

**Confession that Heals: More than *“I’m Sorry!”***

Confessions are usually healing for both the offended and the offender. Most of the time, confessions are heartfelt expressions of the repentance that God has granted. A healing confession is redemptive in that it has the power to “buy back” a lost or broken relationship.

But… sometimes something is missing. Every now and then, a confession seems less than ***heart-felt***. The offender knows he did wrong, but the acknowledgement of wrongdoing falls short.

**Healing Confessions**

A confession is not the same as an apology.

An apology is an expression of sorrow. It is the, “I’m sorry for what I did, and I’m sorry I hurt you” acknowledge-ment that is a necessary ingredient of confession. Without the apology piece, a confession lacks “heart.” Yet, by itself, apologies often cause greater damage to relationships. How is that possible?

***Apologies say so little*.**

When too little is said by the offender, too much is left to be inferred by the offended. Confessions include apologies, but say so much more than apologies. When the *“I’m sorry!”* is offered, many questions come to mind as the injured party contextualizes the apology. “Is he only sorry because he got caught?” “Are they sorry that they are facing consequences?” “Is she expecting me to let her off the hook?” “Do they really know what they did that hurt me?” “How will I ever trust again?” “What will he do differently to avoid repeating this behavior?” “Does she want me to excuse her or forgive her?”

***Apologies are important and necessary, but are not meant to stand alone.***

When we truly repent of the things we did that we should not have done, or the things we should have done that we did not do, we are able to express our repentance by confessing our D-E-E-D-S. The components of a full and complete confession include:

* ***D: Describe*** specifically your actions and their impact without excusing yourself.
* ***E: Express*** sorrow for your actions as well as a willingness to do whatever you can to help make things right.
* ***E: Encourage*** the offended party to share more deeply or ask for anything they need to be restored.
* ***D: Define*** change by describing what you should have done differently if you could do it over again and what you intend to do differently in the future.
* ***S: Seek*** forgiveness by asking for it.

Each of the ingredients of a healing confession has power—and so much more when they occur together.

Why are so many of our confessions not helpful?

**Mis-belief**

A misbelief is a wrong or false belief. One of the most common false beliefs that contribute to weak confessions involves the valuing of intentions over impact: *“Since I did not intend to hurt you, I am not responsible.”*

The offender who focuses on his own good intentions fails to recognize the extent of human fallen-ness. Sinfulness is a category of fallenness, but human fallenness is far broader than sin alone. It is from our fallenness that we fail to

remember our spouse’s birthday, fail to pay attention to the car in front of us, and fail to follow through on the promise we intended to keep. Many relationships have died on the altar of good intentions.

The offender who points to a lack of sinful intent fails to understand that human beings are responsible even for a failure to do good. *“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them”* ([Jas. 4:17](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/James.%204.17" \t "_blank)). Full and heart-felt confessions for unintended injury go a long way in healing damaged or broken relationships.

**Dis-belief**

Disbelief is evident when we are unable or unwilling to accept that something is true or real: *“You are making a mountain out of a mole hill.”*

Despite the tears and the words of pain, the offender dismisses and disregards the injury experienced by the other person. They are hardened to pleas to be heard and understood. An unwillingness to accept the reality of how our words and actions impact others is rooted in a refusal to *“love your neighbor as yourself”* ([Matthew 22:39](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2022.39" \t "_blank)).

Confessions by offenders who believe their own version of reality tend to lack sincerity and come across as a veiled request for the hurt person to “just get over it.”

**Un-belief**

Unbelief is an absence of faith. A weak confession is often rooted in a lack of gratitude for the redeeming message of the gospel: *“You hurt me more than I hurt you.”*

Many offenders have been hurt in the past by the person they have now injured. When the “offense measuring stick” is applied to the list of growing offenses on both sides, and the current offender determines that they have been injured more than they have caused injury, an unforgiving spirit draws the sinner away from the truth of the gospel.

Anyone who has put their faith in the saving work of Christ has been forgiven for all their sins—past, present, and future. As recipients of God’s grace, believers do not get what they deserve, they instead get what they can never deserve—a reserved seat at the banquet feast. Believers who fail to deeply believe the gospel offer flippant confessions.

**Grieving and Lamenting**

When it comes to conflict, sometimes the misbelieving, disbelieving, and unbelieving offender has failed to grieve and lament the realities surrounding the conflict and the damaged relationship. God has provided these two often overlooked ways to revitalize lifeless confessions, to heal hardened hearts, and to make reconciliation a reality.

***Grieving expresses loss and pain.***

Grieving is meant to be done in the presence of loving people willing to *“mourn with those who mourn”* ([Romans 12:15](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom%2012.15" \t "_blank)). Perhaps the reason that the Apostle Paul places the instruction to *“live in harmony with one another”* ([Romans 12:16](http://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom%2012.16" \t "_blank)) immediately after the admonition to *“mourn with those who mourn”* is because relational harmony is often born out of effective grieving. Too often, however, grief remains unexpressed and shows up as anger and hardness of heart.

***Lamenting is putting words to loss and pain in a conversation with God.***

The lament is an expression of grief to God for the realities experienced in this lifetime. Few realities are more grievous than relational conflict. Yet, even the darkest lament is an expression of faith when made to the God who *can* even when he *refuses*.

Heart-felt confessions flow from hearts that grieve and lament the loss and pain of living as fallen sinners in a broken world. Grieving and lamenting set the heart free to believe more deeply and trust more fully the God who calls us to sorrow for sin while at the same time rejoicing in our freedom from it.

**Join the Conversation**

How fully do you confess your D-E-E-D-S?

What are the reasons your confessions lack redemptive power?

Do you regularly grieve and lament the relational losses in your life?

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