

Good morning, everybody. So a group of four pastors got together for dinner one night, and they'd been friends for a long time, and they realized, you know, we've never really opened up and shared deeply with one another. It's been getting together, talking about sports and about ministry. And so they decided we need to take some time and just open up. And so they.

They started to confess some things to one another. And the first pastor said, you know, I struggle with anger. It gets bad when I get mad, I fly off the handle. I lose my cool real quickly. I start yelling, I start cussing.

Sometimes my staff, I think, is, like, afraid of me, and just everybody walks on eggshells around me. The second pastor said, Sundays, after I preach, I go home and I start gambling on football, and I'm not really good at it, and we're in a hole, and I'm scared to tell my wife. The third pastor, kind of emboldened by the first two, said, yeah, when times get really stressful, I smoke pot to kind of take the edge off. And I got to the fourth pastor, and he was really quiet, didn't want to share. And they're like, come on, you can share with us.

You've heard what we've shared. Like, this is a judge free zone. It's safe. Open up and share with us. It's okay.

He finally got the courage together, and he said, guys, I struggle with gossip. You really should have let me go first.

Well, hi, my name is Shawn. I have a new life in Christ. I struggle with pride and with people pleasing and with telling slightly inappropriate jokes to start my sermon, but it's funny. But I think it also illustrates why, when it comes to this topic that we're talking about today, confession, why most of us are like, yeah, I don't know that I want to do that. Because we're afraid that if we say something, it's not just going to stay with the people that we share it with.

It's going to kind of grow, and others are going to maybe find out about it. And so we keep to ourselves. We hide. We don't go to, like, deep truths that we need to get to. And over the last eight years, I've had some guys in my life that I've been able to really be open and honest with that we've been able to have hard conversations and share hard things with one another and hold each other both accountable and also kind of holding each other close and keeping that confidence.

So in 2018, my friend Rick Grover, who's been here to preach before. Rick invited me to be a part of a covenant group that he was starting. And it was just five of us that got together. We made a. A three year commitment to each other.

We would do a zoom call every month, and then we would do two spiritual retreats a year. And the sole purpose of the group was soul care. It was about how are you and Jesus, how are you and your wife? How are you and your family? We didn't talk about ministry except for where it overlapped with our soul.

And it was so refreshing and good to have this group of guys that I could be open and honest with and who were open and honest with me. And like, we grew together so much. And the reason why these groups are important is because unfortunately, we know there's been far too many public stories of guys in this position who have fallen, who have, who have allowed secret sin to hide in their life. And when it became public, it destroyed their families. It dropped a bomb in their church.

And we don't want to be one of those statistics. We want to remain faithful to the Lord. And we know that we need other guys in our life who are holding us accountable so that sin doesn't have an opportunity to take root and grow in our lives. And so when that group ended, I started my own group. We met for three years, that group ended and last Thursday started a brand new group with four other pastors from across the country that now doing this soul care group with, because it's important.

It's hard, but it's important. And these groups are founded off of something. If you've been around for a little bit, you've probably heard me share. I call it the circle of authenticity. It's just the list of authenticity.

And so we want to be honest with everyone, transparent with some, and vulnerable with a few. I think that this is good advice, not just for pastors, but really for all of us. Like, we all want to strive, I think, to live an honest life with everyone. We want to be honest in our dealings, honest in our words, honest in our motives and intentions. So we should seek to live a life that is honest with everyone.

But then we also need some people in our life that we can be transparent with, that we can go just a little bit beneath the surface with and start to open up and share some things to let them in. Like this becomes the group of people that can rejoice when we rejoice and mourn when we mourn. According to Romans 12:15, these are the people that we can start to share some of those deeper struggles that we have conflicts in our life, what the Lord's doing in us. And so we want to be transparent with some. But then I think that we all need a few people that we can be vulnerable with.

A few people that know the good, the bad and the ugly, that know our hurts, our hangups, our habits. We need some people that we don't hide from, and we need them so that our sin does not stay hidden and begin

to take root and grow. And that's my covenant group. That's a few other guys that I'm connected with. And this is so important for all of us to have people in these spaces, because like I said at the beginning of this series, there's a phrase in recovery ministry that says, you are only as sick as your secrets.

You are only as sick as your secrets. And when I say you're only as sick, I don't mean that you are disgusting because of those things, that you are unlovable, that you are, you know, that you are a sick individual. That's not what I mean. It means that there is a sickness that takes root in our soul when we hide things from others, when we try to cover up our tracks. This is toxic to our souls.

Those secrets take root. They grow. They fester. Our secrets poison the way that we view ourselves, and they poison the way that we view others. They even poison the way that we view God.

The secrets aren't just toxic to our soul. It turns out that secrets are actually quite toxic to our bodies, too. Research has shown this. When we are keeping secrets, it raises the stress level in our life because we're. We're always wondering if we're going to be found out.

And when we have increased stress, it releases an extra amount of cortisol into our body. And cortisol is this, like, hormone that raises our anxiety and it changes our moods and affects our body too much. Cortisol can make you anxious, it can disrupt your sleep. It can make you feel tired and fatigued all the time. It can make you irritable and irrational.

And there's a lot of reasons why. Maybe we can feel that, why that cortisone level could be. Could be raised. But I think that we can say honestly that hiding our secrets can certainly contribute to it.

Your body knows when you're hiding. It's amazing how God designed us. Our body knows when you're hiding something. And even more amazing is that modern science is just catching up to what scripture has been teaching for thousands of years. Scripture is like our psalm that we're looking at today.

Psalm chapter 32. So if you have a Bible, open up there with me.

The story leading up to our passage today, I think it's one of the most human and, like, sobering stories that we read in Scripture. King David is at the height of his power. Like, before we get to Psalm 32, we kind of need some. Some context. King.

King David, he's at the height of his power, and he's out walking one night along the. His, like, palace terrace. And. And he looks down and he sees a lady named Bathsheba taking a bath. And.

And he lingers, and he sends his attendants to go and get Bathsheba and bring her to him. She's married. David doesn't care. In that moment, he's overcome by his lust and he abuses his power. In a moment of poor judgment, he sleeps with Bathsheba.

And after a little while, he finds out that she's pregnant.

When David finds out that Bathsheba is pregnant, he doesn't confess his sin. Instead, he tries to cover it up. He tries to manipulate the situation. And so he has Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, who is one of David's mighty men, like one of the men who have sworn allegiance to David to protect him, to fight for him. He's out doing that right now while David was sleeping with his wife.

And he has Uriah brought back in from the battlefield, hoping that if he's home for a couple of days, maybe he'll sleep with his wife. And then the whole pregnancy thing can be covered over, erasing all of the evidence. And when that fails, David realizes that he's got to do something drastic. And so he panics and he sends Uriah back into battle with orders for his commander to put him on the front lines, essentially giving a death warrant to him. And Uriah dies.

Bathsheba becomes David's wife. And in a moment, it looks like David is getting what he wants. His sin is hidden. He's been able to cover his tracks. He thinks nobody's going to find out.

But God knows, and God loves David, and I think God loves Bathsheba and Uriah too much for this to just be hidden underneath the surface. And so he sends the prophet Nathan to David to confront him on his sin.

And in a moment of honesty and vulnerability, David says the words that he's been afraid of all this time. He cries out, I have sinned against the lord. And Psalm 51 is a raw prayer of confession and repentance. In the aftermath of this moment, this is kind of the first psalm that David wrote after this moment with Bathsheba and being kind of found out. And in Psalm 51, David cries out for mercy.

He pleads for grace. He says, create in me a new heart, oh God. Renew a steadfast spirit in me. Cast me not away from your presence. Restore to me the joy of my salvation.

He prays all of these things, these prayers of repentance.

And after some time had passed, I think that David is reflecting on that moment and on everything that has happened since then in his own life. And he writes this second Psalm, Psalm 32. So even though it comes earlier, it's actually written after. It's just how the Psalms were organized. And Psalm 32 is kind of this teaching psalm.

It's called a mystical. It's this teaching psalm where David is reflecting on everything that he's learned through this experience.

And this is what he says, starting in verse one. Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and whose spirit there is no deceit. In these verses, David uses three words for sin and three words for forgiveness. And it's all these six words make one point that God knows our sin.

And yet God also forgives us of our sin, every kind of sin that we commit, inward, outward, intentional, unintentional. God knows our sin, but he doesn't just know it. He offers us grace and mercy and forgiveness. He offers to cover it up. And by the grace of Jesus, he offers to completely remove it from us.

That is the gift that restores our souls, that renews our bodies. And it comes through this confession, this openness and honesty. When David writes in that last part of verse two, in whose spirit is no deceit, what he's talking about there is the person who just is living an honest life. There is nothing inside of them that is trying to hide, that is trying to cover up the one in whom there is no. Deceit doesn't mean perfection.

It means openness. They're open about their faults and their flaws and their failures, and they don't try to hide anymore. And then he compares that blessing to how he felt before, when he was hiding and living in that deceit. He said, when I kept silent. Another translation says, when I refused to confess my sin, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long, for day and night.

Your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sapped, as in the heat of summer. Did you hear the language that David uses here?

He's talking about the pain that comes when we try to hide our secrets. His bones are wasting away. His strength is gone. He says, it feels like the Lord is pressing down against me. I don't think it's out of judgment.

It's. It's wanting to just squeeze that confession out of him because he knows that there is healing on the other side of it.

David's restless. But then we get to verse five. That's kind of a transition.

He says, then I acknowledged my sin to you. Did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt. My sin.

David moves from hiding to naming. He takes that inventory, like what

we talked about last week. He brings it before God. And then this moment of honesty, man. God gives him hope and healing that his soul desired.

And then David turns his attention to those of us who may be caught in that same place. He says in verse six and seven, therefore, let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found. The faithful? Yes, even in our sin and our shame and our hiding, we. We can still be faithful in what we do with these things, and so pray to you while you may be found.

Surely the rising of the mighty waters will not touch them. You are my hiding place. You will protect me from trouble and surround me with the songs of deliverance.

We've talked about it before, but our sin makes us hide in shame. It goes all the way back to Genesis, chapter three, all the way to us. Today. Our sin makes us hide in guilt and shame so that we're not found out. But the irony is.

Listen, the irony is, is that when we hide from God, our soul withers, but we hide. Because we think, man, if I'm exposed, then my soul is going to wither. But no, David says, when we hide in God, he says, you are my hiding place, oh, Lord. In verse seven, when we hide in God, our souls find healing. When we come to him, when we turn to him, his grace is both our deliverance and our shelter.

And confession is the doorway that God uses to move us from hiding to healing. Which is why Step five in Recovery programs and Recovery Ministries deals with this topic at Regeneration, our recovery ministry that we're starting later in the fall. Put step five like this. We admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. Would you say this with me?

We admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. And so how do we do this, this last part, the exact nature of our wrongs, this is kind of what we talked about last week. And taking that inventory and not only knowing our sin, our hurts, our habits, our hangups, but also knowing the why behind them, what's the root cause of them, what drives us to that thing, what makes us hide in shame, why does it do that? That's kind of this part. But then we get to this part.

Once we do that work, we don't just hold it to ourselves. We need to take that and we need to share it with someone else. I want to talk through what that looks like as we close out today. Confession is being honest with God and ourselves. Like this is where it starts admitting to God and to ourselves.

Confession always starts with the humility to say, I'm not perfect.

Which is harder than it sounds, isn't it? Like God knows that we're not perfect. The people who love us know that we are not perfect. They're just kind of wondering if we know it too. And confession is acknowledging.

Yeah, we know it and we see it.

We admit to God and to ourselves. David models this for us in Psalm 51. Again, the Psalm that he wrote on the heels of his sin with Bathsheba. In verse four, he says, against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. And I always think like Bathsheba and Uriah would like to have a word about this first part of the phrase.

Bathsheba would say, no, David, you sinned against me too. Uriah would say, no, David, you had me killed.

But David knows where he needs to start is the one whom he sinned against first. His first sin was against God. His first sin. Sin was going his own way and doing his own thing. And then everything else followed after that.

And so when we confess, yeah, there's probably a time we're going to get to it when we need to talk to somebody else. But we need to be honest with God first because he's the one that we ultimately sinned against. And when we confess this, we tear down any pretense of self righteousness. We stop blaming others and for our actions and the consequences of them. First, John 1:8 says, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

And whenever we're trying to be deceptive, we can only go so far. We're not going to find that healing that we're looking for. But it continues in verse nine it says, no, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and Just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. God desires our honesty, and we are honest with him and with ourselves about our sin struggles. That's when we open ourselves up to receive his grace and his mercy, his hope and his healing.

So we go back to step five. We admit to God and to ourselves and to another human being, the exact natures of our wrong. And so we've admitted to God we've confessed to ourselves, and then we share it with someone else. And I always chuckle. I don't know why I always gotta laugh whenever I read into another human being.

I'm like, who else are we gonna share it with? Like, when you're confessing your sin just a little, you may not want to admit your sin to your cat. Like, you don't need any more judgment in that moment. And I think that this is like resting judgment face of cats right

there. This is actually Quentin's and Renee's cat.

And so you don't want to admit it to your cat because you don't need any more judgment in your life. But when you confess your sin, you also don't want to admit it to your dog. This is my dog, Luna. Luna looks at me like this all day, every day. And so you don't want to admit to your dog because they're like, you walk on water.

It doesn't matter what you do. But I think the point is, is that when we confess our sin to someone else, you don't want to admit it to that person who's just going to beat you over the head with judgment. How dare you? How could you? You are awful.

You are disgusting. But you also don't want to confess to that person. That's like, it's okay, buddy. You know, you're better than most people. We all mess up from time to time.

It's fine. You want somebody in your life that you confess to. And the people in my life that I appreciate the most and help me grow are the ones who speak hard truth to me in love, who speak truth, but who also speak grace. And so you want people in your life that you confess these things to, that vulnerable few that will say, yeah, you blew it, and you went your own way, you did your own thing. But they also need to remind you of God's grace and mercy and love in your life.

Those are the people that we need to open up to and share with. James 5:16 says, Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be Healed. There is something spiritually and physically powerful about confessing our sin to someone. But a question that I get quite often is, well, who should I confess to? And so, yeah, that person that is filled and can help you see both the truth and the grace.

Sometimes the question is, well, do I need to confess to the person that I sinned against? And I think the answer is yes and no. It depends. Like if confessing to the person that you sinned against, that you hurt, that you caused, a break in the relationship, will help them find healing, find restoration, will help them come to terms with some of the pain that you caused in their life, the man, it may be very appropriate to confess to that person because it will help them in their healing journey as it will help you as well.

But if taking responsibility for your actions and the pain that it caused will actually reopen wounds unnecessarily, or it could come across as shifting blame to them or justifying your actions. Like, maybe you need to take a little bit more time in that inventory, doing some heart searching. Or if you confess your sin to the other person because it'll make you feel better, but it may not help them, maybe it's wise to find somebody else for a moment and maybe you'll get to that time, but to find another trusted person that you can share these

things with. Confession is about taking responsibility. It's not about finding relief at someone else's expense.

If you're not sure who to confess to, I encourage you like and start praying. God, give me wisdom for the person that's in my life. And I'm telling you, Matt and I keep joking, we're going to put a confessional here in the church and it might be coming because there's something powerful about it. I hope that you know we are safe, you can share things with us. I try to bear my soul here so that you know it's safe to do it as well.

So if you need to talk to anybody, we're available. We want to be here for you. As you put this into practice, you'll start to notice something pretty amazing. Not only does confession change the way we view ourselves, confession changes the way we view God and understand his grace. But confession changes the way that we view other people, the way that we see others.

Like when you come face to face with your own sin and you confess it and, and you find God's healing and grace on the other side, it starts to tear away any thread of, of self righteousness that you may want to clothe yourself with. Because you realize that we are all in the same boat. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that the ground at the cross is level and we all have to come and bow down before it for mercy and grace.

So we don't hold ourselves in judgment of anyone else. Because we know what we have been forgiven of. And we know what it costs for that forgiveness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it like this in his classic book *Life Together*. He writes, anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the cross will no longer be horrified by the rankest sins of another.

When we understand God's grace in our life and what it cost him to give it to us, we realize, who are we to be horrified by the sin of another? Who are we to stand in judgment? And we start standing beside them. In truth and in grace. We open up to each other.

We remind ourselves that the only source of hope and healing in our life is Jesus. And we fall on his grace again and again and again. Jesus bore the full weight of our sin, our hidden sin, our exposed sin. He died for all of it so that we would not have to carry it anymore. And in exchange for our sin, he gives us his freedom and his grace.

And we are immediately forgiven for it. When we put our faith in Jesus and confess to him that he is Lord and that he is Savior. We lay down our life and we take up new life. We are immediately forgiven, but we're not always immediately transformed and made new into who we are going to be. We begin this process, but we don't go through it alone.

And we are filled with the Holy Spirit, who reminds us of God's grace, who convicts us to turn our hearts back over and over.

When confession happens, God's grace always follows. And today, maybe you just need to pour it out and say, I can't do it on my own anymore. I'm tired of trying. Jesus, I'm ready to run to you. If you're here today, we'd love to help lead you in that.

There'll be some people around the room with lanyards on to pray with you, to maybe take a confession for you this morning. There's no judgment, so we want you to experience the freedom that comes with honesty. Honesty with God, with yourself, and with someone else. We're going to come to a time of communion. We've got communion stations up front and in the back.

I know sometimes when I come to this time, I was talking to a dear friend about this last week. When we think about our sin, the prayer that we pray is, please forgive me. And that's good. I think if you are in Christ, we've already received that forgiveness and yeah, we need to bring it. But instead of saying, God, please forgive me, he's already forgiven for that and so change that to God.

Thank you for your forgiveness, forgiveness. And in this moment of communion, as we remember his body that was broken and his blood that was shed, could we just have a celebration in this room of thankfulness and gratitude for his forgiveness that goes up to his throne as a sweet offering? You've already been forgiven through faith in Jesus and so bring anything that you've been hiding to him and thank him for the grace that he's given you. Let me pray for us. Jesus, thank you for that grace and forgiveness for those who are in Christ.

We have received it. We have been made perfect forever, as Hebrews 10:14 says, even while we are in the process of being made holy. And so as we continue to live in this life and we continue to strive and to go your ways, Lord, you know it. There are times where we choose to go our own ways. So thank you for your grace and your mercy that meets us in that place, picks us up, dusts us off, and put us back on the right road.

If there's anybody here today, Lord, who needs to take that step, would you give them the courage to do it, to find the hope and the healing Jesus that only you can provide? And I pray it in his name. Amen.