

Name Sin

LUKE 15:11–32

GOAL

Adults consider the meaning and prevalence of sin, and of naming sin as the first step toward forgiveness and reconciliation.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

Have mercy on me, O God, for I am a sinner in need of your grace, wisdom, guidance, and peace. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Naming sin is a first step toward being forgiven and forgiving others. It is central to our faith and our practice of worship, as the Prayer of Confession holds a regular place in many corporate worship services. When we come before God, whether individually or corporately, we admit our need for God and name the ways in which we are all separated from God. Sometimes we name what we have done wrong; at other times, we acknowledge what we have left undone. Still other times, we admit that we are part of systems and institutions that undermine God’s justice and mercy. At most worship services we pray the Lord’s Prayer, which includes the line “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”

THE BIBLE STORY

Luke 15:11–32 contains Jesus’ parable of “the prodigal son.” Verse 17 displays a critical turn in the story when the son “came to himself.” The son admits his own shortcomings and recognizes his need for forgiveness. He returns home, ready to name his sins and seek his father’s forgiveness.

In reading the story, readers are reminded that the son is not the only extravagant character. The father is also extravagant with his love and forgiveness of the son. This radical sharing of resources by the father is essential for forgiveness. Once we name our shortcomings, we recognize how amazing the gift of forgiveness can be.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Opening Ritual” (p. 5): Prepare a sheet of newsprint with the words to the responsive litany. Keep for use in all sessions.

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Missing the Mark” (p. 5): Prepare newsprint with the definition of *sin* from the sidebar.
- “Truth and Reconciliation” (p. 6): Select and preview one of the video clips appropriate for your group.
- “Calls to Confession” (p. 6): Gather copies of worship bulletins from your worshipping community.
- “Naming Sin” (p. 7): Write on separate index cards one suggested confession from the activity. Prepare one card for each person in your group. Suggestions may be repeated.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants. Allow time for gathering activities (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the “Summary of the Practice” found in the Unit Overview on page 3 of this leader’s guide. A more detailed discussion of this aspect of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 49 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the entire essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING RITUAL

Display prepared newsprint with the responsive litany and invite the participants to join you in prayer.

Gracious God, we believe you forgive all sin.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Forgive the many times we hurt others and your creation.

Forgive others who also make mistakes.

Help us be as forgiving to others as you are to us.

We believe in the forgiveness of sin. Thanks be to God.

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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- Prepared newsprint with words to the litany



Keep newsprint for use in sessions 2, 3, and 4.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

Show the “*Forgive Overview*” video and the “*Name Sin, Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith Resources YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the session.

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- Internet-connected device

UNDERSTANDING SIN

Read aloud the paragraph at the bottom of page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* that begins, “*Sin* is one of those church words.” Take turns reading aloud each of the listed statements that follow it. Ask:

- ➔ Which statements do you agree with?
- ➔ How can sin refer to simple actions or omissions as well as deeper brokenness?
- ➔ How do these statements help you to clarify your understanding of sin?

MISSING THE MARK

Invite each person to say one word that comes to mind when they hear the word *sin*. Refer to the posted newsprint and read aloud that information about the word. Ask:

- ➔ In what ways is *sinning* like missing a mark or target?
- ➔ When a person sins, is it due to intention, mistake, omission, or some other reason?
- ➔ How does your perspective of sin change if you think of it as “missing the mark”?
- ➔ How does understanding sin as “missing the mark” affect your understanding of forgiveness?

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- Prepared newsprint



Sin is from the Greek word *hamartia*, an archery term for “missing the mark.”

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

Pens



Teaching Tip: If time allows, read aloud the paragraph on page 11 about Mark Allan Powell's research. Discuss participants' reactions.

FOUNDATIONAL PARABLE

Refer participants to “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Summarize the first two paragraphs. Have participants take turns reading Luke 15:11–32 printed on page 9. Invite them to name the sin evident in the parable.

Have adults consider the parable more deeply, approaching it from the perspective of each character: father, younger son, older son, household slave. Use the chart on page 10 to identify from the parable various “wrongs done *by*” and “wrongs done *to*.” Discuss:

- ➔ What factors come into play when you consider the story from different points of view?
- ➔ When you look at the situation from the characters' points of view, how does your naming of sin in the parable change?

COMING TO HIMSELF

Have participants take turns reading Luke 15:11–32 on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Direct them to “He Came to Himself” on page 11. Read the paragraph. Invite participants to give examples of people they know who have “come to themselves” like the younger brother in this parable. Ask:

- ➔ What factors led the person to realize their sin?
- ➔ What changed for the person after their realization?
- ➔ Do you think it is possible for someone to plan a “coming to oneself” moment? Or does one stumble into it?
- ➔ Does this mean one has to sin, then name their sin, before they can find redemption?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

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TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

As the first session in this practice, participants may be just receiving their *Adult Reflection Guides*. They may not have viewed any of the recommended videos regarding Truth and Reconciliation efforts in South Africa, Rwanda, or Canada listed on page 12. Select and show one of the videos to your group. After showing the video, discuss:

- ➔ How is “naming sin” part of this Truth and Reconciliation work?
- ➔ What effect does “naming sin” have on the work?
- ➔ Where do you see a need for this kind of truth and reconciliation work in your community?

Copies of worship bulletins

CALLS TO CONFESSION

Distribute copies of a worship bulletin. Identify the Prayer of Confession section and its three parts: Call to Confession, Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon/Forgiveness. Explain that, in the Call to Confession, the worship leader reminds people what we believe about confession and God's role in it.

If the Call to Confession is printed in your bulletin, read it aloud. Or read one of the Scripture passages from “Calls to Confession” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Ask:

- ➔ What do these statements say that we believe about confession?
- ➔ What do these say about God’s/Jesus’ role in our confession?
- ➔ Why might it be helpful to hear these words before we pray our confession to God?

Notice that Calls to Confession include God’s promise of forgiveness and love. Before we even open our mouths to name our sin and brokenness, we are assured of God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Refer participants to “Prayer of Confession” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite them to work independently to read the Prayer of Confession and respond to the questions for themselves and write their responses and thoughts in their *Adult Reflection Guide*. Discuss:

- ➔ How do you feel when you pray general statements in a unison prayer?
- ➔ Which lines in this prayer apply to whole groups of people as well as to individuals?
- ➔ What are the benefits of naming broad generalities? The limitations?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

WRITING A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Refer participants to “Write a Prayer of Confession” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite them to try writing a prayer of confession appropriate for worship in your congregation. They may work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Distribute paper and pens. Review the guidelines for structuring a prayer in the list on page 15. Encourage the participants to use this as a guide and feel free to alter it if they wish.

When they complete their writing, discuss how they could share their prayers, either with this group or with the wider congregation. Invite volunteers to share their prayers.

A FORGIVENESS NOTE

Explain that, in each session, the *Adult Reflection Guide* offers an opportunity to write personal notes about forgiveness. The notes will not be sent. Rather, this is a writing exercise to accompany “Naming Sin.” They are written for individual reflection.

Refer participants to “A Forgiveness Note—Part 1” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the paragraph. Encourage participants to use the notepaper space in their guide to write a note to someone from their childhood and name a wrongdoing that they need to let go of.

NAMING SIN

Prepare as many index cards as you have participants and write one of these suggested confessions on each card. Make up more if you like.

- I’m sorry I ate the rest of your dessert.
- I’m sorry I didn’t call you back.

Pens

Paper and pens

Pens

Prepared index cards

- I'm sorry I spoiled the end of the movie for you.
- I'm sorry I didn't invite you to our open house.
- I'm sorry I didn't save you a seat.
- I'm sorry that I get competitive sometimes.

Tell participants that it can be difficult to name our sins to another person. This improv activity gives them a chance to practice making a confession to another person about an imaginary incident. Distribute a prepared index card to each person. Encourage individuals to think about how they will make or react to a genuine apology that articulates a wrongdoing.

Form pairs. Have one person in the pair make a confession, naming the apology on their card. Both persons improvise a realistic dialogue that could follow the confession. After a few dialogue exchanges, the second person reads their confession. A second dialogue follows.

Gather the group and discuss:

- ➔ How does it feel to improvise a confession?
- ➔ How does it feel to receive a person's apology?
- ➔ How can improvising saying "I'm sorry" help you make real confessions or apologies?

FOLLOWING JESUS

KYRIE ELEISON

Refer participants to "Following Jesus" on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. If time allows, review the main points of this session and look ahead to the next using the paragraphs on the page.

Explain that *Kyrie Eleison* is an ancient Greek prayer that is sometimes sung after a confession of sin during worship. It may be sung in Greek or English or other languages. The words are:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

In closing, invite participants to enter into a time of prayer. Show the YouTube video "Kyrie Eleison (Audrey Snyder)" (bit.ly/FMKyrieEleison, 2:10). Encourage participants to sing along if they wish.

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