

TAKEAWAY

NOT JUST FOR SUNDAYS

Free
Part 5 – Free to Come Clean

July 25, 2010

Getting Started: How do we go about it?

At the beginning of this *Free* series, we asked you to “consider your ways”—to take a look at the good things, the God things, and the got-to-go things in your life. We are usually keenly aware of specific recurring sins in our lives. But, sometimes, we just have a lingering sense of an inability to wholeheartedly serve God—a sense that there is something keeping us from fully connecting with Him. For me, an analogy helps me understand what’s going on. So, picture yourself getting ready to wash your car. You unwind the garden hose and turn on the faucet. You walk to the car and squeeze the nozzle. But, nothing happens—no water comes out. You know there must be a kink in the hose, so you instinctively yank on the hose and try the nozzle again. Still, nothing happens. You try another trick or two to un-kink the hose, but nothing seems to work. By this time, you realize you’re going to have to go find where the hose is kinked and un-kink it.

Now, picture your life as that hose. Ask yourself if it’s truly connected to the source of life—the Living Water. If you’re not sure about that, it probably isn’t. For you, then, the first step is to get connected. Read John 3:16-21 and 4:1-26. You can humbly confess being a sinner in need of a Savior, ask for forgiveness, repent, and receive Jesus as your loving Savior. If/when you are connected to Jesus, then invite the Holy Spirit to walk with you along the hose of your life. Ask Him to show you where you are kinked—restricting Him from flowing freely through your life. What does “walking along the hose” look like? It begins in His Word because you’re in a relationship (think transformation, not just information). Below are some scriptures that can start you on the journey. Before you begin, pray that God will pore through you as you pore through His Word. Pray that God will give you eyes to see unresolved sin, ears to hear His voice, and a heart that will trust Him as He leads you to confession and your own un-kinking.

1. Read and pray through Psalm 139. Listen for God’s response and jot down anything that comes to mind.
2. Read and pray through the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 or Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Pause after each command to listen for God’s input and jot down what you believe He is saying. Perhaps you feel like the young man Jesus encountered in Matthew 19:16-22. Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:21-28 and 5:38-48. Do these encompassing perspectives convict you of any sins that you need to confess?
3. Set aside time on three separate days for prayer and meditation, and have your pen and paper ready. On the first day, pray that God would reveal anything in your childhood that needs forgiveness or healing or both. Spend about 10 minutes or so considering that time in your life and jot down anything that comes to mind. Do the same thing on the second day considering your adolescence, and then your adulthood on the third day.

After you’ve “walked along the hose” with the Holy Spirit’s guidance and discovered places where there is blockage, submissively recognize that sin offends the heart of God and gratefully allow Him to bring you to a place of God-motivated sorrow. This is godly sorrow and is not to be confused with feeling sorry for yourself. It is more of a willful choice than it is an issue of your emotions. Godly sorrow is a heartfelt hatred of sin. It is acknowledgement that God’s will is superior—His ways are right—and that when you disobey Him, you are blocking Him from flowing freely in and through you. This kind of sorrow leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). It’s important to recognize and embrace that it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

You have been led by the Spirit, in prayer and through His Word, and have submitted yourself to His ways and come into agreement with how God looks at sin. Now, establish in your heart that you are in desperate need of His grace to do what you cannot do for yourself. This will allow you to stop trying to manage your sin—and begin dying to it.

Moving through these steps has prepared you for confession. Read Psalm 51 and begin confessing your sins to your Father. Recount the things He has lovingly shown you over the recent days. Agree with His Word and totally receive His forgiveness for your sins. They are no longer to be found. “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (Psalm 103:11-13 NIV). Rest on the fact that, through confession and repentance, God has forgiven you and cleansed you from all unrighteousness through Jesus (1 John 1:5-10). Picture yourself driving a stake in the ground, never to go back from here.

What is your next step after this? Start with reading and living out John 15 and learning what God wants to do in you and through you. If you start to slip back into feeling that you are the one who has to make this change stick, spend some time dwelling on the Holy Spirit's role in Galatians 5:22-25 (His fruit is cultivated in obedient followers). Now, *claim* and walk in your freedom!

Freedom...Not Just For Adults

Can you imagine going back and reliving your teenage years knowing what you know now? Wouldn't you do things a lot differently? I think we all would. I wonder if that's true at every stage of life. What if our "tomorrows" aren't meant for us to move into freedom, but it's our "todays"? As you read the following story, celebrate this young man's freedom and know that it is not too late for yours. Let it inspire you to step into freedom today.

I recently struggled with abusing the internet. I won't go into details about it. However, the week of camp (Watermarks 2010) during our "quiet time" I came to James 5:16 (NIV), which says "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." That verse really spoke truth to me and helped me think differently about how I had kept my sin a secret. So the next night, during evening cabin time, I confessed my sin to God, our cabin leader, and everyone else in our cabin. Then I made a promise to the leader to do the same when I got back home.

I kept my promise. Friday night, after we got back, I confessed my sin to my parents. Then and there, I truly felt free and I've been the same since then. For me, it all comes back to the Veggie Tales movie, "Larry-Boy and the Fib from Outer Space." At one point during the movie, Larry-Boy quotes John 8:32: "The truth will set you free." He's right. And, even though I haven't watched Veggie Tales since I was little, I still remember that line. Ha-ha...

John 8:31b-32 (The Message) says: "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you." Yep. The Truth set me free, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie?

I grew up in a Christian home, but it was not a safe place to confess one's sins. Instead, I learned to put on the face of perfection and hide anything that wasn't approved. Being vulnerable was not something I learned to do until God began to teach me not to hide from Him (Psalm 139) or others. I am still learning this lesson. The easy thing to do is pretend I don't struggle, or that I have it all under control—even when I don't. This recently came to a head when I believed I heard God telling me it was time to open up to someone regarding the depth of a struggle I had been battling off and on for years. A *real person*, God was clear. He wanted me to actually tell another person! I wanted to reply, "But I told You; isn't that enough?" It was not.

So, I obeyed and let it all out to someone with whom I felt safe and loved. This Christ-follower was very understanding and accepting, but not willing to let me stay in the same place. Once I told one person, it was easier to talk about it more openly and to let others pray and encourage me using God's Word. Through this process, I found freedom from my struggle. Read Ephesians 5:11-15. Why do you suppose it's so important to "shine the light" on our sins? Do our secrets have power over us? Now read Galatians 6:2. How might bearing each other's burdens help us to become a safe place for another follower to share? How about you? Is there anything in your life that God is telling you to confess openly to another person? If there is, be encouraged. Jesus came so that you might be set free. There is nothing to fear that the Light cannot dispel.

I am not yet perfect in my vulnerability. I still have places to go and things to learn. Like the fact that being vulnerable can help create an environment where someone else will feel safe enough to trust me with their "stuff." I wonder if that's why James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to each other? It isn't just one person sitting there listening to a litany of another's wrongdoing. It's more of one person saying, "Hey, I am really struggling with this," and the other praying for them to be healed and set free.

How about you? Do you offer a safe environment where a brother or sister could come to confess a sin to you? How would you react? Do you have empathy and understanding? Are there certain sins that you know would shock or offend you, causing you to reject the one who is confessing? Are there sins you don't think are a big deal...that you might be tempted to excuse rather than encourage repentance or recommend that forgiveness be sought? Would you be tempted to tell others about what that person had done, or could you keep it in confidence? Would you be able to listen patiently, silently, and prayerfully through the confession to discern the specific thing that needs forgiveness and healing? If needed, ask God to help you grow in these areas.

Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of what is left unsaid sin poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and closed isolation of the heart. Sin must be brought into the light...Sin that has been spoken and confessed has lost all of its power.

~Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Life Together

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