

Announcing God's Grace through Confession and Forgiveness



*When I urge you to go to Confession,
I am simply urging you to be a Christian.
(Luther's Large Catechism)*



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God's Grace in Confession and Forgiveness

Therefore confess your sins to each other (James 5:16).

Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:12).

When someone confesses his sins, whether against God or us or other people, we Christians have the privilege of announcing *God's grace* – the good news that for Christ's sake God forgives our sins.

We are accustomed to corporately confessing our sins during worship and hearing our pastor announce God's forgiveness to us. We also receive forgiveness through Holy Baptism and in the Lord's Supper.

As people living in His grace, we yearn to share God's love with those who need it most: "But while [the prodigal son] was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20).

However, we often fail to share God's good news when hearing someone's expression of repentance in private settings. Emotionally upset by the situation, we may be surprised by the confession. Sometimes we struggle with anger or bitterness when we or our loved ones have been deeply hurt. We simply aren't ready to forgive.

While Scripture does not require a specific form for confession and forgiveness, these short rites can guide us in honestly confessing sins without excuse to God and others, and assist us in faithfully announcing God's grace to repentant sinners. These forms provide simple ways to confess our sins to our pastor, fellow Christian, or family member and receive the good news of God's forgiveness.



The Confession

Confession of sin is a private matter, so it should be kept confidential by the person hearing the confession and announcing God's forgiveness. Christians are obligated to respect the confidential nature of a confession.

When confessing, you may prepare by meditating on the Ten Commandments and by praying Psalm 6, 7, 13, 15, 51, 121, or 130. If you are not burdened with particular sins, you should not trouble yourself or search for or invent other sins, thereby turning confession into a torture. Instead, you should mention one or two particular sins that trouble you and let that be enough.

- ◆ *When you are ready to confess, you begin:*

_____ (Name of person hearing your confession), please
hear my confession, and pronounce God's forgiveness in order to fulfill His will.

- ◆ *The person hearing the confession responds:*

Please continue.

I, a poor sinner, plead guilty before God of all sins.

In particular, I confess before you that I have lived as if God did not matter and as if I mattered most. I have not honored my Lord's name as I should; my worship and prayers have fallen short. I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt, and those whom I failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin.

- ◆ *If particular sins trouble you, you may confess specific sins by saying:*

What troubles me specifically is that . . .

- ◆ *If you have sinned against the person hearing your confession, you may also say:*

I have not only sinned against God, but I have also sinned against you and seek your personal forgiveness.

- ◆ *Then conclude by saying:*

I am sorry for all of this and ask for grace. I want to do better.

God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith.

Amen.

Pastor Announcing Forgiveness

(Individual Confession and Absolution)

- ◆ *Upon hearing a person's confession, the pastor announces God's grace:*

Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Yes, Pastor.

Let it be done for you as you believe. In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins: In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

- ◆ *If the person confessing has also asked for personal forgiveness from the pastor, these words should also be spoken:*

As God through Christ has forgiven both you and me, I also forgive you your sins against me.

Amen.

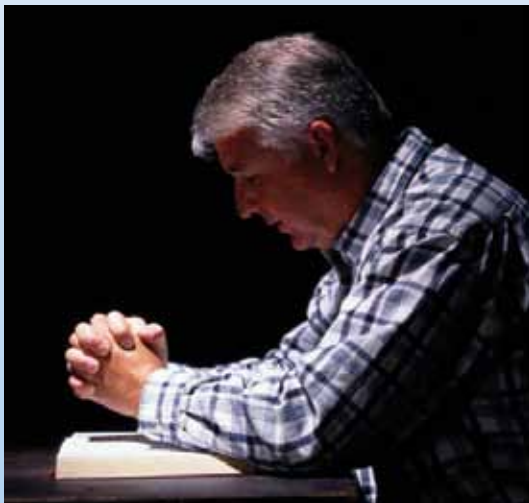
- ◆ *The pastor may know additional Scripture passages with which to comfort and strengthen the faith of those who have great burdens of conscience or are sorrowful and distressed. He may include some of the passages listed under "God's Word Announcing Forgiveness."*
- ◆ *Then the pastor concludes:*

You may go in peace.

Amen.

- ◆ *Pastor and the person confessing may say a prayer of thanksgiving. Psalms 30, 31, 32, 34, 103, and 118 are also appropriate.*

“Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing, that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven” (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, St Louis: CPH, 1986, p. 24).



Fellow Christian Announcing Forgiveness

(also for use within the family)

- ◆ *Upon hearing a person's confession, a fellow Christian or a family member announces God's grace:*

Do you believe that God's promises of forgiveness given in Holy Scripture are written for all God's children, including you?

I do.

Then listen to God's Word and let it be done for you as you believe.

In 1 John 1:9 God promises: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

In Jeremiah 31:34 the Lord declares: "I will forgive your wickedness and will remember your sins no more."

In 1 Peter 2:24, God assures us: "[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Therefore, _____ (name), believe this Good News: For Jesus' sake, God forgives you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

- ◆ *If the person confessing has also asked for forgiveness from the one hearing the confession, these words should also be spoken:*

As God through Christ has forgiven both you and me, I also forgive you your sins against me.

Amen.



May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

A prayer of thanksgiving may follow. Psalms 30, 31, 32, 34, 103, and 118 are also appropriate. The one hearing confession may know additional Scripture passages with which to comfort and strengthen the faith of those who have great burdens of conscience or are sorrowful and distressed. He may include some of the passages listed under "God's Word Announcing Forgiveness."

God's Word Announcing Forgiveness

Upon hearing a brother's or sister's confession and announcing God's forgiveness, you may comfort him or her with the assurance of God's love by reading Bible passages that proclaim God's grace. You may personalize the promise by inserting in the verse the person's name and personal pronouns as noted in the brackets below.

Blessed is [Name,] whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is [Name,] whose sin the Lord does not count against him [her] and in whose spirit is no deceit (Psalm 32:1-2).

"[Name,] I will forgive [your] their wickedness and will remember [your] their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34b).

[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, [Name,] since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (Romans 4:25-5:2).

[Name,] God made him who had no sin to be sin for [you] us, so that in him [you] we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now [Name,] he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel (Colossians 1:21-23).

[Name,] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds [Name,] you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

[Name,] the Lord has taken away your sin (2 Samuel 12:13b).

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