THE LORD’S PRAYER – A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

“Forgive us our sins”
Matthew 6:9-13

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas
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[VIDEO] Every one of us has felt the same way as that little poodle. When we get caught, we feel like hiding behind the wall. We don’t want look eye to eye with someone who knows what we’ve done. We don’t want to face our sin. It’s called conviction. It’s that embarrassing feeling of being found out. And all of us know what it feels like.

As Christians, this is a healthy thing, because conviction tells us that we have strayed from God. It tell us that we have strayed from the one who loves us the most and strayed from His best. Walking with God requires a daily recognition that we still sin and that we need to ask God to forgive us of our sin. Just like we need to take a bath every day to stay clean, we need to confess our sins every day to stay clean before God. So the conviction of the Holy Spirit is a good thing.

When the Holy Spirit convicts us, He makes us feel the wrongness of what we have done. He convicts us when we say something, think something, or do something we should not have. God convicts us because He wants to spare us the destruction of sin and the misery of sin. He convicts us because He wants to conform us to the image of His Son and because He wants us to experience His best.

This conviction of sin and confession of sin is included in the Lord’s Prayer. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, He gave them what we call The Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us how to pray; it also shows us the way to the Father’s heart.

Prayer is an invitation to talk to God. Even better, it is an invitation to talk to our Father. Prayer is how we, as God’s children, come to our Father with any need and any question. Prayer is an invitation to pour out our hearts before Him. When we really think about it, it is amazing that the Creator of the universe would listen to the prayers of such small creatures like us, and yet that’s exactly what our Father promises to do.

Here’s how Jesus taught His disciples, and teaches us, to pray. Let’s recite it together.

“Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:9-13, traditional)

The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of trust (“Our Father”). It is a prayer of adoration (“Hallowed by Your name”). It is a prayer of submission (“Your will be done”). It is a prayer of provision (“give us our daily bread”). And today we will see that it’s a prayer of confession (“forgive us our sins”).

We cannot approach God without confessing our sins. The Bible says, “Your sins have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). Unconfessed, unrepentant sin cuts us off from God, and God will
not hear our prayers if we refuse to confess our sins. That means we’ve got to be honest with God when we pray. No lies. No secrets. No pretending. Prayer is coming into the presence of a holy God and allowing Him to shine His holy light on our hearts revealing the truth about us and exposing what is corrupt in us. And when He does, we can appeal to His amazing grace. And when we do, He forgives, He cleanses, and He restores our relationship with Him. And isn’t that the greatest thing a human being can ever experience? To be in right relationship with God, the Creator of the universe and the holy King of the universe. To be in loving relationship with our Father, accepted, valued, secure, blessed.

**PSALM 38 & CONVICTION**

Experiencing God’s discipline is never fun. It wasn’t fun when my parents disciplined me, but looking back, I’m glad they did. They disciplined me because they loved me. And that’s why God disciplines us. That’s why He convicts us when we sin. It’s His way of calling us back to what is good, right, and best. But again, discipline is never fun, and in Psalm 38, David was honest in describing what God’s discipline felt like.

When he was convicted of sin, David pleaded for mercy. “O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me” (Psalm 38:1-2, NIV). David described God as pulling back His bow and shooting an arrow straight through his heart. That’s what conviction felt like to David. Elsewhere David said, “If a man does not repent, (God) will sharpen His sword” (Psalm 7:12, NAS).

We like to think of God as gentle and loving. We want a God who dotes on us, like a grandfather sneaking us a piece of candy. But God is holy and He will not tolerate unrighteousness and disobedience in the life of His children. The Bible says that when we sin, we offend the holiness of God and we grieve the Holy Spirit.

David described the emotional and physical trauma of conviction.

Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. (Psalm 38:3-10, NIV).

Why such emotional and physical trauma? “Because of my sin,” David admitted (Psalm 38:3). He knew why. “Because of my foolish sins” (Psalm 38:5, NLT). Can you hear the regret in his voice? In the moment, sin is fun. But in the end, sin is devastating, and regret is like a heavy weight around our neck.

The hand of God was pressing down on David’s soul, and He would not give David relief until there was repentance. David knew that and he finally broke. “For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin … Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, do not be far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!” (Psalm 38:18, 21-22, NAS). David could not bear
one more moment of living under the heavy hand of God’s discipline. He longed for relief. He longed for forgiveness. He begged God, “Hurry Lord … I can’t take it any longer. I am so sorry for what I have done. Will You please forgive me?!”

Do you see what was happening to David? The pleasure of his sin had faded away and he was left with guilt and regret. David knew he had messed up. He knew he had offended God. And his conscience was a wreck.

Everyone has a conscience, a built-in monitor of right and wrong, whether religious or not. Romans 2 states that God’s moral law is written upon the heart of every human being, religious or not, so that people “know in their hearts what is right and wrong.” But theologian J. I. Packer warns us that “Satan’s strategy is to corrupt, desensitize, and if possible kill our consciences,” so that we no longer feel that conviction.

And that’s why we need the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who lives within the heart of every believer, magnetizes the conscience like a compass, always pointing to true north, always pointing to what is right. And because it does, our conscience tells us when we are off course. Or, as C. S. Lewis said, the conscience “makes me uncomfortable when I do wrong.” And thank God it does, because our conscience points us back to God.

David felt uncomfortable. Uncomfortably convicted. Uncomfortably guilty.

This feeling of conviction is rare in our day. And I can prove it by reading the Puritan prayers and reading how they confessed their sins. A classic little book called The Valley of Vision is a collection of Puritan prayers from the 1600-1700’s.

- “You are good beyond all thought, but I am vile, wretched, miserable, blind … I bring my soul to you; break it, wound it, bend it, mold it.”
- “Destroy, O God, the dark guest within whose hidden presence makes my life a hell.”
- “Under the conviction of your Spirit I learn that the more I do, the worse I am … O wretched man that I am! O Lord, I have a wild heart.”
- “Lord Jesus, give me a deeper repentance, a horror of sin, a dread of it.”
- “Lord Jesus, I sin – grant that I may never cease grieving because of it, never be content with myself … Kill my envy, command my tongue, trample down self … Deliver me from attachment to things unclean, from wrong associations, from evil passions, from the sugar of sin.”
- “O Lord, no day of my life has passed that has not proved me guilty in your sight … I am guilty, but pardoned, lost, but saved, wandering, but found, sinning, but cleansed. Give me perpetual broken-heartedness, keep me always clinging to the cross.”

That’s what true conviction sounds like. But there are some who insist that Christians should not feel guilty or ashamed and quote Romans 8:1, which does say that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1, NAS). And we’re so glad that’s true. But there is a place for appropriate guilt. When we sin, and when God convicts us, something deep within us should be upset. Gordon MacDonald refers to guilt as “spiritual pain.” That’s what
David was feeling. “Spiritual pain.” Paul called it “godly sorrow.” Guilt is the soul saying in regret, “Oh why did I do that?” It’s David saying, “Oh Lord, I am so sorry for what I have done.”

**PSALM 51 & CONFESSION**

We should long for this conviction. Why? Because God’s discipline proves that He loves us. God convicts us because He wants to spare us the destruction and misery of sin, because He wants to conform us to the image of His Son, and because He wants us to experience His best.

Sin is a trap. It leads to misery and it ruins our lives. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit. It disrupts our relationship with God. So conviction of sin is a good thing, because it leads to confession and forgiveness and restoration of our relationship with God.

So how do we do it? David is our role model and Psalm 51 is the template for confession. When his affair with Bathsheba was exposed, David was broken and convicted, and he poured his heart out to God. Psalm 51 shows us how David confessed his sin and teaches us how we should confess our sin.

**Appeal to God’s grace,** because we are asking for what we do not deserve. “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1, ESV). No matter what you’ve done, no matter how bad you think it was, God is compassionate and gracious. He is eager to hear your confession and forgive you.

**Admit your sin.** “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:3-4, ESV). Here’s the problem. Most of don’t think what we’ve done is evil. A little white lie, an outburst of anger, that’s not evil. Yes it is. Any behavior that is hurtful to others, that is offensive to God, that is counter to the character of God is evil. It’s sin. And to confess it means to agree with God. Confession is saying the same thing God says about our sin. Confession is saying, “Lord, You have convicted me and convinced me, and I agree with You that what I did was wrong.”

And with that confession, there must be what Paul called “godly sorrow.” Richard Foster says that confession is “a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.” There must be, as John Ortberg adds, an “entering into God’s pain over sin.” Why pain? Why regret? Why sorrow? Is that what God’s children are supposed to feel? Yes! Every time we sin we should feel sorrow, pain, and regret. Because every time we sin, it should remind us of the cross. Every flippant, lustful, or selfish act we have ever committed cost Jesus a drop of His blood.

**Allow God to restore you.** “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me … Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:10, 12, ESV). Richard Foster writes, “Confession (may) begin in sorrow, but it ends in joy.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NAS). The Bible says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). When we confess our sins, God promises, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). God does not convict us to condemn us; He convicts us to restore us. He wants us to come home, to come back into loving relationship with Him.
Approach God in brokenness. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17, ESV). James Emery White explains that David’s “confession wasn’t simply about the wreck he had made of his life, but the wreck he had made of his relationship with God.”

David was broken because he realized that he had offended God. True conviction and true confession humbles us and breaks us. As David said in Psalm 38, “Oh Lord, I am so sorry for what I have done.”

GUIDED CONFESSION

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught His disciples, and He teaches us, to pray “forgive us our sins.” So, what is God saying to you right now? What is the Holy Spirit exposing in your life?

- Have you said something, thought something, or done something you should not have?
- Have you sinned against your spouse? Have you sinned against your children? Have you sinned against your parents?
- Have you been arrogant, selfish, or mean?
- Have you been dishonest, shaded the truth, exaggerated the truth, or compromised in any way?
- Do you need to confess a sexual sin or an internet sin?
- What about a sharp tongue, a harsh personality, or a critical spirit?
- What about gossip? Are you guilty of talking about someone behind their back?
- Do you feel bitterness or resentment toward someone?
- Are you unwilling to forgive someone who hurt you? Jesus said in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us” (Matthew 6:12).
- And when it comes to your Christian life, do you have a lack of faith, or a lack of compassion for the needy, or a lack of burden for lost people, or a lack of obedience to something you know the Bible commands you do?

What is God saying to you right now? What is the Holy Spirit bringing to your mind? What sense of conviction are you feeling? What do you need to confess?

And remember when you do, you can appeal to His amazing grace. And when you confess it, He will forgive, cleanse, and restore your relationship with Him. And isn’t that the greatest thing a human being can ever experience?! To be in right relationship with God, the Creator of the universe and the holy King of the universe. To be in loving relationship with our Father, accepted, valued, secure, blessed. So, what do you need to confess?
NOTES

1 Funny video of guilty poodle. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9R-Wrpd8w8
2 See Psalm 62:8.
6 Ibid., page 124.
7 Ibid., page 127.
8 Ibid., page 128.
9 Ibid., page 134.
10 Ibid., page 146.
11 Ibid., pages 150-151.
13 See 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.
14 Psalm 38:18.
15 See Hebrews 12:5-11.
16 See 1 John 1:9. The Greek word “confess” means to agree with, or to say the same. To confess sin is to say the same thing God says about it.
17 See 2 Corinthians 7:9-11.
20 Paul also wrote about being “sorrowful to the point of repentance” (2 Corinthians 7:9).
21 Foster, page 153.
22 See Psalm 32:1-5.
25 David said, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” David was asking God to inspect his heart. “See if there be any hurtful way in me,” “Lord, put my heart to the test and show me if there is anything wrong in my life.” David invited God to audit his life. He was asking God to convict him of his sinful ways, and so should we. And David prayed, “Lead me in the everlasting way.” “Oh Lord, keep me on the right track.” Why volunteer to undergo God’s sifting? So that you can stay on the right track. So that you can avoid the miserable consequences of sin. So that you can experience God’s best.