

Concluding Thoughts

We live in a culture that is often slow to accept personal responsibility for mistakes or purposeful wrongdoing.

While it is true that circumstances and other people can impact behaviour and choices, we all carry some responsibility for the actions we take.

God knows us more than we know ourselves, and looks with mercy on our formation, personality, genetic make-up, etc., but doesn't want to hear a litany of excuses in prayer.

Sometimes we just need to say: I was wrong; I acted badly. Forgiveness is swift and liberating, and will bring the experience of peace and joy.

Let's remember that true confession also includes speaking out that which is true about God and His provisions for us. There is great power in speaking out the truths of Scripture; that we are loved by God, cleansed of sin, purified from shame and accepted by God as His children to be joint heirs with Christ.

When we are close to doubt we can turn to the Scriptures and confess the truth of God's love that will shine into our darkness and stir our faith to flame once again.

Final prayer....

If you have a candle at home you could light it to signify your intention to pray.

We will end with silent prayer, reflecting on the scripture below from Romans 8: 35, 37-39:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We conclude our time of prayer by saying *The Grace* together...

What do you notice about this prayer that makes it a prayer of true repentance?

The focus of this prayer is actually not on the wrongdoing of the people but on the marvellous mercy and forgiving grace of God.

Though Israel rebelled time and again, the Lord remained faithful. Even when they made a golden calf and worshipped it, the Lord did not desert them (v.18), but continued to protect and provide for His people.

Look at how the words 'You' and 'They' are used in describing the faithfulness of God and the recalcitrance of the people.

Compare and contrast the consistency of God with the inconsistency of the people; God's reliability against their unreliability.

As the Jews listened to this prayer and its contrasts, they might have asked, 'Who could blame God if He abandoned us?'

How amazing and incomprehensible it is that God does not abandon them!

- **What caused the Israelites to forsake God time after time?**
- **Why doesn't God abandon the Israelites?**

The confession and acknowledgement of God's goodness continues by considering the time when the Israelites first settled in Canaan – the period of the Judges and the monarchy.

This review of their national history provides everyone who is listening with encouraging evidence of what God has done in the past, the awesome consequences of ingratitude and the inevitability of repercussions if sin is not confessed. Most importantly, there is hope for the future.

The hope that the Jews have is focussed on the unchanging character of God.

They see in the **present** a product of the past and the seed of the future. Their **anticipation** is that knowledge of past events will help them avoid the evil and follow the good. Their **conviction** is that a merciful God will once again forgive them and help them in their hour of need.

- **Having read and thought about this prayer of confession, what do you think is the benefit of confessing the truth of what Scripture says about God and ourselves?**
- **Why can we have hope for the future no matter what our past has been?**

Nehemiah 6

Opening Question

Describe what you think it means to be blessed by God and how are you blessed by God?

Bible Readings

Nehemiah 9: 1-36

Psalm 32: 1-5

Are there any words or phrases in the Nehemiah reading which speak to you?

What situation are the people in? Describe the mood.

The people are fasting, wearing sackcloth and covering their heads with dust. Their fasting bears witness to their devotion, their sackcloth symbolises inner repentance, and the dust on their heads is the external sign of the sorrow they feel in their hearts.

Their prayer begins, as all great prayers do, with worship, adoration and praise by acknowledging that God alone created heaven and earth and all living things.

What do you think fasting is about and should we still practice it today?

Read Psalm 32: 1-5: What state was the psalmist in before he confessed to God?

How do you understand confession?

Why are we often reluctant to confess?

Is it important who we confess to?

The corporate prayer of repentance offered by the Jews has only one petition: that God will have mercy and not think lightly of their hardships. But first they remind God that He is a covenant-keeping God, and they acknowledge that He has also acted justly and been faithful to them. Next they say: 'We have acted wickedly' (9:33).

Or, 'We did wrong'.

How often do you look back at the past and rationalise an incident or action? *'I was wrong, but at the time...'*