leave him and the embarrassment and the humiliation and the inconvenience wasn’t going to happen. Right back to his old ways until she says, “I’m going to leave you” again, and then they’d be back in the office. I won’t say how the stories ended because they all ended in different ways.

Here’s what I came to understand. He was the mule. He was sorry, he said, but only for the consequence of his sin. In other words, he was sorry for himself. He wasn’t sorry for the sin. He didn’t see the sin as a grievous thing, a sin that was hurting the person who loved him, the thing that was hurting the people around him. He didn’t see the sin as something bad in itself. He didn’t see the “sinness” of his sin. He just saw the danger of his sin, the inconvenience of his sin, the impracticality of his sin. As a result, he didn’t change.

He was constantly confessing it whenever it looked like it was going to get him in trouble, and he never changed. As a result, he wasn’t confessing. He *said* he was confessing, but he wasn’t. He wasn’t repenting. He *said* he was repenting, but he wasn’t. He was wallowing in self-

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pity at certain times. *Do you know the difference? Can you see that difference?* So first you have to discern the difference between true and false guilt. Secondly, you have to discern the difference between (I'm trying to be as practical as I can) sorrow for sin and sorry for yourself.

3. You need to change perspectives.

You see that in the very word *confess*. "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." Look up the word *confession* in a Bible dictionary, or something like that, and they will tell you the word *confess* means to say the same thing. The Greek word for *confess* is *homologeo*, which means to say the same thing, but it certainly means more than just to mimic verbally.

What it really means is to come alongside and see things from the perspective of the person you've wronged. So the third thing you have to do when you're confessing to God or the person next to you is you have to do the emotional work. Now, in a way, you've started doing that when you make the distinction between grief and self-pity, when you realize, "I'll never change unless I sense the iniquity of my sin rather than the danger to me of my sin." So you've started to do it, but let me continue.

You have to change perspective. What this means is, as much as you possibly can (it's an act of radical imagination), you have to put yourself in the shoes of the person you've wronged.

I don't know how many times I've heard people say, "Well, if I've offended you, I'm sorry." Listen to that. What that means is, "I don't want to go to the trouble of admitting I've offended you exactly. I don't want to go to the trouble of putting myself in your shoes and imagining what it must be like. I don't want to do that. All I want is I don't want anybody to have to say to me, 'You didn't apologize.' I'm going to do what I have to do just so nobody can say..."

In other words, the person is working out of self-pity. If, in a sense, you go and say, "I can hardly imagine, though I've tried, how you must

have felt because of what I did, and therefore, I am truly sorry," you'll heal that relationship because you're really doing *homologeo*. You're not just saying, "I'm sorry." You're confessing. You're standing in their shoes.

That's just as important ... You say, "*How do you do that with God?*" It's not impossible. You have to say, "O Lord, I can hardly imagine what it's like to create somebody and then sustain them every minute of their lives, keeping their heart pumping, keeping their lungs breathing.... I can hardly imagine what it's like to give everything to somebody and be ignored day in and day out and to have promises broken over and over and over again. I can hardly imagine, but I'm trying, and I'm truly sorry."

If you're willing to change perspectives, you'll start to heal that relationship too.

4. You have to take full responsibility.

Verse 5: "... and I did not cover my iniquity ..." *What does that mean?* At least it means this: "I didn't cover my tail." It means at least that. It means full disclosure, and it means taking responsibility without excuses. Please think of this. You have not really confessed sin when you say, "I did it, but they did it to me too. I did it, but you were just as bad, if not worse." That's not a confession.

You say, "What if it was only 20 percent me and it was really 80 percent the other person?" Admit your 20 percent without excuses and shut up about the other 80 percent. It's not your job. You have to take full responsibility or the relationship with God won't heal, or your own psychological blessedness won't come in, or your relationship with the other person you're talking to won't heal. You have to take full responsibility.

Repentance and confession starts when blame-shifting ends. It starts when self-centeredness ends. It starts when self-pity ends.

So there are the four things (though there's another one I have to finish with). *Do you wonder why so many people seem like they're crying and*

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confessing and they're so sorry and within sometimes minutes or hours, certainly within days or weeks, there's no difference? They haven't changed. They haven't grown. There's no relief. There's no blessedness. It's because you're not doing it like this. There are certain skill competencies you must do, and there they are. But there's really one to go.

The Secret of Confession

What's the basis for this confession and forgiveness? How can God forgive us when we confess? Look at this amazing statement. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and he forgave me." It doesn't say, "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and God thought about forgiving me." It happened. It's immediate. It's automatic, actually. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

How can God do that? We have to go back up to the top where it says, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity...." There it is. Listen carefully. That is an amazing statement. God forgives us because he doesn't count what we've done against us.

It would be a little bit like this. Imagine you got a terrible grade. You got a "D" on a test in a class. The next day the professor comes in and says, "You know what? I'm not going to count that test toward your final grade. The next test, and the next test, and the paper, but that test does not count toward your final grade at all." My gosh, salvation!

That's exactly what David is talking about here. David is saying is, when I confess my sin and God forgives my sin, he covers it because God doesn't count it against us. Our sin has nothing to do with our final grade. Our sin has nothing to do with our final reception.

How is that possible? How could he do that? Here's the answer. It's a hint even in verse 7, where

David says, "You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance."

Look at this. Do you know what's so interesting here? Everybody knows they need to be covered, and David had some sense God himself was going to be the covering. "There is some way in which I can hide in God." That's odd. How can you hide in God when your big problem is you need to hide from God because of your sin? How can you hide from God in God? How could God himself be the thing that covers me? Of course, the answer is this.

Do you know why crucifixion was such a horrible, horrible form of execution? Do you know why crucifixion was the worst kind of execution? Because you were stripped naked and your arms were tied or nailed open so you couldn't even try to preserve your modesty. It was the ultimate keyhole. You didn't die quickly; you died slowly, and you didn't die privately; you died publicly. What that meant was you were utterly naked, utterly exposed. You died of exposure, literally.

People came. They mocked. It was the ultimate keyhole. It was the ultimate dehumanization. Why did Jesus do it? He was stripped so you could be clothed. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him," which means God counted Jesus as a sinner so he didn't have to count us as sinners.

He gave Jesus a status he didn't deserve so he could give us a status we don't deserve. What that means is when you say, "Father, accept me because of what Jesus has done," you are forgiven permanently. Your sins are not counted against you. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...." (Romans 8:1).

Here's why this is the most important thing to keep in mind practically. If you don't understand this, if you don't understand the basis for your forgiveness, you're going to turn the act of forgiveness into a way of trying to warrant God's mercy. You're going to say, "O Lord, have mercy on me because look at how sorry I am. Look at

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how bad I feel. Look at how much I'm weeping. Look at just how submitted I am and surrendered my heart is."

You're going to try to use your confession not simply to reconnect with the God who has already forgiven you in Christ, not simply to get his eye back, to get his relationship back.... See verse 8? In other words, if you don't understand you're permanently and completely forgiven in Christ and what you do when you confess is just simply reconnect to the God who has forgiven you, if you think you have to earn or merit your forgiveness by really having these horribly bad feelings about your sin, you're going to be on a merry-go-round and you'll never get off.

If you look closely enough at any of your repentance, at any of your sorrow for sin, you'll always find bad motives. You'll always find imperfection.

George Whitefield once said, "My repentance needs to be repented of. I cannot repent except I sin." *What does that mean?* You know what he means. He says, "Here's sin A, so I'm going to repent of sin A, but sin B is the repentance itself, because I'm never pure in my motives. I'm never completely free of self-pity. I never completely am able to change perspectives."

You say, "My goodness, *then why confess?* If you're already forgiven, *why confess?*" The answer is to get that relationship, to get that fellowship, to get the intimacy back, eye to eye, no longer a horse or a mule, living like I should live because I love him, because he loves me, because of what he has done for me. When you have that, and only when you have that....

This is the final skill for confession. You need to distinguish between true and false guilt, you need to distinguish between grief and self-pity, you need to change perspective, you need to take responsibility, and ...

5. You need to change your hiding place.

Why do you think David says in verse 7, "You're my hiding place; you are the one who

surrounds me with songs of deliverance; you're the thing that is my real security"? Because something else was.

This is the reason a lot of people will say to me, "I've tried to confess over and over again, and I still don't feel forgiven."

In the early days of Redeemer I was talking to a woman who really was mentally in complete disarray because she felt she had let her parents down in one area. She says, "I've asked God's forgiveness and he has forgiven me, and my parents have forgiven me, but I can't forgive myself."

I went around and around for a long time trying to figure it out until I began to realize something. Maybe her parents had forgiven her, maybe God had forgiven her, but she couldn't forgive herself.

When you can't get over your guilt, even though you've confessed to God, there's a higher god. When somebody says, "I can't forgive myself," what they really mean is, "My real god, my real salvation, my real significance, the real god I worship ... I have broken that god's will, and it won't forgive me."

In spite of the fact her parents said, "We forgive you," the god in her mind was, "I have to be the woman my parents originally wanted me to be. They forgive me, but I'm disappointing to them." She has made the expectations of her parents *the* thing that gave her significance.

When you cannot overcome guilt ... You confess to a priest and you confess to a pastor and you confess to God and you can't overcome guilt. You say, "I just can't forgive myself." That's not it.

The real thing you're hiding in, the real thing that is your significance and your righteousness will not forgive you, and you'll never overcome your guilt unless you change your hiding place, which means unless you repent of the lack of joy you have in Jesus, unless you repent of the lack of joy you have in what he has done.

Psalms: Disciplines of Grace

Dr. Tim Keller

If you cannot overcome guilt, repent, not of feeling guilty, in a sense, but of the fact you're not really hiding in him. You're not really resting in him.

If you do those five things, if you learn how to confess like this, eventually confession will not be what it is for most of us, which is an episodic traumatic experience. It'll be something you do every day with joy. The more accepted I know I am in Jesus Christ, the easier it is for me to admit when I've done something wrong. My identity is not being a virtuous person, a together person, a moral person; my identity is in his love for me.

Ironically, this means the more accepted I feel, the easier it is for me to see my sin. I don't screen it out. I don't deny it. I don't repress it. I see it. This means I'm the opposite of what Sartre says the average person is. You will be the opposite. You don't mind being seen. You don't mind being exposed. You're quick and able to admit where you're wrong, and you don't like exposing others.

Let me ask you these two final questions to know whether you have the blessedness of a person who knows how to confess and repent with joy. *First, are you a safe person to confess to? Are you a safe person to be weak in front of? Do people find it easy to let you know about their weaknesses, or are they afraid because you're a harsh, judgmental person?* You're covering yourself by uncovering others. Get the joy you get in Jesus through confession.

On the other hand, *are you the kind of person who finds you have enough gladness and joy to take criticism graciously? Are you a safe person to criticize?* There are some people ... You can't tell them anything that's wrong that you're concerned about, because they either blow up or they melt down.

They either get angry at you, or else they feel like they're the worst people in the world and they turn into a puddle and you say, "Oh forget it. I didn't mean it." *Are you a safe person to criticize? Are you a safe person to give a confession to? Are you a safe person to receive a confession from? Do*

you have the blessedness of the one who doesn't have to cover anymore? God covers you. Let us pray.

Thank you, Father, for showing us how we can have a blessedness, a fulfillment that comes from knowing we are permanently forgiven in your Son and, therefore, we are covered. We don't have to cover ourselves. Make us not like the people who love to expose others and hate to be exposed. Let us be the kind of people who don't mind being exposed and confessing and repenting and don't need to uncover and expose others. We pray you'd make us people like that. In Jesus' name we ask it, amen.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself

- ✠ Am I a safe person to confess to? Or am I too critical, too fearful, too hard?
- ✠ Am I a person who can be safely criticized?

Confession is an intensely practical spiritual competency you must engage in if you are to grow into the person God wants you to be.

When you know you've failed and fallen miserably:

- ✠ How do you get back up with more joy and power than before – rather than being more broken, crippled, and in worse shape than you were?

Now go and learn what this means.