

Growing God's People

a journal for teachers and other learners

Leading Others in Confessing Sins

The longer we remain silent about sin, the harder it is to confess that sin to God and to a fellow Christian—be that a parent, a spouse, or an accountability partner.

The result of our silence is a rejection of grace. When we're teachers within the Body, it means that we are failing to grow in an area of faith in which we are entrusted with teaching others.

It is the goal of this bimonthly issue of GGP that we as teachers at Cedar Springs Church be encouraged to grow in our willingness to confess our sins to God and to each other.

Only from established private practice can we then take the message of experiencing God's grace out into the congregational units and small groups, encouraging and admonishing others to

incorporate the discipline of confession into their lives and to share God's grace with others as they make known to one another the areas of their lives in which they are most seeking to grow in holiness and defeat habitual sins.

In this issue you'll find a concise overview of the spiritual discipline of confession, a poem that will lead you in prayer to God, the review of a book that redefines Christian leadership to embrace brokenness, and an exegetical exercise that will prepare you to teach on the topic.

God has poured out his love upon us and enriched us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. May God guide us in extending grace to one another.

The Practice of Confession

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When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace. In each issue of GGP, we will focus on a spiritual discipline as it is practiced within the Christian faith.

By Robert Hodge

Halfway through her sophomore year in college, "Jennifer" became a Christian. Immediately, her life bore testimony to God's grace.

Confessing her sinful state and her need of redemption, Jennifer had surrendered her life to the lordship of Christ and abandoned a life-style of casual sex and occasional binge drinking. She was a "different person" and everyone noticed—friends, family, sorority sisters, and coworkers.

Within a year, Jennifer was leading Bible studies, and before graduation was in the core leadership of the campus ministry. Moving to a new city after school, she settled into a job with an engineering firm and became active in an evangelical church. Ministry opportunities abounded, and Jennifer soon became known in the congregation as an active lay leader, a good teacher, and model for others. Behind the appearance—and noticeably

private struggle with sin. Deeper still was a hunger to share those struggles with someone who could listen without offering condemnation and offer the assurance of God's mercy.

Risking rejection—the potential result of removing the mask of "Sainthood" and "holiness—but angered by her pride's refusal and fearful of persisting in sin, Jennifer poured out her heart one night to an older sister in faith.

What she would discover that night was a wideness in God's mercy and a freedom from her fears. In the life of faith, confession, and repentance in reverent fear of God lead to a deeper experience of grace.

The composite story reflects the experience of millions in Christendom who have discovered that confession brings us into the immediate and waiting embrace of a loving Father (our Abba), whose love for us frees us and calls us to a disciplined life of loving Him.

Love for God and learning to love others as God loves them is the pathway to recurrent victory in our lifelong struggle with sin. For nearly everyone that deeper journey begins with confession.



PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE

Confession that goes beyond private confession to God is difficult and tough to practice in environments where we have learned to “respect” one another’s private world and where we may have come to believe that we are alone in our struggle with sin.

“We feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. We imagine that we are the only ones who haven’t stepped on the high road to heaven,” writes Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline*.

Yet the unconditional call of God to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16) remains, and the blessed work of the Body is hindered by a fear of men wrongfully overruling our right and appropriate fear of God.

To find a soulmate with whom you can confess sins, look to a Christian friend who has seen his or her own sin in light of the cross and who can do nothing but speak of the grace which he or she has received from God.

In practicing the discipline of confession, go first to God and ask that your heart be revealed so that you can

see your sins before the righteousness of God. In doing this, look for specific sins—be they outward or inward—so that you are able to deal with the actual sins that constrict a heart and impede a greater filling of the Holy Spirit.

Essential to our confession is a truly sorrowful heart. Writes Foster: “Sorrow as it relates to confession is not primarily an emotion, though emotion may be involved. It is an abhorrence at having committed the sin, a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father. Sorrow is an issue of the will before it is and issue of the emotions.”

Our sins revealed, and our heart gripped with sincere sorrow, we should then adopt a firm determination to avoid sin, asking God to create that desire in us and to give us the strength to stand firmly against our flesh, the world, and the devil.

“Confession begins in sorrow, but it ends in joy. There is a celebration in the forgiveness of sins because it results in a genuinely changed life,” writes Foster.

We teachers at Cedar Springs are frail sinners saved by grace. May we by God’s grace find the courage to be honest. May we honesty lead to confession, and may we discover an abundance of life in experiences worth sharing in our classes.



Teaching and Learning God’s Way

Setting the Soul’s Bride
By T.M. Moore

A circular saw is a marvelous tool. It speeds up the time cutting boards so that you can spend more time with the fun work of hammering nails! But you have to be careful that the angle of the blade is properly set, because if you set the angle wrong, even just a little, you won’t be able to cut a straight line, and your boards won’t fit together (which means that you get to spend less time hammering nails and more time trying to repair the mistake you made by cutting your board with a saw set at the wrong angle, and once you’ve ruined a board, no amount of cutting will fix it. As my dad used to say: “I don’t know, I’ve cut this thing twice now, and it’s still too short!”)

As we saw in our last installment, Cain had the saw blade of his soul set at the wrong angle: he brought his offering to the Lord apart from faith. That carried over into every area of his life, as we see in Gen. 4:17-23. With the blade angle of his soul set to self-service rather than God-honor, Cain went out from Eden and began to build a culture that was the exact antithesis of all that God intended when He made men and women to be vice-gerents over the earth. Cain built a city and named it for his son, thus honoring himself by honoring the child of his loins. Four generations after Cain, the set of that family’s soul-saw being

unchanged, a descendant took two wives to gratify his lusts, evidently considering that God’s “one man/one woman” arrangement did not “work for him.” He raised a child to tend to livestock; does anyone think for a moment that he taught that child about making offerings to God with those animals (as had Cain’s dead brother)? Undoubtedly he taught his son to honor himself with the labors of his hands. He brought forth a child who was effective at forging metals into useful tools—perhaps bludgeons, or knives, which could come in handy when you got angry at someone who had hurt your pride. Another son became a musician, and his father, perhaps inspired by his son’s skill in composition, wrote a song to mock the justice of God.

An entire culture, a growing family, ruined by the set of one man’s soul. Which illustrates why is so important that we begin, from early ages right on up through adults, to teach people to look at every area of their lives from the perspective of faith, of giving honor to God in all they do—whether it’s work, or living in a neighborhood, or dealing with irritating people, or enjoying the work of pop culture, or being faithful to your spouse.

Teachers: Are you setting the blades of your students’ souls to cut straight lines for the Lord?

In this, one of his many “holy sonnets,” John Donne depicted in dramatic and even shocking images the struggle for spiritual growth.

Holy Sonnet XIV

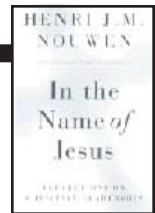
Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usped town to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captivated and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

- John Donne

Featured Book

TITLE:*In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Learning*
AUTHOR : *Henri Nouwen*



Reviewed by Jimmy Davis

This eighty-page book packs a multi-volume punch. Have you read many books that never run dry no matter how often you dip into them? *In the Name of Jesus* is not only short and sweet, it is also deep and wide. I've read it at least once a year for the last four years and I'm continually challenged by its message.

Henri Nouwen, respected counselor, scholar, and professor, was called to minister to mentally handicapped patients in a community called Daybreak. While serving there he was invited to give a series of lectures to a group of priests and ministers on “Christian leadership in the twenty first century.” This book contains both the transcript of Nouwen’s lectures along with the story of how he and one of Daybreak’s patients ministered together during the lecture series.

Nouwen uses two narratives from the gospels to frame his thoughts about Christian leadership: the story of Jesus’ and Peter’s call to be a shepherd (John 21:15-19). Nouwen’s gut-level honesty about the real temptations that face Christian leaders is refreshing and piercing at the same time. We teachers and leaders are tempted by the same tactics used against the Master Teacher in the desert: the temptation to be relevant, to seek popularity, and to be powerful.

Nouwen counteracts each temptation with the words of Jesus spoken to Peter: the temptation to be relevant is negated by the question “Do you love me?”, the temptation to be popular is offset by the task of “feed[ing] my sheep”,

the temptation to be powerful is dismissed by the call to humble servitude as Jesus tells Peter that “somebody else will take you.”

Nouwen then shows us that the “downward” path from defective to effective Christian leadership is taken by practicing the disciplines of prayer, confession, forgiveness, and theological reflection.

The book is rich with insight and should be required reading for all Christian leaders. One of the many quotes that I go back to often is, “The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show me some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus?”

“The Value of a Teacher”

Open your next teaching time with an opportunity for your students to share how a particular teacher profoundly influenced their life.

What lessons do the responses have for work, home, and church?

Preparing to Teach

Biblical Interpretation

I John 1:8-9

“if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”



There are four general meanings for the word “confess” in the New Testament. The first meaning of the word is that of “solemnly promising” as in the case of an oath, as found in Matt. 14:7. A second meaning is that of “agreeing” to something, of which an example can be found in Heb. 11:13 where the heroes of the faith had “admitted that they were but aliens” sojourning on Earth. The third meaning in the NT is “making a confession.” The fourth (and most common) is to “acknowledge” or “declare,” as in Matt. 10:32, where Christ says that those who acknowledge him before others will be acknowledged by him before the Father.

WORD STUDY

1

Look up each of the following passages, and paraphrase the text in your own words emphasizing the various uses of *homologeō* in each of the verses.

confess *homologeō*

as “solemnly promise”

Matt. 14:7

as “agree”

Heb. 11:13

as “confess”

John 1:20

I John 1:9

as “acknowledge”

I John 4:2



I John 1:8,9

What other words or phrases are found in these two verses which cause you to believe that *homologeō* is rightly translated by the English word confess?

2

I John 1:8,9

Two words are placed together to form the word *homologeō*: *homo*, meaning “same” and *logos* meaning “word.” How might an understanding of this compound word aid you in confessing your sins?

3

Old Testament

Using a concordance and a theological dictionary, what does the OT have to teach us about confessing sins—both private and corporate—before God and before others?

4



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation