

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connecting with God

The Lord's Prayer—Part 4: The Prayer of Cleansing

“Forgive us our sins [debts and transgressions].” Matthew 6:16 (NLT)

Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV)

What is one of the biggest obstacles that keeps us from being all God made us to be? The Bible says that it is “unconfessed sin.” Why? Because hidden sin impedes our purposes in life.

As the above Bible verse from Hebrews states, our life is like running a race. Most people, however, never cross the finish line in the marathon race of life. Their path gets hindered by unconfessed sins that derail and weigh them down with guilt. Guilt is a very destructive emotion. Many times, we’ll try to ignore guilt or suppress it and even repress it, but none of that works. It just adds burdens to our life which destroy our confidence. In this fourth part of the Lord’s Prayer series we are going to examine six points on how to address this part of our life that is so important to our freedom.

PATH TO A FRESH START & CLEAR CONSCIENCE

1. REVIEW EVERY AREA OF MY LIFE.

What are we advised to do in Lamentations 3:40?

- What are the advantages for someone who takes a moral inventory of his/her life?
- 1 John 1:9 lists the benefits of confessing our sins to God. What are some common obstacles people face that keep them from confessing *all* sins to God?
- How can people show they are serious about God’s blessing in their lives?

If we want God to be honest with us, we must be honest with him. The following outlines a method to get honest with God:

- Get Alone**—According to Habakkuk 2:1, what should we do once we are alone?
- Ask God to Reveal My Sins**—How does Psalm 139:23–24 illustrate how to reveal our sins?
- Take My Time**—What does Proverbs 20:27 say God will do if we take our time?
- Write It All Down**—What advantage do we gain by writing down our sins and examining them according to 1 Corinthians 11:31?

Discipleship—It is clear that God blesses us when we examine and confess our sins. How serious are you about God’s blessing in your life? Take a few minutes to write down a sin that weighs heavily on you. Examine it. Why does it affect you so much? Have you confessed it to God before now? If not, why?

2. REPENT OF EVERY SIN.

What does Lamentations 3:40–42 point out as the next step after examining our sins?

- Repenting means trusting in God and being willing to change. How do we typically react when faced with the need to change?
- First John 1:8 illustrates how we can deceive ourselves in our way of thinking. What are some common misconceptions about hiding sin?
- Who else may be impacted when someone chooses to minimize or rationalize sin?

Discipleship—Confessing our sins is important, but repenting and changing our behavior is equally as important. God wants to see us change and become more like Jesus. What sin have you confessed multiple times? (This can be shared with the group or admitted privately.) Take a few minutes to write down some steps to change your behavior and end the sin that is weighing on your life.

3. RESOLVE TO MAKE RESTITUTION.

According to Luke 19:8–9, Zacchaeus resolved to pay four times the amount to anyone he had done wrong to?

- What are some ways in which we feel cheated by others or ways we cheated another person?
- What do we believe can be gained by cheating others?
- What do we gain by making restitution and repairing relationships that may have been cheated?

Discipleship—Restitution is the act of restoring to the rightful owner something that has been taken, lost, or surrendered. Make a list of the people or situations where you have hurt someone or taken away something that rightfully belongs to them. Which relationships need to be restored? What specifically can you do today to make restitution? Share your thoughts with your small group.

4. RECEIVE GOD’S FORGIVENESS.

In what way does Hebrews 4:16 tell us to approach the throne of God? What will we receive and find when we need it?

- We have permission directly from God to come to him when we need his forgiveness. Why do you think this is so difficult for us to do?
- For what things in our past do we need to receive God’s mercy?
- How do we benefit from receiving his grace?

According to Romans 5:1, we are justified through our faith in Jesus Christ. What does this verse say we have as a result of God’s gift of forgiveness?

- What does it mean to be justified through faith? What does this look like in our lives?
- Why are there sins in our lives that we believe are unforgivable?
- How do we ask God for forgiveness?

Worship—God gives us mercy to cover our past and grace to help us make future changes in our lives. Worship is doing those things that bring glory and honor to God. Asking him for forgiveness of those sins which we believe are unforgivable is an act of worship. First John 1:9 reminds us that we can confess our sins to God and he can be depended upon to forgive us and to cleanse us from our sins. In your personal prayer time with God this week, resolve to bring him your unconfessed sins so that you truly can receive God’s forgiveness and live just as if you had never sinned.

5. REVEAL MY FAULTS TO A FRIEND.

James 5:16 reveals two life-changing truths for those who desire to be healed—what are they?

- Why is it not natural for people to share their sins with others?
- In what specific ways would relationships be different were people more apt to share their sins with others?

Fellowship—In Psalm 32:1–2, the positive consequence for those whose guilt has been forgiven is happiness, relief, and a record that has been cleared. For what purpose do you suppose God desires that we live a guilt-free, happy life?

- For those of you who have someone whom you can share your sins in confidence, (1) how did you arrange this; and (2) how do you maintain this relationship?
- For those of you who do not have someone whom you can share your sins in confidence: (1) why is this so; and (2) what actions steps might you employ to change this?

6. REPEAT THESE STEPS REGULARLY.

According to Hebrews 10:22, how are we able to draw near to God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of our faith?

- Why do you believe guilt is such a strong deterrent to sensing God’s connection in our life?
- If all of your guilt was suddenly replaced with forgiveness, peace, relief, and happiness, and you were drawn near to God with a genuine heart in full assurance, how do you think this might change your outlook?

Discipleship—Discuss the reasons for why we must repeat the five steps of the **Path to a Fresh Start & Clear Conscience**. Now that we agree as to the “why” of maintaining a guilt-free, forgiven life, what steps can you take today that will insure you will put this knowledge into practice?