

The Prayer of Confession Requires a Repentant Heart

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By Kim Butts

One of the most neglected aspects of our prayer lives—whether individual or corporate, is the need for confession and repentance. We all know that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We all know that when we ask for forgiveness with a truly repentant heart, it is freely given to us by the grace of God through the blood of Christ. So, if we as Christians know this and believe it...why are we so negligent in practicing it?

Why is confession so often overlooked or glossed over in personal and corporate prayer? Is it, perhaps, that the weight of guilt from certain sins sometimes leaves us paralyzed and unable to act? Is it because so many “little” sinful acts are not considered important enough to bring before God? The “white lie” or the “little bit of gossip” or the “fleeting thoughts” have become so insignificant that we don’t even look upon them as sin. Our culture has left us desensitized to the “little sins.”

We are daily becoming more morally corrupt—one “minor” sin at a time. When we can continually stretch what we will allow our minds to absorb and our eyes to take in from our social media, televisions, movies, the books we read, the people we are

around, etc. we are becoming more and more a part of the world and less and less a part of the kingdom of God. If we would just stop to think how the Lord of the Universe, who lives in us, views the things we consider "acceptable," our mind-sets would change drastically.

If we would continually ask the question, "Is this pleasing to God?" we would have no difficulty discerning what we need to stay away from. Instead, we gradually begin to look more like those who are in the world rather than reflecting the image of Christ.

Dick Eastman, in *The Hour That Changes the World*, says, "Confession is a heartfelt recognition of what we are. It is important to God because it indicates that we take seriously our mistakes and failures. Of course, God does not ask us to confess our sins because He needs to know we have sinned, but because He knows that we need to know we have sinned."

Many of us, when we do confess, take a matter-of-fact, less-than-contrite approach. We expect God to immediately forgive us for saying the right words...like when we were children apologizing only to keep from being punished or only because we were caught—not because our hearts were repentant. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:2); "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

What God wants from us is holiness—which can only come from a truly repentant heart. The Lord has called our hearts to purity and moral uprightness—under whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Bending God's standards for our lives is never acceptable, and yet over and over we rationalize them to please others, or to be accepted. E. M. Bounds has said, "Men do not love holy praying, because they do not love holy living." Settling for less than God's best for us allows the enemy to chip away at our moral character. When we let our

guard down –as individuals and as the Church–the enemy is waiting to advance, and to take advantage of our weakness.

God's people need to be holy as He is holy. Holiness doesn't "settle" for small amounts of sin. Any sin grieves the Father who loves us. Our standards should never be set by others–only by God, whose standards are clear and commanded. He is under no obligation to answer our prayers if we have sin in our lives. Dick Eastman has some wonderful insights into the necessity of confession in prayer. He says, "My prayer life will never rise above my personal life in Jesus Christ. If my personal life touches too much of the world, my prayer life suffers."

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18). "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Eastman continues, "According to Scripture there can be no effective prayer life where sin maintains its grip in the life of the believer. This is why confession is critical to our praying and should be implemented early in prayer. It clears the conscience of faith-killing guilt and opens the heart to truly believe God will hear our petitions."

Confession gives God access into our hearts and removes any hindrances to effective prayer. Harold Lindsell, in his book, **When You Pray**, describes confession as a type of spiritual surgery when he says, "It (confession) works healing to the wound incurred in the heart. Just as the surgeon lances a boil to permit the infection to drain and to heal from the inside, so confession opens the sore, drains the poison, and heals from within."

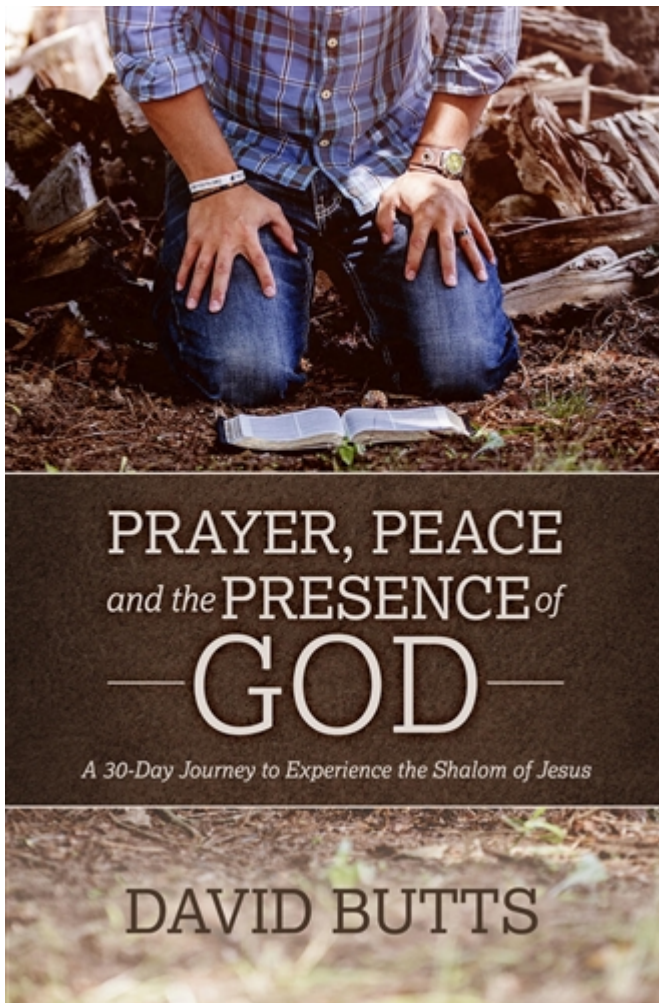
Our sins, large or small, should grieve us enough to desire

never to do them again. “No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him” (1 John 3:6). Let’s not wait until the burden of our sin drives us to our knees (Psalm 32:3-5). Instead, let’s go to God regularly, willingly asking Him to examine our hearts and “see if there is any offensive way in us” (Psalm 139:23-24). We should make a prayer habit of “keeping short accounts” with God. According to John Allan Lavendar, “Before you pray for a change in circumstances, you should pray for a change in character.” As we confess before Him, and true repentance takes place in our hearts, then fruit will be the result. “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...” (Luke 3:8).

God is waiting to pour out revival on a repentant, earnestly praying Church. He is waiting for the prayers of His people who are grieving over the moral condition of this nation and this world. “If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). Coming into God’s presence with repentant hearts in the act of confession paves the way for His grace in the act of forgiveness, and frees us for the ultimate goal of prayer: glorifying God with world-changing prayer!

Kim Butts is the co-founder and Executive Director of Harvest Prayer Ministries. She has authored several books, some with husband, Dave (1953-2022), including: [The Praying Family](#) and [Pray Like the King](#)

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