

Confession

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Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 0 0] Let me add my good morning. As has been mentioned a couple of times already, today we are beginning a new series. And I thought before we begin, it is worth just stopping to acknowledge a lot of people have been working to get us ready for this series.

And two people that I particularly wanted to just thank, even though they're not in this room, is Matt Giglin, who has done a stack of the graphic work for this series, which you'll see in the Bible studies and here on the platform on the screen.

And also Romeo Sanuri, who is part of our 1115 congregation, who helped make these happen. So we are blessed to have people with considerable gifts and also with generous hearts who like to use those gifts to bless us.

It is our prayer that this series will feed and encourage you, will challenge you, will draw you closer to God, will spur you on. And that has been the heart behind every bit of work, whether it's a picture, a word on a page, people standing at the door, songs that have been chosen by our teams.

And so how about before we begin, we just come before God and ask him to do that work in us. Father God, we thank you for this incredible opportunity together as your people.

[1 : 1 2] We thank you for the reminder as we work through Leviticus that what we are doing now is meeting with you together. Father, what we do when your word is open is encounter your presence. And so we ask that the result of this morning and every week that we gather in this series would not be a good service or some more information, but it would be that we are changed, that we are transformed, that we are better equipped to live the lives that you have given us through the death and resurrection of your son.

And so please draw us close to you this morning. Give us an incredibly vivid view of you and your glory that we might be better equipped to live the lives that you have given us.

Amen. I remember the night I became a Christian. It was quite possibly, even to this point, the most overwhelming night of my life. I was 14 years old.

I was on a camp and I cried. Well, 14-year-old boys aren't supposed to cry, especially when there are girls around who they're trying to impress, but I did.

I wept. I was absolutely leveled by this incredible, unconditional love that God would offer to even someone like me. Even as a 14-year-old, I had a reasonable awareness of the parts of me that were fairly unlovable.

[2 : 3 3] There was probably more bits that I wasn't aware of, but there was enough there for me to know that loving me took effort. And so to hear about this incredible love just blew me away. Even though I had parents that loved me well, I had good friends in my life, it was clear to me that night that there was something special about the way that God loved me.

There was something more about that love. And I was just overwhelmed. I was just filled with gratitude and I was convicted. And at that moment, I was absolutely committed to live every second of every minute of every day of every week of every year that God would give me in service of him.

I knew that this was a life-defining moment. It happened on a camp in January of 1996. I remember where it was. It was at Illaroo Farm.

I don't know if that campsite even still exists. And I came home from camp still absolutely on fire for God. Just so excited to be a Christian, ready to change the world, ready to be totally different, ready to leave behind what I used to be like and the reputation that I had and all those sorts of things, ready to be different and leave sinful habits behind.

12 months later, I went on the same camp as a 15-year-old. And I remember at the same point in the camp where they were giving people the opportunity to start following Jesus, explaining what he had done and how much he loved them, I had this moment of deep and intense guilt.

[4 : 08] Because standing there, I suddenly realised that that resolve, that commitment, that conviction that I had had only 12 months earlier, had almost entirely worn off.

In fact, if I'm honest, probably by mid-February of that year, it was gone. I was back into the usual rhythms of life and the new me that I was aspiring to seemed like a kind of embarrassing overstatement.

I hadn't arrived as this new person that I was supposed to be if I was going to follow Jesus. Now, I knew and I firmly believed that God's love for me wasn't going to be undone by my sad and maybe even pathetic attempts at following him and living for him.

But I also knew that there wasn't much in my life that said, hey, Sam is different now to what he was 12 months ago. There wasn't much evidence to say, hey, Sam's a Christian, whereas he wasn't before.

And so now the preacher's standing at the front of the room, inviting people to put their trust in Jesus, to become Christians, and I'm sitting there thinking, well, something clearly needs to change, but I can't do that because I've already done that.

[5 : 27] I did the becoming a Christian thing. I did the going down the front, praying the prayer, putting your hand up, whatever you want to call it. So what was I supposed to do with this incredible guilt and correct perception that not a whole lot had changed?

I mean, I don't know about you, but if you've been around church for long, you've heard enough testimonies or stories of Jesus that go something like, before I met Jesus, I was a jerk. I met Jesus and now look at me.

That wasn't my story. Before I met Jesus, I was a jerk. Then I met Jesus and 12 months later, I was still a jerk. In fact, let's be honest, there's some of you who think that I'm still a jerk now.

But seriously, in that moment, I was feeling this obvious awareness that I wasn't anywhere near where I was supposed to be. I couldn't do that first step.

I'd already done that. So what do I do now? And so I figured, as somebody who had said I'd become a Christian, had been hovering at church and youth group for 12 months, everyone around me assumed that I was going great.

[6 : 35] I had two options. Rather than admit how kind of pathetic my attempts at following Jesus were, I could play it down, not just to them, but to me as well, and go, maybe it's not so bad.

Maybe I am moving forward more than I think. Or I could try a lot harder and make up for the fact that I'd wasted this first 12 months. I figured they were my two options.

I knew there was a standard that, or at least I felt this pressure that I had to live up to some sort of standard, I didn't want to be another Christian hypocrite. I wanted God to still love me.

I wanted to be as good as all these other Christians around me seemed to be. And really, if I'm honest, I think what I expected was that I was supposed to be like Jesus. I even had a WWJD band to remind me I was supposed to be like Jesus.

And maybe that's a pressure that you feel, trying to follow Jesus right now. Maybe you're not having that moment like me on camp, but with a little bit of a push, a little bit of self-reflection, you feel a discomfort of, I'm supposed to be here, and in reality I'm somewhere down here.

[7 : 49] Christians never explicitly say, hey, you've got to be perfect. We wouldn't use that word, but think about the way that you respond to moral failure.

When you come across it in other people, do you find yourself wondering whether or not they're really Christian? Do you find yourself measuring who the best Christians are based on their level of goodness or their level of morality?

Or what about in your own life? When you become aware of sin in your life, are you tempted to justify it as not so bad?

Because let's be honest, it's uncomfortable to carry guilt. It's uncomfortable. Or maybe when you find sin in your own life, you feel that increased pressure to somehow make up for it.

Somehow pray more, serve more, give more, attend more. Does it all just get compounded by this fear that people might find out about this sin?

[9 : 02] Somehow the secret might get out. Find out what? That you're not as good as you're trying to pretend that you are?

Find out that you're not as perfect as Jesus? Wouldn't that be a shock? And so you're trapped in a cycle of doing everything you can to cover it up, to keep your failure a secret, to not let anyone else know that you make mistakes.

And every time you do that, you increase the pressure on yourself to hold up this standard of godliness. You increase the pressure to maintain this show, this pretense.

And maybe it adds guilt that just drives you. And so you're serving a lot. You're ticking all the obvious boxes of following Jesus, but deep down you are feeling this incredible pressure.

You are driven by this ridiculous weight. Because somewhere along the line, you and I and most of us started to believe the lie that as a Christian, you had to be perfect.

[10 : 12] Or at very least, you had to be better than most people. Better than the people who aren't at church. We started expecting ourselves to have kind of arrived as Christians.

And maybe it's from a verse like verse 5 in 1 John 1. We open the Bible and it says, This is the message we've heard from Him and declare to you. God is light.

In Him there is no darkness at all. And if we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. And so we start to panic. We think, well, I want to live in fellowship with God.

I want to be a Christian. And so I can't acknowledge darkness. I can't acknowledge failure. Because then, apparently, I'm a liar and I have no fellowship. And so we feel this pressure.

But you've got to understand, that's not what this verse is saying. That's not what any other verse that might sound even vaguely like that is saying. Because the next verse says, If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.

[11 : 25] So we're already walking in the light and yet we still need purification. So it's not telling us we need to be perfect. But somewhere along the line, our own fear and insecurity has meant that is a lie we have begun to believe.

And I want to begin this series by saying that if there is any part of that sentiment that resonates with you, if there is even a hint of this that you think, yeah, that sounds right.

I need to be better than the people around me. I need to be good enough for God. You need to hear that that is a lie. You need to really listen today and throughout this series because Jesus wants to show you what He means when He says, My yoke is easy.

My burden is light. following Jesus is a journey. It's about becoming something.

It's about being slowly and progressively transformed. If you're a Christian, if you're following Jesus, you are not a finished product. I can say that with absolute confidence.

[12 : 32] You are on a journey and you have not yet arrived. You are not at the destination. You are not done. Margaret Graham, who is the wife of the famous evangelist Billy Graham, has on her tombstone, end of construction.

Thank you for your patience. Jesus says following Him is like being on a narrow road. It's a road that leads to life.

It's a road that ends in the perfect life, in the perfection that maybe we desire. But being on the road is not the same as being at the end of the road. Anyone who has kids and has been on a road trip with those kids knows that there is an obvious and important distinction between being on a journey and arriving at your destination.

You've sat in the car and heard the haunting chorus of, Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? And after answering no for the thousandth time, maybe you chose to get a bit creative.

We're on the way. We're almost there. Or maybe, you know, the doozy, which I believe is untrue. But anyway, it's not about the destination. It's about the journey.

[13 : 42] Your kids will quickly teach you that that's not true. The whole point of a journey is to get somewhere. You know, the journey might increase your joy on the journey if you do fun things, but you are on a journey to get to somewhere.

And kids are pretty astute. They will work out that no matter how you spin it, being on the way, being on the journey, and actually arriving at your destination is not the same thing.

The joy of the journey, the point of the journey is only served when you arrive. And so if you're a Christian, you haven't arrived yet.

You need to hear this. Jesus says he will carry his work on. He will make sure you arrive eventually. But that arrival, that completion will be at the end of the journey.

That will be heaven. That will be when we finally get home. The Christian life is a journey between two points. It's the point that I just talked about when I was 14, when you discover that on the cross, Jesus died so that you could be forgiven.

[14 : 49] And you receive the new life, that the journey begins there. And the other point is heaven, when finally one day you'll be face to face with God, every bit of sin and sickness and evil and everything that is bad in you and in the world is totally removed.

But right now as a Christian, you live between those two points. Following Jesus is a journey. And so this series is about how do we live on that journey?

What does it look like to not just wander aimlessly, but actually to flourish, to thrive on this journey? What does it look like to maintain momentum, to keep going, to find joy, to grow in your delight in God on this journey?

What does it look like to not just shut your eyes, block your ears and hope that eventually one day you'll be home? What does it look like to love Jesus and enjoy him more and more every step of the way?

In heaven, we will be perfect, sinless, just like Jesus. But until then, that's not a standard that Jesus expects of you.

[16 : 02] That's not the measure he's holding up next to your life. And as long as we keep expecting that of ourselves and each other, we're making it more difficult for one another to do this journey.

In fact, for some people who are checking out Jesus, some people who are trying to decide whether or not this whole Christian thing is worth it, this expectation, this unwritten law that we have about being good enough, is enough to turn them away.

Because, again, they correctly understand, hey, I can't do that. And for some Christians, it's this unwritten standard, this pressure, that makes following Jesus far harder than it's supposed to be.

Being a Christian means being unfinished, which means every person in this room who is following Jesus is unfinished. Every person in this room who is following Jesus right now has sin.

Whether or not anyone else knows, you know. You have sin in your life. Maybe sin you've been wrestling with, maybe sin you've grown comfortable with, but you have sin in your life.

[17 : 17] The issue is not if you fail as a Christian, but what you do when you fail as a Christian.

Have a look at verse 8 with me in 1 John 1. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Now, none of us is actually walking around saying, hey, I'm perfect.

Well, at least I haven't heard that. But what we do by not actually specifically acknowledging our areas of failure or weakness is essentially imply that we're perfect.

We essentially give off the sense that there's nothing wrong. And what we're doing by not regularly recognizing and acknowledging sin is, in brackets, claiming perfection.

Making God out to be a liar, according to this verse. Or walking in the darkness. Putting on a show. Not showing what's really going on in our life.

[18 : 21] And if you talk a big game like that as a Christian, if you walk around acting like you've got it all together, then people will expect you to have it all together. If you're not confessing sin, it's a fair assumption that you either don't have any, or at least you don't think you do.

And that's a recipe for pressure. For you and the people around you. That's a recipe for insecurity for you. Because what happens if you suddenly do become aware of your failure after you've been pretending that you're perfect?

And ultimately, it's a recipe for hypocrisy. That's why the world looks at the church and thinks, why would I want to be one of them?

They say this and they do this. And so I just want to ask the question, I want you to ask yourself the question, why do we do that? Why do we try and act like we're better than we really are?

What is it that we think we gain? Who is it that we're trying to impress with our apparent perfection? I mean, we know that we do it. That's where we get our hypocrite tag.

[19 : 31] We know that we do it because so often people who aren't like us, who aren't as moral as us, who don't have the same background or upbringing as us, feel incredibly uncomfortable in our churches.

So why do we do it? Why do we hold ourselves and the people around us to a standard that is clearly impossible? Because it's not a pressure the Bible ever puts on you.

It's not a pressure Jesus ever puts on you. Jesus never says, hey, you're saved by grace, but you stay in depending on how good you are, depending on how much progress you've made.

See, the power of failure and sin over us is the fear that goes with us. The power of it is the fear that we have that somehow we might lose God's love for us.

It's a fear that Satan loves to grab hold of. Satan is sometimes called the great accuser. And what he does in those moments of failure is he presses the button that we already have of being insecure before God.

[20 : 44] He reminds us of something that's actually true. We don't deserve to be loved by God. But he does it in a place where suddenly we're feeling that pressure more acutely.

And he will just keep reminding us how bad we are. putting the pressure on us to either improve, be better, or give up.

So many well-intended Christians live with this pressure when they fail. They try harder and harder to be better. They serve more and more to cover up the guilt for their moral failure.

But inside, they're just wracked with guilt and petrified that God is going to stop loving them, that people are going to find out what they're really like.

But you've got to understand, Jesus doesn't respond to failure like that. I mean, in verse 9 it says, If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[21 : 57] Jesus responds to your shame and guilt and sin and failure with the gentle invitation to come back to him. With the gracious offer of unconditional forgiveness and cleansing and purification.

When he looks at your sin, his response is, Confess it to me. Hand it over and find that I respond the same way I did the first time you did this.

With forgiveness and love. This verse doesn't say he might forgive us. He doesn't say he'll, when you come, weigh up how many bad things you've done before, what your track record is.

It says he is faithful. He is just. He will forgive you. He will purify you. So often, our failure leads to insecurity and fear when it comes to following Jesus, but it actually doesn't have to.

Failure is going to be part of the journey, but God in his grace has actually transformed your failure into an opportunity for you to get deeper security in him. God actually sees your failure and thinks this is an opportunity for you to be even more certain that I love you.

[23 : 17] One of the things that I love to do with both my boys is building with blocks. Sometimes they ruin my excellent creations, but I overlook that because they're little.

But something I've noticed, particularly in my eldest son, Bailey, is this fierce independence when it comes to building. It's also, you know, that's kind of a euphemism for he doesn't like sharing, but he also likes to do things by himself.

And so sometimes he'll be struggling to get the next piece on his tower or to attach this ridiculously inappropriate piece off the side of this house or zoo that he's built. And I'm sitting there kind of trying to be patient.

Do you want daddy's help? He says, no. Okay? I'll keep watching while he fumbles about for a little bit longer. You know, the internal wrestle in me just wanting to fix it and make it work.

But I sit and I patiently wait and eventually I get to the point I think, okay, I'll offer again. He's starting to get agitated and frustrated. You know, pieces are about to be thrown. There's about to be a tantrum. And I say, would you like daddy to help you do that piece?

[24 : 20] He shuts me down a little more aggressively the second time around. And the struggle is that in that moment his desire is actually good. He wants to grow in his capability.

He wants to get better at this thing. He's frustrated that his skills are not moving forward, that he can't actually get this piece to fit the way that he wants it to. But that good desire becomes toxic when it stands between him and the one thing that can actually solve his problem.

In this case, namely me. Sitting there offering to help. that good desire to be capable is toxic because in that desire he rejects help.

And in the same way, our good desire to please God, the rightness of wanting to live increasingly holy lives, of wanting to increasingly be more and more like Jesus, that's a good desire, the rightness of responding to failure with shame and guilt becomes toxic when it drives you away from the one thing that can help you become more like Jesus.

The one thing that can help you deal with shame and guilt. The only way you can deal with sin and failure in your life is through Jesus, through his death in your place and he's saying every time you fail, not just once, once upon a time, every time you fail, come back to Jesus.

[25 : 45] I mean, did you catch this kind of strange little sentence at the beginning of chapter 2? It says, my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus is the only thing that deals with sin. He is sufficient to deal with all of your sin and not just your sin but the sins of the whole world and this is written to Christians.

It's written to dear children, to those who have begun the journey, to those who at some point decided to start following Jesus and here we're being told, don't leave confession behind.

Don't leave acknowledging that you're inadequate just to the beginning of the journey. this is a regular part of the journey following Jesus. Putting your hand up saying, God, I still need your grace just as much as I did when I began.

[26 : 53] Every time you sin, there is still grace, there is still forgiveness and it's offered freely. The only thing that can stand between you and that forgiveness is your own pride, your attempts to self-justify your actions, your attempts to impress people and God, whether it's from playing down sin or trying to make up for it, so long as you think that somehow God needs you to be good enough for Him to love you, you will spend your whole life crushed by a standard that you will never live up to.

So long as there is even a skerrick of belief in your mind that God's love is dependent on how good you are, you will spend your life trapped in a cycle of guilt, failure, denial, pretense, judgment of others and ultimately the fear that one day God and everyone else will find out what you're really like and treat you the way you deserve.

God knows what you're like. The Bible said that Christ died for us when we were still sinners. Christ died for us fully aware of everything you had ever done up to that point, fully aware of everything you were going to do from that point forward, more aware of your deepest, darkest secrets than you are.

He already knows grace. And when you fail, grace is on offer. Again, this isn't an if you fail issue, this is a when you fail.

When you fail, God offers grace. He offers forgiveness. And this matters more than just in the instantaneous sense of not feeling bad, of kind of escaping that discomfort of shame.

[29 : 00] encountering God's grace like this again and again is essential to journeying well as a Christian.

Essential to this journey between what Jesus has done on the cross and what he has prepared for us in heaven. Confessing sin is an assurance building activity. It's a gift that God has given us.

It is a tool that God has given us so that we don't just fall over the finish line one day and think, thank God that journey is over. But so that we hit the finish line with momentum.

So that each day we get more and more excited for what the future is because we're tasting that future in the momentary grace that we get every time we come to God without failure and hear the words, you are forgiven.

Completely, irreversibly, unconditionally forgiven. I mean, think about what you did when you first became a Christian. You confessed now, it might have been clumsy, it might have been vague, it might have been general, but on some level, when you became a Christian, you said, God, I know I don't deserve this, I know I don't deserve to be loved by you, but please forgive me.

[30 : 17] And he did. In that moment, he did. And every step since then, if you're still going as a Christian, has been a response to that moment of tasting and experiencing God's incredible love, of having the weight lifted.

But what regular confession of sin does is draw you back to that experience. Draws you back to the power of that experience.

It's kind of like a long distance relationship. I don't know if you've ever had a relationship with somebody across oceans or states or whatever it might be. If you don't speak to or see the person that you love regularly, it's inevitable that over a period of time, the power of that love to drive your actions and emotions is going to slowly decrease.

Now, it might still be sufficient to keep you faithful, to keep you committed to that person, but it's not going to have the same drive as if you are face to face enjoying that person's company regularly.

It's not going to have the same impact on you as if you were actually in their company, delighting in all the things that drew you to them in the first place. It's not going to have the same drive that's possible when distance is removed and you get to enjoy that person day in and day out.

[31 : 45] Now, in the same way, your first time experience of God's grace when you became a Christian, if you are one, is ultimately powerful enough to get you to the end of this journey.

I want to make that really clear. That grace that God showed you in forgiving you once is enough to get you to the end. God promises he's not going to let you go if you've taken step one and said, I want to be forgiven.

God has you and he will make sure you get to the end. But God's desire, again, is not that you collapse over the finish line. God's desire is not that you bang your head against the wall and following him throughout your life and then one day think, again, full life, a joyful life, a secure life.

He wants your momentum to build in following him. He wants you to be more confident of his love for you at the end of your life than you were day one when you hadn't even had the chance to disappoint him yet. He wants you to grow.

He wants you to keep tasting grace and confession is a gift that he has given us for us to taste grace. It's an opportunity he has given us that we might taste and experience his incredible love.

[32 : 55] It is a chance to air our dirty laundry, to show him the deepest, darkest parts of us, the things we're most ashamed about and find that again he says, I love you and I forgive you.

And again he says, I love you and I forgive you. And again he says, I love you and I forgive you. And as you do it once, you suddenly think, wow, he even forgave that. And so the next time you're more confident and you do it again and you think, wow, he loved that.

And he gets this track record for you that's not just theory you've heard about, but it's love that you've experienced. And so more and more we need to be people who confess sin to God.

and as we do it, who discover that his love is more powerful than our pride, our lust, our greed, our selfishness, our laziness.

And every time you do it, it'll be like reliving a mini version of that first moment that you tasted grace. That first moment, initial joy of discovering that God loves you more than you can possibly comprehend and that he will always love you.

[34 : 10] Every time we stop to confess sin, we get the chance to experience that joy afresh. And so we need to be people who confess.

We need to be people who are honest about how we're going, who walk in the light, that's what it means, who show what's really going on because we're not trusting in our ability to fake meeting a standard.

We're trusting in God's love for us that is stronger than our failure. And so if you're not regularly asking for forgiveness from God, and I don't mean generally like, hey God, I haven't done very well this week, I mean specifically.

Like, hey God, I thought this about that person this week and I know that doesn't honour you. Like, hey God, I lied about this in this way because I was more worried about my reputation than yours and I know it's not okay.

specific confession. If you're not doing it, then God's love will seem small, distant and inadequate. You'll find yourself like I did a year into my journey of following Jesus, not really going anywhere.

[35 : 18] prayer. So often, any lack of energy or enthusiasm that Christians have can be traced back to an entree-sized encounter with God's grace.

Expecting yourself to survive the whole meal after just snacking when God has offered you a buffet. All-you-can-eat grace for all of your life, for every sin, for every failure.

prayer. If you're feeling flat, if you're not feeling enthusiastic for God, if you're not driven to love Him, maybe if those words that I talked about at the beginning where I was just busting to follow Jesus with every minute, sound familiar but from the past, you're not going to be able to fix that by trying harder.

You're only going to fix that by feasting on grace, by airing your dirty laundry and discovering again that God loves you anyway, probably more than you even realize.

We regularly confess here at church at St. Paul's. We pray prayers together to do it. We sing songs of confession but there's always the potential in those that we can say the words, let it go past.

[36 : 34] So I want to push you right now. I'm basically finishing here. I want to push you to take this grace opportunity.

This isn't just a right now thing, this is about every step of the journey. What we're doing in this series is trying to hand you the tools that we believe God has given us so that the journey towards home is one where you get more and more momentum, more and more excitement, more and more confident and so I want to push you as we finish today to take the opportunity to confess sin to God.

Specific sin. If you're sitting there and you can't think of anything, two things you need to know. You definitely have something to confess because we're all unfinished and you've gotten really good at denying it.

Ask God to un-teach you that. Ask God to show you what it is that's unfinished. If that's your thing you need to confess, start there. Confess that God, I've been practicing this faking for so long that I don't even know the areas that aren't good enough anymore.

But right now, take the opportunity and confess for yourself. We're going to sing to confess together in a moment but before we get there, I want you right now to go through the process.

[37 : 57] Stand before God, admit who you are and find that his response is the same as it will always be. I love you.

I forgive you. So, forth, hope you help us. Habitat enough mehr you