

FORGIVEN

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CONFESSION

SAMPLE

SESSION 1

Where Are You?

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). Sin—and the resulting guilt—is a universal experience. Maybe we try to justify our sins and ignore the guilt. Maybe the guilt becomes all-consuming, and we can’t see a way out. But that guilt isn’t meant to be ignored or to consume us. Guilt is a wake-up call, and God wants to use it to draw us mercifully back to himself.

Our encounter with God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation always begins with God seeking us. The guilt that we experience when we sin is God’s merciful call to us, just as he called out to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: **“Where are you?”** (Genesis 3:9). God seeks us out when we have sinned, not to scold or punish us, but to offer us his healing and his forgiveness. It’s certainly true that God is omnipotent and just, but before all else he is our loving, merciful Father. If we understand this, then guilt is not something bad to be avoided or ignored, or another wound in our already broken hearts; rather, it becomes a step toward reconciliation.

When we are confronted with feelings of guilt, we have an opportunity: Will we find ways to distract ourselves and justify our behavior, or will we recognize God’s wake-up call and make the necessary changes in our lives? God is walking in the garden of our lives, calling to each one of us: “Where are you?” Will you allow him to find you and heal you?

DIGGING DEEPER

Contrition, which is sorrow for sin, is good because it means that we want to repent and be reconciled to God. There are two types of contrition: (1) perfect, which means that we are sorry because we love God above all else and are sorry that we have offended him (see CCC 1452); and (2) imperfect, which means that we are sorry because we fear the punishment for our sins (see CCC 1453).

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Understand that God uses our feelings of guilt to get our attention and to show us that something needs to change.
- Recognize the various ways that we tend to react to an experience of guilt.
- Understand that God is a loving Father who seeks us out when we sin.

STEP 1: OPENING PRAYER

*Begin this session by leading the **OPENING PRAYER**, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 6. Then read or summarize the **INTRODUCTION** for your group.*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!
LORD, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice
of my supplications!
If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
LORD, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
that you may be feared.
I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the LORD
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.
Amen.

—Psalm 130

SESSION 1 | WHERE ARE YOU?

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever received a “wake-up call” that inspired you to make a change in your life? Maybe it was something significant like a health issue that forced you to make better choices. Or perhaps a comment from a friend convinced you to take a different course of action on something. When we go off course in life, God often sends us a wake-up call to draw us back. But sometimes it’s difficult—even painful—to stop, listen, and turn around. Thankfully, God doesn’t ask us to do it on our own. He not only calls us home, but he also walks with us every step of the way.

STEP 2: CONNECT

Can you share an experience that was a “wake-up” call in your life?

What do you think is the most important thing about being a Christian?

“In the life of the body a man is sometimes sick, and unless he takes medicine, he will die. Even so in the spiritual life a man is sick on account of sin. For that reason he needs medicine so that he may be restored to health; and this grace is bestowed in the Sacrament of Penance.”

—St. Thomas Aquinas



STEP 3: VIDEO

Introduce and show the video episode for this session, which will last about 33 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching. Then discuss the questions in Step 4.

I. Wake-up Call

- A. Guilt can be God's way of getting our attention
- B. Signals that something needs to change
- C. How do we handle guilt?
 - 1. Find distractions
 - 2. Rationalize our behavior
 - 3. Blame others
 - 4. Admit we're wrong

II. Sin

- A. About breaking a relationship, not just breaking a rule
- B. Leads us to hide from God, like Adam and Eve

III. God's Perspective

- A. Above all else, God is love
- B. "Father" is who God *is*; "Lawmaker," "Judge," etc. is what he *does*
- C. "Where are you?"
 - 1. When we sin, God seeks us out
 - 2. The only sin God can't forgive is the one for which we won't ask forgiveness

"Confession is an act of honesty and courage—an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God. It is an act of the prodigal son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by Him with the kiss of peace."

—Pope St. John Paul II (from a homily in San Antonio on September 13, 1987)



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STEP 4: DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in italics below each question as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

1. What is your interpretation of this statement? “When we sin, God does not love us less, but we love ourselves less.”

(In Genesis 3:8 we read: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Adam and Eve knew of God’s unconditional love for them and yet they were afraid and hid from him. What changed? “Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart” [CCC 397]. As a result of their sin and shame, Adam and Eve had difficulty trusting in God’s love for them.)

2. “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.”—Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*.

In light of this quote, why is a well formed conscience essential for our happiness?

(Sin wounds us, and virtue rewards us. Virtue is the habit of doing what we know to be right, and we are rewarded with freedom as a result ... freedom to love selflessly. A well-formed conscience helps us to know what is true, good, and beautiful so that we can make the right choices with our actions.)



3. “God doesn’t just want more from us, he wants more for us!”

What do you think this quote means?

(It's easy to do good things because we think God wants us to check items off a to-do list: go to Mass, pray every day, stop complaining so much, go to Confession ... and the list could go on and on. But in reality, God only asks us to do things that will increase our capacity to share in his life and love! The Catechism teaches that man is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake", and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created ..." [CCC 356]. In cooperating with God's grace, we grow in our ability to resist temptation and grow in the ability to love like God does. This is the reason that we were created and the "more" God desires for us.)

“Conscience is a judgement of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed.”

—CCC 1778



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STEP 5: COMMIT—ENCOUNTERING GOD’S MERCY

*Direct participants to the **COMMIT** section on page 10 of their Study Guides and encourage them to spend time with this take-home assignment and be prepared to share the next time the group meets.*

Consider God’s call to Adam and Eve after they had sinned: “*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’*” (Genesis 3:8–9).

Adam and Eve’s first impulse after their sin is to hide themselves from God. They feel that same guilt we experience when we know we’ve done something wrong, and it causes us to be separated from him. **Do you ever feel a desire to hide yourself from God? Why or why not?**

Have the participants write their reflections in the space provided in the Study Guide.

When God comes to the Garden, he already knows Adam and Eve’s sin. He seeks them out not to call them to account for their actions and pay the price for their mistake; he isn’t looking to scold them or punish them. God is calling them back—out of shame and hiding, back to himself. He wants to repair the damage that sin has done.

God loves us so much that he won’t let anything at all stand between us and his love. Before Adam and Eve have even expressed sorrow for their sin, God seeks them out. This is the incredible beauty of God’s mercy! As St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “*But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).

God doesn’t wait for us to come back to him after we have sinned—he comes looking for us, just as he looked for Adam and Eve. In his merciful love he searches for us to bring us home. He is calling to each one of us: “Where are you?” **What is your answer? What are some areas of your life that you need to surrender to God’s merciful love?**

Have the participants write their reflections in the space provided in the Study Guide.



STEP 6: WRAP-UP AND CLOSING PRAYER

Here are the key points participants should take away from this session:

- 1. Guilt isn't a bad thing—something we should ignore or justify—but rather a wake-up call and a step toward reconciliation with God.*
- 2. The many ways we deal with guilt, including distraction and changing our thought process to justify it, can keep us from acknowledging our sins and recognizing our need for God's forgiveness.*
- 3. And above all else, God is a loving and merciful Father who seeks us out when we have sinned to call us back into relationship with him.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment....

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me hear joy and gladness; let the bones which you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit....

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

Amen.

—Psalm 51:1–4, 7–12, 15

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1422–1429

Pope St. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia (Reconciliation and Penance)*,
Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (1984)

Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11–32

NOTES

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