

Bedroom

Getting Ready: Confession

Paul Bailey

Our hearts are incredibly absorbent. Like a sponge, we collect relationships, experiences and events and we imbue these with meaning and significance. Our most powerful relationships and experiences and our most traumatic events stay with us and we convert these into beliefs values and habits.

Teacher and author Stephen R. Covey writes, “Our parents and others are our role models... In effect, they give us a role or life script. These scripts become our parts, our roles. They are more emotionally absorbed than they are consciously chosen.”¹

Notice Covey’s last sentence, “They are more emotionally absorbed than they are consciously chosen...” Every relationship, every, experience, every event is somehow absorbed into the inner core of our being. This by itself is not new or startling information, what is more interesting is the fact that emotionally intense or traumatic events or experiences are not only emotionally absorbed they somehow stay with us as we try to process or make sense of these.

We incessantly absorb events, experiences and relationships. Some of these events, experiences and relationships are traumatic, painful and very hard to process. One of the real dangers of this constant emotional absorption is that our hearts and minds are overloaded with emotional and psychological baggage. The problem is accentuated by the fact that this baggage is held sub-consciously in parts of our minds that cannot access automatically.

So here, I am, a 38-year-old man with good intentions but over-burdened with 38 years of emotional and psychological baggage and I live, love, learn work and play with people who are at different ages and stages who have their own baggage. As we live together, we try to touch each other but our baggage gets in the way.

Basil Pennington wrote:

“We are broken persons and live in broken communities in a state of brokenness. We are alienated from ourselves and from each other. We do not readily fit together. We are like a bunch of porcupines trying to huddle together for warmth, who are always driven apart out of our fear of the wound we can inflict upon each other with our quills.”²

We do not readily fit together. The issue is how we live together as broken people in broken communities with all of our baggage. The simple answer is with great difficulty. The more complex answer comes from James’ letter, the 5th chapter and verse 16:

“¹⁶Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.” James 5.16, The Message Bible

In other words, the only way for us to live in community with each other is to find ways to mutually off load our baggage in a safe loving and therapeutic community. We do this off loading by sharing

¹ Stephen R. Covey *Principle-Centred Leadership* p.131 Simon & Schuster 1992

² M. Basil Pennington, *Thomas Merton: Brother Monk*, Harper & Row, 1987, cited by Gordon MacDonald in *A Resilient Life*, p. 216, Nelson Books 2004

Bedroom

Getting Ready: Confession

Paul Bailey

ourselves with each other in authentic love. “Authentic fellowship is not superficial, surface-level chit-chat. It is genuine, heart-to-heart, sometimes gut level, sharing. It happens when people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives. They share their hearts, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses and ask for help and prayer.”³

Now James says, “Make this your common practice...” The truth is this is not our common practice and it is not the common practice of most churches or Christian communities. Why is this?

The clue to why this does not happen is found in the phrase “Confess your sins to each other.” Confession is supposed to be something we do in community *with* each other as opposed to something we *do* to each other. Confession is one of those essential relational ‘one anothers’ that requires mutuality: we are supposed to confess to each other.

Confession is not a moral superior hearing a morally inferior’s confession but equals sharing each other’s struggle. This is what Paul means when he writes, in his letter to the Christian community in Galatia, saying, “¹Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day’s out. ²Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ’s law. ³If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.” Galatians 6.1-3, The Message Bible

Confession should happen amongst equals. It should also be mutual. One of the excuses people make for failing to practice confession is the lack of trust or confidentiality. However, if we are sharing each other’s failings and are praying for each other, then you hold my secret and I hold yours.

What is confession and how does it work?

Confession from the Greek word *ex- [out of] omologeō [to speak, utter or declare]* meaning literally to speak out from oneself. “The preposition *ἐξ, forth, out,* implies *full, frank, open* confession, and so in every case of its use in the New Testament.”⁴

Confession is speaking out from the depth of your heart your sins, your failings, your fears and struggles. In doing this we submit ourselves to each other. We also purge our souls from powerful and potentially toxic emotions such as shame, guilt, fear and secrecy. Family therapist Terry Kellogg writing about intergenerational dysfunction and secrets notes, “There are secrets everyone knows but no one talks about that makes everybody feel crazy and shameful. Secrets that very few know, but everybody acts out. Intergenerational secrets that affect the entire system. Secrets become crazy making. The bigger the secrets, the larger the family dysfunction. The secrets often breed dishonesty and lies. The secrets are boundary violations. *A family is only as sick as its secrets.*”⁵

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 138, Zondervan 2002

⁴ Marvin Vincent *Word Studies In the New Testament*

⁵ Terry Kellogg with Marvel Harrison *Broken Toys Broken Dreams* p.117, BRAT Publishing 1990

Bedroom

Getting Ready: Confession

Paul Bailey

Confession liberates us from the tyranny of our secrets. It allows us to walk in the daylight and to breathe fresh emotional and spiritual air. Hiding always requires the cover of darkness but the darkness that covers us also oppresses and controls us; so that our secrets grow and become overwhelmingly powerful in the dark.

James 5.16 challenges us to build in the bedrooms of our lives the kind of relationship to build with each other the kinds of relationships where openness, honesty and authenticity are more valuable than sinless perfection. James challenges us to build relationship and communities that heal. Larry Crabb, in his book, *Connecting*, writes, “Communities that heal are communities that probe and expose, that help see what’s going on inside them and encourage them to handle their struggles more effectively.”⁶

What should we confess? James says that we should confess our ‘faults’ KJV. The Greek word here is *paraptoma*. This is “a false step, a blunder” literally, “a fall beside,” used ethically, denotes “a trespass,” a deviation, from uprightness and truth⁷” James uses this word to imply a false step a slip. The idea being that in our journey towards God and wholeness it is likely that there will be several false steps or falls and we need to be there for each other.

There is a horizontal dimension to confession where we confess to each other. However, there is also a vertical dimension in which we both carry each other to God through prayer. In other words, simply confession to each other is incomplete and inadequate. We must take yet another step; we must carry our sins and failings to God through prayer. James says “pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed.”

The Amplified Bible renders James 5.16 as:

¹⁶Confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins) and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored [to a spiritual tone of mind and heart]. The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working].

As we pray for each other not only do we experience healing and restoration of our hearts, minds and our bodies, but we also make tremendous power available for each other.

How do we create healing communities where confession is the common practice?

1. We must create bedrooms. Intimate spaces where the chosen few are allowed to enter and see-into-me (that is into-me-see). Unfortunately, churches and Christian communities can be boardrooms where we measure and evaluate performance. James 5.16 requires us to form a different kind of relational circle.

⁶ Larry Crabb, *Connecting A Radical New Vision*, p.34 Word Publishing 1997

⁷W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine’s complete expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

Bedroom

Getting Ready: Confession

Paul Bailey

2. We must be willing to surrender our secrets. This is incredibly difficult because it requires a level of nakedness and transparency that is by its nature uncomfortable. The motto for these kinds of communities must be 'you show me yours and I'll show you mine'. In the bedroom, everyone gets naked. I know how that sound but you know what I mean.
3. We must value authenticity and honesty much more than we value perfection. Too often, we react to disclosures and confession in a spirit of judgement rather than an attitude of acceptance. If you cannot accept me for who I am, get out of my bedroom. You can hang around in the corridors, you sit in the living room, you can even go to the basement or the kitchen but the only way you get to come into the bedroom is through a spirit of acceptance.

In a world that struggles beneath the heavy burdens of guilt and shame James 5.16 challenges us to: ¹⁶"Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed." James 5.16, The Message Bible