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# THE LIFE-GIVING WOMAN

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NOVEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

I've been praying all month about this newsletter. It feels tricky to write about something as uncomfortable and vulnerable as confession. And it is a little scary, if I'm honest. I haven't arrived, I've not moved past my own need for the humility to confess sin and turn from it. I've felt the tension of living what I write.

But as we continue the conversation about what a life-giving woman is, I can't overlook this fundamental practice of the Christian life. How we as women relate to God and others when it comes to our sin will have tremendous ramifications both for the present and the future.

You'll notice that I'm not writing about both confession and repentance this month, but simply confession. The reason is because I hear a lot of teaching and talk about repentance, but not much on confession. Repentance happens, but there seems to be a bypassing of the vulnerable heart-to-heart connection that happens with the confession of sin. When we skip that difficult, yet gloriously-freeing, opportunity to humble ourselves before another, a critical component of intimacy in a relationship is left out. And it really does hinder relationship. (More on this later)

I see a need for us women to be better confessors. One thing the Lord continually reminds me of is that I never will move past my need to practice this basic and vital discipline on this side of heaven.

But I want us to be discerning women who look out for the ditches on either side. Our culture cries out for (even demands) "authenticity," which often means baring anything and everything in the name of "being real." But the other ditch is carrying ourselves in such a polished way that people wonder, "does she ever struggle?"

I've wrestled with these words. My prayer for you this month as you read my letter is that somehow, the Lord will use them to provoke thought and movement in your

heart unto deeper affection for the Lord, and greater depth of relationship with Him and others.

So without further ado,

### **What is confession?**

First, let me talk grammar. A verb transitive is a verb that has a direct object receiving the action. In other words, the subject is doing something to someone or something else. Keep this in mind and pivot with me into a quick word study.

Listen to how the word **confess** is used in the Bible. We're told in:

- Numbers 5:5-7, "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel, when a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and **that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin** that he has committed."
- Psalm 32:5, "I **acknowledged my sin to you**, and **I did not cover my iniquity**; I said, "**I will confess my transgressions to the LORD**," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."
- John 12:42, "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees **they did not confess it**, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."
- Acts 9:22, "(His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should **confess Jesus to be Christ**, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)"
- 1 John 1:9, "**If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- 2 John 1:7, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, **those who do not confess** the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh."
- James 5:16, "Therefore, **confess your sins to one another** and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."
- Romans 10:9, "because, if you **confess with your mouth** that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
- Rev. 3:5, "**I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.**"

With those verses in mind, look at the definition of "confess" according to Noah Webster:

"To own, acknowledge or avow, as a crime, a fault, a charge, a debt, or something that is against one's interest, or reputation."

“To own; to acknowledge; to declare to be true, or to admit or assent to in words; opposed to deny.”

So, taking our knowledge of a verb transitive + the definition of confess + a brief survey of Scripture, we can gather that *confession of sin is the verbal owning (taking responsibility of), acknowledgement of, and declaration to God and man that it is true we are guilty and have sinned.*

Isn't it interesting that confession has a verbal component? I believe God intends confession to be spoken for a few reasons, which I'll flesh out:

1. He is a speaking God
2. He revealed Himself to us specifically through His Word
3. He intends words to be the primary means for us to reveal our hearts

God is a speaking God. With His Words, He spoke the world and everything in it into existence (Genesis 1-2). God has revealed Himself generally to all through His creation ([Rom. 1:19-20](#)), but to those who fear Him, He has revealed Himself specifically through His Word (John 1:1, Heb 1:1-2, Ps. 119:105).

He has *revealed* Himself to us through His Word.

In Him is light, and there is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5), and He wants that for us. But the way we get the dark out of our heart so that His light can flood it is by bringing what's in it out into the open.

We reveal ourselves through our words.

We see this practice modeled in various ways across the Christian life. We verbally, publicly confess the reality of the Lordship of Christ, we praise the Lord with our words, we teach one another about Christ with our words, we correct in Christ with our words, we encourage, we prophesy all with our words.

We have words to speak them.

There is power in the spoken word. We can see throughout Scripture the power that resonates when the Lord opens His mouth to speak ([Job 37:4](#), [Ps. 29:9](#), [Jer. 10:13](#), [Jn. 5:28](#)). Surely as image bearers, He intends for our words to be powerful, too ([Pr. 18:21](#)). We are His agents here on the earth.

I believe He wants us to *verbally* own and acknowledge our sin because in so doing, we model His character. **If the Lord hadn't spoken, we wouldn't have known His heart.** He didn't speak because He had to--He *wanted* to speak. He *wanted* to reveal Himself to us. He doesn't want to keep Himself hidden, because He knows that in Him, fullness of life dwells.

God chose to reveal Himself because it's who He is.

Likewise, we should be people who want to live in the light. There shouldn't be any area of our life or heart that we want to keep hidden, afraid of others seeing. Our hearts were made to be known and seen, just like the Lord's, and the way this happens is by speaking what's in there.

### **Why Confession?**

By putting words to what's deep inside and then speaking them, even the ugly and shameful things, our heart is in the process of being made whole. We are cooperating with our Father, who wants to root out sin and replace it with Christ-likeness. Why *wouldn't* we confess our sin, if we grasp this beautiful reality?

I believe part of the answer is that we are often deceived into concealing our sin. Fear, and ultimately pride, leads us to hang onto our self-perceived image. We want to be seen as having it all together, as respectable, dignified people. To confess that we are jealous of the woman who is thinner than we are, or that we ate too much today because we were anxious, or that we yelled at our kids because we were angry, is embarrassing and shameful and if we're really honest, if we reveal those things, we believe it might affect what others think of us.

That's raw. But isn't it true?

We might confess our sin privately to God, but we forgo **the act of obedience** that is confessing it to other people. Remember two of the verses we read earlier,

"Therefore, **confess your sins to one another** and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:16)."

And...

"**If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)."

God tells us to confess our sin to others, because by bringing our sin into the light, it allows for healing that keeping it concealed simply cannot accomplish. Imagine knowing that you have cancer. You've admitted it and are even talking to the Lord about it. But you just can't bring yourself to go to the doctor, who could help you treat it. So, you keep it to yourself. But what eventually happens? Well, the cancer slowly, and sometimes quickly, overtakes your body. You become weak and sicker. If you had only gone to a doctor! If you had revealed to him what was ravaging you on the inside, he could help you fight it.

It's similar with sin. God has given us to one another, to help one another get rid of the sin that so easily entangles us. When we choose not to go to one another and confess our sin, it's like refusing to go to the doctor who can help you fight cancer.

Our growth will be stunted, and sometimes, we'll get quite sick on the inside. Listen to what David said when he did this:

“For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psalm 32:3).

When we speak what is in our heart, we disclose who we really are to other people. And who are we, really? Aren't we all needy, dependent sinners in need of a perfect God? Sinners in need of grace and forgiveness? Children who need the tender discipline and warmth of our Father?

When we willingly confess our sin, we are acknowledging this. We are confessing that we need Christ, and that there is nothing good in us. This is a beautiful thing that pleases the Lord, and it's in this posture of humility that the Lord delights to come and do a beautiful redemptive work!

Revealing what is in our heart to another is vulnerable, and I touched on this briefly last month. It can be a scary thing. Confession of Christ as Lord is costly, and so is our confession of sin. In both circumstances, we may experience persecution, maligning, the end of a relationship, a tarnished reputation, consequences for sin, etc.

But, if we are in Christ, **He** is whom we love most of all—not our reputation or consequences—and we will be willing to bring into the light whatever it is the Lord shines His light on. We have counted the cost, and we say along with Paul,

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Php 3:7-11).

This isn't easy. It takes courage. It might even require an all-out wrestle in the Spirit. **But Christ-following women are courageous women, because our confidence is in Him**, who began a good work in us, and will finish it (Php 1:6).

He tells us to walk in the light, and so we do it (1 Jn. 1:7).

We love Him, so we obey Him (Jn. 14:15).

I love how Paul Tripp says it, “We no longer live based on our assessment of what we possess in strength, character, wisdom (from family, education, experience). We base our lives on the fact that because Jesus lives in us, we can do what is right in desire, thought, word, and action, no matter what specific blessings or sufferings we face.”[\[1\]](#)

What a freeing stance!

The safest person in all the world to confess our sin to is our Lord. He is the One who made a way for us to be forgiven of our sin, and He is the One who will help us to say no to sin in the future. When we confess our sin to Him regularly, it will keep an open line of communication with Him and a tender heart before Him.

We don't generally venture into dark places alone, right? Well, it's not much different with the dark places in our hearts, which we all have. Most of us don't willingly go there of our own volition. We don't want to be exposed, so we avoid it. But friends, in effort to save ourselves the discomfort, we're actually cheating ourselves. Sure, maybe it will save us from looking messy in front of others. Maybe it will save us some tears or hard conversations. But in the end, what it means is forfeiting depth of relationship with the Lord.

And goodness, that's the last thing I, and I'm sure you, want to sabotage!

Here's the thing. **As long as we're unwilling to go with the Lord to dark places in our hearts, we hinder ourselves.** Our growth in the Lord becomes stunted, and our relationships with others can only go so far.

When I speak of inviting the Lord into dark places of our hearts, I'm not talking about going on a sin hunt with the Lord. But I am saying that slowing down and praying through [Psalm 139](#) is healthy and good.

On this side of heaven, our sin is slowly being worked out of us. *Praise God.* It's a painful process, but the Lord isn't a Father who is nitpicking and then disciplining for every little thing He sees. No, He is desirous of a whole, healthy heart that is rightly oriented to Him. And so, at just the right time, He shines His light on that place that He wants to heal.

Can I pause for a minute and marvel that reality? *At just the right time, He shines His light on that place that He wants to heal.* He shows us our sin so that He can heal us and make us more like Him. This is astounding and marvelous! We hate it when our sin is revealed, but if we only understood Who He is, then we would be grateful and relieved!

So we confess our sin out of obedience and out of a desire for depth of relationship and growth with the Lord. But, do you remember how last month I said that the degree to which we seek to know God and allow ourselves to be known by God will directly affect our ability to relate to others?

If we are not regular confessors of our sin, our relationship with others will be fragmented. There will be something in the way, preventing depth of relationship, and perhaps in some circumstances, preventing any real relationship at all.

Listen to 1 John 1:7 again, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

The Lord directly ties the sort of fellowship we have with one another to our confession of sin. Those with whom I have the greatest depth of relationship with are those with whom there is a regular, reciprocal confession of sin to one another. Why?

Well first of all, it doesn't really work if one person pretends like they have it all together. Nobody does. There's a freedom that comes with being honest and real with one another. In a healthy relationship, it will be reciprocal, even across generations. I have younger women in my life that I am honest with about my sin. And, I have older women in my life that are honest with me about their sin.

But I also believe that the power of the spoken word (Pr. 18:21) plays a big part here. We have a very real enemy who wants nothing more than to destroy us, and a primary means that he manipulates is shame.

Shame is a good, useful, God-given emotion that is meant to alert us that we've sinned against God. It should produce movement toward God. He is ready to receive us because we have an Advocate in Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:1-2). But Satan often likes to creep into that space between us and the Lord, those moments before confession has taken place, and lie to us. He wants us to believe that we're unforgivable. He wants us to believe whatever he can get us to, because he knows that it has the potential to keep us from confidently approaching our Father in search of forgiveness. He also knows that when he accomplishes that, we will be vulnerable to sinning more because we already have unconfessed sin. So Satan gets his way doubly.

Ugh! Doesn't it make you mad just to think about it? It makes me want to put up a good fight.

Some of us have a really hard time getting over our sin. And by that, I mean that when we sin, even after confessing it to the Lord and asking for forgiveness, we walk in shame, unnecessarily. We get ensnared in the enemy's sneaky deception, and this is just the time when we need others who are safe enough for us to vulnerably share where we are.

This is a time when it can be helpful and healing to confess our sin to someone. James says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” The Lord loves to minister through brothers and sisters in Christ as instruments of healing!

For so long I got tripped up into thinking I could not approach Him because I was too

sinful. Yes, I confessed my sin, but how could He ever want me near Him? It took a good few years of His patient Fathering for me to understand that the experience of shame was exactly when He wanted me to run to Him, when His arms were wide open for me.

But I didn't learn this on my own. It happened as I confessed my sin to two people I trusted. Their voices spoke truth over me and they prayed for me. Over time, it's had a powerful effect. I couldn't have done it alone. Was it hard? Yes. Was it scary? Yes. But it has been worth it.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will bring conviction and we'll resist it. We deceive ourselves into thinking we've not really done anything wrong. So, why would we tell anyone? Oh, but this is a time when we should be telling someone. Because if we don't, it is easy to go down a path into more hidden, deeper sin. And we can be sure that in the Lord's kindness and mercy, He will discipline us. Our sin will find us out (Num. 32:23).

There is a real cost when we hide sin. There's a real cost if we've confessed our sin to the Lord and are being tormented by our enemy afterward. We *will* eventually be affected physically because we are embodied souls. Our inner man affects our outer man.

Have you ever found yourself biting the inside of your mouth, having tightness of chest, sweating, heart racing? All of these things can be the result of keeping things hidden. Something is going unaddressed in your heart, and it's manifesting outwardly. Keeping sin concealed is stressful, and this isn't what the Lord wants for us.

Some of us don't intentionally conceal sin. It's not a conscious decision, but it may be because you are blind to sin that you need to confess. It's helpful to take some time to evaluate where you are, and to ask the Lord to help you align your heart with his in this matter of confession of sin.

There is an aspect of disciplining ourselves to confess our sin that's involved. Most of us aren't eager to acknowledge that we have sinned. We'll naturally resist it, and we will need to make ourselves do it. Eventually, it does get easier, and it will become a regular part of our life.

### **How Do We Confess**

In a nutshell, we should confess specifically, with Biblical language, and frequently.

God is specific. Have you ever noticed that? He puts details in the Bible that are fascinating. Take Exodus 25, for example, when he gives detailed instructions for how to construct the ark of the covenant. Or, 1 Corinthians 13:1-5, when he defines what love is. He could have given a fuzzy generality like our culture today does, but He



didn't. He was quite specific. We aren't left wondering exactly what he means.

When we're talking about confessing sin to the Lord, we should be as specific as we can be. There need to be no hidden corners—He already knows about them anyway.

But when it comes to how specific we get with other people, we need to be discerning.

The reality is that no person can forgive our sin against God, only He can ([1 Tim. 2:5](#)). Sometimes, we go to other people in an effort to alleviate the feelings of guilt we're carrying because we've not yet repented. We know we're guilty and that we should confess, but we haven't quite reached genuine repentance yet. Putting it all out on the table may offer temporary relief, but until a turning in our heart has happened, we'll continue to be plagued with guilt.

But also, it's just not always appropriate to share every little detail. I think it depends on the sin, the reach of it in regards to how it affects the lives of others, and who you're sharing with. John Piper says, "It doesn't mean you need to broadcast to the whole world your specific sins. That wouldn't be good for them, and it wouldn't be good for you."[\[2\]](#)

When we've sinned against another person and they know it, we must take full responsibility verbally ([Matt. 5:23-24](#)). But also, we must use Biblical language. If we're honest, it may feel hard to do both of those things. Humans are experts at evading responsibility, blame-shifting, and using language that takes the sting out of the reality of the issue. But it cheapens a confession and apology when we allow ourselves to do any of these.

Here's an example. Recently, I snapped at my son. Now, I could apologize for "snapping" at him, but I've not yet found that behavior or heart issue in the Bible. Do you see how that word takes the edge off my sin of anger? It's much more helpful for us all if I put Biblical language around not only my outward behavior, but what was in my heart. So, when I confessed my sin to him, I said something like, "Brant, will you please forgive me for speaking harshly to you? I was angry, and I shouldn't have spoken to you in that way."

It was clean and to the point.

There are nuanced situations in which we may wonder how specific we should be. These circumstances are perfect for cultivating conversation with the Lord. Ask Him about it, take time to dialog with Him about it. It doesn't need to be a split-second decision. He's comfortable with allowing you to wait on Him for guidance, and often these situations are invitations from Him to go to Him.

The second part to the how of confession, I believe, is the frequency. This should be a normal practice of our life ([Matt. 6:12](#)). There is no reason to make an occasion of it. If

we are in a healthy Christian relationship, then confessing sin should be as common as talking about the weather. Sure, there might be times that arise when something very serious has taken place, and it is much harder to bring it into the light. But for the most part, we should be excellent confessors.

### **A few words about embodied souls made for community**

All of this talk about confessing our sin to others begs the question, “Do we confess our sin to anybody and everybody?” I would answer no.

We need to be discerning as to whom we confess our sin to. But admittedly, this can be tricky. We need to be prayerful women, asking the Lord for another trustworthy heart. God revealed Himself so that no one is without excuse. But there are specific things that He doesn’t reveal about Himself, except to those who fear Him ([Ps. 25:14](#), [Matt. 11:25](#)). This is called general and specific revelation. He has been general with many and specific with few.

To be prudent in regards to whom we reveal our hearts to is to mimic our Father.

The other side of this conversation on confession that we need to address is the reality that we **should** be a safe place for others to come and confess their sin. We have the ability to speak life into the hearts of brothers and sisters, and we should.

**We have a stewardship responsibility when someone opens themselves up to us in this way.**

I’ve had varying experiences through the years confessing sin to others. I’ve learned the hard way that it’s not wise to confess my sin to just anyone. I’ve had experiences ranging from non-response to superiority “I’m up here, you’re down there” responses to gracious responses.

When a person comes to you to confess sin, it’s vital to remember how difficult it can be. It takes courage to reveal an ugly, shameful thing that you’ve done. And often, it’s come after a process with the Lord that has been humbling, so the person confessing involved likely does have a broken and contrite heart ([Psalm 51:17](#)). Just like the Lord, we should not despise that heart. Nor should we be shocked with what they’re confessing. If we know ourselves to be ones who have vile things being worked out of us, we will be some of the most understanding people.

Taking the time to acknowledge that is a beautiful way to love another. “I know it took courage to share that with me, thank you for trusting me with a part of your heart” is similar to how the Lord responds to us. When we humble ourselves and move toward Him after we’ve sinned, He will always respond with graciousness that is shocking.

If someone has come to you confessing a sin that has far-reaching consequences, such as pornography viewing, it’s wise to prayerfully follow-up with questions. Don’t barrage her with a machine-gun of them, but ask the Holy Spirit to lead the

conversation, and simply seek to care well for her as one who loves her.

For example, you can ask her how she has re-routed the desire and craving of her heart that only the Lord can satisfy. What steps has she taken to prevent herself from falling back into the sin? Does she need help with that? Offer to pray for her.

I mentioned earlier that I'm honest with younger women in my life about sin, and that I have older women who are honest with me about their sin. This is a situation in which I exercise discernment, and I believe my older women are discerning when they share with me. The women who disciple me would not claim to have arrived, and so they are willing and able to walk in humility with me. But it just wouldn't be appropriate for them to share details of their sin, unless I am somehow involved.

Think of it as a parent-child relationship. Should a child bear a parent's burdens? Would it be appropriate for me to confess to my child that I am struggling with lustful thoughts? No, it wouldn't. It would place a burden on them that they are not yet capable of bearing. Similarly, I shouldn't ask a younger woman to bear the burdens of my sin. The Lord has given me a husband, peers and older women to do that.

Recently, one of my mentors shared about her struggle with anxiety over a particular situation in her life. I believe it was appropriate for her to share this sin struggle with me. I can relate to it, have experienced it, and can pray for her in it. She didn't unload something too weighty for me to bear.

### **If you've stuck with me this long, you're a trooper.**

This process of confession and caring for another's heart in confession, when handled well can yield a beautiful depth of friendship in the Lord that is impossible otherwise. There is a knitting together of hearts that happens when we choose to let people in close, trusting them with some of the rawest, deepest parts of us. It's hard, there's no doubt about it. But the Lord made us for this kind of relationship. He intends to bring healing, joy, fullness of life through it.

I really want that, don't you? I want to know the Lord and become more and more like Him, while experiencing deeper heart connections with others.

### **I would love to hear from you, is this topic of confession scary to you? Does it resonate?**

Lastly, **a few favorites for you this upcoming Christmas season...**

- If you're in need of a great gift for a friend, check out the [Growth Book](#). These are great for men and women. I've been through a few of these, and they will continue to make my library more beautiful. Bree and I are on a writing team together, and getting to know her and the story behind the book has made it that much more valuable to me! **While supplies last, they are offering three**

colors of their books for 15% off each!

- [Come, Let Us Adore Him: A Daily Advent Devotional by Paul Tripp](#) – Give me anything and everything by Paul Tripp to read! This is hands-down, my favorite advent devo to prepare my own heart during this season. I highly recommend it. *This is an affiliate link, if you click on it and purchase, I will receive a small compensation.*
- This [Christmas Album](#) by friend Justin Rizzo has been one of our favorites for a few years now.

**Blessings to you as you enjoy this Advent season,**

**Kelly**

[1] Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, How People Change, 151.

[2] <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-important-is-it-to-confess-my-sin-to-someone-other-than-god>



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