

Life in Rhythm
Daily Devotionals

Session Four
Repentance

Weekly Memory Verse

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." — 1 John 1:8-9

Day 1

The enemy is real. Don't trust him! — by Scott Benson

Reflect

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." — Ephesians 6:12

"Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." — 2 Timothy 2:25-26

Interact

Ephesians 6:12 pulls no punches in telling us that we're in a real spiritual battle and our opponent, Satan, is never to be trusted. In John 8:44, Jesus calls Satan the "father of lies." In fact, whenever he lies, he's only speaking his native language — "there is no truth in him." Craig Groeschel gives us insight into Satan's cunningly deceitful schemes, but also reminds us that God's Word is the spiritual lie detector we need to lead us to the truth:

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, our "thoughtology" Professor Paul said, "I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Satan will whisper accusing questions and deceptive statements. He schemes to twist your mind, because if he can, he then diverts you from your purpose, distracts you from God's voice, and destroys your potential. If he can get you to believe a lie, your life will be affected as if that lie were true.

Unfortunately, Satan's lies are easy to believe. Why? Part of the reason is that because of sin, we have a flawed internal lie detector. God warned us: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17: 9).... "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). That's definitely the problem, so what's our solution? How do we access God's power to stop Satan's lies? How can we demolish his strongholds in our lives? If Satan's primary weapon is lies, then our greatest counter weapon is the truth of God's Word. Not just reading the Bible but learning to wield Scripture as a divine weapon. God wants us to view his Word that way.

See how Hebrews 4:12 offers a direct solution to the warning of Jeremiah 17: 9: "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it

judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart".... God's Word was the first weapon I learned to use to remove lies and replace them with truth, changing both my thinking and my life.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The second half of that sentence is in the passive voice, meaning it is not something we do but instead something that is done to us. The good news is that God is ready to renew our minds by leading us to "a knowledge of the truth" ... so we can "come to our senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken us captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Then, as Jesus said, "(we) will know the truth and the truth shall set (us) free" (John 8: 32). (Groeschel, *Winning the War in Your Mind: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life*, p. 44-45)

Reflection Questions:

1. When are you most vulnerable to Satan's lies?
2. What kind of lies does he tempt you to believe?
3. How has God's Word helped you to expose Satan's lies and lead you to the truth?
4. Is there a situation now where you sense Satan is scheming to deceive you?
5. How could the truth of God's Word set you free?

Pray and Respond:

Write down your thoughts or prayers to God in your *Life in Rhythm* journal.

Going Deeper

Every day you'll have an opportunity to "go deeper" into God's Word by practicing the REAP study method. Read the following scripture and use your journal and the REAP method to unpack the following scripture and apply it to your life.

Learn more about REAP at <https://rhythms.friends.church/reap>

John 3:16-21

Day 2

Feeling “Dis-Appointed”? Christ Is Being Formed in You — by Scott Benson

Reflect

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” — Galatians 4:19

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” — Philippians 1:6

Interact

All of us know how it feels to be disappointed. John Ortberg reminds us that sometimes we can even live in a “state of dis-appointment,” especially when we realize that we’ve missed the life that God’s “appointed” us to live. We can “dis-appoint” God, too, whenever we displace Him and appoint ourselves in His rightful place. But even in disappointment we can still hold on to the hope of Christ being “formed” in us:

I am embarrassingly sinful. I am capable of dismaying amounts of jealousy if someone succeeds more visibly than I do. I am disappointed at my capacity to be small and petty. I cannot pray for very long without my mind drifting into a fantasy of angry revenge over some past slight I thought I had long since forgiven....

Sometimes, although I’m aware of how far I fall short, it doesn’t even bother me very much. And I’m disappointed in my lack of disappointment. The feeling of disappointment is not the problem, but a reflection of a deeper problem — my failure to be the person God had in mind when he created me.

But God is determined ... not simply to repair most of our brokenness. He wants to make us new creatures. So, the story of the human race is not just one of universal disappointment, but one of inextinguishable hope.... Your story is the story of transformation. You will not always be as you are now; the day is coming when you will become something incomparably better.... The possibility of transformation is the essence of hope....

The Greek word “morpho,” used in Galatians 4:19 (“until Christ is formed in you”), means “the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person.” It was the term used to describe the formation and growth of an embryo in a mother’s body. Paul agonized until Christ would be born in the Galatian people, until they would express his character and goodness in their whole being. Paul said they — like us — are in a kind of spiritual gestation process. We are pregnant with possibilities of spiritual growth and moral beauty so great that they cannot be adequately described as anything less than the formation of Christ in our very

lives." (Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*, p. 13, 15, 17, 20)

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you resonate with Ortberg's personal feelings of disappointment?
2. How does the hope of Christ being formed in you give you encouragement today?
3. How do you see Christ being formed in you?
4. Give thanks for God's promise to continue His "good work" in you until "the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Pray and Respond:

Write down your thoughts or prayers to God in your *Life in Rhythm* journal.

Going Deeper

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1 John 1:5-10

1 John 2:4-6

Day 3

Hesitant to Confess? Jesus Will be Gentle! — by Scott Benson

Reflect

"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness." — Hebrew 5:2

"God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant." — Romans 5:20 (NLT)

Interact

Often we are hesitant to confess our sin before God. Severe images of disapproving parents or other authority figures easily come to mind when we begin to anticipate the kind of reception we might receive from God when we admit our sin. But just as Hebrews 4:14-16 reassured us of Christ's solidarity with us in our pain and weakness, Hebrews 5:2 now shows us the gentle spirit with which He will welcome all who humbly come before Him. Dane Ortlund comments:

When Hebrews 5:2 says that Jesus "is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray (i.e., accidental and willful sins), the point is that Jesus deals gently and only gently with all sinners who come to him, irrespective of their particular offense and just how heinous it is. What elicits tenderness from Jesus is not the severity of the sin but whether the sinner comes to him.

When we sin, we are encouraged to bring our mess to Jesus because he will know just how to receive us. He doesn't handle us roughly. He doesn't scowl and scold. He doesn't lash out, the way many of our parents did. All this restraint on his part is not because he has a diluted view of our sinfulness. He knows our sinfulness far more deeply than we do. His restraint simply flows from his tender heart for his people ... He deals gently with us.... It's the only way he knows how to be." (Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, p. 54-55, 57)

Reflection Questions:

1. Is it hard to believe that Jesus will deal gently with you when you confess your sin? If so, why?
2. What, if anything, makes you hesitant today to confess your sin?
3. Are you open to experiencing Jesus' tenderness with you as you confess?

4. Take the opportunity now to confess any sin in your life.

Pray and Respond:

Write down your thoughts or prayers to God in your *Life in Rhythm* journal.

Going Deeper

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John 13:6-10

Acts 3:19-20

Day 4

Out of Hiding ... Into Authentic Community — by Scott Benson

Reflect

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." — James 5:16

"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." — Proverbs 28:13

Interact

It's so easy to allow the shame and guilt associated with our sin to drive us into hiding. Out of fear of embarrassment or judgment, we silently bear the weight of our sin, all alone. And that's exactly how Satan wants us to feel — isolated and afraid. But as Dallas Willard reminds us, confession to others is a gateway to spiritual healing in our lives. Willard notes the power of communal confession:

Confession is a discipline that functions within fellowship. In it we let trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures. This will nourish our faith in God's provision for our needs through his people, our sense of being loved, and our humility before our brothers and sisters. Thus, we let some friends in Christ know who we really are, not holding back anything important, but, ideally, allowing complete transparency. We lay down the burden of hiding and pretending, which normally takes up such a dreadful amount of human energy. We engage and are engaged by others in the most profound depths of the soul.... But confession also helps us to avoid sin.... Persisting in sin within a close community ... (in) the fellowship of a transparent body of Christ is unsupportable unless it is hidden.... Nothing is more supportive of right behavior than open truth. And the bearing of the soul to a mature friend in Christ ... enables such friends to pray for specific problems and to do those things they may be most helpful and redemptive to the one confessing. Confession alone makes deep fellowship possible, and the lack of it explains much of the superficial quality so commonly found in our church associations. What, though, makes confession bearable? Fellowship. (Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 187-188)

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your greatest fear in confessing sin to others?
2. How does being able to "lay down the burden of hiding and pretending" motivate you to confess?
3. When you've confessed to others, how did you experience their grace and support?

4. How has confession empowered you to turn away from sinful patterns in your life?
5. Do you need to confess something to someone? Who is that person and how will you do that?

Pray and Respond:

Write down your thoughts or prayers to God in your *Life in Rhythm* journal.

Going Deeper

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John 13:15-16

John 16:7-10

Day 5

Life Beyond Regret: Confession 101 — by Scott Benson

Reflect

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." — 1 John 1:8-9

Interact

At your next group discussion, we'll dive deeper into the Rhythm of Repentance ("choosing to honestly *confess* and *then turn away from our sin* in humble surrender to Jesus"). Together as a group we'll enter into an experience designed to provide freedom from some of the strongholds in our lives — those areas of sin where Satan has "twisted a weakness we have into a binding knot where he's holding the ropes" and we're unable to break his hold simply by trying harder to be "good." It's important to note the sequence of confession *preceding* repentance. We need to call out our sin (confession) *before* we can turn from it (repentance). To understand more about confession, John Ortberg offers a helpful primer on the what and how of confession:

Because many of us struggle to accept the reality of forgiveness, that is the reason that God has given us the practice of confession.... Confession is not primarily something God has us do because he needs it. God is not clutching tightly to his mercy as if we have to pry it from his fingers like a child's last cookie. We need to confess in order to heal and be changed.

Confession is a practice that, done wisely, will help us become transformed. When we practice confession, two things happen. The first is that we are liberated from guilt. The second is that we will be at least a little less likely to sin in the same way in the future than if we had not confessed. Sin will look and feel less attractive.

So how do we practice confession in a way that begins to heal our souls? Confession that helps us experience the power of forgiveness is a process, not a single act. There are three steps in confession:

1. Preparation — We begin by placing ourselves into the care of the Spirit and asking for help. Apart from this, confession is dangerous. If left to ourselves, we are prone to self-condemnation for things we are not to feel guilty about, or alternatively prone to glossing over the truly ugly stains that demand attention. We need the Spirit's help.

2. Self-examination — This entails taking time to reflect on our thoughts, words, and deeds and acknowledging that we have sinned.... A helpful approach to self-examination is to think through various categories of sin.

Probably the list used most often is that of the seven deadly sins: pride, anger, lust, envy, greed, sloth, and gluttony. Where do we stand in regard to each of these? Confession should be specific, concrete, and particular. At the heart of it, confession involves taking appropriate responsibility for what we have done. This is not easy to do. To confess means to own up to the fact that our behavior wasn't just the result of bad parenting, poor genes, etc. But confession means that somewhere in the mix was a choice, and the choice was made by us, and it does not need to be excused, explained, or even understood. The choice needs to be forgiven. The slate has to be wiped clean.

3. Perception — We need a new way of looking at our sin; a new understanding of it. All sin involves denial. One of the worst things about sin is that it carries with it a certain moral myopia — nearsightedness. It distorts our ability to detect its presence.... So in this step of confession, we ask for honest perception. We want to see our sins through a new lens. We begin to see our sin through the eyes of the person we sinned against. We struggle to see them through the eyes of God." (Psalm 139:23-24 – Ortberg, p. 129-133)

Reflection Questions:

1. Ortberg notes two benefits to confession: liberating us from guilt and making sin look less attractive. How have you experienced those two things to be true?
2. Of Ortberg's three steps to confession (preparation, self-examination, and perception), which one is most challenging for you? Most important to you?
3. How is God calling you to take the next step in confession?
4. Take time now to thank God for the gift of confession.

Pray and Respond:

Write down your thoughts or prayers to God in your *Life with Rhythm* journal.

Going Deeper

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Psalm 51:1-7

Session Four

Repentance

Our new Rhythm this week is Repentance!

Here's our summary: *As the Spirit helps us take inventory of our lives, we choose to honestly confess and then turn away from our sin in humble surrender to Jesus. By receiving His gracious offer of forgiveness, we can find the freedom and power we need to live in obedience to Him.*

Take a closer look. Did you see how repentance leads to finding “freedom and power” to “live in obedience to Jesus”? That’s what our “Life in Rhythm” series is all about: becoming more like Jesus!

But before we can get there, there’s one important first step we need to take. We need the Holy Spirit’s assistance in taking inventory. We need His help to see ourselves as He sees us. That’s why David made that courageous request in Psalm 139:23 to “Search me, God, and know my heart.”

Our heart is the center of who we are. In Mark 7:21, Jesus said that sin comes “out of a person’s heart.” So, ultimately, it’s our heart that needs to be cleaned up and forgiven.

After we’ve partnered with the Holy Spirit to assess our sin, then we’re ready for two more essential steps: to honestly confess our sin and to turn away from our sin.

Honest confession is calling it as it is. It’s admitting, “Yes, that’s me, I did it.” No denial. No minimizing. No rationalizing. It’s taking seriously the warning in 1 John 1:8 that “if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” It’s being a truth-teller when it comes to calling out our sin.

But once we’ve recognized our sin, we’ve got a critical decision to make: to turn away or not. To make a 180-degree turnaround or to keep traveling down “sin street.” But know this: if we don’t make that about-face turn, we’ll never experience the hope and healing we need to become more like Jesus. It’s our choice!

Week 4 is all about repentance: taking inventory, honestly confessing, choosing to turn away, being forgiven, finding freedom and power, living in obedience, and becoming more like Jesus!

Today, we'll be entering into a "Repentance Experience" which your facilitator will introduce. But first hear the promise of spiritual refreshment that comes whenever we repent and turn away from our sin:

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Are you ready for your sins to be wiped out and to feel refreshed by God?

Agenda

1. OPENING PRAYER
2. VIDEO (10 MIN)
3. CONNECT & REFLECT (30 MIN)
4. REPENTANCE EXPERIENCE (45 MIN Optional)
5. PREVIEW NEXT SESSION
6. CLOSING PRAYER

Watch Video

The Session 4 video will be available on October 10.

<https://rhythms.friends.church/videos>

Connect & Reflect

1. If you heard the message on the Rhythm of Repentance this past weekend, did you sense God's Spirit speaking to you? If so, how was He stirring you?
2. Did you interact with the Daily Reflections this past week? If so, were any of them impactful?
Day One — counteracting Satan's lies with the truth of God's Word (Hebrews 4:12)
Day Two — holding on to the hope of Christ "being formed" in us (Galatians 4:19)
Day Three — stepping into confession, knowing Jesus will be gentle (Hebrew 5:2)
Day Four — coming out of hiding and admitting our sin to others (James 5:16)
Day Five — choosing to confess and receive His forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9)
3. Ask everyone to pray silently, telling Jesus your most honest thoughts and feelings about the repentance process that we're about to experience. Ask for courage in calling out your sin as the Holy Spirit shows you. Ask for His help in turning away from your sin. Share your desire to experience His forgiveness. Ask for the Spirit's power to become more like Him.

God's Response to Our Sin

Just before our Repentance Experience, let's be reminded that Jesus will "deal gently" with us whenever we confess our sin. In our Day Three Reflection last week, Dane Ortlund insightfully shared, "What elicits tenderness from Jesus is not the severity of the sin but whether the sinner comes to him."

Just by us coming to Him in confession, we know that Jesus will welcome us with gentleness. But then Ortlund surprises us with another unexpected revelation of how God views our sin:

If you are part of Christ's own body, your sins evoke his deepest heart, his compassion and pity.... He's on your side. He sides with you against your sin, not against you because of your sin.... God looks at his people in all their moral filth ("My people are bent on turning away from me," Hosea 11:7) ... but his heart is inflamed with pity and compassion for his people ("My compassion grows warm and tender ... and I will not come in wrath," Hosea 11:8-9). He simply cannot give them up. Nothing could cause him to abandon them. They are his.

We tend to think that because he is God and not us, the fact that he is holy renders it all the more certain that he will visit wrath on his sinful people ... (but) the sins of those who belong to God open the floodgates of his heart of compassion for us. The dam breaks. It is not our loveliness that wins his love. It is our own unloveliness. Our hearts gasp to catch up with this. It is not how the world around us works. It is not how our own hearts work. But we bow in humble submission, letting God set the terms by which he will love us." (Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, p. 71-75)

Group Discussion: *How are you surprised by God's response to our sin? Do you struggle to understand why He would respond with "warm and tender" compassion? Do you struggle to believe it's even true? If our sins "evoke his deepest heart," how does knowing that prepare you for our "Repentance Experience"?*

Strongholds Experience (45 minutes)

What is the “Repentance Experience”?

You will have an opportunity to enter into a brief time of self-examination and confession, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you. You'll review a list of “strongholds” of sin and their corresponding behaviors. Next to each stronghold will be an alternative spiritual attribute that describes the kind of freedom that God longs for you to experience in that area. For instance, next to “bitterness” is “forgiveness.” You'll also find Scripture to gain insight into the freedom that God offers and that will reaffirm your true identity in Christ. As you sense the Holy Spirit's leading, identify any stronghold areas where Satan has a foothold or where you've allowed patterns of sin to develop.

After you've had time alone with God, you'll have an opportunity to share and confess your strongholds to part of the group, as you feel led by the Spirit. Next, the group will pray over you, asking the Holy Spirit to break any strongholds in your life so that you can experience the Spirit's healing power of freedom and forgiveness.

James 5:16 provides an instructive model for your time together: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

What is a stronghold?

A stronghold is any area of sin where Satan has “twisted a weakness we have into a binding knot where he's holding the ropes” ... and we're unable to break his grip simply by trying harder to be “good.” Each stronghold is an area of spiritual battle where Satan wants to discourage and defeat us. Ultimately, we can't win those fights without the Spirit's power to “demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Galatians 5:16 reminds us to “walk by” or be guided by the Spirit so that we “won't be doing what our sinful nature craves.” (NLT)

As the Holy Spirit reveals behaviors and patterns of sin in our lives, we can choose to confess them and ask for His power in turning away (repenting) from our sin. The apostle Paul tells us that we have total access to “the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20). That's the kind of power we need to claim victory and experience breakthrough over our strongholds.

What steps will we follow?

- Your facilitator will provide an overview, answer questions, and guide the process.
- Groups with men and women will separate into single-gender groups for greater intimacy.
- Groups will divide into sub-groups of 4 or less to ensure enough time for sharing.

- Each person will review the “Stronghold/Freedom” list, inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal strongholds.
 - Circle “Strongholds” on the list, and consider how you’ve experienced each stronghold.
 - Reflect on the “Freedom” attributes and associated Scriptures, and reaffirm your true identity in Christ.
- Each person will confess their strongholds to the group as they feel led, claiming the freedom of God’s forgiveness.
- After confessing strongholds, each person will be prayed for by the group, asking the Spirit to break those strongholds and to give them freedom.
- Keep in mind:
 - If you sense the Spirit prompting you to pray for someone, please step up.
 - Group members will struggle with the same strongholds — no one is alone.
 - Avoid offering quick fixes or advice. The group is there to listen, pray and encourage.
 - Consider encouraging a group member this week. Repenting of strongholds is challenging and someone may need your support.
- Your facilitator will close by leading a debrief, inviting people to share and ending with prayer.