



**// OVERFLOW**  
LIVING WATER FOR AN EMPTY AGE

**SECRECY &  
CONFESSION**

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**GUIDE**



## OVERFLOW PODCAST

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Ruth Haley Barton, and Justin Earley.

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**BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART,  
FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD.**

**MATTHEW 5:8**

# WHAT ARE SECRECY & CONFESSION?



**“MY SON, GIVE ME YOUR HEART AND  
LET YOUR EYES DELIGHT IN MY WAYS.”**

**PROVERBS 23:26**

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**SECRECY AND CONFESSION ARE  
ANCIENT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHOSE  
ROOTS ARE DEEP IN BOTH SCRIPTURE  
AND TRADITION. THIS MONTH,  
THE INVITATION IS TO TAKE THESE  
TWO POSSIBLY UNFAMILIAR SPIRITUAL  
PRACTICES AND LEARN HOW THEY CAN  
EXPAND YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD,  
YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF,  
AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR  
SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY.**

## SECRECY:

Secrecy is an invitation to serve only God through your good deeds.

## CONFESSION:

Confession is an invitation to lay your authentic self before God or a trusted confidant in Christ, being received in love for who you really are and were created to be.



In Your Overflow Journal, take a few minutes to reflect on your understanding of the words *secrecy* and *confession*. Where have you read of secrecy and confession in the Bible? What does it mean to confess? How are the two related?

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## OUR PROMISE

Any authentic relationship centers around truth and love. Truth allows our whole self to be seen, and love will enable us to change, grow, and mature in Christ. God's love has already been given, so we can proceed in confidence knowing this month's practices will shape your walk with Christ and your community.

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Both secrecy and confession can be startling words. However you feel about these two concepts, rest assured you are probably not alone.

This month, we will work to know ourselves as God knows us. The promise of scripture is that God already knows everything about you. Psalm 139 says that God has already searched you and he knows you. What a gift of assurance!

In return, we search ourselves, know our own hearts, and invite transformation through being known by God.

// Our society offers false knowing, but our God offers restoration and belonging. //



**Begin these practices by quietly reflecting on what it means to be known by God. We have a personal God who answers prayers, is with you wherever you go, and leads you in the way everlasting (Psalm 139).**

## **SECRECY:**

We are journeying together to learn what it means to practice goodness for God alone. What does it mean to practice generosity, fasting, and resting before the Lord without shouting it from the rooftops? Does our work even count if it is kept secret and not posted to our social media outlets?

**“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:3**

Dallas Willard phrases it beautifully:

**“ONE OF THE GREATEST FALLACIES OF OUR FAITH,  
AND ACTUALLY ONE OF THE GREATEST ACTS OF  
UNBELIEF, IS THE THOUGHT THAT OUR SPIRITUAL  
ACTS AND VIRTUES NEED TO BE ADVERTISED TO BE  
KNOWN...SECRECY, RIGHTLY PRACTICED, ENABLES  
US TO PLACE OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT  
ENTIRELY IN THE HANDS OF GOD.”**

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## **CONFESSION:**

Confession is an invitation to be fully known by yourself, God, and one another. The practice of confession enables authenticity within Christian community to grow. In our context, this practice can be extremely difficult. We often hide a few layers of ourselves because we fear the shame of exposing our whole selves. The Gospel offers a different perspective: one of redemption and love.

This month, we will consider how the Good News of the Gospel reframes being fully known as both a tool and a gift of transformation.

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In your Overflow Journal, spend some time reflecting on the prompts below:



Do people perceive you to be the person that you truly are?

Is there a difference between your private life and your social presence?

# A FEW POINTERS & SUGGESTIONS:

## BE CONTENT:



As humans, especially in our American context, we are rarely content. We work to receive accolades and often make even the purest deeds a competition. This month, the invitation is to practice being your best self for an audience of one, and perhaps a powerful first step is to practice **being content**.

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## BE AVAILABLE:




Confession is done within covenant relationships. One of the greatest privileges is to give a sister or brother in Christ a listening ear. It is also one of the most sacred. Make sure this month that you practice both listening and confessing. To do both, you must **be available**.

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## BE COURAGEOUS:



This month's practices are a profound **invitation to be vulnerable with** yourself, God, and your community. It will be a practice of self-assessment and intentional conversation. Begin with yourself. Be honest with yourself, then lay it before God.



In your Overflow Journal, consider what may be the most challenging aspects of these two practices. Then, write a simple prayer and ask God to meet you in those perceived challenges and extend his love and encouragement.



It is human nature to keep things hidden. Think about it; many of our worst nightmares are nightmares of exposure. We feel shame for things we think, say, and do. In an effort to control other people's perceptions of us, we mask these hidden areas of our lives.

In Genesis, once Adam and Eve had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, their first act was to clothe themselves, or hide part of themselves from God. From the beginning, we have worked to avoid being fully exposed for who we really are.

But how do we show our full selves to God? What is the language we should use in prayer that will allow us to be transparent and attuned to the character of God?

The Psalms are full of David's yearning to be known by God and to be saved by God's faithfulness. Psalm 32 is often referred to as the Psalm of Confession. It gives language for how we are to speak to God in moments of shame and guilt, in times when we have dishonored God himself, our neighbors, and ourselves. It also gives us a guideline to how we are to practice self-examination in a time where we need to be certain our confession is genuine and true.



**Pause to read Psalm 32 and spend time considering the words offered. How do we practice genuine confession and what is the promise we receive through this practice?**

# WHY DO WE PRACTICE SECRECY & CONFESSION?



AS CHRISTIANS, THE CALL OF OUR LIVES IS TO ATTUNE OUR HEARTS TO THE DESIRES AND DIRECTION OF GOD. WHEN THE WORLD SAYS TO WORK HARDER, TALK MORE, AND CULTIVATE THE LIFE YOU DESIRE ON PUBLIC PLATFORMS, GOD OFFERS QUIET, REST, AND BEING BOTH FULLY KNOWN AND FULLY LOVED.



Read Psalm 139 and write two verses from the Psalm that resonate with your experience of being known by God. Then, consider the following questions:

1. What stands out to you about the Psalm?
2. How do you feel known by God?
3. Do you believe what Psalm 139:3-4 says about your life and intentions before God?

The practice of secrecy allows us to orient our intentions to the heart of God, where they belong. Scripture promises that God sees and knows your good acts, big or small.

## WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF CONFESSION?

“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 5:17

Would you be surprised to know that the practice of confession is the calling of all who are Jesus followers? While we often think of confession as a Catholic practice, it is a healing practice given to each of us.

It is helpful to consider the three facets of confession: private, personal, and corporate confession.

**Private Confession** is what is held sacred between you and God through prayer.

**Personal Confession** is the realization that we have all fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and have much to confess to each other in a covenant relationship.

**Corporate Confession** is done within a community, often during worship, where we recognize that we are a fallen society and there are corporate sins for which we need to confess and ask forgiveness.

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The earliest practice of confession was usually a public affair. You can see this in the Gospels during the sacrament of baptism, where people were baptized in the Jordan River after confessing their sins. (Matthew 3:6)

**Private Confession:**

Today, no matter your religious background, confession is a necessary and humbling practice. Recall that Psalm 32 promises forgiveness if we confess.

**WHEN I KEPT SILENT, MY BONES WASTED AWAY THROUGH  
MY GROANING ALL DAY LONG... 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.**

Forgiveness is both the promise and gift from God. We no longer need to validate ourselves because God offers to cover our sins for us. There is great freedom in this realization. We are no longer scared of God knowing our true selves because he, through Jesus' sacrifice, has covered our transgressions.

### **Personal Confession:**

We do not *need* an intercessor to receive God's forgiveness. However, sometimes, the person we have the hardest time forgiving is ourselves. This is where the practice of personal confession can be healing and transformational.

Consider the power of Jesus' words:



**// YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN //**

**MATTHEW 9:2, MARK 2:5,  
LUKE 5:20, LUKE 7:48**

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The comfort of hearing those words spoken over your life is a gift through the practice of confessing with one another.

When you enter a holy relationship with a trusted friend in Christ, the words we speak to each other bring life and encouragement for the journey. Father Peter, a Jesuit at Ignatius House (a Jesus Retreat center nestled in the heart of Sandy Springs) says, "We go to confession to hear the words 'you are forgiven' so that we can go out and share that with another." We recognize that though we do not have the power to forgive sins, we do have the power to remember and remind others that Jesus has forgiven our sins.

When we journey together in Christ, we are shaped by confession, forgiveness, and accountability to become God's holy people.

# WHAT DID JESUS DO?



HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE TERM  
MESSIANIC SECRET? JESUS  
BEGAN HIS MINISTRY BY ASKING  
PEOPLE TO HELP HIM PROTECT HIS  
IDENTITY AS THE MESSIAH. WHY?



**Read the story of Jesus healing the man with leprosy in the Gospel of Mark 1:40-45. Then, consider the following:**

1. What does Jesus ask the man to do after he had been healed?
2. When the man disregards Jesus's request, what are the repercussions?
3. In your reading of the story, what are Jesus' intentions for hiding his identity?

Jesus began his ministry by pointing to God's goodness instead of seeking his recognition. When the man whom Jesus cured decided not to heed Jesus' requests, it changed the trajectory of how Jesus could travel and minister to those within the city.

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**This month, spend time in the Gospel of Mark. One of the greatest examples Jesus provides is that he continually points to God while people look to him.**

**While reading the Gospel of Mark, see how many times you notice Jesus redirecting the attention from himself to his heavenly Father.**



**Perhaps consider making notes in your Overflow Journal, reflecting and analyzing how your good deeds point to God instead of yourself. How can you honor God by practicing secrecy?**

# WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?



JESUS TAUGHT BOTH SECRECY AND  
CONFESSION THROUGHOUT THE  
GOSPELS. BOTH PRACTICES CAN  
BE SEEN IN THE PARABLE JESUS  
SHARES ABOUT THE PHARISEE  
AND THE TAX COLLECTOR.





Read Luke 18:10-14 and answer the following in your Overflow Journal:

1. What do you notice about the Pharisee's prayer?
2. What does the tax collector possess that the Pharisee lacks?
3. In your opinion, what does the word justified suggest in this story?

The Pharisee is so consumed with *what he does*, that he is incapable of recognizing God's goodness. It is suitable to pray, fast, and be generous, but only if you do these things to the glory of God. The ends should never be your own glory. While the Pharisee recounts his good deeds, the tax collector *confesses* his shortcomings and, with humility, knows his actions have fallen short of the glory of God. What a striking dichotomy Jesus offers in this parable.

"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

LUKE 18:14, *WORDS OF JESUS*

The invitation is to humble ourselves before the Lord and to confess our failings to receive forgiveness.

## **PRACTICE:**

Spend some time in private confession before the Lord. Practice humility before the Lord. Then, in your Overflow Journal, record three words describing your private confession experience.

## **HOW CAN WE BE VULNERABLE?**

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston who has spent the last decade researching courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She is quickly becoming a household name for her work with Fortune 500 companies and their quest for courage and vulnerability in the workplace.

According to Brown, to be vulnerable, we must first be courageous. Suppose your team (or, in our case, community) is a place where true courage exists. In that case, authenticity and vulnerability will allow us to fully transform into the people God has created us to become.

## **WHERE VULNERABILITY THRIVES, TRANSFORMATION CAN TAKE PLACE.**

Brown's work is groundbreaking for the secular and Christian world, but for Christians, we must acknowledge that our faith is what encourages us to be vulnerable. Through faith, we realize God's goodness and redemption are gifts that allow us the courage to be vulnerable within trusting Christian relationships.

# GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IS WHAT GIVES US THE COURAGE TO BE VULNERABLE WITH EACH OTHER.

Through that vulnerability, we enter into the practice of confession and are transformed into the people God has individually called us to be.

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**“AS IRON SHARPENS IRON,  
SO ONE PERSON SHARPENS ANOTHER.”**

**PROVERBS 27:17**

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## **REFLECT:**



Is there someone in your life with which you can be vulnerable? If so, consider how much courage and time it took to cultivate that relationship. If not, what makes being vulnerable and fully known a challenge in your relationships?

## **PREPARE FOR GROUP TIME THIS MONTH:**

This month during your Overflow group time, we will share stories to experience accepting and belonging. Please come prepared having thought about how you will share your story using the prompts on Page 22.

# GROUP PRACTICE



AS WE GATHER TO PRACTICE SECRECY  
AND CONFESSION THIS MONTH,  
WE INVITE YOUR OVERFLOW GROUP  
ON A JOURNEY OF BEING KNOWN.

TO BEGIN YOUR TIME TOGETHER,  
OPEN IN PRAYER AND THEN WATCH  
THE VIDEO BELOW:



SECRECY  
INTRODUCTION  
VIDEO

## PREVIOUS MONTH'S REFLECTION:



How was it for you to carve out time to rest and delight in the Lord this past month?

What practices or rhythms (if any) are you looking forward to taking with you into the next month?



Scan the QR code to watch the **Secrecy and Confession Teaching Video**.

The type of confession we are practicing this month is done in a small accountability group, and we know that many of these groups are new and just beginning to become places of belonging. Most likely, this is not the place to practice personal confession. Instead, we will practice what it means to be good listeners and good storytellers, to practice being wholly known.

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**“Our Western world has long emphasized knowledge—factual information and ‘proof’—over the process of being known by God and others. No wonder, then, that despite all our technological advancements and the proliferation of social media, we are more intra- and interpersonally isolated than ever. Yet it is only when we are known that we are positioned to become conduits of love. And it is love that transforms our minds, makes forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”**

**CURT THOMPSON**  
AUTHOR OF ANATOMY OF THE SOUL

The irony of the modern age is that we are more connected than ever but also more isolated than ever. Even the Surgeon General's report from May 2023 warns of the "epidemic of loneliness and isolation." To be known is a gift.

To know someone fully, to hear someone's confessions, and even to hear their stories, we must be good listeners.

**// This month, we will practice telling and listening to one another's stories. //**

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To ensure enough time to share, please come to group time prepared with your story shaped by the prompts below. Please allow no more than eight minutes for each story to be shared. If your group is large, consider splitting into two groups so appropriate time is allotted.

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## **STORY PROMPTS:**

1. Share one or two experiences/things that formed your adolescent years.
2. What one or two life-shaping moments have formed your faith journey?
3. What are your current joys and challenges?

These prompts are purposefully ambiguous. There is no right or wrong way to share your story. It is simply *your story* to share.

There is, however, a proper way to receive someone else's story. Before you begin sharing stories, consider the following listening guidelines:

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### **A good listener will...**

- Hold the space to listen to each other.
  - Acknowledge this group is a sacred space to listen to another's story.
  - Recognize this is not a time to offer advice or ask questions. There is no need to fix anyone. We are simply listening.
  - Relax and know that you do not even need to offer a tissue if there are tears. No need to fix or facilitate emotions that appear within someone's story. Trust they know where to find the tissues.
- 

Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that true Christian community is not possible until two things happen. First, we all must recognize our own sinfulness and that together we are a fellowship of sinners. Second, confession amongst our fellowship is a requirement of true Christian community. By recognizing our own failings, we are better able to accept the shortcomings of others in our lives and love more deeply. By walking together in life, shoulder to shoulder with those whom God has put in our lives, we create a pocket of heaven on earth—a place to belong, be accepted, be loved, and be pushed to become who God has created us to be.

## SECRECY IN THE FAMILY

### THREE IDEAS:

#### Service Project:

- As a family, choose a service project or act of kindness to carry out together. Plan it so that it can be done discretely.
- After the secret service activity, reflect as a family on the experience and the feelings it evoked without focusing on posting it on social media or who knows about it.

#### Secret Service Day:

- Designate a day where each family member performs an act of service in secret. It could be something as simple as doing a chore for another family member without them knowing.
- Discuss the experience and the challenges of keeping the act a secret.

#### Anonymous Giving:

- Encourage and arrange for ways to give to charity or to individuals in need anonymously.
- Teach the value of financial stewardship and the joy of giving without recognition.

Each month, our Family Ministry Team will provide resources for your family to experience these practices in your home.



# CONFESSION IN THE FAMILY

## THE ABCS OF CONFESSION EXPANDED:

### Admit:

- Encourage family members to spend time in personal reflection to identify areas where they may have fallen short of their own or their faith's expectations.
- Sometimes writing down thoughts can help clarify them. Consider using your Overflow Journal for these reflections.

### Bring to God:

- Set aside a dedicated time for prayer within the family where members can bring their confessions to God. This could be done individually or as a group, depending on your family's preference.
- Create or use guided prayers that help in articulating confessions to God.

### Confide:

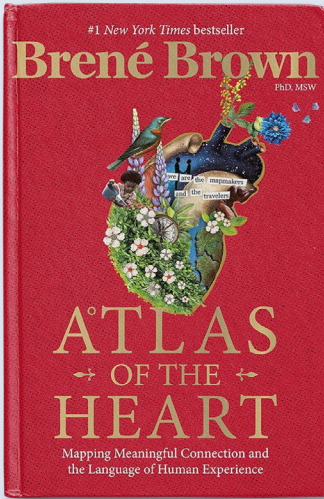
- Help each family member understand the importance of choosing a trustworthy person to confide in, someone who inspires them to be closer to God.
- When a family member confides in someone, they can pray together for forgiveness and guidance towards reconciliation.



Scan the QR code to watch members from our Family Ministry Team help you as you continue to discern what this practice could look like in your family.

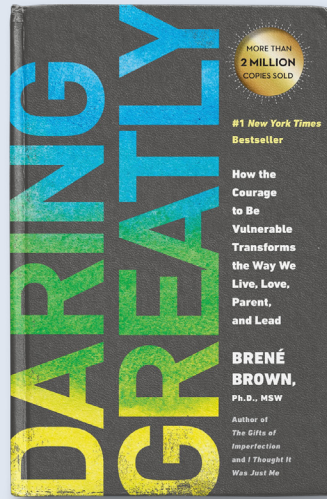
# RESOURCES

Want to go deeper in Secrecy and Confession Practices?  
Consider reading one of the suggested resources below:



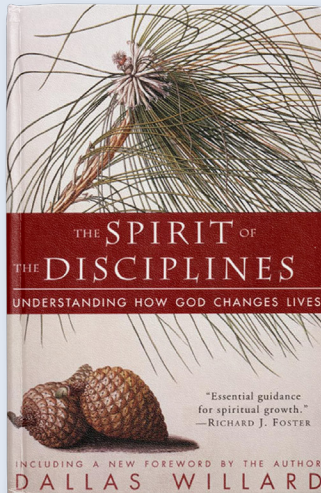
## ATLAS OF THE HEART

Brené Brown



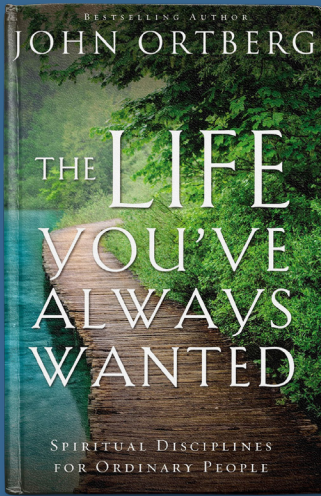
## DARING GREATLY

Brené Brown



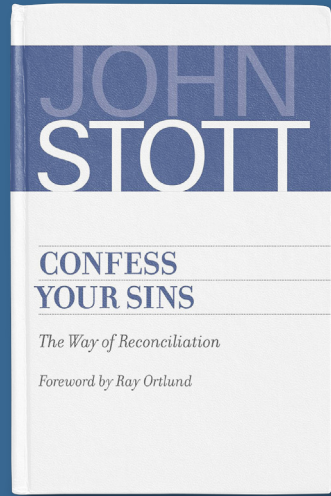
## THE SPIRIT OF THE DISCIPLINES

Dallas Willard



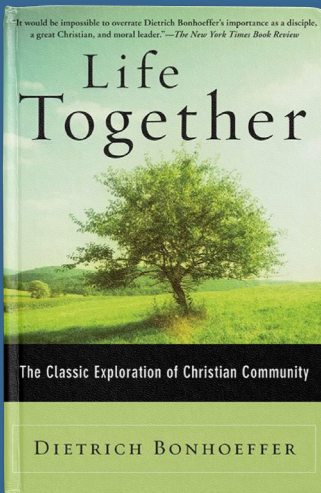
**THE LIFE YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED**

John Ortberg



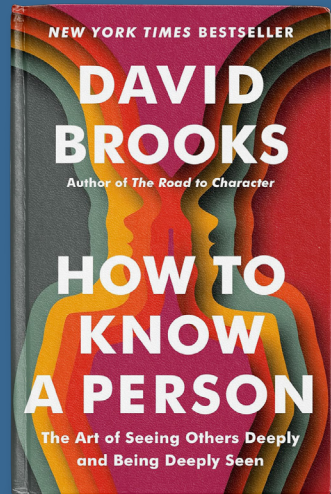
**CONFESS YOUR SINS**

John Stott



**LIFE TOGETHER**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer



**HOW TO KNOW A PERSON**

David Brooks

“BUT IT IS THE GRACE OF THE GOSPEL,  
WHICH IS SO HARD FOR THE PIOUS TO  
UNDERSTAND, THAT IT CONFRONTS US  
WITH THE TRUTH AND SAYS: YOU ARE  
A SINNER, A GREAT, DESPERATE SINNER;  
NOW COME, AS THE SINNER THAT YOU  
ARE, TO GOD WHO LOVES YOU. HE WANTS  
YOU AS YOU ARE; HE DOES NOT WANT  
ANYTHING FROM YOU, A SACRIFICE,  
A WORK; HE WANTS YOU ALONE.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER  
*LIFE TOGETHER*



PEACHTREE  
CHURCH