

DAY 2

CONFESSION

As a result of our sin, all of us are born into this world separated from God. This is known as original sin. But we are also all born with a conscience, which helps us determine right and wrong.

Contrary to popular belief, it is entirely appropriate for us to feel sorrow and guilt after committing a sin. It's appropriate because, in fact, we are guilty. This is the natural response that we ought to experience. The apostle Paul lays out the two options in 2 Corinthians 7:10: **"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."**

Wow! Paul declares that sorrow can bring either repentance or death. It's what happens after you sin; what you do with your sorrow, that makes all the difference; it determines whether you'll experience freedom or not.

Although people say we live in a "post-Christian" nation, as recently as 2019, the Pew Research Center said that 65 percent of Americans still self-identify as Christians.⁶ Collectively, we do not have a problem identifying ourselves with Jesus, but we have a problem truly understanding what a life marked by the grace of Jesus looks like. Sadly, in a nation filled with supposed Christians, few depend on Jesus to overcome sin. LifeWay research found that "only 22% of American men and 33% of American women said they depend on Jesus Christ to overcome sin."⁷

Any pursuit of freedom outside of Jesus will always lead to more bondage.

The devil wants to take your natural feeling of guilt and turn it into lifelong shame. After all, there is a big difference between guilt and shame.

**GUILT IS: "I DID SOMETHING WRONG."
SHAME IS: "I AM SOMETHING WRONG."**

Guilt brings conviction. God can use guilt to bring us to our knees in confession—and confession is the key that unlocks our prison cell. It brings freedom. Andy Stanley says in his book, *Enemies of the Heart*, that confession has “the potential to free you from your guilt...Remember, the purpose of confession is not to relieve your conscience; it’s to effect change and reconciliation.”⁸

Shame, on the other hand, brings condemnation. Satan uses shame to imprison us, to condemn us to death. Shame hits at your core identity and leaves you with constant feelings of inadequacy. The devil wants you to carry that shame with you wherever you go.

1 Peter 5:8 (NLT) declares: **“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”**

The devil devours you from the inside. He will prowl around and roar at you with false accusations to convince you that you not only did something wrong, but you are something wrong. He will try to place labels on you, and sometimes, sadly, he will even do it through the people who love you. But I know from personal experience that the most negative person speaking to me in this world is not anyone else. It’s me. If the devil can get you to carry around that shame, he knows you will never experience the full, abundant life and freedom that Jesus offers to you. Are you going to let the devil win and turn your guilt into shame? If so, how’s that been working out for you?

There is another option. You can bring your sorrow, your guilt, and whatever level of shame you are experiencing to Jesus. In Jesus, you will experience His total forgiveness. Instead of elevating your guilt into shame, Jesus will remove your guilt by His grace. And it all starts with a wonderful practice called confession.

Look at what the apostle John says to us in 1 John 1:8-10: **“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”**

John reminds us that every one of us has committed a sin. If you say you haven't, well, John just called you a liar. So there you go. You just lied. Now you can join the rest of us sinners in this challenge!

In the church tradition that I've grown up in, we begin every worship gathering by confessing our sins before God. One time, a gentleman who had come for a few months scheduled a meeting with me. He said he enjoyed many aspects of our church, but he so disliked the practice of confession that he decided he was leaving our church. He explained that it's pointless to make this communal confession because God doesn't want us to remember our sins any longer. He has already paid for them, so to confess like this is not trusting that God has done this mighty work.

I tried to explain to him that the reason we confess our sins before God is not so that we experience more guilt, and certainly not shame. But rather, we do this because confession puts us in a place to ultimately experience God's kindness. Any acknowledgment of our sin—and the sorrow we experience because of it—is an important part of confession, but it is never the end goal. I remember telling

this man, “If you walk away from confessing your sins more focused on your own brokenness than on God’s kindness, than you have completely missed the point.”

Romans 2:4 declares this truth for us: **“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”**

Repentance is the process of changing, or turning, from a particular sin. Until we truly turn from our sin, we will not experience the full freedom that God wants for us! But remember, it is not through our power, grit, hard work, and perfection, but rather, it is through God’s kindness that we will ultimately experience His freedom.

What truly changes us from the inside out is that God has been kind toward us, in spite of our sin. Through His forgiveness, He offers a free gift that you absolutely do not deserve—grace.

In *Recovering Redemption*, Matt Chandler writes, “For what’s broken in us—what’s aching for recovery—is beyond our ability to fix. And from the moment it broke, all attempts to redeem it by ourselves are doomed to futility and failure. We need God. Or else. Not just once. Not just to get His signature on our heavenly hall pass. But forever. We will never get over needing Him.”⁹

When we confess our sins to God, we give Him an opportunity to do His saving work in our lives. We confess our sin to God so that we hear His words of forgiveness over our lives. Without God’s forgiveness, it is impossible to experience freedom.

On Days 13 to 19, you will learn about the powerful practice of confession. In confession, you are given the opportunity to experience the kindness of Jesus. You will see that the same kindness Jesus so willingly gave to his friend Peter is also offered to you.