

| Practicing Confession and Repentance |

*Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**" Mark 1:15*

Confession and Repentance

The primary way your group engages in the mess of normal everyday life is through intentional, regular repentance of sin. This is the basic way that we relate to Jesus; we are called to "repent and believe in the gospel." Sin is not a surprise. It is common. The question is not whether or not we will sin. The question is, "Will we repent and believe the gospel?" People will not naturally do this well. It is your role to create an atmosphere of repentance in your group that leads to new or renewed belief in the gospel.

1) Set the Tone

The only way we can truly repent is if the gospel is actually true. There are always two sides to confession. We are confessing our sin, but we are also confessing our savior. We confess sin and we confess Christ. This should always be the atmosphere for repentance in your group. You confess sin, and you believe the gospel. Confess that Jesus is your hope and your salvation. Remind your group why we are invited to repent in the first place. Repentance should always lead us to greater belief and faith.

2) You can talk about your sin, but you can't talk about mine

Your group has to be a safe place to confess sin. When you begin to build in the rhythm of open confession and repentance, you have to set the tone for confidentiality. Basically: "When we confess tonight what we say here stays here. You can talk to anyone about your sin, but you can't talk to anyone about mine." When someone is struggling with sin and confesses that to your group, it stays with your group.

3) Make it Regular

Repentance needs to be a normal rhythm for your group, even if this means you have to schedule it. It can be great for a group to make confession a normal weekly rhythm, but often you have to intentionally devote your entire group meeting time to practice and lead in this well. Have specific nights when your group gets together, this is the only goal. Lead in with questions like, "Where are you sinning? Where do you have unbelief? Where do you need the gospel right now?"

4) Go for the Jugular

Your group has real sin. So do you. We are going to be real about ourselves and our shortcomings in our groups. We are going to talk about real junk, and it is easier to do this if you set the tone early on in your group. Set the tone for repentance in your group early on by making it a regular practiced habit. When your group first begins to grow in confession and repentance, go for the jugular. Lead in this by repenting personally and being vulnerable. Be real, be raw, and be the one who sets the foundation for this early in your group. This will help your group have a healthy open process for confession and is always easier if you set this up from the beginning. A good way to do this with your group is to have everyone tell their

story of how they got here and what has shaped their lives. You can do this with your whole group when you first form or when new people join your group.

5) Give the Gift of Going Second

Lead in repentance and give your group the gift of going second. Start off by being vulnerable, frank, and clear about your own sin, struggle, and idolatry. Then let your group follow you vulnerably into the light. If the first thing confessed in your group is “I’m not praying enough,” it is difficult to follow that up with, “I’m addicted to porn and haven’t told my spouse.” This does not mean that you ought to “manufacture” something to repent of, but luckily you will not have to; you are in need of repentance. So think about the implications of your sin, the idolatry behind it, and lead by helping set the tone for what repentance ought to look like.

6) Pre-confession

It can also be helpful to train your group in pre-confession. Pre-confession is simply growing in the ability to understand yourself, your sin patterns, when you are likely to sin, and inviting your group into these struggles to keep you from sinning. Rather than waiting, sinning, and then telling your group what you did, we can begin to grow in seeing our hearts and saying “The end of the semester is coming up, and when I’m stressed, I’m more likely to pull back from all of my relationships and stop being around.” “My ex-boyfriend is coming back in town, and he wants to hang out. Every time I get around him I do something stupid.”

Putting it in Practice

1) Before Confession

As you begin to lead your group in repentance and confession, it is often helpful to remind them of what confession is, why we practice it, and some ground rules for your group i.e.: “In a minute, we’re going to spend some time confessing and repenting. The only reason we are able to do this is because the gospel is true. Jesus died to save sinners. That’s why we’re here - because we believe that. So as we are brutally open and honest about our struggles, our pettiness, and our brokenness, we aren’t just confessing our sin, but we’re confessing our savior. Remember, our goal is to point one another back to Jesus. We’re going to give good news before we give good advice ... (You might spend a few minutes reminding people how to do this) ... Remember too that what we say here stays here. You can talk to anyone about your sin, but you can’t talk about mine.”

2) During Confession

Everyone needs to give their full attention during confession. Phones down. Eyes up. Listen. Ask questions: “When is this most tempting?” “What do you believe _____ will provide for you that you keep being willing to go back to it even though you know it is wrong?” “How often do you get angry like this?” “Is there usually a trigger that leads you into this sin?” “Who else should you confess this to (spouse, roommate, parent)?” As a group leader, you may need to help people during confession to see their sin. Often people will say things like, “Please pray for me. I’ve been getting angry at work a lot because my boss is an idiot.” It is helpful for you to make sure that true confession takes place rather

than everyone believing that this is excusable because of the circumstances. Ask questions to guide them like, "How can you continue to repent so that you don't react sinfully to your boss and your coworkers? How do you need to change so that, even though your boss may be an idiot, you can still be Christ-like?"

3) Post Confession

It is the worst to confess sin and have your group just stare at you blankly for five seconds and then move on. One of the ways that you can respond to someone confessing is to simply thank them for being honest and believing the gospel enough to admit that they are a sinner. Sometimes it is appropriate to tell someone that you are sorry that something happened to them. The sin they are holding bitterness over should never have happened to them. Tell them that you love them and are sorry they had to go through something like that.

Always point to Jesus. He is the reason we can confess. He is the reason we can bring our sins into the light by being transparent about our weakness and failure. As individuals confess, help lead your group in gospeling them. Always end by remembering that we are sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus. He is our righteousness. You are not stuck in your sin. It does not have the final say over you. Jesus is the hero. We are free.