
Candid Confessions: *what happens when the Bible's reality becomes personal reality?*

Psalm 119

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Introduction *The Big Idea: Candid confessions to God happen when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality.*

What happens when a change agent enters a place in need of change? This question came to me this summer as my wife and I took on a home improvement project. Our house needed some work. Rooms needed painted and piles needed to disappear. There were things broken that needed fixed and areas that needed cleaned. "Clutter and colorless" were about to change into symmetry and beauty.

One of the places in our home needing change was the infamous bedroom closet. In this seemingly small area lurked many surprises. There's the usual clothes and shoes. Boxes also of pictures and keepsakes. Yes, the fourth grade writings from our children with their zany cartoon characters. And indeed, the scuffed walls needing paint and the stuff in the corner needing eviction. But the surprise for me still remained.

From the outside, the job looked somewhat doable. I did not realize the size of the job until I came up from the downstairs on that Saturday afternoon and entered our bedroom. Lisa had spent many hours in that claustrophobic closet. And now there she was, sitting in the midst of a quarter century of marital history that had overflowed out from the little closet and into our big bedroom—all over our bed, all over the floor and up onto the headboard and dressers. Wow . . . one thing definitely stood out. When a change agent enters a small place in need of big change whatever is inside will come out—some of which to be taken to the garbage and the rest of which to be reordered and relished. The aftermath of Lisa's invasion was unmistakable. The walls are clean and the light is bright. Symmetry and beauty are now residents.

Our topic for the next three weeks bears resemblance to a closet needing a change agent. Psalm 119 presents a man invaded by God's Word. Psalm 119 rings out what happens when the Bible's reality becomes one's personal reality? C. S. Lewis, known perhaps best as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, talked about the bible and the Christian faith much before he was born again. But after his conversion, he said this about the effect the gospel had on him. "A believed idea . . . *feels* different from an idea that is not believed."¹ We can be in a room and hear the bible taught with little to no feelings about that particular glory. But when unveiled beauty enters our soul, illuminating our darkened eyes and awakening our dead hearts, out flows candid confessions to God.

¹*The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, vol. II: Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931-1949. ed. Walter Hooper (HarperCollins e-books, 2004), loc. 72.*

Candid Confessions to God

This 3-week series is titled *Candid Confessions to God*. The title answers the guiding question “what happens when the bible’s reality becomes my personal reality”? In other words, when God’s word by his spirit enters our hearts and gives us life candid confessions to God occur.

By Candid I mean genuine, open and heart-felt. Candid implies not holding back from God who made us and will take care of us. We stop trying to impress him with our words (or those around us who listen to us pray). We give him our heart—our praise of him, our petitions to him and our pursuit of him. We are open to God. Wide open! The words we speak to him are not coerced or contrived. They are not fake or forced. We are free! We are free as we speak to him.

By Confessions I mean acknowledge and affirm what he shows us. If he does not reveal himself to us by his Word and Spirit, we do not know him at all. But when he tells us what he is like and what he likes, we then confess this back to him in the form of praise. We say things to him like, “You are good and do good. You sustain the world. Your creation sings of your worth. You are loving and amazing and awesome and glorious and kind and patient, etc.”

When he reveals to us our sin, we agree with him. We do not act like a defense lawyer. We don’t justify our sin. We don’t act like he does not know what he’s talking about. No! We agree with him. We confess our sins genuinely back to him in the form of petition such as, “I have sinned in not loving you completely or loving others consistently. Have mercy on me. Forgive me on the basis of what Christ did on my behalf. Mercy me. Love me. Bounty me with your presence”.

And when he reveals his beauty to us, we confess our desire of him and our determination to pursue him. We say things like, “I love you and desire you and cannot wait to be with you and will follow you and pursue your pleasurable promises. I will not hold back. I will obey gladly.”

Put together, what happens when God reveals reality to us by his word through his Spirit? The answer according to ps.119 is our faith personally responds to him² in candid confessions.

So, here is how the 3-wk. series is structured (refer to handout)

Confessions of Your greatness & goodness.

When the Word wakens the heart I will express *candid confessions to God of His greatness & goodness*. This sentence is a summary of today’s message. Today, we will witness the singer of Ps.119 confessing candidly of God’s greatness and goodness. This message will focus on PRAISE.

Next week the message will is:

²David Powlison pointed out an obvious characteristic to me concerning Psalm 119. He showed me that the most frequent words used in Ps.119 are first person and second person singular pronouns – I to you. In other words, the Psalm is an ongoing confession to God. Powlison summarizes Psalm 119 saying, “I, your servant, talk to you, LORD, who speaks and acts, whom I need and love.” See David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2005), 11-32.

Confessions of my sin & suffering

When the Word wakens my heart I will express *candid confessions to God of my sin and suffering*. This sentence is a summary of next week's message. Next week, we will witness the singer confessing candidly of his sin and suffering. This message will focus on PETITION.

And we will finish our series with the message,

Confessions of my desire and determination.

When the Word wakens my heart I will express *candid confessions to God of my desire and determination*. This sentence is a summary of the third and final week of this series. We will see the psalmist confessing candidly of his desire and determination. This message will center on PURSUIT.

By exploring Psalm 119 we come to notice that Psalm 119 is about God revealing himself to us by his Word through his Spirit. By his Word and through his Spirit, He is the great change agent entering the small space of our souls and evicting anything that does not bring glory to his name and gladness to our hearts. And what he leaves behind is amazing. We will increase in personally praising him, petitioning to him and pursuing him.

With bibles open to Psalm 119, let's look at the first message Candid Confessions to him of his greatness and goodness.

What happens when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality? Please stand and read/pray with me portions of Psalm 119. (Taken from the ESV, verses 68a, 94a, 176, 95-97, 18, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 40)

"You are good and do good. I am yours; save me . . . I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant. Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. [And so,] Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law . . . enlarge my heart . . . give me understanding . . . lead me in your path . . . incline my heart to you . . . turn my eyes from looking at worthless things . . . and give me life!

You are great

The first bible reality we will take note of this morning is "God is great". When bible reality becomes our personal reality candid confessions to God of his greatness happen.

Psalm 119 is chock full of the theology found in the first five books of the Bible known as the Torah. Our psalmist clearly knows and is known by this theology. For example, the psalmist confesses God's greatness to him as he thinks about creation. Take a listen to v.89-91

Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants.

"all things are your servants" = the sun, moon, stars, planets, comets and galaxies . . . The psalmist confesses God's greatness back to God as he realizes afresh that creation is

formed and fixed by God's spoken word (see Gen.1-2). While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. Creation is in cadence with God's thoughts (see Gen. 8:22; Heb.1:3). Oh, our psalmist marvels at the creator to the extent that he verbally confesses to him, "You are great."

Tonight before you go to bed, go outside believing the reality that "You have established the earth and it stands fast". Recall how vast creation is – the earth, our galaxy, this universe. Imagine with me climbing aboard your personal space craft tonight that travels at the speed of light (186,000 miles a second). You now can go around the earth 7x in a second (this entire earth you stand on and are thinking about tonight). If you'd like, in your space craft travelling the speed of light, you can go to the waxing crescent moon tonight in just 2 seconds.

But don't forget, God's creation that he simply spoke into existence is vast beyond our imagination. At this speed you currently are travelling, it will take you 4.3 years to reach our nearest star you are looking at tonight. Furthermore, to cross just our galaxy at the speed of light, it will take you 100,000 yrs. And to stretch your imagination almost to the breaking point, don't forget that the universe, according to Hubble, contains an estimated 100 billion galaxies. It will take you traveling at this speed 2 million light years to reach just the next closest galaxy. Isaiah 40:12 tells us that creation can be measured with the breadth of God's hand (from outstretched pinky to outstretched thumb). Let your jaw drop tonight under the sheer greatness of God.

Do you confess like our psalmist in v.120, "My flesh trembles for fear of you . . ." The shear power of a being like the Triune God of the universe causes our psalmist to confess "my flesh trembles for fear of you". The concept behind the term "flesh trembles" stands for a metaphor of something that makes one's hair stand on end. The New English Bible translates the Hebrew word like this: "the dread of thee makes my flesh creep". This Hebrew word is found in Job 4:15 of Eliphaz's sense of seeing a ghost. He says, "a spirit glided past my face; that (and here is our word) the hair of my flesh stood up."

Psalms 119:120 communicates an experience that only can occur when the heart senses the greatness and magnitude and majesty of the creator of the universe. The psalmist has his heart touched by bible reality. God is real. And God is really powerful. Sheer magnificence of God and his word causes the psalmist to say in v.161, "my heart stands in awe of your words".

What happens when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality? Candid Confessions to God of his greatness occur.

You are good

But if God were merely sheer strength it would be terror to us. If God were just raw power and not ravishing pleasure we would never tenderly be drawn to him. We would go insane running from him and calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne" (Rev. 6:16; see also Gen. 3:8). In our Psalm we find the psalmist confessing these words to God, "You are good and do good" (v.68).

When the bible's reality becomes our personal reality we confess to God not only that he is great but also that he is good.

How does the young psalmist know that the LORD is good? Where did he pick up that notion? And too, what does it even mean that he is “good”?

Again, the bible’s reality that changes his people does not come from within us. We do not know the heart of God by imagining who he might be. NO. God’s self-revealing written revelation (i.e. the bible) tells us who he is. The Bible reveals God. Where the psalmist caught sight of God as good likely came from Exodus 33 (and certainly other places).

Up to this point in Exodus, what kind of God did the Egyptian deliverance reveal the Lord to be? The great I Am, the LORD almighty displayed himself as supreme over creation, and false gods and nations that did not listen to him. Here, on display, is the LORD who has no rivals. Period! God is supreme! God is great!

But now in Ex. 33, Moses was doubting whether or not he could succeed in what God sent him to do. To address his insecurity and doubts, God did not talk about Moses. He talked about himself. Responding to Moses’ real concern, God said, “I will make my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Ex.33:19).

Hear this now. God supremacy used for his people’s sufficiency is his goodness on display. Let me repeat. God’s supremacy (i.e. God is great) used for his people’s sufficiency (he protects and provides) is his goodness on display (his glory). The psalmist declares from his delight, “You O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (see Ps.86:15; Ex.34:6, 7).

This explains how our psalmist can candidly confess things like “when I think of your word from of old, I take comfort”, “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning. I remember your name in the night”, “Your blessing has fallen to me”, “You are my portion”, “at midnight I rise to praise you”, “the earth is full of your steadfast love and you have dwelt well with your servant” (vv.52,54,55,56,57,64,65). With all his heart, our psalmist candidly confesses to God, “**I am yours, save me.**” (v68).

This is Psalm 119 – what it sounds and looks and feels like when the bible’s reality becomes our personal reality.

In closing, let me ask you, “is this your experience?” In reading the bible and hearing the bible preached, has its reality become your reality? Do you feel the worth of the greatness and goodness of God? Has the bible’s reality about God become your personal reality for life and salvation? Has the effect of the Word and Spirit on your heart yielded candid confessions to God?

In my reading, I came across two men who sound like Psalm 119. The first one lived in Tokyo in 1918. He had been sent to prison repeatedly. He was known to many for being as cruel as a tiger. His name Tokichi. As he neared his death sentence for murdering a man, two Christian missionaries – Miss West & Miss McDonald – visited him with a New Testament and encouraged Tokichi to pick up the book and read one of the Gospels. And so he did. He came upon the story of Jesus’ trial and execution. He read words that captivated his attention. “Jesus said, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” Stunned, Tokichi said,

I stopped: I was stabbed to the heart, as if by a five-inch nail. What did the verse reveal to me? Shall I call it the love of the heart of Christ? Shall I call it his compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that with an unspeakably grateful heart I believed.³

Candid confessions to God came from Tokichi's lips just prior to his execution. Just as the bible's reality became Tokichi's personal reality, so too we witness this in another man.

Augustine, a prominent Christian theologian of the fourth century AD wrote a book after his conversion called *Confessions* (I highly recommend that you read this book. All 350 pp. are written in the same style as Psalm 119. He confesses everything to God—things about God and true things about himself). In his book *Confessions*, he recounts when the bible's reality became for the very first time his personal reality. Can we say with Augustine,

How sweet it suddenly became to me, to lack the 'sweetness' of those follies and what I was afraid to be separated from was now a joy to part with! You cast them forth from me, You who are the true and highest sweetness. You cast them forth and entered in their place Yourself, You who are sweeter than all pleasure . . . now my soul was free from the biting cares of seeking and getting . . . my infant tongue [could speak] freely to You, my brightness and my riches and my heath, Lord my God."⁴

Or are we enamored with the greatness of money or politics or vacations or sex or TV? Do we love to confess the goodness of weekends or golf or grandkids or clothes or food? If the greatness and goodness of God has not gripped your hearts, if we are not accustomed to enjoying the bible's reality as our personal reality, then let us now repent and reorient the gaze of our souls onto the God of Psalm 119. Please stand with me in this closing prayer, let us confess together with the Psalmist,

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things [and] open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things (v.37, 18,) . . . make me understand the way of your precepts and I will meditate on your wondrous works . . . enlarge my heart so that I will run in the way of your commandments . . . let your steadfast love come to me (v. 27, 32, 41).

I AM YOURS; SAVE ME!

Save me from a loveless life. Save me from. . . and save me for a God-glorifying life. . . Save me for . . .

³John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 147.

⁴Aurelius Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1996), 214.