

Spiritual Disciplines: Confession

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to our service for Sunday, March 14th, 2021. My name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor of Braemar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Welcome to you this morning, however you're joining us. If you're listening to this service later in the week, if you're tuning in right now, if you're watching on video, tuning in on Facebook, checking it out on our website, there's so many options for you to connect with us right now.

And so I encourage you to do that. I encourage you to, if you're looking for more information about our church, email us at info at braemarbaptist.com.

Visit our website, braemarbaptist.com. It's that easy. Or if you have a prayer request, you can send it to prayer at braemarbaptist.com. So if you'd like to be added to our weekly email newsletter and some of the other things we send out, just let us know that at info at braemarbaptist.com.

And we'll add you to that as well. So as I say, lots of ways for you to engage with us, for you to connect with us, and for us to respond back to you.

[1 : 06] So God bless you as you join us this morning in whatever way you're doing it or join us later. Let's pray this morning. Father God, we praise you for your infinite wisdom.

We know so little and yet we're so grateful that we serve the one who knows all things. We confess that our hearts have been shattered by our sinful desires, Lord.

We've tried to hide our shame from you and we admit that. Please forgive us for the ways that we've slandered or hurt other people in our lives. Lord, our hearts are broken and we can't save ourselves.

We thank you for knowing our own hearts better than we do. We thank you for saving us through your Son, Jesus Christ. And we thank you for bringing our dead hearts to life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, please guard our hearts from a critical spirit. Help us to not lose heart when we feel pressures leading us into doubt. Lord, renew our minds, we ask you, and give us the confidence through the truth that are found in the words of your word, the Bible.

[2 : 24] And it's in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, that we pray all these things. Amen. Part of ministry and part of different things that come up as you're preparing a church service and doing things like that, as you may well be aware, is that announcements pop up that you miss.

And so I was in the process of beginning to record this service, actually, and got a message that I wanted to pass on to you. And that's a great opportunity to support one of the ministry organizations and the work that they're doing.

So Canadian Baptist Ministries is a ministry that our church and our denomination supports. And you can check out their website at cbmin.org.

That's C-B as in Bob, min.org. Right now, Canadian Baptist Ministries is doing a very special initiative. They're doing some fundraising to help.

There's some food crises that are going on around the world. And right now, if you give through Canadian Baptist Ministries, they have a matching appeal right now.

[3 : 37] And what that means is that your donations will be matched one-to-one. So whatever you give will be matched. And so that in that way, together, we can be the hands and feet of Christ as we actually give, as we contribute towards things that are being done.

So if you normally give to our church, you can just, if you're sending an EFT, an electronic funds transfer, you can indicate food crisis in the subject or the message portion of your EFT.

Or if you give by a traditional way, if you give in an envelope or that kind of thing, when you're giving to the church and you want to give specifically towards that, please indicate in the designated funds area of your gift, your donation food crisis as well.

And we'll make sure that those donations go to this specific effort. So remember, as you're giving in these next few weeks, if you want to give to this, it will be matched one-to-one.

So that's just a great opportunity. So I encourage you to participate in that if you're led. Well, we're continuing in our sermon series titled Spiritual Disciplines Exercise Your Faith.

[4 : 48] And we've been recognizing through our series that as followers of Jesus Christ, as his disciples, we can benefit from some tools and skills that can help us on our journey.

And these tools and skills are known as, we've come to learn, spiritual disciplines. Well, spiritual disciplines are designed, not designed, but intended to help us put ourselves in a place, in a state of mind, in a state of heart, where we can best connect with God.

And this morning, or right now, we're moving into that third section of discipline. So as I talked about at the very beginning, they're grouped. They're grouped into inward disciplines, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines.

And now we're entering that corporate discipline section. Well, corporate. That word sure probably gives you a fuzzy, warm feeling, doesn't it?

I know it does for me. Corporate. Well, the word corporate may also not seem to really fit with the idea of spiritual disciplines for us. The idea of connecting with God.

[5 : 58] Corporate feels very, well, corporate. It feels very structured and very rule-based and all of that. It doesn't necessarily feel like a spiritual discipline.

But we need to recognize the meaning of the word corporate in this context. Corporate actually means together.

I'd even suggest that it identifies this group of spiritual disciplines as things that we engage in together. And there's a few words that really stem from the same root word as corporate.

Corporate. Well, one is corpse. Core. And that's C-O-R-P-S. It's pronounced core as in marine core. Another word is corporeal.

Well, what's the link here then? What does this body of words have in common? Exactly. All of these words relate to the idea of a body.

[6 : 59] A group of people who share a common set of ideals or interests or, in our case, faith, belief, allegiance to God.

The corporate disciplines then are the spiritual tools, the guides, the practices that are viewed as applying to more than just us as individuals.

They apply to all of us together as a unified group. The corporate disciplines then are a community kind of focus.

The community aspect of our faith journey is extremely important. So, while there's certainly value or necessity in cultivating your personal relationship with Christ, that is critical.

Being surrounded by strong community is what we were made for. We were designed to live together, grow together, worship together, challenge one another in community.

[8 : 05] In a corporate way. And the church itself acts as a larger part of this community. So, today we're going to begin looking at the corporate spiritual disciplines as we focus on the discipline of confession.

The word confession may bring something to your mind almost immediately. Maybe you imagine two detectives in an interrogation room, bright light shining down on one person sitting on one side of a desk from a good cop and a bad cop on the other side.

Maybe that's what you see. Police officers seeking to get a confession out of someone who's been suspected of committing a crime. The idea of being innocent until proven guilty may come into play. Possibly there's also a sense of forcing or coercing a confession out of someone who may actually be quite reluctant to give one.

Well, from that perspective, I believe we may get a sense that confession is simply about guilt and punishment. Another perspective.

[9 : 18] Perhaps you have a Catholic background in your faith journey. Perhaps you attended a Catholic school. You have friends or family members who practice Catholicism, who are Catholic Christians.

Well, one thing I think bears recognizing. As Baptists, as Protestants, we need to remember that our Catholic brothers and sisters are Christians, just as we would think of ourselves.

While we certainly have some differences, some nuances in the ways we practice our faith, the different things that we recognize theologically and so on, we both recognize Jesus Christ as the

Son of God.

We recognize that human beings are sinners in need of a Savior. We recognize the Bible as the true and eternal Word of God.

You might be surprised to know, actually, that there are many Protestant denominations that have just as many differences from one another as Protestants do from Catholics.

[10:28] And in some cases, even more. You may find more differences amongst Protestant denominations than between someone who is a Protestant and someone who is a Catholic.

While we recognize Catholic and Protestant, that both are ultimately Christian, we need to recognize that we have far more in common than not.

I just wanted to take a moment to reflect on that. So for Catholics, confession is a very specific process that involves a priest.

For Catholic Christians, confession is not simply a state of mind or a state of heart, but it also means a specific set of actions. A Catholic goes to confession.

It's a process. They go to their church or their parish. They meet with their priest. They follow specific steps in revealing their sins directly to the priest, who then gives them absolution.

[11:33] Well, the implication, we need to be clear, the implication is not that the priest forgives the person's sins on their own. If that's your understanding, that's not correct.

The priest acts as a mediator between the person and God to hear that person's confession as human being to human being and granting them through the power of God, through God's grace, forgiveness.

The priest leads the individual through confession, through repentance, and ultimately forgiveness. And that's only available, Catholics would agree, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It's not the priest who has the power to forgive them. So I believe our perspective on confession may be somewhat limited, like the perspective we have recognized we might have on prayer.

It's about intention. It's about connection. It's about relationship. For prayer, we pray because it's the way we talk to God, the way we worship Him, the way we engage the power of God in our own lives and in the lives of other people.

[12:50] When we pray in intercession for someone, we are asking God to act for someone else. But we may have the same question about confession.

Why do we need to reveal and confess our sins to God at all? Doesn't He already know about them? Well, yes, that's absolutely true.

God does know about our sins, whether we confess them or not. So why do we confess our sin? Why must we confess it?

Well, confessing our sins is the first step in recognizing and acknowledging that we've chosen our own way over God's way. Confession isn't about guilt.

It's about humility. It's about turning away from pride. It's about recognizing that we've acted against God's plan for our lives. It's about turning away from that pride, turning away from our pride.

[13:57] And turning back to God. And more than that, confession should lead to repentance for us as well. Recognizing that we will repent of what we have done.

We will turn away from that. And we will, as we've talked about before, do differently after. Well, we strive to turn away from sin and sinful actions, sinful choices in our lives.

That's what repentance means, is that we will strive to do that. It's also about correcting the course of our lives. Reorienting ourselves back to God and His will.

Confession leads to repentance, which unlocks the power of God's forgiveness to us.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 1, 9. And this is a verse I remember memorizing as a young child. Perhaps you did as well.

[15:05] 1 John 1, 9. My friends, how is your confession life going?

Do you confess your sins to God? And when you do that, do you feel forgiven? Do you feel free? Or do you find yourself overcome by guilt?

Do you feel yourself overcome by the bad choices that you've made? Are you hard on yourself in that way? Do you find that you're confessing the same sins over and over again?

And then you find yourself unable to let go of the guilt that's associated with that. The guilt that you feel and perhaps stops you or makes it hard for you to accept God's forgiveness.

My friends, God wants to forgive us. He gave His Son so that we could receive a pardon and be freed from our guilt and shame.

[16:21] When we receive Jesus, we are forgiven from all the sins we have ever committed or will ever commit. Isn't that an amazing, amazing perspective?

Eternal forgiveness is ours through Jesus. God's forgiveness isn't somehow dependent upon us confessing our sin. But we should want to confess our sin to God because we have been forgiven. Do you see that connection? That forgiveness exists. And we should want to confess because we know that He will forgive. And in that confession, in that forgiveness, we're restored in relationship. It's like any relationship. When you apologize to someone for how you've hurt them or what you've done against them, there's healing, there's growth, there's restoration of connection there. And that's what we want with God. Friends, we shouldn't want anything to get in the way of our relationship with God, least of all our sin and our prideful, sinful choices.

[17:37] As I've said in the past, God's forgiveness is not just a get-out-of-jail-free card that we can simply recycle over and over again without the recognition of any of the cost or any of our own responsibility.

Do you see that? How passive that idea is to continue to sin knowingly, recognizing that the forgiveness will come, and yet not taking responsibility, not owning the responsibility, not recognizing the bad choices and seeking to do differently after.

We need to confess our sin. We need to commit to not continuing in the old pattern of behavior. Maybe you can reflect on this, but does it seem like a very sincere confession to you if we ask God for forgiveness and then merely either intend consciously or through force of habit, go right back to doing it again?

Does that seem like a sincere confession? But we're also not intended to seek to avoid sin on our own power either.

Maybe that's a struggle for you, is that you continue to beat yourself up about it. You are in a pattern of sin, you commit the sin, you ask for forgiveness, and yet you repeat it, and you feel like you're doomed somehow to repeat the cycle over and over again.

[19:13] But we are not intended to seek to break our pattern of sin on our own. Friends, God knows your most difficult struggles.

He knows your internal thoughts. He knows your actions, your sinful actions that you get caught up in. He knows those things. Ask Him for the strength to defeat those temptations the next time you face them.

You know, I found from personal experience that the more times you turn to God for help, the more times you're able to resist the temptation from sin.

And the less power over time, I've found this myself, that that temptation will have on you. When the temptation comes, ask God for the strength to do differently, to act differently.

And over time, when you resist that temptation through the power of God, it will weaken. I promise you that. One piece of advice I've often given to others is, and it's also worked for me, is pray and walk away.

[20:25] When you recognize a temptation in your life, ask God to give you the strength to resist it, in the moment if necessary. Then remove yourself.

This is the you part. Take intentional action to remove yourself from the temptation. Remove yourself from the circumstances and the environment where you are facing that temptation. But this is where I think we might run into a bit of confusion. If, as Protestant Christians, we don't recognize confession as involving a priest, and if we also recognize that confession is primarily about us and God, and confessing our sins in a personal way to God, then how does confession in any way become a corporate discipline, or something that we would consider in the perspective of our local church community?

Well, let's explore that a little bit. Do you think to yourself, how are my personal sins, anyone else's business other than God?

I don't really want to stand up at the front of the church and declare what I've done, reveal all my dirty secrets for everyone? So where does this idea of corporate confession come from?

[21:50] Well, we find it in James chapter 1, the book of James chapter 1, as James encourages his readers to pray, to sing songs of praise, to seek healing.

And then ultimately, he comes to recognize that if someone has sinned, they will be forgiven. But as James recognizes that forgiveness, it quickly grows into a corporate perspective.

Because James says in James chapter 5, verse 16, Therefore, confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other, so that you may be healed.

Do you hear that? Confess to each other, and pray for each other. So yes, you can go directly to God, through Jesus, for forgiveness, to seek forgiveness.

But confessing our sins to each other, has an important part in the life of the church as well. For example, if we've sinned against someone else, the Bible calls us to make that right.

[23 : 04] To go to the person, and ask their forgiveness. To confess our sin to them. If our sin has somehow affected the church, we are called to confess that publicly.

Perhaps there are examples that you can think of in your own life. But, you know, that does happen. If a situation happens where someone's sin somehow affects their, a public role that they've had in the church, we've, we've seen that in the past with church leaders.

They, a personal sin, a private sin, has affected a larger group of believers, a larger Christian community. And that confession then becomes public.

And that's an important thing as well. Accountability, a sense of confession, from your brothers and sisters in Christ. If we struggle with particular sins, specific sins, our church family can, and should, play a role in supporting, and encouraging us.

Both personally, one-to-one, and in prayer. That's what it's about. This journey isn't always easy. And it's never, it was never meant to be a solo journey.

[24 : 20] Another perspective. Have you ever confessed a sin to God, and still felt somehow unable to accept his forgiveness?

I touched on this a moment ago. But, I'd encourage you that if you find that, share your struggle with a trusted friend, with your pastor, me, or, you know, if you're connected to another church, share it with your pastor, someone that you trust, and allow them to help you recognize that God really does forgive you.

There's a great deal of freedom in that. For someone to confirm and affirm God's forgiveness for you in your circumstances. Friends, that can be really powerful in helping you become free from the guilt and shame of your sin.

Corporate confession can bring encouragement and a sense of God's love and forgiveness that's unlike any other you have experienced.

When we share God's love and forgiveness amongst one another, it bonds us as brothers and sisters in Christ, in community.

[25 : 40] I encourage you to try it. Speaking of confession, I want to close our time together with a prayer of confession.

So as I pray these words, allow them to be your personal prayer to God this morning. Let's pray.

Dear God, all my life I've been running from you, pretending I was good enough to get to heaven, and that there was no need for me to worry about sin, because there are so many people who are worse sinners than me.

And yet, Lord, I realize that I'm as much a sinner as every other person, and as much in need of a Savior as every man or woman that has ever been born.

Father, I realize that all sin is equally bad in your eyes, and the punishment for sin is spiritual death and separation from you for all eternity.

Lord, I humbly kneel before you and confess my pride and my foolishness. I admit I am a sinner in thought, in word, and in deed.

[27 : 00] And Lord, I am in desperate need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, my Savior.

Father, I confess that it's only through the blood of the Lord Jesus that my sins can be forgiven.

I believe and know that Jesus Christ died to pay the price for my sins, to forgive me of my sins, to break the power of sin in my life, and to clothe me in His righteousness.

Thank you, Father, for this free gift of grace, and thank you for pursuing me when I was running from you in my pride. I pray all these things in the powerful name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen. My friends, go in the freedom that you can confess your sin and receive the forgiveness and love of your Father in heaven.

Go in peace and have a great week. God bless you.