

bread for the journey

Confession

Grace empowers us to make our confession. So ... what's the problem?

If confession is so good for the soul, why do people avoid it like the plague? Most of us are rather shy about telling the embarrassing truth about ourselves. We would rather take a pass on the opportunity to cleanse ourselves and free ourselves from dragging around the dirt and damage we have done to ourselves and others. Unless we are bragging about it or glorifying the past—which we have done on occasion to gain leverage among our peers—we isolate and go into hiding when it comes to admitting the exact nature of our wrongs. You understand my meaning here: telling folks you spilled more booze than they drank is not confession. It's one-upmanship. Imagine putting this on your resume: "I closed more bars and was kicked out of more clubs than you ever frequented in your young life." Our instincts tell us if a fellow recovering person is legit when talking about the past. We know because we recognize in ourselves the difference between truth-telling confession and drunkalogue. An honest confession is built upon the solid foundation of grace and gratitude.

The program of recovery and spiritual growth is simple. It is not rocket science. Simple, however, is not easy. Simple means non-complicated; it does not mean it is a slice of apple pie. Recovery is particularly excruciating and painful at the Step 4 and Step 5 hurdle. The foothills of recovery turn into a mountain climb at this point. The path is clear but not as well worn as you might think. If recovery is rare, it is most often due to the degree of difficulty it is for us to tell on ourselves. We readily slip on the

steep slope of "a complete and searching moral inventory." Admitting to God and self is one thing. Admitting to another human being is quite another. Some of us regard confession to another human being as an impossible hurdle. Without grace and gratitude as wind beneath our wings, confession is tough.

We are not stupid. We understand the reluctance hiding behind the lie and the cover up. We know what was going through Governor Rod Blagojevich's mind when he faced the media and said with unflinching eye, "There are no clouds hanging over me—the sun is shining on me." Lord knows, he would have much preferred to run off to a mountain retreat than to have climbed the mountain of confession. Either he lives in the land of denial or he lied about it. A fabrication seemed preferable to confession. The lie helps to keep an image intact. The lie empowers us to live another day. The lie almost convinces us it is the truth. We tell the lie because we don't trust that anyone forgives and forgets.

Forgiveness, we mistakenly think, is a myth. No one forgives. When the truth comes out and we stand naked before our judges, evaluators, assessors and life partners, we risk a loss of face, a loss of power, a loss of prestige and a loss of position. There is so much to lose by telling the truth. We would rather fabricate than abdicate. Confession is not an option for those who don't believe in forgiveness.

Who cannot understand that particular form of disbelief in the kindness and mercy of the human community? When people get caught up in a crime or sick behavior—whether the crime or sick behavior be embezzlement, phony credit, abuse, relapse or a hand in the cookie jar—our accusers and judges tend not to forgive and forget. When we are caught, we are not forgiven and

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what we did is not forgotten. We are cornered and forced to hand over the keys of freedom, leverage and power. Now, they have us where they want us: out on the street, on a lower level, out of their lives or, at least, in a place of subservience begging for mercy. Should I tell them that the drop will come back dirty or shall I continue the charade? Nine times out of 10 we continue the charade rather than risk suffering the consequences of being dragged into the open, charged and found guilty for engaging in sick or immoral behavior. We know the deal. If they think you are okay, you have won a hand and another day to play. If they know you are dirty, you have no ace to play. Game over.

So, we take our chances on living the lie and maintaining the deceit. It has served us well in the past. An addictive lifestyle has gotten us to the place where we are now. Aye, my friend—there’s the rub: an addictive lifestyle full of deceit and deception brings us to where we are today. We may win a hand or two by playing our cards close to the vest. But this is not poker. This is life. If we don’t tell the truth, make our confession and bring the “big uglies” out of the closet, it’s game over. So we take our chances: we continue the con or we go with the grace.

Hannah Arendt, a Jewish philosopher, has made a living reflecting upon and writing about the Holocaust. One of her abiding

principles of recovery from the tragic and devastating consequences of history’s monstrosity is forgiveness. “The only way to begin again is to forgive.” Most of us trust God to forgive. That is, after all, God’s business. God is in the business of grace— unconditional acceptance of broken human beings whom he has created. God forgives. Do people forgive? Not easily. It’s monumental when we forgive ourselves, but next to impossible for people to forgive and forget what we have done. So we stay in hiding rather than take our chances on the “next to impossible.”

AA and the spiritual principles of recovery offer no wiggle room here. If we want recovery and are willing to go to any length, we must take our chances on a reluctant-to-forgive-and-forget human community. In order to rejoin that human community, we must do what it takes to bring our integrity to the table. An honest confession to another human being is necessary. Those who do come clean, often report a never-had-it-before freedom in their spirit and confirmation of God’s grace. God grants us serenity when we “admit to God, self, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” This is how it works. 



The Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain

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is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Chaplain at Rosecrance. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with addictions. Together, and by God's grace, we will try to make a difference.

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