

Discipleship 2008: Building a Prayer of Confession

The *L & S Jesus Christ*, which is a DiscipleShip, is ready for boarding. All aboard, who are going aboard. As disciples of Jesus, we embrace and assist in spreading the teachings of Jesus. Last week we began our year of discipleship building with a lesson on prayer.

We gave definition and thought to prayer:

1. An act of reverent petition to God
2. A heightened receptivity to God
3. Honest and humble conversation with God
4. An act of communing with God

We remembered Jesus told us to pray in private and he prayed in public with his disciples. We learned our entire focus in prayer should be directed toward the One True God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, the Trinity. Prayer is not to tell God what to do, but to appeal to God's goodness. We talked about how prayer gives us opportunity to become more like God, more loving, more patient, to have more self-control.

We began a discussion about the acronym ACTS, using it to help us grow as disciples and specifically in our understanding of prayer – ACTS stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Last week we defined adoration, as an act of worship, as profound love and highest regard. We built a prayer of adoration, using words to tell of God's might, glory, omnipotence, mercy, justice, love. When we left last week, we encouraged one another to be in prayer throughout the week, just as the Apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing. How many took the time to offer a prayer of adoration to God? How many received blessings from prayer? (Thank you for being a witness to prayer, and encouragement for the rest of us to pray.)

This week we build on our understanding of prayer as we discuss Confession. So, what is confession?

Many of you will remember on television the steely-eyed Perry Mason glaring into the eyes of the witness, confronting them with irrefutable evidence that leads directly to them. Sooner or later, (but definitely within an hour) the witness on the stand falls apart, "I did it. I did it." That's a form of confession.

If we turn to the dictionary, we read Confessionⁱ defined as:

- The act or process of confessing, especially a disclosure of one's sins in the sacrament of reconciliation
- Something confessed, especially disclosure of one's sins to a priest for absolution.
- A written or oral statement acknowledging guilt, made by one who has been accused or charged with an offense.
- An avowal of belief in the doctrines of a particular faith; a creed.

The word **Confession** is used by many churches in the sense of a statement of faith. The word is used in many Bible translations to mean *admit one's faith publicly* (e.g. [Epistle to the Romans 10:9](#)). The *Confession* of a church may therefore be used to mean its public statement of faith or doctrine, as in the Apostle's creed.

A church or group that belongs to a [Confessing Movement](#) strives to adhere to its public confessions strictly. *Oh, does that mean I believe that after church also?*

Many of us are familiar with the religions of Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. We may not know a lot, but we may be familiar with them. Over the past week, I found each has characteristics in common; belief in a higher power

(i.e., God), love, prayer. And each of these, like Christianity, teaches confession, the need to confess one's wrong doings.

Poverty, hatred, abuse, addictions, war, arrogance, complacency, sin we commit by doing and sin we do by omitting to do. As I ponder the world's current state of sinfulness, I wonder why the followers of these long standing religions, including Christianity, don't spend more time in confession. If nothing else, if we spent more time in confession, it would leave us less time to sin.

Roman Catholics teach the [sacrament](#) of Penance (commonly known to many as confession) in which individual men and women may confess sins committed after baptism and have them [absolved](#) by a priest. The power of forgiveness belongs to Jesus alone, but Roman Catholics believe God can and does exercise it through the Roman Catholic priesthood.ⁱⁱ

Protestant churches believe that no priestly intermediary is necessary between the Christian and God in order to be absolved from sins. Protestants, however, confess their sins in private prayer before God, believing this suffices to gain God's pardon. And confession to another is often encouraged when a wrong has been done to a person as well as to God. [Matthew 18:15-20](#)

Lutheran churches practice "confession and absolution" with the emphasis on the absolution, which is God's word of forgiveness. Confession and absolution may be either private to the pastor, or corporate with the assembled congregation making a general confession to the pastor in the [Divine Service](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

Recently I had a conversation with a person who wants to be a pastor in another denomination of the Christian faith. He said their denomination did not call them to confess their sins. I hope what he meant is that they may not expect people to confess in public, or even come to the pastor or priest. But to not confess sin would go against that which we are shown in Scripture, or taught by tradition. In everything I have read so far, I have not found a faith that does not teach and understand confession of sin in some way.

In the United Methodist Tradition, Wesley believed it so necessary he wrote a sermon called "The Repentance of Believers" and created a worship service known as the Covenant Service, a service in which the congregation comes together on an annual basis to confess individual sin and community sin. Here are some thoughts from that service:

Every person must recognize their sinful condition and remember that they cannot experience forgiveness outside the grace of God.

It is important that we recognize our continuing need for confession. We have tended to connect confession only to the moment of turning to Christ for the first time.

But scripture validates, and Wesley affirmed, even the Christian's need for a periodic prayer of confession as well. In Wesley's own words: "the most holy among us is subject to a thousand infirmities which spring from our fallenness.

Our shortcomings and human failings need the atoning blood of Christ as well as our 'properly so-called' sins. According to the apostle Paul, all of us must live daily recognizing our need of the cleansing work of Christ.^{iv}

The act of confession offers opportunity for reconciliation between God and the sinner, between the sinner and the offended. When confession is made from a broken and contrite heart, forgiveness can and should be offered to the perpetrator of sin, which again restores relationship with God, the offended and the community of faith. It restores the relationship of the self, allowing the me, myself and I to live together in peace in the same skin. Through the act of confession, we have the opportunity to be restored to our whole selves.

I invite you to pray the following prayer, seeking to confess your sin before God, seeking God's forgiveness, seeking to be filled with God's grace and glory that you might live a life as person called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Shine on Me

The day grows long, darkness surrounds me,
The sin and shame of life before me.
My heart is longing to kneel before thee.
Forgive me, Lord. I know that I need thee.

Shine on me,
Radiance of God.
O let your glory
Surround me.
Precious Lord,
O shine on me.

The morning comes, eyes are so heavy.
A stream of tears now burst the levy.
My heart cries out to the One that I know,
Who'll touch my heart and revive my soul.

Rain on me,
Water of god.
O let your glory
Now bathe me.
Precious Lord,
O rain on me.

Before thy throne willfully I fall.
Name that I love, O, Author of all.
Both day and night I call the One;
Creator, Spirit, Begotten Son.

Live in me,
Spirit of God.
O let your glory
Now fill me.
Precious Lord,
O live in me.

(by James McGuire)

ⁱ <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary/entry/confession>

ⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession>

^{iv} http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/covenant/Wesley_Covenant-Jeren_Rowel.htm