

# GOING DEEPER

Discipleship Resources for Community Church



Ezra 9

**Confession is God's gift to a renewed people  
to "keep going" with Him.**

Week 8  
Nov 11 - Nov 17  
2018



## MONDAY

Ezra is drawn into confession before the Lord as he sees the sin of the people in Ezra 9. This week we are responding to the work of confession in our ongoing renewed relationship with the Lord. One of the challenges of confession is that there are a lot of myths related to its practice. Potentially one of the most dangerous is the myth that we are *asking God if He will forgive us*. In light of the cross- God's grace is both sufficient and assured. As we turn to confession- there is no question of what God will do. The only question is what will we do? Or will our hearts actually be contrite?



How do you confess to God? Do you question if his grace is sufficient to cover all our mess? As the spirit guides you, consider writing your own prayer of confession this morning without a question of whether or not God may forgive you. Instead, consider how confession is actually acknowledging the ongoing role of the good news of the gospel into every corner of your life.



Confession in corporate worship is often followed by the assurance of pardon or the prayer of absolution. Even as your heart has perhaps been drawn into confession today (without even questioning God's ability and promise to forgive you)-- read this assurance of pardon.

*Our God fulfills His promises and is true to His word.  
We have confessed our sins.  
God has forgiven us,  
Because Christ died for us. Amen.*



## TUESDAY

*3 When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.*

*-Ezra 9:3-4*

It's important to acknowledge that confession is not always solitary, but communal. Just as Ezra confessed his people's sin to God in the context of community, we are called to do the same. Dietrich Bonhoeffer unpacks the importance of this practice in his book, *Life Together*:

"In confession there takes place a breakthrough to community. Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community.... Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of another Christian, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders, giving up all evil, giving the sinner's heart to God and finding the forgiveness of all one's sin in the community of Jesus Christ and other Christians. Sin that has been spoken and confessed has lost all of its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin.... We are talking exclusively about confession between two Christians. A confession of sin in the presence of all the members of the congregation is not required to restore one to community with the entire congregation. In the one other Christian to whom I confess my sins and by whom my sins are declared forgiven, I meet the whole congregation."

(Tuesday continued...)

(Tuesday continued...)



What is your natural response to the excerpt above? Are you gripped by fear of vulnerability, or feel expectant relief in unloading sin's weight? As you go about your day, dialogue with God and ask Him to give you strength and courage to reach out to someone you can trust.



Take some time to breath deeply with God, and prepare to reach out to someone you can trust to admit your shortcomings. It's okay to start small, test the water, and find that you can really trust this person to be truly honest with you. When you're ready, reach out to this person and delight in God's community of forgiveness.



## WEDNESDAY

*5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God 6 and prayed:*

*“I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.”*

*-Ezra 9:5-6*

On Sunday, we learned that confession is an ongoing part of a renewed relationship, but it's hard to do when our sin can feel so great. Think of Ezra when he said, “our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached the heavens.” What would it look like if we take some small steps towards confession by surrendering little moments to God? Oftentimes we are distanced from God in seemingly unimportant instances when we lose our focus on Him. We let our immediate selfish desire take over without pausing to reflect where God is in a particular instance.



In a quiet moment, prayerfully devote today to God. Throughout the day, try to pause in moments where you find yourself wanting to make a quick decision or response to another person. Surrender those moments to God, and seek His voice over the world's or your own. If we intentionally surrender to Him, then we're that much closer to a renewed relationship with God.



Were you able to give situations to God today? What situations were hard to surrender? Take a moment to write down any reflections on how the heart condition changed your day today.



## THURSDAY

*5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the Lord my God 6 and prayed:*

*“I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.”*

*-Ezra 9:5-6*

As Tim discussed on Sunday, confession keeps us from minimizing or maximizing sin. Ezra models for us a godly response to sin: he draws near to God through confession. Instead of brushing the transgressions of his people aside as insignificant, he boldly confessed their sin. Instead of wallowing in fear and shame, he humbly and vulnerably confessed their sin.



Consider your tendency to view and treat sin, and how it affects your relationship with God. Do you commonly shrug sin off, minimizing its potential foothold in your life? Or do you let the guilt and shame of sin overwhelm and distance you? Start your day with a written prayer to God about any such tendency, and admit to Him your insecurities about confession.



Look back on your written prayer from this morning. How did it feel to begin your day in a posture of confession? Consider how that posture may renew a dialogue between you and God.



## FRIDAY

In today's society, bearing the guilt of sin is usually very individual and private. If we don't like confessing to one another or we don't like confessing to God, how much less do we like confessing with one another to God? However, in Ezra's story, we learn that he is distraught that his people have sinned against their God despite the love and grace He has showed them time and again. Ezra is ashamed and feels the weight of their sin, and His response is to go into confession before the Lord.



Read over Ezra 9 once again. What do you notice about Ezra's response to his people's transgressions? Try to think of a time that you also have mourned your community's transgressions. Would you say that your faith, like Ezra's, is tied to your community's faith?



Before going to sleep tonight, consider what it may look like to practice confession in the context of a community of faith. Perhaps it begins by acknowledging to a friend an area of growth you both may have. Spend some time praying for your community's faith, confessing as you feel lead.



## SATURDAY

*“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

*-John 1:8-9*

The end of Ezra’s prayer, “*Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence*”, states the human condition in a nutshell and our need for a savior. But if we know Jesus, then we know the only One who **can** stand in God’s presence! As our perfect Savior, he stands in the Father’s presence on our behalf, so that we, through faith in Jesus, can also stand in God’s presence! How amazing is this forgiveness! How amazing is God’s grace!

This week, as we have learned about and practiced confession by owning up to the ways we have been unfaithful and hurtful to our Lord, have you experienced a heightened awareness of how amazing our salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection really is? Do you have a heightened sense of gratitude for God’s forgiveness?



If so, as a way of responding with gratitude for God’s forgiveness, ask God to help you to go through your day, with a desire and a decision to be forgiving of others as he has forgiven you. Expect to encounter a situation today in which you will have the opportunity to respond with a forgiving heart.



Recall the events and relationships of the day. How many times did you have an opportunity to forgive as God has forgiven you? Talk to God about what you are learning about confession and forgiveness. Rest in your bed with gratitude for God’s amazing forgiveness.