



GOAL

Youth explore the confession of the prodigal son in Luke 15 and discuss the role of confessing and ways to confess.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- G** Game
- M** Music
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, bless the youth who trust in me; guide my words so that your will is known to them. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Confession is the practice of recognizing before God, ourselves, and others how we have fallen short of God's hopes and expectations. It is about being honest and acknowledging where we have messed up, broken relationship with God and others, and engaged in sin.

Confession is an individual and personal practice as we reflect on our behavior. It is also a communal practice. In worship, we often name and acknowledge the ways in which we have collectively participated in unjust systems. Confessing involves recognizing not only what we have done wrong but also how our actions—and inactions—have impacted our relationships and inflicted pain and suffering on others.

THE BIBLE STORY

In the story of the lost son, the younger son asks for his inheritance from his father, leaves his family obligations, wastes the money, and ends up destitute. He rehearses a confession to his father, hoping to at least work for him as a servant. The father sees him returning, races to him, and welcomes him back with full family status. The son's confession is important for him to say, but the father (who, of course, represents God) is more interested in restoring the boy to life than punishing him.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

While there are many themes in addition to the lost son's confession, such as the older brother's resentment, the overwhelming grace of God exemplified in the story is a reminder that God's promise of forgiveness frees us to confess anything. Many youth feel burdened by guilt for strong new emotions and desires they are learning to handle. It is just as important to stress the never-failing grace and forgiveness of God as it is to confess our sins.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Post the four sheets of newsprint from session 1 (the three that list sins, the *Confess* sequence, and God's desires; and the one with Psalm 51).

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Review the Infographic" (p. 15): Use the *Confess* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).
- "Review Worship Bulletins" (p. 15): Obtain worship bulletins that include prayers of confession and assurance of pardon.

GETTING STARTED

- Paper
- Colored pens
- Prepared newsprint sheets from session 1

EXAMPLES OF CONFESSIONS



Welcome youth as they arrive. Give them a piece of paper and invite them to use the colored pens to either write about or draw a time when they admitted to doing something wrong and how they felt when they confessed. Also invite them to write on the posted newsprint anything they thought of since the last session related to sins and what God desires.



If you sense a strong negative vibe from some in the group due to thinking of confession as some authoritarian judgment they don't need, invite reactions before going on. Ask how people feel about this subject of *confess*. How has it been misused by the church? Affirm their feelings and confirm that some church leaders have interpreted *sin* and *confess* in harmful ways. Point back to the newsprint and reaffirm that *confess* is meant to be a step to move us from what's wrong in the world to repairing and creating a world of justice and love.

After youth have arrived, gather and invite volunteers to show what they wrote or drew and briefly explain what they felt when they confessed. Tell the youth that today's topic is *confess*. Invite them to create a definition for *confess* and post it on the middle newsprint sheet under "Confess."

Pray this prayer or one of your choosing. Tell the youth that this is a common prayer of confession used in worship:

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer,
we confess that we have tried to hide from you,
for we have done wrong.
We have lived for ourselves,
and apart from you.
We have turned from our neighbors,
and refused to bear the burdens of others.
We have ignored the pain of the world,
and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.

In your great mercy forgive our sins
and free us from selfishness,
that we may choose your will
and obey your commandments;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.¹

Invite participants to add to the newsprint anything from the prayer that is not already listed. Example for the list of sins: living for ourselves; turning from neighbors; refusing to bear the burdens of others; ignoring the pain of the world; passing by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.

1. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 58.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

REVIEW THE INFOGRAPHIC

Gather around the *Confess* infographic poster and discuss some of the types of sins and confessions listed. Invite youth to explain where the theme for today, *confess*, relates to the entire process of confess. Why is it important?

C

- Confess infographic poster

THE BEST APOLOGY YOU'VE EVER HEARD

Form pairs or groups of three people. Tell the youth to tell about a sincere apology they have said or received or seen. After all have told something, have the group prepare to tell the larger group what they believe are the core elements of a good, sincere apology or confession.

Gather as a large group and invite each small group to tell what they think are the core elements of a good apology or confession. Hopefully, they will include things like admission of guilt or wrongdoing, sincerity, respect of the other person, and not blaming the other person receiving the apology.

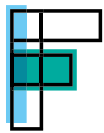
C

REVIEW WORSHIP BULLETINS

Work alone or form pairs. Distribute worship bulletins and invite participants to read them, circling any part of the worship that includes the theme of confession. There may be a prayer of confession, but sometimes songs or hymns and other parts of worship contain elements of confession. Have the youth underline or write words and phrases that express regret for sins committed. Also have them circle the pronouns used; *we* shows the corporate nature of confession in worship. Gather as a group and discuss. Point out that each prayer of confession is paired with an assurance of pardon, a reminder of God's grace.

AT C QC

- Pens
 Worship bulletins that include prayers of confession



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

RETELL THE STORY OF THE LOST SON

Form three groups and make sure each group has at least one Bible or a digital Bible. Have a volunteer prepare to read Luke 15:11–32 aloud to the group. Tell the group to listen carefully to the apology the young man prepares to tell his father. Have the youth read the story.

D

- Bibles

Assign one of the characters in the story—father, lost son, older son—to each group. Tell them to reread the story from the point of view of their character and think about how they feel about the lost son and his confession. What is their reaction?

Return as a large group and allow each group to report. Ask what role the confession plays in the story of the lost son returning home. Make sure to point out, if it has not been pointed out already, that the father welcomed his son home fully and without punishment.

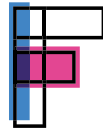
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- Internet-enabled device
 - Bibles

WATCH THE STORY OF THE LOST SON



Show the animated video of the Lost Son (bit.ly/FMLostSon, 4:57). Help youth find the story of the lost son in Luke 15:11–32 in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read the story and discuss these questions:

- ➔ The boy confessed to his father but didn't say what he did. What did he do wrong?
- ➔ Do you think his older brother forgave him?
- ➔ What does it mean that the father welcomed him back without punishing him?



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

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- Pens
 - Copies of Resource Page 1

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION



Distribute pens and copies of Resource Page 1 and explain that it contains prayers of confession used in worship. Invite the youth to a time of quiet and have them read the prayers, circling any phrases they like and choosing one prayer they like the most. Consider playing soft music if you have that option.

Gather as a large group and share responses.

-
- Internet-enabled device

LEARN ABOUT LUTHER'S 95 THESES



Explain to the group that Christians have often pointed out sins of other Christians when they need to. The Protestant Reformation included many Christian leaders, like Martin Luther, who publicly confessed the sin of the official church and called it to change.

Watch the YouTube video “History 101: The Protestant Reformation | National Geographic” (bit.ly/FMLuther95, 4:27), and discuss these questions:

- ➔ What were the sins of the official church that Luther and others called out?
- ➔ How did the church react?
- ➔ What are sins of churches today that may need to be confessed?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

-
- Internet-enabled device
 - Marker

CONFESS PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE CHANGE



This activity makes a good connection between the first session (see sin) and the need to confess. If you use this activity, it might be useful to review it in the next two sessions as well. Show Greta Thunberg's speech to world leaders at the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit (bit.ly/FMGretaThunberg, 5:19). Point out that Greta sees sin and has named the sin that needs to be confessed.

Work together to name what needs to be confessed based on Greta Thunberg's speech and what youth identify. Add these to the newsprint list of sins from the first session.

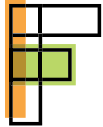
WRITE OR DRAW A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

A AT C QC

- Paper
- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Colored pens

Offer the youth the opportunity to write or draw a prayer of confession in their own words. Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 for inspiration. Depending on your group, choose one of these options to work:

- Form two groups. One group can write a prayer of confession that is primarily centered on personal sins. The second group can focus on social sins.
- Work alone. Provide time for youth to look at the newsprint and resource page and write a prayer of confession.
- Draw a confession and then tell what it represents.



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING

Allow a few minutes to debrief what was discussed today. It may help to tell youth that, while we are looking at four aspects of confess, they do not always fall neatly in order. We offer confession sometimes even when we don't see our sins.

Encourage participants to think of one thing, one sin they have committed or participated in, and commit to confessing it in the coming week. Perhaps that means talking with someone and confessing to them.

Close by reading a prayer of confession written by youth in the session, reading Psalm 51:1–4 in unison, or reading Psalm 51:10–12 from the posted newsprint. Thank the youth for their participation.

- Posted newsprint of Psalm 51:10–12

Prayers of Confession

Notice how sin is named in each prayer of confession. Some are very concrete and some abstract. The pronoun we is used in public worship since the prayers include everyone present. Most important, prayers of confession usually begin with a reminder that we can confess because we are certain that God already knows all and promises to forgive our sins. And they end with an assurance to everyone that, yes, God does forgive us so that we can change and do better.

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned
against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind
and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as
ourselves.
In your mercy, forgive what we have
been,
help us amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways
to the glory of your holy name.²

Giver of life, in the midst of a plundered earth
we groan with creation: **Have mercy on us.**
Giver of life, in the midst of poisoned water
we groan with creation: **Have mercy on us.**
Giver of life, in the midst of polluted air
we groan with creation: **Have mercy on us.**
Giver of life, in the midst of mountains of waste
we groan with creation: **Have mercy on us.**
Giver of life, in the midst of rising seas,
we groan with creation: **Have mercy on us.**
Giver of life, forgive us
and make us agents of healing
for the good of your creation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray.³

Let us confess our sin against God and creation, saying,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
For our indifference to the destruction of wildlife,
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
For the greedy search for profit with no respect for life,
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
For the violence ravaged against the earth,
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
For our silence before bulldozed forests and
contaminated rivers,
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
For our voracious thirst to consume
without a thought of future generations,
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**
Forgive our arrogance, Lord,
when we place ourselves at the center of your universe.
Forgive our lack of passion to preserve your creation.
In your mercy, teach us to love your creatures,
and to care for life in all its forms.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.⁴

Merciful God,
Your justice protects those who are weak,
yet we seek the shelter of privilege and power.
Your righteousness redeems those who are poor,
yet we seek the status of wealth and possessions.
Your peace upholds those who are oppressed,
yet we seek the security of weapons and
retribution.
Forgive us our sins, and lead us to true
repentance,
that we may trust you in all things;
through Jesus Christ we pray.⁵

2. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 20–21.

3. *Book of Common Worship*, 563.

4. *Book of Common Worship*, 583.

5. *Book of Common Worship*, 608.