

40 Days of Prayer

Leaders Guide

Session Three “The Power of Grace”

What Participants will need:

1. Handouts
2. Bible
3. Pens

BE SURE TO ALLOW 30 MINUTES FOR THE PRACTICE & PRAYER SECTIONS.

OPENING

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

BIBLE STUDY

Do not just read verbatim the answers written here. Give people the opportunity to think on their own and interact with the question and the issues it raises. Most questions are open-ended and there are many right answers. Ask the question and give people the opportunity to share what they think. Most times they'll get it right on their own and in the process they'll come up with many additional rich thoughts and ideas as well.

1. This is an open-ended question with no “right” answer. The purpose here is to allow people to gain background on Psalm 51 and to begin to think about the value and purpose of forgiveness.
2. I could go on and on with this point but to summarize, the goal is to be perfect exactly what God created us to be; transformed to be like Jesus; and filled with Christ. Key words here are transformed and filled. This is an inside job, something God does inside our lives. This is a transformation of our nature, character and attitudes which results in a change in our thoughts and actions. Only God can accomplish this.
3. God's forgiveness is absolutely necessary to accomplish this goal. Without forgiveness, we are stuck, we fall far short of the goal and we'll never measure up. Eventually we'll give up. God's forgiveness allows us to keep growing and moving towards the goal. When we fail, it's not the end. God's forgiveness allows us to get back up, refocus ourselves and keep growing. Now we are in a better position to answer the question of why God forgives David (and us). It is because God's goal is not our punishment and condemnation. God's forgives us to achieve the goal of our transformation to be everything He created us to be.
4. All of these verses guarantee God's forgiveness. There are many benefits of being confident in God's forgiveness. First, it is liberating. There are many people who are weighed down by guilt over things they have done. This guilt prevents them from

experiencing the joy of God's presence in their lives. When we can be confident of forgiveness we are liberated to enjoy God again wanting to have a stronger relationship with Him and knowing God wants the same. We are also liberated to serve God. Guilt often leaves us feeling like we are unworthy to be used by God for any kind of significant service. Being confident that we are forgiven liberates us from this false guilt. We are also motivated by the love and forgiveness we've experienced. In gratitude we *want* to serve and honor God.

5. Because the goal is our transformation into the likeness of Christ, and because it is something God accomplishes inside of us, confession plays a pivotal role. Confession is God's *gift* that allows us to realize God's forgiveness and remove the damage of our specific sins. When we confess, 1 John 1:9 tells us that God *cleanses* us from all unrighteousness. This is an awesome thing. Confession removes the sins that hinder God from transforming us. If we received a diagnosis of cancer, the first question on our minds is, "Can it be removed?" Sin is a cancer of the soul and confession removes it.
6. For this question, have the group read Psalm 51 then process what it teaches about confession. There are several sub-questions to help the processing.
 - David offers no excuses for his actions. His attitude towards what he has done is that it was absolutely wrong. He is completely broken about what he has done and horrified about what it has done to his relationship with God.
 - David's desire is to be forgiven, cleansed, restored, given a pure heart that will not sin against God. His language is very passionate.
 - David's statements reveal that he believes God to be a forgiving and loving God, a God he can come to and confess and ask for forgiveness. David shows that he believes God desires to have a relationship with us and he shows that his relationship with God is of utmost importance. Hence, he pleads to be forgiven and restored.
 - A summary could sound like: Confession is an attitude of brokenness about what we have done wrong. It is a recognition that we see that what we have done is wrong and inexcusable. It is a passionate expression of our desire to be forgiven cleansed and restored.
7. There are a number of hindrances to prayer. One is our own pride. We have a really hard time admitting that there is anything we need to confess. The problem usually is that we are measuring by the wrong standard. We look around us and see plenty of people who are far worse than we are and think, "I'm pretty good." We're looking the wrong direction. We need to measure ourselves by God's pure standard of perfection. Compared to that, we fall short. Another hindrance is that we view confession as a punishment. We're dragging ourselves through the mud. That's not very appealing or motivating. The reality is that confession is not God's punishment but God's gift. God gives it to us so that we can be cleansed and restored. Another problem is a misunderstanding of forgiveness. Some people take the attitude that because God died on the cross to forgive sins once and for all I can do whatever I want because I'm forgiven. This is a gross misunderstanding and abuse of God's loving forgiveness. While God has forgiven sin once and for all, we can either receive or reject God's gift. To receive God's gift we must recognize our sinfulness and that it separates us from God. Then we must confess our need for God and our faith that Jesus is God's Son who died on the cross and rose from the dead to forgive our sins and give us new life. Then we confess our sins so that God can remove them from our life and achieve His transformation. To confess but not repent is impossible. If we do not repent then what we are really saying is that I do not believe that what I am doing is really all that wrong. That's not authentic confession.

8. From this weekend's message: "Guilt depletes our energy, destroys our confidence, damages our relationships and keeps us stuck in the past."
David talks about the physical stress of covering up sin and living with guilt. Holding on to sin takes a heavy toll spiritually, emotionally, relationally and physically. Here is an excellent example of how our life cannot be broken up and compartmentalized. Spiritual issues affect emotions, relationships, and health and vice-versa.
9. Healthy guilt is the conviction of the Holy Spirit that what we are doing is wrong and needs to be stopped. David was convicted and felt the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba. Healthy guilt will lead us to confession and repentance and a restored relationship with God. Unhealthy guilt is when we continually beat ourselves up over wrongs done in the past. Rather than embracing the forgiveness of God available through confession we carry the load of shame. "I'm unworthy. I'm no good. I'm useless to God." This flies in the face of the truth the Bible proclaims that we are worth dying for (and God did die for us). We are created for good works which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." Read to the group the sidebar on page 51 of the devotional book called "Satan's One-Two Punch."
10. Repentance simply means to turn around and go the other direction. Confession without repentance is insincere confession. When we confess we are saying "I believe that what I am doing is wrong." If we truly believe something we are doing is wrong, we will seek to do everything we can to stop doing it. However, if are unwilling to repent we are saying something like, "I know other people say this is wrong, I know the Bible says this is wrong, I may even think in my mind that this is wrong and say so, but in my heart I do not believe it is wrong enough to stop."
11. Should confession be a daily habit? Do you sin every day?

PRACTICE

The "4 C's" can be helpful way to study and apply scripture. It is part of the suggested exercises in the daily devotional book. By using it in your small group you reinforce the habit and its value. The "4 C's" also serve as a very helpful guide for prayer, providing you with praise, confession and requests. If you are short on time, you can skip this part and go on to the prayer time.

PRAYER

To not leave time for prayer is to miss the point of the whole study!

It is appropriate after a study of confession to give people a chance to confess their sins.

1. Reassure people that this will be a time of prayer they will do silently.
2. Remind them that this is a GIFT from God, and opportunity to come clean and allow the Holy Spirit to continue to transform us to be like Jesus.
3. You may want to use this as an opportunity for people to commit their lives to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Explain that the Bible speaks very clearly that we all have sins that have broken our relationship with God and separated us from His presence and the life He has to offer. Further explain that rather than rejecting us, God continues to love us and desires to restore our relationship with Him. In order to restore our relationship, God became flesh as

Jesus Christ and was crucified on the cross to suffer the punishment for sin in our place. We now have forgiveness available to us because of Jesus' sacrifice. The question is not whether God rejects but will we reject Jesus? To receive forgiveness for sin and a restored relationship with God along with the new life that comes with it, we must put our faith in Jesus. This means we recognize our need for God and God's forgiveness. It means we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for our sins, that he rose from the dead and that we can receive forgiveness and new life through Jesus. Then, we commit all of our life for the rest of our life, to Jesus because we recognize that he is God and our Savior. Tell people that if they are at a place where they realize they need God's forgiveness and they are ready to receive it by committing their lives to Jesus. They can do so now by praying silently the prayer you pray out loud.

Pray something like: "Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I need your forgiveness. I believe that you are God, that you died to forgive my sins, that you rose again to offer me new life. I want that forgiveness and new life. I confess that I have done (state whatever specific sins come to your mind). Those things are wrong and I now choose to turn away from them and towards you. I commit all of my life for the rest of my life to you. I invite you to enter my life, take it over and transform it. Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for the new life I have just received. Thank you for your presence now in my life. I ask now that you will give me the strength to live for you and walk away from my sinful habits. Amen."

Let everyone know that if they prayed that prayer, they have just become a Christian. They are now forgiven and the life of God has just entered them and all of heaven is celebrating. Tell them to PLEASE let you know that they prayed that prayer so that you can celebrate with them as well and support them in prayer. (Then please let us know so we can do the same).

4. Next, simply review the steps of the exercise, clarify any questions people might have and allow them to go through the steps on their own. Tell them you'll gather them up in 10 minutes for a closing prayer.
5. When you gather everyone again, ask if anyone wants to share about how they sensed the presence and work of God as they practiced confession (not what they confessed unless they feel it's important to share that). If someone does share a sin they've confessed, remind everyone about the agreement to keep confidentiality and then be a physical representation of God's forgiveness. Close by thanking God for any experiences of release or healing and for His promise of forgiveness.



The 40 Days of Prayer Study is written by Phil Sommerville & Christie Syftestad and can be reproduced by small group leaders for use in their groups