

# Practising Spiritual Disciplines



## CONFESSION

**Accountability • Self-Examination**

*Confession draws us into the divine mystery of redemption.*

*At the heart of God is the desire to give and forgive.*—Richard J. Foster

*A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.*—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

### “Confession is good for the soul!”

We know that confession is good for the soul, but it can be very hard to do. After all, we can put a great deal of energy into appearing good when something is wrong with us. But, as Adele Ahlberg Calhoun reminds us in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, “This very appearance of goodness can be a way we defend ourselves against our sin. For when we can’t see our sin, we have nothing to confess.” And so we need some counsel in the giving of a confession.

In *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard Foster provides a three-point plan for developing the discipline of confession in our lives:

- 1. An Examination of Conscience:** This is a practice during which the soul comes “under the gaze of God.” In this experience we are inviting God to show us areas of our lives that need his forgiving and healing touch. We are invited to pray as the Psalmist did: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV).
- 2. Sorrow:** Sorrow is necessary to a good confession. In the discipline of confession, sorrow is not an emotion; rather, it is disgust at having committed the sin. Sorrow is a deep regret for offending the heart of God. This kind of sorrow, Foster says, is an issue of the will before it is an issue of the emotions. Sorrow demonstrates penitence and is a way of taking the confession seriously.
- 3. A Determination to Avoid Sin:** In the discipline of confession, we ask God to give us a hunger for holy living. John Wesley once said, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God ... such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.” The determination to avoid sin is really the desire to “seek first” and be ruled by God (see Matthew 6:33).

### My Action Plan

→ Examine the “sin-network” in your life as evidenced in willful sins, self-centred habits and broken relationships.

→ Confess sins by examining your life in light of the seven deadly sins, the Ten Commandments and prayers of confession found in Scripture.

→ Replace sinful habits with healthy ones.  
→ Seek God’s grace to change.

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

Cut out and keep in your Bible or journal. Allow these verses to mould your idea of confession.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NIV).

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:16 NRSV).

“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13 NIV).

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19 NIV).

“Teach me, and I will be quiet; show me where I have been wrong” (Job 6:24 NIV).

“I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: ‘Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws’” (Daniel 9:4-5 NIV).

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:5 NIV).

Also see 2 Samuel 24:10, Mark 11:25, Leviticus 26:40-42.