

Hearing God's Voice
Week 7: Confess & Repent

Today we are going to look at the connection between two biblical commands and our ability to hear God's voice. This is a discussion about **confession and repentance**. These are **church words** that have been **misunderstood and misused**. Today is about reclaiming religious words to their original meaning.

In a lot of people's minds those two words have a **negative connotation**. They almost sound **mean**. That misunderstanding may come from what we have called **malformed views of God**. If we believe that God is either **angry, ambivalent, or absent**, then we will tend to think that confessing and repent are someone shining a bright light in our faces, trying to get us to **"spill the beans" about how bad we really are**. Then God will say, **"I knew this one was no good."**

The angry god needs to be **appeased**. He's yelling at me, so maybe if I tell him how good he is and how bad I am, **then he'll not send me to hell**. Or if I can get his **attention and approval** by telling him how bad I really am. Or maybe if he knows just how messed up I am, **he'll come back and care for me**.

All of these malformed views of God cause us to fear and avoid the idea of confessing and repenting. I've put a lot into this **false self** that others see, so why would I think it's a good idea to come clean on who I really am when no one is looking.

Today, I want us to **take a deep breath** and think. We don't have to view confession and repentance that way. **We can go from "you had better" to "why wouldn't you?"** It doesn't have to be that old saying, **"Turn or burn."**

17th century Scottish pastor John Colquhoun said: **"When a man is driven to acts of obedience by the dread of God's wrath revealed in the law and not drawn to them by the belief of His love revealed in the gospel; when he fears God because of His power and justice, and not because of His goodness; when he regards God more as an avenging Judge, than as a compassionate Friend and Father; and when he contemplates God rather as**

terrible in majesty than as infinite in grace and mercy; he shews that he is under the dominion, or at least under prevalence, of a legal spirit."

Legal spirit, that's the "you had better" attitude toward confession and repentance.

In essence, **we cannot decipher God's language** without confession and repentance. There is no place for God's word to land and **take root to produce a harvest.**

Let's define confess and repent. **Confess is to agree with what God already knows**

It's agreeing with the loving God who brought us close to himself through Jesus and has adopted us as his own. It's not agreeing with the angry god who simply wants us to grovel.

God knows the rotten things I've said, done, or even thought, and he loves me anyway. He actually wants to come close so that he can change me into someone more like Jesus.

Repent is to change direction leaving one thing and moving toward something different.

To repent is to make an about face from pursuing my own agenda, to following my new master who loves me.

The logical order is as stated.

#1. I agree with God that what I have done is sin not just in deed, but also in my desire to be in control.

#2. Then I repent by taking my first steps of walking away and walking toward Jesus.

If you've never made it official that you are with Jesus, that's the place to start. You do those two things and then trust him and start following.

This is different from what we call the **cycle of shame**. This is when I try to resist temptation, give into temptation, feel guilt; rinse and repeat. It is not the cycle of shame. You can also call this, **White Knuckle Holiness**. This is transformation that is **based upon will power**. It can also lead to some **religious behavior that can make me feel like I'm making up for being stuck in this cycle of shame**.

So what does this have to do with hearing God? **Well, in a word, everything.** **Confession and Repentance makes hearing God possible.**

It is one of the top input's that can create a Jesus-like life. The other two are reading the Bible four times a week and being a part of a faith community.

Beginning next week, we are going to talk about **spiritual practices**. We have them in three categories; **The Slow Life, The Grounded Life, and The Generous Life**. It's a **desire—practice—habit—character** process where God transforms us or makes us new. We have a desire for God or the things of God. Next we need to do something to practice this desire. If practiced enough, then it can become a habit or second nature, where we don't even think about it, we just live that way.

Here's the problem: We can't ignite the power of these practices until we experience confession and repentance. Here's why confession, or agreeing with God and repentance, turning away from our old life and toward Jesus, **makes hearing God's transforming voice possible**. Because...**It is about dealing in reality not fantasy.**

Confession is getting real. This is who I am and where I am at right now.

It's like when I used to do **personality test** with kids at Westland H.S. in Columbus. There were certain kids who would take the test and it was obviously not who they were. They answered the questions based upon who they **thought or imagined they were**. Typically, these kids were wounded early in life. **They were stuck in fantasy about who they were.**

Or there have been **kids who I've coached** who are not dealing with reality in their estimation of their skills.

That personality test **cannot help the kid who is fantasizing to see how God has created him**. It can't help that kid **see his or her brokenness that, without help, will define their relationships for the rest of their life**. And, in the same way, that kid who is totally delusional about his abilities on the tennis court **isn't going to be able to receive the coaching needed to transform his game** into something close to what he believes it to be.

We have to call our sin, our weakness, our vulnerabilities, what they are. No amount of dressing for success, speaking to influence others, working out in the gym to compensate, degrees on the wall, or money and toys, will work **as long as we are living in fantasy about what our lives are like and where we are in opposition to the transforming presence of God**.

Ancient Chinese proverb says...["The right naming of things is the beginning of wisdom."](#) [Chinese Proverb](#)

When we aren't dealing in reality, sometimes it's **because we just aren't emotionally mature enough to see ourselves clearly**. Sometimes **we just refuse to**. After all, our culture says **all you have to do is believe and then your dreams will come true**. That's why there are always people on **American Idol** who don't know that they can't sing a lick.

One book that is on my list to read this spring and summer is ***Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*** by Peter Scazzero. I actually was able to hear him speak at an online conference about what the church should focus on in coming out of COVID. He says it very simply. **"We cannot change what we are unaware of."** [Peter Scazzero](#)

OK, enough of ancient proverbs and Christian writers. Here's what the Bible says. These are Paul's words to a very important church in Ephesus. **Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.** ¹² **It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret.** ¹³ **But their evil intentions** (Remember, it begins with a desire...)

will be exposed when the light shines on them,¹⁴ for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light." Ephesians 5:11-14

What does light do? It "exposes" evil deeds. But it really starts before that. It exposes evil intentions. It makes everything visible.

What is the light? It is God's presence or God's voice speaking to us. But that begins with confession and a desire to repent that opens up the door so that God's light can shine upon it. If we are not aware of these desires or practices, then God's light will not illuminate the truth until we are willing to admit it and deal with it.

The light is what makes what seems impossible suddenly possible. It is not likely that a person will change at a character level. Light can do that.

Light is what wakes us up in the morning. Our bodies are made to respond to light. That's why too much time in front of a screen at night can affect your sleep. The blinds open in the summer will wake your body before you want to be awake. "I'm not going to bed, it's not dark yet!" Trying to sleep in a tent in the UP when the sun sets at about 11:00.

Dreams are fantasy and they are foggy, distorted visions. Light brings sharpness or clarity to what is seen.

That's your opportunity to do something. That's when I am able to hear God's voice and sense his presence. That is when he can begin to make the change in me that needs to happen both at the desire level and at the behavior/attitude level.

The light is God and his truth. If the bible says it's not what God wants, then it's sin. I can disagree with God, but then I'm creating my own reality where I'm ok. Our unwillingness to confess that an attitude, thought, or behavior is sin based upon the belief that God isn't really good and that he is holding out on me.

Don't wait for me to list your sin. If there's something you are doing or thinking that doesn't seem right or you're just not sure of, then seek out the truth in the Bible yourself.

Am I willing to trust him that I can have a full abundant life only if that trust leads to obedience.

*"Confession is always stepping out of fantasy and into reality. Reality, as painful as it may be, is the only place in which freedom may be enjoyed."
Learning to Live and Love like Jesus Pg. 141*

Fantasy can't give freedom because you are trying to change someone who doesn't exist. God knows the real you, loves the real you, and wants to change the real you. **Believing the fantasy will always lead to me making a fool of myself.**

He can't do anything with the fake, fantasy, you.

That brings us to the next reason why confession and repentance are the thing that makes hearing God's transforming voice possible. **God cannot transform what he is not allowed to touch.**

That is why it is commanded. God wants to transform our lives and give us abundant life, but he cannot without confession and repentance.

Here's a guy who was always calling Gods' people to confess and repent from their wickedness. *Then the LORD said to me, "Even faithless Israel is less guilty than treacherous Judah!"¹² Therefore, go and give this message to Israel. This is what the LORD says: "O Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever."¹³ Only **acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the LORD your God and committed adultery against him by worshiping idols under every green tree. Confess that you refused to listen to my voice.** I, the LORD, have spoken! Jeremiah 3:11-13*

These things are listed that I am fessing up to; guilt, rebellion, adultery, and refusing to listen. Deflecting is when my guilt is in comparison to someone who is worse, my rebellion is when it's someone else's fault that led me astray, adultery is finding my identity in another "solution" and my

refusal to listen becomes **"did God really say that?"** These are ways that we can keep God from touching what he would like to change in me.

Sometimes I don't want to think about how I'm spending money. I can't change anything, I have to look at it.

I can't see where my sin will take me, the trajectory of it if I don't confess it, and allow the light of God to shine on it. **I'm stuck skipping down the primrose path** to destruction because I can't see where this is taking me.

You want some Jesus? Ok, I've got some Jesus for you. **"The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" Mark 1:15**

Good news is accessible when we repent. Then we can see how it is good news. If I don't repent, then I won't be able to see The Kingdom of God because I've got my own fantasy kingdom to manage.

And the really good news is that the time is now, today. The kingdom of God is near because you are about to experience it, because of your willingness to confess and repent.

It's what makes hearing God's transforming voice possible. It takes us from **fantasy to reality.** It's important because **God can't transform what we won't let him touch.** And finally because...**Confession & repentance are not simply about me.**

Confession is a community issue it affects others, 152, **"your sin wants to be alone."** Bonhoeffer

I'm more useful to others when I live in confession and repentance.

"The end point of discipleship is loving others, so the humility posture of confession and repentance is the same posture by which we love and serve others." *Learning to Live and Love like Jesus* pg. 151 The posture of confession and repentance is the posture of a disciple of Jesus **who can make the kingdom present for others.**

This is the verse that makes it uncomfortable. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. James 5:16

When I remain alone with my sin, I miss the "great power" that produces "wonderful results. Yes, God could give great power and wonderful results without me confessing to a person, but he chooses to do it this way.

You create a bond with someone with whom you confess sin, particularly when it is mutual. I have a bond with the men with whom I've been confessional. They hold me accountable.

Yes, this is a risk. But the bigger risk is not doing it.

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. 1 John 1:8-10

"Fooling ourselves" is another way of getting back to fantasy as opposed to reality.

It's not a one and done. Or I did it when I came to Christ. Yes, there is an initial point when we step over the line of faith and trust Jesus. That trust enables us to confess our sins and our self-reliance and then repent by turning toward the direction of our new master.

Repentance is the step of allowing God into that part of your life after becoming real and transparent.

God's part is that because he is faithful and just not only forgives us, but clean. You can be clean! I get to say that in every baptism that God views you as clean.

Learning to Listen

1. Prayer 1 John 1:8-10

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2. Confess your sins to God right now.

Take some time either by **kneeling** or taking a posture of one who is guilty.

3. _____ is someone with whom I could be transparent?

Guidelines for where and who... **Confession works best in a small setting** with one or a couple of friends with whom you have developed a closer bond. **If it's an addiction** or something of that sort, you should probably not even do this in your bridge group. That can come later. **Might need professional help.**

This is the opening for God to speak and me to hear him. It is the beginning of freedom.

(Pic of canoe behind the rock) Confession and repentance is the **first rock** in the raging river of life that you get to slip behind and enjoy God's presence. You get to slide out of the daily activity, pace, and noise, in order to be in God's presence so he can speak and transform your life. **Then, when you re-enter the madness**, you will be better able to navigate life as one who he has brought close as an adopted son and sent to represent him as an **ambassador**.