

FOLLOWING JESUS
A Disciple's Handbook

Lesson 6:
“Following Jesus in Confessing and Forgiving”

Confessing and Forgiving Introduction

☐ Read Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:5-14

Jesus' disciples saw first-hand how His life of prayer to the Father produced dynamic, life-changing results. They wanted to know what He knew about prayer, do what He did in prayer and receive the results He received in prayer. So, one day, after Jesus had finished a season of prayer, one of His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray as their Master and Lord. He responded to their request with dynamic *words* of prayer that revealed a dynamic *way* of praying. Contained in this prayer we find these words: *“And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”*

On a previous occasion, Jesus had given His followers principles of prayer, practices of prayer and a pattern for prayer that would help them rightly relate to God, to one another and to the world. He said this pattern for praying would release God's kingdom power and glory to establish His divine purposes in the earth. In this teaching on prayer we find these words: *“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”* And, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

In both instances, Jesus emphasized the need for confessing one's sins against God and others and forgiving another's sins against them to remain clear and clean before God and others. Jesus taught that everything in His kingdom worked on the basis of being right with God, right with oneself and right with others. Jesus taught that right relationships would release His righteous rule. Confessing and forgiving are at the very heart of this. Jesus taught that agreeing with God about the nature of what sin is and naming it (confessing) is vital to relational integrity with the Father. And He taught that acknowledging the sinful debt of others and canceling it (forgiving) was vital to relational integrity as well.

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Confessing and Forgiving Defined

In the Scriptures, the words *confess*, *confession* or *confessing* have to do with honestly and truthfully acknowledging and agreeing with God concerning sin and righteousness. Confessing then can have to do with acknowledging and agreeing with God concerning sound doctrine or sinful deeds. We are to hang on to everything that is faithful and true, and to let go of everything that is false, unworthy and unclean. It is important that we understand that sin comes out of the life from a repentant heart by way of the mouth. Confessing sin isn't so much about saying "I'm sorry" as saying "I did it." Confessing sin is saying the same thing about sin as God says. We are called to be a people who ongoingly confess sin to God and to others we have in any way violated or wronged.

In the Scriptures, the words *forgive*, *forgiveness* or *forgiving* have to do with the canceling of a moral or spiritual debt on the basis of a price being paid by another. God forgives and cancels the debts of sinful mankind through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. In the Old Testament, the blood of animals temporarily appeased the demands of a righteous and holy God. In the New Testament, the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, fully and eternally redeems and reconciles man to God and to one another. When we confess our sins to God, we are forgiven on the basis of the price for sin having already been paid by Jesus. When we confess our sins to one another, we forgive one another on the exact same basis. As God has forgiven or canceled our debt in Christ Jesus, so we forgive or cancel one another's debts in Christ Jesus.

... sin comes out of the life from a repentant heart by way of the mouth.

Confessing and Forgiving in the Life of Jesus

John the Baptist came preaching a message of repenting and believing in the coming Messiah through confessing sins and consecrating one's self to receive His mission, message and ministry. (☐ Read Matthew 3:1-12.) On the heels of John's declaration of how to prepare for the coming of the King and His kingdom, Jesus came with the same call and command. (☐ Read Mark 1:14-15.) Jesus came from heaven to earth to bring the fullness of God's grace and truth, helping people to be honest with God about who they were, who His Christ was and how to find their way back to Him. (☐ Read John 1:14-16.) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus confronted the need for people to look first to the sin in their own lives and honestly acknowledge it before examining sin in someone else's life. (☐ Read Matthew 7:1-5.) Jesus came to reveal sin and righteousness, darkness and light, death and life. He called men to confess sin and to confess Him as the way of truth and life that reconciled relationships with God, with self and with others. (☐ Read Matthew 10:32; John 14:1-6.)

In all of Jesus' dealings with people while on earth, he embodied a message of forgiving others on the basis of God's grace through the offering of His Sinless Son. (☐ Read John 3:14-17.) He called people to receive the loving offer of a forgiving Father and then to release that same love in forgiving others. (☐ Read Luke 17:3.) Near the end of His earthly ministry, He gave His disciples a command to love one another in the same measure and by the same means He had loved them—the love of God the Father in and through Him. (☐ Read John 13:31-35.) This love included completely forgiving one another, unmistakably marking them out as His followers and disciples. At the Last Supper, Jesus' final celebration of the Passover with His disciples, Jesus said that His blood would provide the payment for the forgiveness of sins that the Father desired to release. (☐ Read Matthew 26:27-28.)

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Confessing and Forgiving in the Life of Jesus' Followers

In the writings of Christ's disciples, the message of confessing and forgiving is clear. The Apostle John wrote that coming into agreement with God's assessment of sin and honestly acknowledging it would result in forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness. (☐ Read 1 John 1:8-9.) It is important to note that the forgiveness and cleansing John is referring to with God is *relational* and not *salvational*. Having been reconciled to God through repentance and faith in Christ, the confession of sin is now about restored relational intimacy with Him. The Apostle James wrote that confessing our sins one to another and praying for one another in faith removes a relational impediment and opens a divine door to all manner of healing and health. (☐ Read James 5:16.) In the New Testament, it is clear that three main obstacles to receiving answers to prayer are unbelief, unconfessed sin and unforgiveness. Jesus' followers taught that these obstacles must be confronted and conquered if one is to live in the free flow of God's love and power.

Time and again the Apostle Paul emphasized the need for followers of Jesus to forgive one another in the same manner they had been forgiven in Christ. (☐ Read Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:12-13.) The standard of forgiving others that they were to live by was the standard that had been established by God the Father through the redemptive work of Jesus the Son—forgiving people's debt of sin completely. Even an early church leader named Stephen who had been assaulted and killed by a mob resistant to his message, forgave his attackers and asked God to do the same. (☐ Read Acts 7:59-60.) He basically repeated the same words his Lord had spoken concerning His tormentors while on the cross. (☐ Read Luke 23:34.) In the Scriptures and throughout church history the response of true believers and followers of Jesus who have been sinned against has always been the same—forgiving those sins according to the limitless forgiveness extended by a loving Father through His Saving Son.

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Confessing and Forgiving in Our Lives

So, the standard and strategy for confessing and forgiving in our lives is clear—fully agree with God and acknowledge sin in our own lives while we fully forgive the ways in which others have sinned against us. We first confront and confess sins we have committed, enabling us then to accurately and appropriately forgive others their debt of sin toward us. This is what will keep us righteously relating to God and others. A lack of consistency in this area will compromise the integrity and intimacy of our relationships with God the Father and Jesus the Son, diminishing the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (☐ Read Ephesians 4:25-30.) It will also compromise the integrity and intimacy of our relationships with others.

Being honest to God and loving to all is foundational in being a true disciple and follower of Jesus. Being honest and humble in an age of dishonesty and pride enables us to be counter culture Christians who live by the kingdom values of grace and truth. (☐ Read John 1:16-17.) Being loving to all resists the human tendency to repay evil for evil and reveals the Lord’s heart of overcoming evil with good. (☐ Read Luke 23:34 and Romans 12:17-21.) As faithful followers of Jesus, confessing and forgiving are to become a lifestyle that leads to reconciled relationships with God and man.

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MEMORIZE: *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* (Matthew 6:12)

Use the following lines to write out the scripture to help you commit it to memory.

KEY TRUTH: Jesus emphasized the need for confessing one's sins against God and others and forgiving another's sins against them to remain clear and clean before God and others.

YOUR RESPONSE:

This is how you can respond in loving obedience to Jesus as you apply the truths from this lesson to your life.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal sinful attitudes and actions in your life, confessing them one by one to God in humility and honesty.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal instances where you need to forgive others who have sinned against you, forgiving them from the heart as you cancel their debt and release them to Christ.
- Make a fresh and new commitment to first look at and confront sin in your own life before looking at sin in the lives of others, and daily take your debts to the Lord in confession and cleansing while you release others from their debts in faith and forgiveness.
- Find someone younger than you, either spiritually or chronologically, that you can humbly and honestly share these principles with.

WRITTEN RESPONSE: Lesson Review

Review each section from the lesson on the previous pages to fill in each blank below. This review will help to reinforce the truths from this lesson in your life.

1. _____ sin is _____ the _____ thing about sin as _____ says. We are called to be a people who _____ sin to God and to others we have in any way _____ or _____.
2. As God has _____ or _____ our debt in Christ Jesus, so we _____ or _____ one another's _____ in Christ Jesus .
3. He called men to _____ sin and to _____ Him as the way of truth and life that _____ relationships with _____, with _____ and with _____.
4. In the New Testament, it is clear that three main _____ to receiving _____ to prayer are _____, _____ and _____.

5. So, the _____ and _____ for _____ and _____ in our lives is clear—fully _____ with God and _____ sin in our own lives while we fully _____ the ways in which others have sinned against us.

WRITTEN RESPONSE: Life Reflection

Using the journaling section on the pages at the end of this lesson, write in your own words your responses to the following questions.

1. What have you learned and what has impacted you personally from this lesson?
2. In reading the scripture references in this lesson, what are you sensing and seeing the Holy Spirit highlighting and revealing to that will enable you to better follow Jesus?
3. As a disciple and follower of Jesus, what steps of loving obedience do you need to take to see what you have learned in this lesson become ongoing practices and patterns in your life?