

Life Group Leader Guide #12

5/28/17

Guilt, Confession, and Repentance

If we engaged in self-examination, we were likely confronted with much of the sin and brokenness that is within us. We might see more clearly our faults and shortcomings that make us feel inadequate. We might grow insecure and feel like we fall short of God—and we do. This is the source of a lot of guilt in Christian churches. Many people even give up on faith, asking, “Why should I keep trying if I will never be good enough?” It is important for us to know how to deal with guilt in a healthy way so that we do not grow overly discouraged.

The difficult thing about dealing with guilt is that we are usually inclined to do it very differently from how God wants us to deal with it. Often, when we find that we have done something wrong, the last option we consider is owning up to it. Rather, we try to hide. We want to conceal as much as possible about what we did wrong so that no one knows we are flawed in that way. We come to church and put on a false face because we don’t want anyone to look down on us. Against every inclination we have, God desires that we confess our faults to others and actively try to repent of those things.

Confession is perhaps one of the hardest practices we will talk about this year. We are uncomfortable with exposing our sins and struggles because we do not want to be judged. We think that revealing these things will lower others’ opinions of us, and that people will never look at us the same way. This fear of confession points to a bigger problem: perhaps the church has failed to create an environment in which confession is comfortable. This means we, as members of the body of Christ, have a lot of work to do in order to change this. One of the most valuable ways a church can combat sin is to create an environment in which the members can be open and honest with one another, inviting prayer for each other so that healing will come (James 5:15-16).

The other response to guilt is repentance. Scripture seems to indicate there are two different types of sorrow. In 2 Corinthians 7:5-12, Paul rejoices because his previous letter to the Corinthians (which was apparently very harsh) made them feel guilty. He clarifies in verse 9: “I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief has led to repentance.” God’s goal in giving us guilty emotions is not so that we will feel bad, but so that we will turn from those sins that plague us. This is what godly sorrow will produce in us.

This week in our groups, we will not ask anyone to confess anything they are not comfortable saying. Instead, we will revisit our previous practice of intercessory prayer, and allow everyone to spend time with someone discussing any struggle they have—whether it is a sin or anything else—and then receive prayer in that moment. This is a judgment-free zone; our only intention in this time is healing and support for one another.

Discussion Guide:

Scripture Reading: Have different group members read the following verses. After reading them all, reflect on them. Talk with your group about what these verses say about the significance and meaning of confession, guilt, and repentance for Christians. Talk about words or phrases that stood out to you. This discussion is freeform, but try to keep it within 15 minutes to allow time for the practice.

- Confession: James 5:15-16; 1 John 1:8-9; Proverbs 28:13;
- Repentance/Guilt: Psalm 32:1-11; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Luke 24:44-49

Practice: To close our small group session this week, we want to go back to our previous practice of intercessory prayer and incorporate this idea of confession.

1. **Break off into smaller groups.** Like before, you may get in groups of two or three, or you may choose to remain in a larger group. For this practice, we ask you to separate men and women—perhaps find separate classrooms or at least different parts of the room. Whatever the case, make sure everyone is included!
2. **Discuss/Confess to one another.** We recognize this is an uncomfortable thing for many, so please understand we are not asking you to talk about anything you don't feel comfortable discussing, or to reveal your "deepest, darkest secrets," etc. If you do not want to confess a sin at this time, feel free to discuss a struggle/burden in your life that you are dealing with and would like prayer about.
3. **Pray for each other.** Make sure the prayer requests remain specific—in other words, pray for each other by name for the specific thing that the person mentioned. This applies especially if you stayed in a larger group. Try getting in a circle and having everyone pray for the person to their left. After these prayers are said, you can be dismissed.

Further Reflection: If you have time, you may discuss these questions with your group or with whomever you prayed. Likely, there will not be time to do this, so these questions are mainly for further reflection and discussion as we seek to apply this within our congregation.

1. How well do you think we practice confession in the church? Name some positive things we do, and also note things that could use improvement. How could we improve them?
2. How do you think the church suffers when the members do not feel comfortable or safe to confess? How does it benefit when they do?
3. In his book *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller says that one of his most powerful experiences happened when he and some of his Christian friends set up a confession booth on a college campus. There was a twist, though: instead of inviting people to confess, *the Christians confessed to the people* (mostly nonbelievers)—telling them how sorry they were for failing to live up to Christ's call on their lives to love and serve. Many people came to Christ through this effort. Why do you think this worked? Why was confession so important to the relationship of Christians to the world on that college campus?