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SINCERE CONFESSION AND FULL FORGIVENESS¹

ADDRESS everyone involved: God first, then other people

I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you." Psalm 41:4
Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. Acts 19:18; cf. Luke 19:8

AVOID if, but, and maybe: no excuse-making, minimizing, or blameshifting

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32:5; cf. Psalm 51

ADMIT specifically: not vague or imprecise, and use biblical labels

sinful attitudes

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:15-16
What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. James 4:1-3; cf. Matthew 15:19

sinful words

An evil man is trapped by his sinful talk, but a righteous man escapes trouble. From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.... A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. Proverbs 12:13-19; cf. 11:13; 12:18

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit (literally, "give grace to") those who listen. Ephesians 4:29; cf. Philippians 2:14

sinful actions

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12; cf. Exodus 20:1-17

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

ACKNOWLEDGE the hurt: express sincere sorrow for the way you hurt the other person

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Romans 12:15-16

...Your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended.... Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

1 Corinthians 7:8-13; cf. 2:7

¹ This study is adapted from Ken Sande, "The Seven A's of Confession," *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 1997, 2004), p. 126ff. I have added the eighth ("Allow Time"), explanatory notes, and some biblical citations. Other excellent resources available at www.RW360.org.

ACCEPT the consequences: possible loss of privileges, restitution, developing a plan for rebuilding trust where it has been broken

(The guilty person) must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong.... Numbers 5:5-7; cf. Luke 19:8

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2; see also Daniel 6:4; Nehemiah 13:13; Luke 19:17; 1 Timothy 3:11

ALTER (change) sinful attitudes and behavior: actual turning from sin to God in obedience, including “putting on” the opposite of the sin from which you are repenting

So he got up and went to his father. Luke 15:20

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.... He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:22-32

ASK for forgiveness: a humble acknowledgment of the “debt” that needs to be forgiven, giving the offended party opportunity to grant forgiveness

Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father. Genesis 50:17; cf. 2 Samuel 19:18-20; Matthew 5:23-24

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, “I repent,” forgive him. Luke 17:4

...Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. James 5:16

ALLOW time: not demanding or coercing the person to forgive you; any promise of forgiveness must be sincere and in good conscience before God.

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. Ephesians 4:25; cf. Colossians 3:9

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 3:5; cf. Psalm 15:4; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5

FOUR PROMISES MODELED AFTER GOD'S FORGIVENESS

The Meaning of the Words, “I Forgive You.”

I will not think about this incident. [not dwell on it]

I will not bring up the incident to use it against you. [not memory used as a weapon]

I will not talk to others about this incident. [not slander and gossip]

I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our relationship. [not memory worked out in actions]