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John 20:23

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(These resources are not copyrighted. You can use them as-is or adapt the words to fit your situation. Mel Van Hattem)

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Thank you salutes

RESOURCES – Prayer of Confession Time

Introductions or Invitations to the Prayer of Confession Time

Some pastors just say, “Let us confess our sins.” Or “Let us use the prayer of confession printed in our bulletin.” I’ve found it is much more constructive to put an introduction invitation about the compassionate presence of God.

My Theological Basis

1. John Calvin states that “a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God.” Calvin describes a “Two-Fold Grace”—not just forgiveness, but also empowering sanctification. Calvin is fond of I Corinthians 1:30 “The source of your life [is] in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (nrsv)

(Source: Accepted and renewed in Christ : the "twofold grace of God" and the interpretation of Calvin's theology (2007) by Cornelis P.Venema. Reformed Historical Theology Series, vol.2).

2. The Heidelberg Catechism gives a model for such a preface with its first question and answer.

3. Two writers for the Christian Psychological Association helped me understand the power of this approach. Bruce Naramore describes how love and grace are better motivators to positive maturing than fear and fear of abandonment. (p.124) Mansell Pattison describes the reconciling power in knowing that God’s forgiveness is waiting. (p.176) (Counseling and the Human Predicament “A Study of Sin, Guilt, and Forgiveness” (1989) (The book was produced by the association).)

Scripture in an invitation

Rev. David Kahler uses a scripture regularly as an invitation.

Rev. David Alexander often builds a call to confession on a scripture. For example, “Come all who are weary of carrying heavy burdens.’ and “Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and were delivered from their distress.”.

Pastors often incorporate a scripture into their invitation.

Scriptures to consider in an invitation.

“As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who revere him. He knows us inside and out. He knows our inner strengths, and our human shortcomings, our passions and our faultiness. His steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting, with those who will follow his covenant ways, making things go right for them and for their children.” Psalm 103:13-18 (modern translation)

Come to the Lord your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
He is eager to relent and not punish.

Joel 2:13

When people pray for help, God listens and rescues them from their troubles.
The Lord is here to rescue all who are discouraged and have given up hope.

Psalm 34:17,18

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

⁹ He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.

¹⁰ He does not punish us for our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.

¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who revere him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

¹² He removes our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west.

¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate to those who revere him.

Psalm 103:8-13 New Living Translation (NLT)

God high above, sees far below

No matter the distance, he knows everything about us.

The moment we call out, God steps in,

He expands our life with his influential empowering.

God's love is eternal.

The Lord will renew you.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose in you.

Psalm 138

The Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One says: "I am the one who rescues you, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go."

Isaiah 48:17

"With everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord your Redeemer. I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake. Return to me, for I have redeemed you. I will rebuild you. This is the inheritance of the servants of the Lord."

Isaiah 54:8,11,17, 43:25, 44:22

Call to Me and I will answer and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them, to redeem them, to renew them, to bring them into a fulfilling life now and forever.” John 3:17

Be transformed by renewing your mind that you may excel in conveying the good, accepting, outreaching love of God. Romans 12:2

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Ephesians 1:5 (fits with Heidelberg Catechism answer #1)

We have a great high priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus, the son of God. So we can hold on in faith. We don't have a high priest who cannot be touched with feeling our pain. For he was tested and tempted as we are. Therefore we can come boldly before his merciful throne and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Pastoral Introductions and Invitations

Short Intros

Let us come before our renewing and redeeming God in prayer.

Here is a time in worship for receiving God's compassion, refreshing grace, and renewing redemption.

Here is a time to embrace God's healing power of forgiveness and renewal.

Here we experience the renewing grace of God that makes us whole, knowing that God does not want guilt to stagnate us but wants our valuable souls to grow and blossom.

We come with gratitude before a personally renewing God, who like a divine coach can bring us into a more fulfilling life, as we experience that He understands, forgives, guides and redeems.

With open arms God welcomes all who call on His name—

No one stands outside the circle of His mercy and love.

So here is a time to experience his renewing grace,

bringing to him what bothers us and receiving his transforming compassion.

Hear God's message for you from Joel 2:13: “I don't easily lose my temper, and I don't like to punish. I am merciful, kind, and caring.” This is a time for talking things over with God, and experiencing his refreshing renewing helpfulness.

We welcome this prayer time as:

“A reality check about how we are doing and where we can bring what is heartbreaking or challenging or deterring our integrity, for God is present with compassion to restore, fix, mend.” The Scripture says, “The Lord is near to all who call on him”

Longer ones

As we begin worship we are grateful that we are in the presence of a grace-filled God, who

- treasures us, even with our human limitations,
- cares to befriend us, even with our sins and shortcomings,
- and even cares enough to want to renew us and develop our potential for good.

We enter now into His redeeming presence--a forgiving and renewing heavenly father. So we can bring our hopes and discouragements, and also our regrets, embarrassing situations, and shortcomings, and find his renewing grace to help us move on from fear, guilt and resentments to being a positive force for good in life situations.

Let us join in the unison prayer printed in the bulletin.

Let us bring to God what is holding us back from living a fulfilling life. In Hebrews 4:16 we read that “Jesus, the son of God, was tested and tempted as we are. He can feel our pain. Therefore we can come boldly before his merciful throne and find grace to help in time of need.”

We may not feel as close to God as we want to be. We do some good things but we miss out on some of God’s hopes for us and some of our own hopes and integrity. God is here with empathy and solutions.

We are blessed that God loves us, human though we are. God not only offers us forgiving grace but also redeeming love so we can step beyond what is holding us back. So we invite you to bring to God what is holding you back from being a growing soul. Feel God’s forgiving grace and his loving presence to strengthen you in pursuing what needs transformation in your life. Feel his empathy for life situations you are facing, so you can live a more fulfilling life with the partnership of His compassion.

Story Invitations

Dr. T. Patrick Milas (Sage Library Director) recommends examining The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out

by Brennan Manning (2005) It is packed with sentences and paragraphs that declare God's grace and renewing love is present in our varied situations.

Rev. Richard Bierwas writes: "There are times, certainly not always, where I will use an illustration to introduce the Prayer of Confession."

Max Lucado: God Thinks You're Wonderful (good for ages 2-7)

It's a kids book but this is information that everyone benefits reading or hearing again -- you are loved beyond your ability to comprehend. You are loved unconditionally, perfectly. God sees you as you can be and loves you as you are. The illustrations enhance the emphasis. There is a touch of humor to delight sometimes too.

Invitations to a silent prayer of confession

Rev. Paul Nulton invites the congregation to pray in silence about their own "sins, temptations, and greeds" and includes in the invitation, for example, these descriptive words: "sins and temptations": "'me and Jesus only matters" "attitudes that ignore the world, neighbors, and issues of justice and mercy. "

Rev. Arlene R. Wilhelm writes: "When I plan worship, I always include an extended time for silent reflection after the unison confession is done. After that time of silence, I speak the words of assurance and hope

"We need more silent times in worship so folks can absorb and reflect. It's good to do after the sermon, too."

Sample

In the silence of these next moments, offer to our compassionate God those things that are bothering you, what you have been trying to carry alone, and what will be easier to face with Christ as your friend and burden-lifter than trying to carry alone. Share with our redeeming God what's deterring you or tempting you or frustrating you, so his transforming love, grace and strength can bless you.

(Mel)

Invitation to a guided silent reflection time within the prayer...with a "coaching question"

Rev Beth Scibienski writes:

"I have begun to use a "coaching question" rather than simply saying "A time of silence is kept" or "Silent prayer for Confession." To give you an idea, here are two excerpts... "

For this coming week:

Loving, forgiving God,
your love and forgiveness knows no bounds.

Your compassion never runs out.

Pause to remember a time when God extended love and forgiveness to you.

Because of your love for us
and the high regard in which you hold us,
you entrust to us the capacity to extend that love
and forgiveness to others.

God, forgive us when we fail to do that.

Pause to consider someone to whom you have difficulty offering forgiveness.

From three weeks ago:

**Because we live in this modern, tech-driven, twittering age,
we often forget what you have done for us, God of every blessing.
We pat ourselves on the back for our ability to learn new computer skills,
but have forgotten that life is more than a machine.
We have more than we could ever use yet,
like squirrels, store up more and more.
Our faith is often pushed to the back of the closet,
to make room for all the fears we wear so easily.**

Pause to make note of all that we have.

Is there a lack of trust in God's provision that you need to confess?

Forgive us, Restorer of life.

**As you clothe us with your grace and mercy,
may we share with those who have so little.**

**As our hearts overflow with your love and wonder,
may we offer them as gifts to everyone we meet.**

Give us opportunity to give of our abundance

To those whose lives are filled with tears and pain.

Pause to think of one or two people that you could bless this week somehow

When Trauma disrupts our faithful ways

Confessing we need God's help to avoid missing his will and his vision for us in a challenging or disheartening time.

"Bent beneath the burdens of the world around us, and the world within us, Lord, have mercy on us.

“Sorry for what’s happened, worried for what’s near us, fearful for our futures;
Lord, have mercy on us.”

(Rev. David Alexander)

Bent beneath our loads we bow, God, alone to you.
Memories of how we’ve lived lead to fears anew.
Work and worry only bring anguish and despair.
Meet us here Lord, where we’re at. Hear our humble prayer.

(Rev. David Alexander)

God we confess that we need and want your empowering presence and partnership.
You can improve how we feel about ourselves and our purposes. You can improve our
awareness of opportunities to live out a fulfilling life of significant meaning. You can
alert us to avoid the energy depletion of temptation lures.

(Mel)

When we are bumped around by unfairness and injustice, Lord, we need your
helpful empathy, compassion and inspiring example to enable us to rise above the
devastating paralysis of feeling frustrated, helpless, discouraged, and having lost our
initiative.

We are here because you believe in our worthiness and giftedness. You
treasure us.

And you also had the courage to believe transformation of lost souls was
possible. We want your spirit to keep stepping into our world, believing in human souls,
able to realize their need for compassion while they are still ornery, and believing you
are at work in their hearts, and you believe in us as worthy ambassadors.

(Mel)

Sinfulness of choosing to live independent from God

Merciful God we’ve tried to hide the wrong we’ve done from you.

We have lived for ourselves and turned from our neighbors;
refused to bear or even to hear the troubles of others;
ignored the pain of the world; and
passed by lonely, hungry, poor, and oppressed folks.

Forgive us for this sin;

free us from selfishness; and

guide us to choose your will and follow in your way. Amen.

(Rev. David Alexander)

Gracious Lord, turn we pray, an attentive ear to our prayer. Hear the contrition of our
hearts and take away the sin which hampers your sacred relationship with us. Rid us,
we pray, of selfish obsession, bitter words and thoughts. Free us dear Lord with your

atoning grace. Make the conduct of our lives a living witness to the faith we confess.
Amen.

(Rev. Richard Bierwas)

Lord, we confess we need your help

-to live for what is valuable.

-to continue to Re-form our common pursuits and pastimes in the light of your vision,
for you want to guide us to significant, fulfilling, abundant living.

We want to include your perceptions in our daily decisions. We want that more
fulfilling vision so we can live nobly, more intimately, with more depth in our
conversations, and more integrity in our relationships.

And now in the quiet time, we bring to you personal anxieties, shortcomings,
needs, and hopes so your grace and perceptions can refresh and renew....

(Mel)

God's compassionate commitment toward our sanctification as well as our justification.

Rev. David Alexander.

Prayer 4.

When compared to light eternal, nothing else has but a glow.
But that dimness in itself has blinded us and brought us woe.
Flash and bombast of the market and our need to make a show
Drive us to ignore our neighbors and the needs of those we know.

We can say the devil did it, bound our hands from reaching out.
Stuffed our ears with cotton wool and cut us off from cry and shout.
But we know that we ourselves prefer to leave things as they are
Keeping all things nice around us, thinking evil's somewhere far.

God of gods and Light of lights, break through walls we try to build.
Show us in the world around the needs of others we can fill.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss your kingdom's goal
Shine your light upon the way that leads to vision of what's whole.

Prayer 6

Lord, since you are willing,
 cleanse us of what stops us loving heart and soul and mind.
Lord, since you are willing,
 free us of what drives us to destroy what you have made.
Lord, since you are willing,
 touch us with your love and heal us of what makes us ill.
Lord, since you are willing,
 draw us to each other in true fellowship. AMEN

Rev. Richard Bierwas

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION Gracious Father, we humbly open wide our lives before you seeking the things which make unity, purity, and peace. Forgive us Lord we live unto ourselves. Forgive us when our self-interest usurps the welfare of others. Forgive us when we live as if we're the only ones who matter. Grant us your cleansing grace and orient our lives towards gratitude for all that Christ has done on our behalf. Amen.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION Gracious Lord of our lives, heal us we pray. May the atoning grace of Christ our Savior be shed down to lift the burden of sin which weighs upon us. Lord, we desire nothing less than to offer our words and songs of praise this Sabbath day steeped in the grace which makes us whole. Amen.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION Gracious Lord, turn we pray, an attentive ear to our prayer. Hear the contrition of our hearts and take away the sin which hampers your sacred relationship with us. Rid us, we pray, of selfish obsession, bitter words and thoughts. Free us dear Lord with your atoning grace. Make the conduct of our lives a living witness to the faith we confess. Amen.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION Gracious Lord Jesus, we gather here to worship One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we open our mouths with words of praise, grant us we pray, your precious redeeming grace. Grant us pardon for our sins, that our words and songs of praise might be found acceptable in your sight. Amen.

For God's help to bring out the potential He sees in us for being a redeeming presence.

God we confess that we need and want your empowering presence and partnership. You can improve how we feel about ourselves and our purposes. You can improve our awareness of opportunities to live out a fulfilling life of significant meaning. You can alert us to avoid the energy depletion of temptation lures.

Lord, we are so human! You know the times we may have:
Forgotten a commitment to someone and had to be forgiven
Gotten caught in a crab and brag syndrome or a despair and given up mentality rather than addressing how we could face reality with you on a plan and try production.

We are here to pray for insight and freedom to overcome the changeable shortcomings in our life with some inspiring ways You see possible. Through the power of your compassion, we pray for awareness of potential you see in us and around us for development and renewal reflecting your love for treasured souls and your ability to not only forgive but to redeem people.

(Mel)

Lord, during this worship time, we will be bringing before you opportunities and dilemmas we are facing and our friends are facing, grateful for the gifts of your perspective.

And we are grateful that you can help us handle any regrets or guilt that causes us to hide rather than be productive, or what may have crushed the heart or soul of someone by an action or words. We want your healing compassion and your renewing grace so we can step above sins that hold back the potential of our soul, and learn from our mistakes, and get on with living more fully, enjoying your image within us, being creative and redemptive. Amen

(Mel)

Lord, we believe that you care about every soul that we meet. Yet, even though we enjoy being treated as your son or daughter, it is hard to do what you do and call us to do as well—to reflect your love or convey that truth in word or deed to some people we meet.

So today we bring before you the names of people we fear.

Today we bring before you the names of people it is difficult to talk to.

Today we bring before you the names of people we have misunderstood and some with who there is a broken a bond of trust.

Today we bring before you the names of people we regret we have shortchanged in relationships.

Only with your help and vision can we grasp more the fulfilling life in our dialogues with all we meet. So we open ourselves to sense how you would like to work through us to affirm, encourage and even renew the souls of those whom we greet in our life transactions. Amen.

(Mel)

Prayers that list specific sins and/or temptations

Lord, we need and want your help to live a significant, fulfilling life.

We want your help to avoid the lure of destructive temptations in our culture.

- Sexual porn on the web
- Website interesting news and articles that can so engross that I am tempted to cut worthy pursuits with family, neighbors, and friends.
- Proliferating gambling invitations on TV.
- Racial prejudice that keeps us from valuable relationships.

(Mel)

From east and west, from south and north, you bring, O Lord, the wanderer home.

As them, we too are lost and aimless, caught in places where we've roamed.

Addicted to our phones, computers, pods and tablets, games and screens

We've lost direction in our freedom, can't discern what isn't clean.

Break down the bars and walls that hold us captive in our little worlds.

Point out the ways that Jesus showed before we, into chaos, swirled.

Be like a compass showing truth, a map that shows the way to go.

And like a mighty river wash and carry us within your flow.

(Rev. David Alexander)

Gracious Father, we humbly open wide our lives before you seeking the things which make unity, purity, and peace. Forgive us Lord when we live unto ourselves. Forgive us when our self-interest usurps the welfare of others. Forgive us when we live as if we're the only ones who matter. Grant us your cleansing grace and orient our lives towards gratitude for all that Christ has done on our behalf. Amen.

(Rev. Richard Bierwas)

Lord, especially when we are tired, we get sucked into time wasters—junk TV programs, internet distractions and temptations, horror movies, and I-Phone solitary games. But you have rewarding and fulfilling purposes for us that we are not prepared to undertake or too distracted to see. So we are here to state we need help. Help us redeem our time, Lord, with awareness of your views about our potential. Amen.

(Mel)

Lord, we need your help to avoid destructive temptations that keep being presented to us in our life situations. So we are here seeking your strength and your wisdom to overcome their leer on us and others.

We bring before you pornography—so readily available on the web and so addictive, the lure of too much alcohol, drugs that seem like an interesting venture concealing their danger, and time-draining attitude-warping entertainment, including that sprinkled with the lust of adultery or violence as the fascinating key to a successful conclusion.

We want to avoid the lure and the high losses that we know some acquaintances have had to face. We are here for your help to embrace alternate fulfilling pursuits and see the reward of choosing to move away from what can be so damaging. We want to help our friends and family avoid tragic costly temptations too, and see the joy of pursuing what you envision for an abundant wholesome life. Help us Lord to invest now in a secure wise valuable future. Amen.

(Mel)

Prayer of Confession crafting

Rev. Richard Bierwas writes:

“Voice and Vocabulary: “I want it to be akin to the vocabulary of the congregation voice. In other words, I’m aware that I’m in effect putting words in other people’s mouths. I want the words to sound authentic to the congregation’s voice, not necessarily mine. The Prayer of God’s People elsewhere in worship I put more comfortably in my voice as I am the one speaking it.

“Theology: I try to give my prayers of confession a reformed theological sense about them. At the very least, it’s an opportunity to make clear our theology and its life affirming bent. “

- Confessing how we need and want God’s help.

I might use a phrase within a prayer having to do with our “complete reliance” upon Christ’s grace, etc. Similar phrases might be, “utter dependence” or something that invokes the need for the Holy Spirit to empower us, lead us, guide us, etc.

- Spelling out in the prayer what our hopes are for living a more purposeful Godly life and avoiding those hindrances and sins that cloud our spiritual health and energy and effectiveness.

I would likely capture this in a few sentences or phrases within a prayer. I like to emphasize our call to be Christ-like. I think one of my examples expresses the desire that, to encounter us would be as to encounter Christ himself. I also like to use the biblical phrase of “holy and blameless” before God’s sight.

- Spelling out temptations in society that we want God’s helpful empowerment to avoid.

In my up scale economic context I might mention the “folly of the pursuit of false gods” and go on to list: wealth, status, career... etc.

Addressing specific life challenges for God’s helpful renewal

How do we overcome blandness and state specific temptations and high risk lures in our culture without accusing the whole congregation of sins they are not committing?

I found that using the word or phrase “sometimes” or “when we” or “we want to avoid succumbing to these temptations” helped label specifics in a way that were more vital and relevant to daily life challenges and yet kept the prayer valid with integrity for unison reading by the congregation without carrying wrong offensive accusations.

(Mel)

Bland or False Accusation Prayers,
or exaggerated wording which cuts authenticity

“We cling tightly to the fleeting treasures of this world and do not open our hands to receive blessings from you.” (*Why then did I come to church?*)

“We do not listen for your word of grace.” (*I came to church to feel God’s grace.*)

“We refuse your love and withhold ourselves from others.”

“There is no health in us.”

Avoiding Bland or False Wording

Try adding words like:

“sometimes”

“there are times when...”

“We want to avoid these temptations in our culture, and the destruction they bring.”

Sample of adding specifics and a different approach:

“We are easily caught up in the greed and fear of the society around us.”

Improved wording::

“The greed and false fears in our society are influences we want to avoid luring us away from a fruitful fulfilling life of wisdom, character, spiritual integrity, and being a renewing Christ-like presence.”

Avoiding just a laundry list of how bad we are

Add confession about what we believe about God’s renewing compassion.

Add confession about needing and wanting God’s renewing grace to empower us with {certain Biblical virtues, hopes, aspirations, fulfilling purposes}.

Add confession about inner strengths and giftedness that you want God’s empowering compassion to help you continue to build.

Add confession about adverse challenges in society that you want God’s partnership in avoiding or courage to transform.

Unclear scripture translation

WORDS OF ASSURANCE EXAMPLE – Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

CLEARER

(CEV) God's gift of undeserved grace is what saves you. ⁶ God raised us from death to life with Christ Jesus, and he has given us a place beside Christ in heaven... How truly good and kind he is to us because of what Christ Jesus has done.

WEBSITE TO HELP: BibleGateway.com gives you many translations. You can download as much as will help you. It is user-friendly. You can select translation and verses.

More on crafting:

See recommended books and websites.

Declarations of God's forgiveness and renewal

Rev/ Paul Nulton has aimed to include: "God's many faithful promises to forgive sincerely confessed sins and reminding congregations from time to time that the worst of sins, even abominations, are forgiven since Jesus died the death of one committing abomination, blasphemy for making himself equal to God in minds of his accusers - the meaning of hung on a tree until just before sundown."

Heidelberg Catechism 18

And who is this mediator—true God and at the same time truly human and truly righteous? Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given us to set us completely free and to make us right with God.

Declaration by the Congregation

Rev. David Alexander invites the whole congregation state in unison to each other the affirmation of God's grace.

Scriptural Words of Assurance

Called by some ministers "Words of Encouragement"

Or "Assurance of God's forgiving grace and redeeming compassion"

Or "Assurance of God's renewing Grace "

My Goal: Scripture that declares in addition to forgiveness that you are not hopelessly stuck in your sin patterns, but God's compassionate empowering is with you to help you overcome that sin which hinders a more abundant life with God.

I found 20 scriptural “Words of Assurance” passages that declared, in addition to God’s forgiveness, God’s renewing redeeming presence was with us as we face what is hindering us from living a fulfilling Christ-like life. Here are samples.

(Mel)

When people pray for help, God listens and rescues them from their troubles.
The Lord is there to rescue all who are discouraged, broken-hearted or have given up hope. Psalm 34:17,18

¹⁴ The Lord says, “I will rescue those who love me.
I will protect those who trust in my name.

¹⁵ When they call on me, I will answer;
I will be with them in trouble.
I will rescue and honor them.

¹⁶ I will reward them with a long life
and give them my salvation.”
Psalm 91:14-16 (nlt)

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

⁹ He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.

¹⁰ He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.

¹¹ For his unfailing love toward those who revere him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

¹² He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west.

¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate to those who revere him
Psalm 103:8-13 (nlt)

God high above, sees far below

No matter the distance, he knows everything about us.

The moment we call out, God steps in.

He helps us overcome our shortcomings.

He expands our life with his influential empowering.

God's love is eternal.

The Lord will renew you.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose in you.

Psalm 138

“The Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One says: I am the one who rescues you, who teaches you for your own good, who leads you in the way you should go. And I will form you and use you to reconnect people with me.

Isaiah 48:17, 49:8

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. We are not cut off. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:23

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Ezekiel 36: 25 - 27

When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from the hands of sin and death. This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's an expectant adventure. God himself has taken up residence in our life. God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. Romans 8:11-15 (msg)

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:31-34 (niv)

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

II Corinthians 5:18, 20

“God teaches us to give up our worldly desires and ungodly choices, and to live decent and honest lives. Jesus Christ gave himself to rescue us from everything evil, to make our hearts pure, to be energetic in doing what is good, and to be his very own beloved people. We are blessed with the kindness of God and his renewing hope in our life situations.” Titus 2:11-14 (cev,msg)

Scriptural Words of Assurance – re: Confession of Trauma

What a stack of blessing you have piled up
for those who worship you,
Ready and waiting for all who run to you
to escape an unkind world.
You hide them safely away
from the opposition.
As you slam the door on those oily, mocking faces,
you silence the poisonous gossip.
Blessed God!
His love is the wonder of the world.
Trapped by a siege, I panicked.
“Out of sight, out of mind,” I said.
But you heard me say it,
you heard and listened.
²³ Love God, all you saints;
God takes care of all who stay close to him,

Psalm 31:19-23 (msg)

When people pray for help, God listens and rescues them from their troubles.
The Lord is there to rescue all who are discouraged and have given up hope.
Psalm 34:17,18

Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you. If your heart is broken, you'll find God right there; if you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch your breath. Disciples so often get into trouble; still, God is there every time. Psalm 34:17-19 (msg)

The Holy One, says this:
“I live in the high and holy place
with those whose spirits are contrite and humble.
I restore the crushed spirit of the humble
and revive the courage of those with repentant hearts.
Isaiah 57:15 (nlt)

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't always know what to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us and God can understand all our thoughts and hopes. God will work for good with those who love Him. God has chosen you for his significant purposes. (Romans 8:26-28)

We have a great high priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus, the son of God. So we can hold on in faith. We don't have a high priest who cannot be touched with feeling our pain. For he was tested and tempted as we are. Therefore we can come boldly before his merciful throne and find grace to help in time of need.
Hebrews 4:14-16

God's Law

Invitation of how to live in gratitude for God's forgiving grace and compassionate empowering redeeming presence.

(The RCA liturgy places the summary of the law and 10 commandments after the announcement of God's forgiveness. It is placed here as a response in gratitude for Christ's atonement and God's forgiveness.

(Following the summary of the law, some pastors have added scriptural supplements which define with more specifics how to live. Here are samples.)

Scriptures that describe it more

Rev. David Kahler reports he often finds one in that lectionary passage of the day.

Rev. Richard Bierwas writes: re: Expressing gratitude for God's enriching presence by a guided response as noted in the summary of the law or other scriptures.

"I love it when the Psalmist talks about the "delight" found in the law. "For there I find delight" or "freedom", etc. Too often people have in mind being restricted by the law when in fact it's there to give us freedom, delight, etc".

David Kool and Andrew Ryskamp writing in Faithward.org recommend these scripture passages for "creating an environment where people can thrive and achieve their full potential."

Philippians 2:1-8
Colossians 3
Matthew 28:18-20
Psalm 95:6,7
Galatians 5:22,23

SAMPLES

Be fair to the poor and to orphans.
Defend the helpless and everyone in need.
Rescue the weak and homeless from the powerful hands of heartless people.
For I the Most High God declare you are my angels, servant leaders and my children.
Psalm 82:3,4,6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

This is the year when the lord will show kindness. He has chosen me to give them in place of sorrow, blossoming flowers, in place of broken hearts, joyous praise to God.

The Lord has chosen me to bring good news. For, planted in situations by the Lord, I will be able to rebuild ruinous plights, even what may have been ruins of many generations. Isaiah 61:1-4

What God is looking for in men and women:
It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,
be compassionate and loyal in your love,
And don't take yourself too seriously—
take God seriously. Micah 6:8 (msg)

¹³ You are like salt for everyone on earth. But if salt no longer tastes like salt, how can it make food salty? All it is good for is to be thrown out and walked on.

¹⁴ You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden,

¹⁵ and no one would light a lamp and put it under a clay pot. A lamp is placed on a lampstand, where it can give light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶ Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13-15 (cev)

Don't criticize people's faults, unless you want the same treatment. That critical spirit will boomerang. Do you have the nerve to say, "Let me wash your face for you" when your own face is distorted with contempt? Matthew 7 (msg)

Don't be hard on others, and God won't be hard on you. Forgive others, and God will forgive you. If you give to others, you will be given a full amount in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap. The way you treat others is the way you will be treated. Luke 6:37-38

"Relax. Don't be so preoccupied with *getting* that you miss out on receiving and responding to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You are dear friends to me and God. The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself." Luke 12:29-32 (msg)

Be transformed by renewing your mind that you may excel in conveying the good, accepting, outreaching love of God. Romans 12:2

Let us have a real warm affection for one another....and a willingness to let the other man have the credit.

Let us not allow slackness to spoil work.

When trials come, endure them patiently...And as for those who try to make your life a misery, bless them. Don't curse, bless.

Share the happiness of those who are happy, and the sorrow of those who are sad...Don't become snobbish, but take a real interest in ordinary people.

Don't become set in your own opinions.

Don't pay back a bad turn with a bad turn to anyone.

Don't say, It doesn't matter what people think, but see that your public behavior is above criticism. Romans 12:10-12,14-17

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. II Corinthians 5:18, 20

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22,23

Don't get tired of helping others. You will be rewarded when the time is right, if you don't give up. Help people whenever you can. Galatians 6:9

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Christ encourages; his love comforts. His Spirit brings alive compassion and sympathy. Bring about accord and unity. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourself. Care about others as much as you care about yourself. Philippians 2:1-5

In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep vital your heart and mind through Christ Jesus Philippians 4:6,7

God chose you to be the holy people he loves. So put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him, no matter what your cultural status. Christ lives in all of us. That is what matters. Colossians 3:10-12

Whatever you are doing, put your whole heart into it, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for others, knowing that there is a Master who will give you your heritage as a reward for your service. Colossians 3:23-24

Tell God how you are thankful for every person you know. Ask God to help and bless them all. I Timothy 2:1

Avoid pointless quarrelling, and the fine print of the law code. Concentrate on the essentials that are good for everyone. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously that he restored our relationship with God and gave us back our life—now and for eternity. Titus 3:6-9

Build on what you have been doing, building your faith as expressed in good character. Keep adding goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God,

friendliness, concern for others, and generous love. That will show that what you know about our Lord Jesus Christ has made your life useful and meaningful.

II Peter 1:5-8

Corporate Prayers of Confession

New Brunswick Professor Nathan Jérémie-Brink has been encouraging me to notice “Corporate Prayers of Confession” in the Psalms and also in some contemporary worship services.

[Definition] Confessing before God the sins of the community or the church community or the world community.

The RCA 1988 Worship Guide Book encourages “Corporate Prayer”

“The corporate nature of the prayer (of confession) reflects the truth that sin is not only individual but shared by humanity. Sin is both individual and corporate....{this} helps the congregation recognize that in buying and selling, in peace and in war, we are inextricably a part of the inequality and exploitation of this world, and that we must face the truth about ourselves and need continually to ask forgiveness. The corporate prayer may well allow a period of silence in which we confess our involvement in corporate sin as well as individual sin.”

Understanding worship in the RCA : the Lord's Day service with the Directory for worship (1988) By Reformed Church In America

David Kool and Andrew Ryskamp writing in Faithward.org give this definition of Micah 6:8: “justice is “to create a world where all people have equal opportunity to fully develop the gifts that God has placed within them.” Also it is what “helps the Christian community to be diverse, holistic, and inclusive, so that the passions, interests, and gifts of all God’s people can be realized.”

I've discovered that separating that prayer from the personal prayer of confession time cuts congregational confusion. So I have shifted this initiative into the “Prayers of the People” section of worship.

My definition: Confessing before God for society’s sins, interceding for the redemption of society and that God will raise up leadership to transform these destructive dimensions in the culture, and show us how we can be ambassadors of grace and transforming renewal too. (Mel)

Rev. Paul Nulton reports that he includes at the prayer of confession time (1) a time for personal confession and (2) a time for corporate confession. Here is what he says about corporate confession:

“Congregational prayer of Confession where the church's failure to make a difference in the world for God's justice, righteousness, peace, and etc. are confessed together using a liturgical prayer of unison. Issues of controversy among Christians, Proper Biblical political issues like racism, economic justice, the church's mission in the world are dealt with here, not in silent & personal confession unless individual does this on own volition.”

On occasion he “sometimes placed the Kyrie after the Corporate Confession. Sometimes, I would ask the congregation to kneel at pews during times of confession like Reformed Churches historically did as did Calvin's Church!”

Elder Cathy Lowden of the Saddle River Reformed Church with staff member Stephanie Doyle print in the bulletin many items for prayer for renewal in society. Here are some examples:

Saddle River Reformed Church Worshipping at Old Stone Church

PRAYERS OF SUPPORT FOR

- Those working to dismantle racism and break barriers for people living with disabilities
- The poor, oppressed, sick, lonely, homeless, unemployed, exiles and refugees, infirm and the dying, prisoners, and caregivers
- Those serving our country and all peoples affected by war and terrorist attacks
- The victims of mass shootings and their families
- All victims of tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and drought
- Leaders of government and international aid organizations
- RCA missionaries

The Reformed Church of Highland Park (RCHighlandPark.org) has figured out a way to include the Corporate Confession into their Sunday Prayer of Confession time.

Websites for commentary on social ills, temptations, and Godly aspirations to enhance the Prayer of Confession times.

Church and Culture.org

Free commentary on culture each week by James Emery White, who is the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, NC, and a former professor of theology and culture at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where he also served as their fourth president.

Faithward.org

This RCA website includes articles that on how to be engaged in a Christ-like way with the world and in our culture.

Rca.org/about/dismantaling-racism

More Suggestions about development of this worship time

Using Scripture in Each Phase

Rev. David Kahler writes:

Optimally, I will use the Sermon's Scripture for any or all parts:

Intro to Confession

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon

The Law

That said, rarely does Scripture explicitly meet all those portions of the liturgy, though we're trained to spot the Guilt, Grace, Gratitude of the Scripture. I then either use phrases from my exegesis and/or sermon to construct the remaining portions. As a last resort, I use the other Scriptures from the lectionary that Sunday. And as an absolute final last resort, I use what's written in the RCA's Lord's Day Liturgy.

Trauma and Theology

Dr. Victor Milas, Sage Library Director, noted that the study of Trauma and Theology has grown in recent years. These studies have resources for prayers stating "I need God's help to release me from being overcome with anger, etc. which is deterring my healing and useful vitality."

A Search Engine (Google, for example) will reveal Seminaries and Universities who have built courses on this recently. Plus you'll find more descriptions

The Reformed Church of Highland Park (RCHighlandPark.org) includes in the prayer of confession time some descriptions on the aspect of confessing our need for God's renewing grace where our hopes and aspirations have been crushed.

Rev. Dr. Peter Watts in Faithward.org describes how his church grew through small groups where people could identify wounds, losses, stresses, griefs, etc., and pray together about it.

An RCA church modeling both Personal and Corporate Prayer

Rev. Michael Otte and Dr. Elizabeth Pollitto recommend checking out RCHighlandPark.org to see creative ways and effective ways for developing the Confession time. (about 15 minutes in on their recorded worship services) They use song, scripture, spoken expressions, and prayer to lead the congregation in awareness of the compassionate presence of God to whom we can confess not only "unhealthy patterns of behavior that we just can't seem to leave behind" but also crushed hopes for which we need His comfort and renewal. This is followed with scripture/song of God's renewing grace and a "memory verse" about gratefully living in relationship with God in our daily life. Included also are sins of our society which entwine us too.

[I'm searching for more worship resource websites without copyright restrictions, having samples for busy pastors and giving Christian commentary on our culture. Please alert me at melhkh@yahoo.com.]

Books with useful samples

Rev. Roland Ratmeyer writes:

As a resource, I often turn to the liturgies in *Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion*, WJK Press, edited by Kimberly Bracken Long..

Rev. David Jones recommends worship resource materials from the Iona Community such as the Wee Worship series.

Rev. Charles Stickley writes:

I have used (still do) a little book called Bread For The Journey by Ruth C Duck for several portions of the worship service. Sometimes I use them as she has printed them and at other times they are the basis for compiling my own prayer or call to worship... several good resources for various worship services as well."

[Ruth Duck writes in one of her books "hopefully these resources spark your own creativity." The copyright gives ok to use the material in worship or creatively modify it...if you put a credit line in your church bulletin.

[I, Mel VH found, like Charles, that I needed to select and edit so that I avoided making a long laundry list of items that said, "This is how bad I am", but offered no indication of God's renewing grace. I was able to take some narratives in Ruth Duck's book Flames of the Spirit and transform them into a prayer which said, "God, I believe in your ability to empower me to overcome these sins and hindrances to living the fulfilling life that you envision for me, for you want to develop my life, my giftedness and my potential." And then I'd list some admirable traits of a Christ-like life that were our hopes.]

Dr. Patrick Milas recommends The Book of Common Prayer produced by the Episcopal Church for having many relevant-to-life statements that resonate with a broad range of people.

Dr. Patrick Milas recommends The Ragamuffin Gospel: "Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out" by Brennan Manning Jun 28, 2005. It has refreshing renewing wording on God's grace as well as descriptions of sinful pathways we want to omit or avoid.

Sing a New Creation under its "Confession and Assurance" section addresses more than pardon. Those songs address the renewing redeeming empowering presence of God which declare we are treasured souls with a high and holy calling, even though having human weaknesses.

I am looking for more resources on the web or in books that give usable models. Pastors are busy. I found myself time-pressed and straining some weeks to put quality effective material into each Sunday's worship experience. (Mel at melhkh@yahoo.com)

In-depth study resources on the concept of forgiveness and renewal.

Counseling and the Human Predicament “A study of Sin, Guilt, and Forgiveness” (1989) A production of the *Christian Association for Psychological Studies*, edited by Leroy Aden and David G. Benner. (Includes notes on the Second Calvinistic Conference on Psychology and Psychiatry) Addresses estrangement from God and reconciliation, receiving God’s compassion is key to repentance, and to God’s transforming power to being an ambassador of renewing grace and redeeming love.

Forgive and Forget by Lewis B. Smedes has subtitles: “The Healing Power of Forgiveness” and “Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve”. Smedes was professor of Theology and Ethics at Fuller Seminary.

Raising GOOD Children by Dr. Thomas Lickona

“How to help your child develop a lifelong sense of honesty, decency and respect for others” covers birth through teenage years on a variety of subjects and references to many outstanding studies by people in the field of psychology and morals.

Dr. Lickona was a SUNY professor of Education, with 20 years in parent/teacher education, including teaching at Harvard and Boston U. He was president of the Association for Moral Education. Many public libraries have copies.

Highlight to examine: Children grow through various stages about what is right and wrong, or important for them to pursue and to reject, to be responsible respected people at that age. This book’s descriptions include a summary chart of the research by Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development.

The Courage to Pray by William Brownson

Confess you want God’s empowerment of the potential He sees, overcoming what in God’s eyes and your’ s is demeaning your real self.

Copyright information

Observation: Many books and websites of prayers are copyrighted in such a way that we cannot use the material or edit what we see there. Pastors are busy with many time commitments and yet want to have quality and relevant inspiration in their Sunday leadership presentations. I am searching for books and websites offering the freedom to use what you see in leading worship and giving Christian commentary related to our culture.

A copyright that lets you use the material in worship.

Flames of the spirit : resources for worship (1985) Ruth Duck, editor

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Her helpful phrase: “Hopefully these resources spark your own creativity.”

Thank you salutes

Respondents to the survey letter:

David Alexander
Richard Bierwas
Rodney Haveman
David Kahler
Cathy Lowden
Paul Nulton
Michael Otte
Elizabeth A. Pallitto,
Deborah Petersen
Roland Ratmeyer
Beth Scibienski
Charles Stickley
Christina Tazelaar,
Angela Wei
Arlene Wilhelm
Jodie Wu

NBTS staff who have opened my eyes to resources:

James Brumm, Director, Reformed Church Center
Christina Geunther Sage Library Archivist
Dr. Nathan Jérémie-Brink, NBTS professor
Dr. Patrick Milas, Director, Sage Library
Dr. Elizabeth A. Pallitto, Archivist, Reformed Church in America

Pioneers in positive relevant use of the Prayer of Confession time

David Alexander
Joshua.Bode
David Jones
Terry O Brien
Gregory & Rebecca Town

Others who have encouraged and contributed to my development of relevant resources:

Susan Dorward
Stephanie Doyle
Cathy Lowden
Linda Hufschmid
Richard Bierwas
Robert Gram
Stephen Germoso
Naoki Inoue
Soo Kim

John McKenzie
Robert Mitchell
Jeanette Sweetman Poulsen
Roland Ratmeyer
Claudette Reid
Beverly Sullivant
Jodie Wu

Prayer writers who have been especially motivating to me: Malcolm Boyd, Peter Marshall, Robert Schuller, plus three Riverside Church NYC pastors who composed prayers about the personal needs of people: Harry Emerson Fosdick, Ernest Campbell, and Evelyn S. Newman.

And thank you to Irene Van Hattem, my wife, for being a sounding board in many suppertime dialogues and giving me the time to pursue this form of ministry.

More usable free samples

Email me at melhkh@yahoo.com. I'm continuing to research and write. I've got a myriad more of introductions, prayers, responses, and other related resources.

Mel Van Hattem