

Question: I find it hard to admit when I have made a mistake or sinned in some way because I fear others will use it against me. What would Jesus do?

The Bible tells us that some of the greatest of God's servants made mistakes. For example, Moses dishonored the Lord by striking the rock to bring forth water instead of speaking to it as God had commanded (Numbers 21:8-12). The apostle Peter denied Jesus three times (Mark 14:66-72). Before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul thought he was serving God by persecuting Christians (Acts 26:9ff). Later he wrote, "I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:12). In fact, the Bible teaches that we are all sinners in need of God's grace (Romans 3:9-18, 23).

Because we are all sinners who are still in the process of growing into the likeness of Jesus, we are taught to confess our sins both to God and to one another and to pray for one another that we may be healed (James 5:16). Only by acknowledging our sins, can we pray as Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

However, openly acknowledging our sins and failures is often made difficult by the fear that some self-righteous people will not forgive us but will use this against us. This concern about disrespect and ridicule from some people is justified. We often find ourselves crying out for God's help like the Psalmist who said, "Proud men have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path" (Psalm 140:5). The wise man of the Proverbs added, "The proud and arrogant man—'Mocker' is his name" (Proverbs 21:24). But we must not allow pride or fear to keep us from acknowledging our sins when appropriate. The wise man also said, "He (the Lord) mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34).

In spite of the reactions of the self-righteous, followers of Jesus should understand the need for gracious forgiveness from God as well as the need to give and receive grace from others. We should accept the fact that we are forgiven sinners constantly struggling to overcome failures so we can grow into the perfect likeness of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Christians should in any way boast in their mistakes and sins. It means all of us understand that humbly acknowledging our failings can enable us to learn from those mistakes and not continually repeat them.

In light of the above, I believe Jesus would encourage humility and honesty with God, with self and with others regarding our mistakes and sins. A failure to acknowledge our sins prevents us from receiving grace and forgiveness. This failure also hinders the process of learning and growing into the likeness of Jesus our Lord. However, an open and confessional spirit can help us develop a beautiful, loving community of faith where believers can accept personal responsibility for their lives and can help one another become better people. Although self-righteous and disrespectful people – sometimes including those who claim to be Christians – may ridicule, genuine followers of Jesus Christ will have an even greater respect for those who are willing to admit their mistakes, learn from them and not repeat them.

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