

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 their Lord. He responded to the 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 another occasion, Jesus had given His followers principles of prayer, practices of prayer and a pattern for prayer that would help them to 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 and defeat every attempt of demonic forces to thwart God's heavenly plans. 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, clean and confident before God and man. 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, both heavenly and earthly, 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. He also taught that acknowledging the sinful debt of others and canceling it (forgiving), was vital to relational integrity as well.

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. Our focus in this lesson is on confessing sin, agreeing with God on its nature and naming it as such. It is important that we understand that sin comes out of the life from a repentant heart by way of the mouth. Confessing isn't so much about saying "I'm sorry" as saying "I did it." Confessing 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 sinned against or wronged.

In the Scriptures, the words *forgive*, *forgiveness* or *forgiving* have to do with the cancelling 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 on the basis of the complete payment for sin's penalty, power, guilt and shame 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 restores 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 cancelled our debt in Christ Jesus, so we forgive or cancel one another's debts in Christ Jesus.

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 the Messiah's mission, message and ministry. (Read Matthew 3:1-12.) On the heels of John's declaration and demonstration of how to prepare for the coming of the King and the 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 men to be honest to 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 confront and confess sin and to confidently confess Him as the way, the truth and the life concerning peace and 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 expressed and embodied a message of forgiving others on the basis of God's goodness and 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 involved and included forgiving one another and forging an unbreakable bond that would unmistakably mark them out as His followers and disciples. At what we call 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 longed to release. (Read

Matthew 26:27-28.) Jesus came from a forgiving Father to form a forgiving family who would love one another without fail.

Confessing and Forgiving in the Life of Jesus' Followers

In the writings of Jesus' followers, 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 results in forgiveness and cleansing from unrighteousness. (Read I 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*. 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. These obstacles must be confronted and conquered if we are to live in the free flow of God's love and power to us and through us.

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 lived 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 thoroughly and 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 been the same—forgiving those sins according to the limitless forgiveness extended by a loving Father through His Saving Son.

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 forgive fully the ways in which others have sinned against us. We first consider 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 clear, clean and confident before God and others. A lack of clarity in this area will compromise the integrity and intimacy of our relationships with God the Father and Jesus the Son, as well as silence 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 fundamental in being a true disciple and follower of Jesus.

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

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, clean and confident before God and man.

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 Reinforcement

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

1. Confessing is _____ the _____ about sin as God says. We are called to be a people who _____ to _____ and to _____ we have in any way sinned against or wronged.
2. As God has _____ or _____ our _____ in Christ Jesus, so we _____ one another's _____ in Christ Jesus.
3. _____ called men to _____ and _____ and to confidently confess Him as the _____, the _____ and the _____ concerning _____ and _____ relationships with God, self and others.
4. In the New Testament, it appears that three main obstacles to receiving answers to prayer are _____, _____ and _____.
5. So the _____ and _____ for confessing and forgiving in our lives is clear—fully _____ with God and _____ sin in our own lives, while we _____ 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?