

# Get In The Game

## Drills For Disciples: Part 4

### Confession

Written By

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Show me a great, successful baseball team, and I'll show you one committed to performing and perfecting various drills designed to hone and sharpen their abilities. I know the truth of this premise because I've played for coaches who understood its importance. Whether we played pepper to get geared up for a game, or two players tried to catch each other while running bases, our coaches used drills to build team unity and cohesion and to maximize and mature our various skills.

Another drill I'll never forget involved lining the team up on our uneven, rock clod, hard as cement, semi-grassy practice outfield. The team trainer stood next to the coach with a bunch of balls, while the coach held a bat. At his command, one player stood apart from the others. The goal? Stop the ball he hit at you by whatever means possible. Believe me, I've seen guys throw their bodies at the ball to knock it down when they couldn't get their gloves on it. Why were they so intense? The answer is simple: We couldn't go into the locker room until all eighteen of us stopped that ball.

After watching unbelievable catches from seventeen guys, invariably the eighteenth man's ball would take a weird, deflecting bounce off an uneven part of the field, causing it to shoot past him. At that point, we'd start all over again. During one practice, when one player in particular kept missing the balls, the team collectively dog piled on him and then got back into

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line. That team-building moment is burned in my former athletic brain. Sure, that was a crazy drill, but it proved quite effective in making us aggressive, fearless players when it came to attacking the ball during a competitive game.

Spiritually, we, too, as players on the Lord's team, must give ourselves to definite, demanding drills in order to mature as His players. And we are called to mature by God:

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God ... (Hebrews 6).*

Mastering the drills called *Silence and Solitude* and *Bible Study Methods* help us along this worthy path; however, they are not the be all, end all of drills. A third drill should never be overlooked as you seek to get in optimal spiritual shape. It's called *Daily Confession* and it's an important one you need to develop as you walk with Christ.

## Develop The Drill Of Daily Confession

What is confession? It is coming clean of sin before the eyes of God. It is being truthful with yourself regarding how you've strayed from God's dictates and teachings. It is seeking a divine cleansing of the soul which becomes soiled and stained by daily sin. But this is to get ahead of ourselves. To appreciate the true, intrinsic value of this drill, we must break it down into its five biblical and theological components.

### The Foundation Of Confession

First, we must understand how confession is both positional and practical.

Positionally, we are born sinners under the wrath of God and incapable of saving ourselves. Paul substantiates this sad spiritual reality better than any biblical writer in Romans chapter 5:

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—<sup>13</sup> for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come (Romans 5).*

Spiritual and physical death reign all because of the willful sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). For those who say this isn't fair, that they didn't have a chance, or that they wouldn't have given into the temptation of the Devil to flagrantly disobey God, all you have to do is consider what happens when one player on a baseball team commits an error: The entire team is held guilty, yes, when a pitcher balks as he attempts pick off a runner, say at first base,

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the team is collectively guilty.<sup>1</sup> Makes you want to ask yourself, “Am I guilty of being a sinner before God?”

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is this: He, and He alone, paid the price for our sinful status, thereby giving us the possibility of replacing our unrighteous, unholy position with His righteousness and holiness. Again, we appeal to Paul for cognitive illumination:

*<sup>17</sup> For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men (Romans 5).*

Sinners are declared saints in God’s courtroom when to believe in the saving work of Jesus, the Messiah. In Romans 10, Paul introduces us to this wonderful reality and offer:

*<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved ... (Romans 10).*

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<sup>1</sup> “Balk,” Wikipedia, accessed October 1, 2015, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balk>. Balk actions: A pitcher is restricted to a certain set of motions and one of two basic pitching positions before and during a pitch; if these regulations are violated with one or more runners on base, an umpire may call a balk. With a runner on base and the pitcher on or astride (with one leg on each side of) the rubber, under Official Baseball Rules, it is a balk<sup>[2]</sup> when the pitcher:

- switches his pitching position from the windup to the set (or vice versa) without properly disengaging the rubber;
- while on the rubber, makes a motion associated with his pitch and does not complete the delivery;
- when pitching from the set position, fails to make a complete stop with his hands together before beginning to pitch;
- throws from the mound to a base without stepping toward (gaining distance in the direction of) that base;
- throws or feints a throw from the rubber to an unoccupied base, unless a play is imminent;
- steps or feints from the rubber to first or third base without completing the throw;
- delivers a quick return, a pitch thrown right after receiving the ball back, with intent to catch the batter off-guard;
- drops the ball while on the rubber, even if by accident, if the ball does not subsequently cross a foul line;
- while intentionally walking a batter, releases a pitch while the catcher is out of his box with one or both feet
- unnecessarily delays the game
- pitches while facing away from the batter;
- after bringing his hands together on the rubber, separates them except in making a pitch or a throw;
- stands on or astride the rubber without the ball, or mimics a pitch without the ball; or
- attempts to throw to a fielder in a spot not directly at a base
- delivers a pitch during a squeeze play or a steal of home, if the catcher or some other player steps on or in front of home base without possession of the ball, or touches the batter or his bat. The ball is dead, the batter is awarded first base, the pitcher is charged with a balk, and the run scores. (rule 7.07)

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The moment you make this faith statement, you move from spiritual death to spiritual life, from a state of unholiness to one of positional holiness derived from the Lord Himself. Once more we look to Paul's teaching to validate the exciting reality provided by the Lord's work on Calvary:

*<sup>30</sup> But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption ... (1 Corinthians 1).*

Confessional faith places you in the sphere of Christ (to pick up the grammatical import of the preposition, "in"). His holiness, therefore, becomes your new position before the Holy Trinity. Before we move forward, I am compelled to stop and ask, "What is keeping you from coming to Christ in believing faith so that He gives you a holy positional standing you can never acquire on your own efforts?"

Once you are saved, your holy position before God never changes. Once more, Paul says this much in his letter to the church he founded in Corinth:

*<sup>21</sup> He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5).*

The inspired writer makes the same assertion in his letter to the Philippians:

*<sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith ... (Philippians 3).*

Your position never changes, but your daily performance certainly does as you (hopefully) wage a spiritual war against the godless world, the unholy desires of the flesh, and the exploits of the Devil (1 John 2:16; Galatians 5:19; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11). Paul addresses this daily struggle in Galatians so well:

*<sup>16</sup> I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law (Galatians 5).*

The struggle is a reality, but now, as a member of God's family, you have the option to submit to the Spirit's leadership and live differently. Yes, you are positionally holy; however, until you see Christ, these three forces just mentioned will persistently oppose you. Your God-given

responsibility, therefore, is to use the drills, like Spirit dependence and filling (Ephesians 5:18), at your disposal to move you away from sin toward holiness.

Confession is one of those key drills which moves you along the path of maturity in Christ. It is part of the sanctification process, which ebbs and flows each and every day as you encounter the world, the flesh, and the Devil. It is what you do, as we shall see later, to make sure your spiritual life is practically clean before your holy Lord. Daily confession is what secures forgiveness from your Lord when you sin, and it is the process which, by definition, serves to transform you into His likeness. Listen, again, to Paul:

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7).*

How do you cleanse yourself, your spiritual man when you are defiled by sin? How do you perfect holiness in your life? It comes by means of humble, honest confession. Such is the amazing foundation of our faith provided by Jesus. It gives us a new standing through confession, and it calls us to match our position with our performance through continual confession. All of this leads me to ask another pertinent question, “Are you moving on toward maturity by means of confession? How much time do you spend in a given day in confession before God?”

In order to create and nurture a spirit of confession, we must briefly consider a second relevant truth. I call it ...

## The Facets Of Confession

Biblical confession is twofold: public and private.

James, our Lord’s brother, teaches us about public confession:

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful (James 5).*

Contextually, James just addressed how these saints sinned by playing favorites (2:1), verbally accosting each other (3:9), fighting among themselves (4:1), slandering each other (4:11), and unjustly and unmercifully judging each other (4:12). With this verse, he teaches them the high value of public confession for heading toward spiritual health. Obviously, many broken, tattered relationships needed healing, and honest confession coupled with prayer was the prescription for securing this coveted spiritual healing and health. Really, it is difficult to fight with another saint, to treat them unjustly when you ... along with them ... live confessionally. Did you get that? Perhaps you need to read it one more time. Public confession clears the air. Public confession destroys confusion and chaos. Public confession builds body life instead of destroying it. Public confession creates authenticity and accountability, the two things which lead to spiritual maturation and bodily unity.

Right now, I’m sure, some of you are thinking, “I know someone I need to go to and seek their forgiveness for something I’ve said or done ... or failed to do. Yeah, I’ve exacerbated a situation because I’ve not confessed my part in making things head south.” If God is speaking to you, then don’t hesitate to step up and out today.

Confession isn’t just supposed to be a public drill among maturing believers, it is a private matter as well. In fact, I’d dare say that if you have a private confessional life, then

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evidencing a public one will be a natural occurrence. Numerous Scriptures give us ample insight into this all-important drill. I'll present them and then make some appropriate comments:

<sup>10</sup> Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly" (2 Samuel 24).

<sup>11</sup> You, O LORD, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me. <sup>12</sup> For evils beyond number have surrounded me; My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; They are more numerous than the hairs of my head, And my heart has failed me (Psalm 40).

<sup>4</sup> Around me gathered all who were in dread of the sentence of the God of Israel on this apostasy of the exiles, while I remained motionless until the evening sacrifice. <sup>5</sup> Then, at the time of the evening sacrifice, I rose in my wretchedness, and with cloak and mantle torn I fell on my knees, stretching out my hands to the LORD, my God. <sup>6</sup> I said: "My God, I am too ashamed and confounded to raise my face to you, O my God, for our wicked deeds are heaped up above our heads and our guilt reaches up to heaven. <sup>7</sup> From the time of our fathers even to this day great has been our guilt, and for our wicked deeds we have been delivered over, we and our kings and our priests, to the will of the kings of foreign lands, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to disgrace, as is the case today (Ezra 9).

Private confession begins first with an awareness, a sensitivity to sin committed. We're still talking about and seeking to emulate spiritual men like David and Ezra because they doggedly lived out this eternal truth. They weren't locked onto the sins of others first, which speaks of pride, but were deeply concerned about their sin, first and foremost. Identifying sin in their own lives logically led to a sorrow for sin or sins committed, followed by a private, sometimes tearful and sober time in private at the feet of God, the One who is ready and willing to forgive all sinners (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 99:8; Colossians 2:13).



Take stock of your life right now as a saint. Be honest. Ask yourself, "How often do I confess my sin before the Lord? Daily, weekly, monthly, annually ... never?" Here's a follow-up question: "Am I really sensitive to my sin, or does the sin of others get to me?" If so, then perhaps a new prayer is in order, "Lord, forgive me of not listening to your Spirit when He convicts me of my sin. Give me the boldness of Job who prayed with confidence:

<sup>23</sup> What are my faults and my sins? My misdeeds and my sins make known to me! (Job 13).

If you don't believe in the power of prayer, then just pray this one short sentence and watch God answer forthrightly. And, if you haven't been praying confessionally in private, I'm sure your uniform has been soiled for quite some time. May these words from the Scriptures move you toward public and private question which can, and will, give you a clean uniform for a change.

All this uncomfortable talk about confession leads to a third practical facet of our drill. I've labeled it ...

## The Fears Of Confession

We need to talk about these because this is where we get tripped up. Yes, we know we should be confessional; however, we quickly freeze up at the thought of engaging in the divine drill because of numerous fear factors. Let's list some of them:

- We're fearful of what others might think of us if we come clean.
- We're fearful of what others might say about us to other people.
- We're fearful of not looking like our lives are in control.
- We're fearful of being embarrassed.
- We're fearful of feeling freakish because no one else has sinned like we have.
- We're fearful a confidence might be broken which will do untold damage to us or others.
- We're fearful of being seen as a victimizer and not a victim.
- We're fearful that God won't forgive us for what we've done.
- We're fearful ... well, you fill in the proverbial blank.

In a word, these are nothing more than (lame) excuses for not doing what we know we should do as saints desirous of growing up in our relationship with Jesus. Henry Ward Beecher puts this all in perspective with these wise, penetrating words, "The real man is one who always finds excuses for others, but never excuses himself."<sup>2</sup> Are you a real, spiritual man? Perhaps it is time to become one by putting fear aside and leading the confessional life which leads to true spiritual maturity.

A fourth, and final, thought about this pivotal drill for disciples is this:

## The Facts Of Confession

Should you decide to move from covering your sin to confessing your sin, here are some of the wonderful, life-changing benefits the Scriptures say will come your way:

- *Relationships will be restored.* When David desired to come clean from his adulterous sin with Bathsheba, we see his honesty before God, followed by a spiritual cleaning of his soul ... a cleansing which naturally led to a restoration of his walk with God.

<sup>2</sup> *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.* <sup>3</sup> *For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.* <sup>4</sup> *Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.* <sup>5</sup> *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.* <sup>6</sup> *Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make*

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<sup>2</sup> "Excuses Quotes," Brainy Quotes, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/excuses.html>.

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*me know wisdom.* <sup>7</sup> Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (Psalm 51).

Such is the outcome of true confession. It restores your relationship with God. It also restores relationships with others. Got anyone you need to get right with by means of your confession for wrongs committed. Go to them and God will not only forgive you, your actions will breathe life into the relationship as nothing else can.

- *Cleansing will be realized.* John's promise in First John, chapter 1 certainly can't be overlooked ... ever.

<sup>8</sup> If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us (1 John 1).

Note well. Confession is highly conditional. God knows it will not be automatic in all of our lives all of the time because we struggle with the flesh. However, when the Spirit convicts you to move toward articulating your confession to God, He is ... and always will be ... faithful to forgive and cleanse you from your sin, be what it may. These twin reactions of God are just who He is (Deuteronomy 7:9; 32:4 Psalm 145:13; Isaiah 49:7). He'll never look at your contrition and contrition and say, "Well, I don't think I can, or ever will, forgive you for what you did in that situation." No. He stands ready to forgive and cleanse, but you must first come to Him in humble, honest confession. When you do this you'll find cleansing at the deepest level of your soul, as David suggests:

<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah. (Psalm 32).

What sin or sins do you need to come clean from right now? What sin or sins are plaguing your conscience? A deviant habit? A forbidden relationship? A penchant for cheating to get by? A web site you should never surf? A person you should never text with? A business deal which you purposefully lied to a potential client about? A child you've provoked by means of your legalistic rules? Regardless of what it is know this: Jesus has His arms outstretched to you right now.

- *Pumps will be primed.* What do I mean? I mean that when you courageously step out with confessional living, others will follow suit, resulting in unity, peace, and spiritual growth on an even larger scale than you anticipated. An event from the life of Ezra sheds much needed light on this truth:



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While Ezra prayed and acknowledged their guilt, weeping and prostrate before the house of God, a very large assembly of Israelites gathered about him, men, women, and children; and the people wept profusely. <sup>2</sup> Then Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, made this appeal to Ezra: "We have indeed betrayed our God by taking as wives foreign women of the peoples of the land. Yet even now there remains a hope for Israel. <sup>3</sup> Let us therefore enter into a covenant before our God to dismiss all our foreign wives and the children born of them, in keeping with what you, my lord, advise, and those who fear the commandments of our God. Let the law be observed! <sup>4</sup> Rise, then, for this is your duty! We will stand by you, so have courage and take action!" (Ezra 10).

I don't know what complex, thorny, sad situation you are involved in right now, I don't know what you've done, I don't know how you have sinned, and I don't know how your sin has negatively impacted people in your life; however, what I do know is this: The moment you get



right with God and with others, is the moment the floodgates of confession and forgiveness can be opened in formerly tattered relationships, resulting in mutual confession and a renewed comradery for Christ and His cause.

Confession. It is some kind of drill, isn't it? Believe me, there is not a more important drill than this for heading toward being a better player on the Lord's winning team. Embrace it on a daily basis and watch it change you and your world.

### Additional Story To Consider For Small Groups:

One night before Christmas, Clay and Velma Lykins of Jefferson County, Kentucky, stepped onto their porch to turn off the Christmas lights and saw a large object wrapped in plastic, sitting at the end of their driveway. Under the plastic was the wicker chair that had been stolen from their front porch 18 years earlier, along with a note:

To whom it may concern: Approximately 13 to 17 years ago my husband stole this wicker rocking chair from the porch of this house. I am ashamed of his behavior and am returning this stolen item. I have since been divorced from my husband and have since been "born again." My life has completely changed and I want to undo any wrongdoing to the best of my ability. I know this chair is not in the same condition as when it was stolen and I apologize. I now live in another state, Tennessee, and am rarely in this vicinity. I realize the cowardly fashion in which I am returning this, but the reason is obvious. I will not bother you again. Please forgive us. Sincerely.

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The rocker was placed in the bedroom along with the letter where it became a treasured keepsake.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Byron Crawford, "Returned With Regrets: Long-Delayed Reparations are Mysterious, But Treasured," *Kentucky Living* (February 2014).