

## SageTalk Episode 17: Confession Opens the Door to Transformation

Paul Lawler: Hi, this is Paul Lawler and I'm delighted to be with my brother Al Henson today and this is Sage Talk.

Al Henson: And Paul, it's a great joy to be here and if you've been listening to the Sage Talk broadcast with us or podcast with us, you've been noticing a trend, a thread, a rope that we've been tying everything into that we could entitle your growth, your transformation as a brother or sister, and we're going to continue that theme. In some of our podcasts, we've talked about walking on the grace highway, which is we're under grace. We're no longer under law, we're under the grace of God and grace has provided for us unmerited, all that Jesus is, available to all that we need.

Al Henson: I want to say that one again. Grace is all that Jesus is made available to all that you and I need. And on this highway, God has made Himself available to all that we need to be transformed, and perhaps the preeminent purpose of God in our lives and the preeminent passion of God that should be in our lives, Romans 8:29, "That we would be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ." So we're going to be taking up topics around the subject of transformation on the grace highway.

Paul Lawler: So Al, as we do that today, we have the delight of sharing with our listeners, another one of the keys of our own transformation in Christ, and one of these keys or the key that we're looking at today is the key of confession of sin. And there are three ways we want, or primary ways we want to spend some time talking about this today. First, what is confession of sin, based on 1 John 1:9? Secondly, when James tells us to confess our sins to one another, how does this relate to our transformation? How is this significant for the believer? Then thirdly, what is the fruit that this produces in regard to our transformation? So we're going to engage in conversation around these things.

Al Henson: Yeah. Confession, biblically, spiritually, practically, experientially is such a vital, critical part of one's spiritual life and transformation. So let's just start Paul and talk a few minutes about what is confession? What does it mean? The actual word, biblically, the word confess, you mentioned 1 John 1:9, but if we confess our sins, the word confess means to agree. Biblically, it means to agree with God. Now, it's really important Paul, I've learned even when it comes to my sin, I need to see my sin from God's perspective. What has it done to God? What has it done to myself? What has it done to others? And I need to understand seeing and agree with God about my sin, and one of the great problems of pride is not then willingness to take ownership for our mistakes and our weaknesses and our sin.

Al Henson: So confession is to agree with God, but to agree with God about our sin, to agree with God about how He looks at our sin, to agree with God about who He is and what He's done on the cross in Calvary, to forgive us of our sin and the grace that He's providing not only to forgive us of our sin. Romans come to my mind when he says, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? We're under grace," and what God has given us that we don't

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have to continue in sin, that we can find victory over sin. Then at the same time because Satan comes into this.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: The accuser of the brethren, when we're beginning to see our weaknesses and our faults, to also agree with God that there is no condemnation. There's conviction, there's wrong, but to agree with God that there's hope not only in transformation, but to agree with God that even though I have sinned, it didn't change this nature that God gave me, this righteous Holy nature that God has given me, in the person of Jesus Christ. So confession is a full agreement with God even in the times of repentance and remorse.

Paul Lawler: Al, as you share that, in our coming into agreement with God, I want to lift up something that I've encountered many times as a pastor, primarily one-on-one, sitting with a believer, struggling, and seeking patterns of confession of sin, a statement's made like this from time to time. "I believe God can forgive me. I just can't forgive myself." And I believe that many of the things that you've just shared speak to the heart of what's tripping that believer up, as they allow a subtle form of pride to creep up into the forefront of the heart, and to take the place of God in expressing forgiveness as confession is entered into.

Al Henson: Yeah.

Paul Lawler: So would you speak to that?

Al Henson: Yeah, the way I put that, I've seen that a lot in my own life as well as in the lives of others, that it's hard to receive the forgiveness of God and what I have come to understand is if I am unwilling, if I don't receive the forgiveness of God, I actually have taken the place of God in my own life. I have said, "I don't deserve it," or, "Not me," and that's God-like kind of thinking. God says, "You do. I love you. You do because of who I've created you to be. You deserve to be forgiven. Not only you need to be, I want to forgive you and you deserve to be forgiven and I want you to be forgiven because I want you to walk on in peace, but I also want you to grow and mature and move forward."

Al Henson: An interesting thing has taken place in my life when it comes to confession Paul, and that is that I used to not like that place. Now I love it. And brother and sister, you may be listening in and you may not fully understand that, but in times of confession, there's such an intimacy with God because in that kind of humility and that place of need, and that place of openness and vulnerability, the waters of the spirit of God flows in into the midst of that. And I know even as a dad, I have children and grandkids, and when I've disciplined them in love, some of the most intimate moments that I've had in their lives is after the discipline, because that wall that was between us, that intimacy that came, and this is why it's so vital into transformation.

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Al Henson: It's not the confession that transforms us. It is the confession that brings us into the presence of God and the truth of God and the life of God, and God is in his word and his spirit is what's transforming us, but this kind of confession gets us in. The other part of the reason why I enjoy it is because it's in times of confession, now I used to have my greatest times of embracing the accusations of the enemy. So now I've come more and more and grown some to not listen to that condemnation and accusation.

Al Henson: I remember Paul, there'd be times that I felt like I needed to sort of mourn for four or five days, so that I prove how sorry I am about what I've done. Sometimes it's okay, we do need to remember and grieve over our sin for some time, but I did it more because I felt like I earned the right, more the right to be forgiven. But now, there's not a sweeter time, when I'm affirmed by God. That's the opposite of the accusations. I'm affirmed of His love, affirmed of who He's made me to be and wants me to be. It's such a beautiful time of intimacy with God and in confession.

Paul Lawler: A part of coming into agreement with God is believing Him. If we confess our sins, He is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Al Henson: So let's go now and back to one of these main points which we're wanting to make today. Confession brings transformation. We've talked about what confession is, and we've even gone into confession with God. Paul, let's talk a little bit about the James 5 passage, another realm of confession is with each other.

Paul Lawler: Mm-hmm (affirmative). James says this in James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to another. Pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." Now, we're aware that, to many people that's a pattern they may never have entered into, and I've witnessed this many times as a pastor where we maybe teach on this passage or share in a small group with believers and this is new to them.

Paul Lawler: Someone once said this, "We're only as sick as our secrets," and that has great connotation and meaning for the believer, that when we're given this instruction in the book of James, that one of the ways that a believer matures and is transformed is when he or she has a close, I call it band of brothers or band of sisters, perhaps in some discipleship group or discipleship band where there is a level of Christ centered, Holy Spirit empowered trust and ability to be transparent with our souls, in a way where we can be honest with one another around our own sin, our vulnerabilities.

Paul Lawler: Al, I've been journeying with brothers for decades, one of which I went to seminary with, where we get together several times a year, and we do this. In fact, I believe it's one of the reasons by God's grace, I've been able to go the long haul in ministry is by keeping my soul fresh through, not only confession of sin before God, but confession of sin in an atmosphere with brothers.

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- Al Henson: And I think this Paul is what brings about a greater work of God, a greater evidence that God is among us. One of the things to clarify here, this James 5 text truly does speak of the power of God, he really speaks to the power of healing here. Not only healing us from sin, but even physical healing that can take place in this kind of context, and I think a part of that is so many I think body sicknesses come from soul sicknesses and spirits sicknesses, and it's the soul and spirit that's finding healing, then also it brings health even to the physical body.
- Al Henson: It's always important to make sure that our confessions are with trustworthy people. So the appropriate people at the appropriate time and saying the appropriate things, because sometimes I've heard someone confessing and mostly I think, are you confessing your sins or someone else's? Or are you wanting me just to agree with you that they were mostly wrong and you were a little bit wrong. Confession is really about you, and you and God.
- Al Henson: I remember Paul when I was in seminary, I got a little vulnerable here and that as a young man, I had struggled some with pornography and I was in seminary and I was still ... Now I thought I've surrendered to preach the Gospel, now I will have victory over this, and I was struggling with having victory and I thought, "How can I be a pastor and a preacher and a minister with this kind of struggle," and like you said, "These secrets." And I had been studying James in chapter five about confessing our faults one to another and praying one for another that you may be healed, and I just took a risk.
- Al Henson: There was a group of us brothers that were meeting once or twice a week in the lunch hour, instead of eating lunch, we'd meet to pray. And one day I just said to them, "I have a personal request," and I opened up and just shared with them my struggle with this area of my life, in pornography and an interesting thing happened. I thought I might be rejected. Love got deeper, the presence of God got deeper. The other brothers began to open up and to my surprise, they were all struggling too. This is a real struggle among men, and I have experienced significant victories through the years now, 40, 43 years later, significant victories.
- Al Henson: I'm so grateful to God for these victories, but a lot of that came around, the honest openness with brothers and the grace of God, not only coming from God Himself, but through the brothers as we prayed for one another and sought one another, and here's the testimony. In my seminar class, where 20 something young men who wanted to be pastors, there's only five remaining in ministry and those five, they were in a group meeting with me.
- Paul Lawler: Wow.
- Al Henson: Yeah. It's the power and even the benefit, and it is God ... Really James 5 it's not a recommendation. It really is a commandment. It's a gentle commandment. Confess your faults one to another, warm, gentle, confess your faults one to

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another, that you might pray for one another and that you might be healed, and I was healed.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: It was a process, but I was healed.

Paul Lawler: You know when we keep things private, when God in His love has offered us this opportunity of not only confession with Him, but confession with sisters and brothers, knowing that we have an enemy that comes to steal, kill and destroy and bond us up in fear and shame. One of the things that I have found when I confess my sin to brothers is that I'm liberated. We're liberated from shame, we're liberated from isolation. We are liberated into experiencing the body of Christ and Christ.

Al Henson: I just have to say something.

Paul Lawler: His person-

Al Henson: It's just something, I know I'm interrupting.

Paul Lawler: It's okay.

Al Henson: I just got to say this, Paul. I think the greatest question of every human being's soul is not am I loved, it's am I lovable, and it's in confession one with another. When we bear out our weaknesses and our ugly and then a brother loves us and we say, "Oh, I am loved. Maybe I am lovable. Maybe I'm not as ugly as I thought. I am somebody that can be loved even in my failures and my weaknesses," and that's one of the greatest. It is true. We're all lovable in the sense, especially in Christ, we're lovable, but to experience that, really affirms that truth, that not only am I loved, but I'm lovable.

Paul Lawler: And now you've beautifully set up what confession to God and when we are in a safe place among brothers or sisters to confess our sins to one another, what it's unto, that there's a freeing from shame, guilt and a liberation, but that liberation is unto a greater degree of healing, fruit bearing, transformation into the image of Jesus.

Al Henson: Actually as a pastor, I have found, you have a lot of experiences and I kept asking the question why in some of these 12 step programs that I'm seeing some real transformation and salvation. Now with some, they just talk about God and I wouldn't recommend that. I think if you're going to get in a group and that kind of program, God is Jesus and we need to speak about Jesus and the Gospel and the power of the Gospel, Romans 1 and 18, "For the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation." But I think one of the things that the reason why these things were so helping those who were in bondage and addictions was because of this confession. Not only their confession of their need of God, but

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the confession of their weaknesses and their failures. And they found this expression of God's spirit working among them in love and in power and they found freedom and healing.

Al Henson: So practically speaking to any brother or sister that's listening, practice confession, but you do need to find some brothers and sisters that you can trust and be vulnerable with and pray together, because of the James 5 texts. It says, if we confess our faults to one another and pray for one another, then we shall be healed.

Paul Lawler: You know, Al, obviously, we're all Protestants, but I'm aware that in the Catholic church, just their pattern of confession, that it's really based on this passage in James that we're looking at. I'm not trying to say that that's prescriptive, the Protestant church needs to adopt that methodology, but I think it's important for we realize, for our listeners to realize that this is not an anomaly in Christian practice or Christian history. That this is something the saints, those who've matured and been transformed by Christ, really have been engaged in practicing for hundreds of years.

Al Henson: Yes, without doubt. Wherever I have seen the movements of God taking place, you see this kind of movement. Actually, most of the movements of God that I have seen, even in larger crowds, have been when the preacher stops preaching and someone in brokenness and humility comes and people perceive it. And then sometimes I've seen where they open up a microphone and people begin to share. They're sharing not only the brokenness and the weakness, but the peace that they're getting, and the forgiveness that they're receiving and the joy.

Al Henson: I think that's where 1 Corinthians 14 comes in and says, you may want to speak in tongues, but I would rather you prophesize, which means to speak forth the stories of God and the truth of God, and then everyone among you will know that God is there. Even the lost will come in and know that God is present and there's amazing power and presence of God in confession just with God alone, but confession with other brothers and sisters together with God, it's amazing presence and power of God comes into this and then it's God who begins healing and transforming us.

Paul Lawler: Amen, amen. So Al, our Sage Points based upon what we've shared today, one is the power of confession before God, and to recognize that when we're confessing, we're coming into agreement with God, not only an agreement that we've committed a sin and He forgives, but agreement in the context of all that God is.

Al Henson: And I think Sage Point too is that a part of confession is the confession that God loves us and the confession that I have a God who died for me, and who has bore my sins, the confession that He can forgive me. And if I might say this Paul, in confession, when I come to God, here's what I hear. "Son. Yes, you're wrong and you shouldn't have done this and I forgive you, but I want you to know, son,

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this is not who you are. What you just did is not who you are. This is not who I've made you to be and who I want you to become. So son, come to me and I will give you the grace and the wisdom to begin to live out who you really are."

Al Henson: So that confession is that not only the negative, what I say, the negative part, confessing the weakness, the fault, the sin, but the positive part of the confession as to who God is and who I am and who He intends me to be with Him out into the future. Such a positive part of confession.

Paul Lawler: That's beautiful. The image that comes to mind is that it's not, "You've sinned, go sit in the corner." It's, "You've sinned. Now come crawl in My lap and see Me for who I am and let's make this right."

Al Henson: And the third Sage Point is the realm of confession. Confession with you and God alone, but confession with other brothers and sisters as God would lead and guide.

Paul Lawler: And the fruit that it all produces, that it's unto a greater degree of light and revelation, healing and restoration.

Al Henson: I was with a young boy this Sunday, his mother had brought him. I did talk this Sunday in church with two of us actually bringing the message together, and so this young boy had gone to one of the other shepherds. A mother had brought him, and I could tell walking away that mom wasn't satisfied and the boy was deeply irritated. And I thought, whatever mom wants to take place here, whatever God wants to take place here is not working. I knew the moms since she was a little child, and I knew this was her stepson.

Al Henson: A little bit of his story is, is that his father died when he was six and his mother married the father. So she was a stepmother and then she remarried and he had a stepfather, and a year or so ago, stepdad, his stepfather died. So he's experienced the death of two men in his life, and he didn't know how to deal with this hurt, this trauma, this pain, and in his mind, where's God?

Al Henson: "You're setting your teaching or speaking about this wonderful, good God and He doesn't seem so good to me." And I knew all of this, so I just called his name out and said, "Come here," and he didn't want to come. I said, "No, you know, come here." He said, "I'm a side mean." I put my arm around him on his shoulder, and I said, "I know you think I'm crazy. I'm just a crazy old man." He smiled a little and he said, "No, you're okay." And I said, "No, be honest. Confess to me, just be honest with me." He said, "Yeah, you strike me as a lot crazy." And I said, "Okay, that's good." And then I just repeated what I knew about his two dads and I said, "I can't imagine what you're feeling, the hurt, the pain."

Al Henson: And then I said, "I'm going to give you some advice." I said, "I want you to go home and get alone in your bedroom, close the door, and I want you to sit out on the floor, just get comfortable. And I want you to look up and say, God, I am

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so angry at You. I don't understand You God. They say, You're good. How could a good God let this happen to me? Just talk to God. Get honest with God, that's confession, and he can agree." God knows he's angry at Him. God knows he doesn't understand God. And I said, "Just tell Him. Let it all out. Tell Him." And I'm about halfway through this and this young man starts weeping, and people around are watching, what's this?

Al Henson: I just went heart to heart with him, and it was interesting the power, even him considering the possibility that he could make that kind of confession before God.

Paul Lawler: That's good.

Al Henson: And mom sitting over there weeping, and now we're having a Holy moment. So the results, the power, the healing, the affirmation that can come, the forgiveness that can come, the peace that can come, the transformation that can come in this tool, we might say, this call of God to walk His people of confession. So I've learned actually that a true transforming one is walking in a constant state of repentance, turning away from turning onto in a constant state of confession, because I may in an hour walk into an unusual situation, or get a call of a trial. I may walk into a fire and I may need to confess at that moment, "Lord, I'm struggling. This trial wants to flip me off of one of my leg, my feet out from under me." So confession is just that agreeing with God about my weaknesses, my need, casting all my cares upon Him for He cares for me.

Paul Lawler: All that is strong and it reveals how deeply God is our safe place.

Al Henson: Yes.

Paul Lawler: So with those things in mind, would you close us out in prayer on this day?

Al Henson: I would. Father, we're always aware that a brother or sister, older, younger, that are listening and you knew they would be listening and you're speaking. I pray that I love the word that brother Paul just said, "With You God is a safe place." And with You God is a grace place. With You God is a place of forgiveness and a place of power and a place of healing. And I pray my brother and sister there would not only make confession a practice of life, but even now, they might find a moment where they just stop, pull off the side of the road or wherever they are, and just stop and think about what do I need to confess to God now? What do I need to affirm? What weakness do I need to just be open about? What emotions or feelings or thoughts I'm having about God that maybe are wrong or right about me? What confession do I need to make?

Al Henson: Then I pray. I pray that every brother and sister could find safe people, grace people, spiritually minded people that they could have conversations with about their sins, their failures, their weaknesses, and vulnerability, because God, we know that Your spirit will move deeply into the midst of that. So spirit of the



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living God now, touch every brother and sister where they are as they're listening, and help them and guide them. In Jesus name. Amen.

Paul Lawler:

Amen. Amen.