



North Raleigh Community Church
DOWNTOWN

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-DISCLOSURE WORKSHEET

RETHINKING THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

To Know Thyself . . . Is the Beginning of Wisdom
- Socrates

SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-DISCLOSURE WORKSHEET

INTRODUCTION

This worksheet will guide you through the ancient practice of confession. Since the word, “confession” has picked up so much baggage through the centuries, a quick definition: It is the rigorous practice of understanding ourselves, and then sharing what we learn with a trusted spiritual friend (*Part 5 below will explain a bit more about spiritual friendship*).

A few introductory notes...

1. Obviously confidentiality is a premium!
2. This is a difficult practice. It rewires deeply established brain patterns. So, take your time. At first, choose small episodes. Tackling easy episodes helps us rewire our brains. We learn to change our thinking patterns, which helps us better approach the big, troubling episodes in our lives.

That being said, even though the work is difficult, it’s well worth doing. Change our minds, and we alter the forces that dictate our daily lives. This practice is powerfully transformative.

3. The *Community Care* and *Conflict Resolution Teams* have been doing this practice a while. If you get stuck on the worksheet, text or leave a voicemail at **919-762-6722**. Include your name, contact info, and the word “worksheet.” Team members will share their experience with the process.

PART 1: WHAT HAPPENED?

Choose A Single, Afflictive-Emotion Episode

- Q.** What happened that caused your afflictive emotion?
Keep it to a single episode – something that happened on a day, at a time. **Be specific!**
Be objective. Recount the episode in 2-3 sentences, as if you were a third party witnessing it.
- A.** *In the recent election, Donald Trump used inflammatory language about immigrants. I teach a school full of immigrants. They are beautiful, precious children, but some of their families, I’m sure, include undocumented members.*

I am frightened about the future for “my” kids.

PART 2: THE STORY I TELL MYSELF (DATA DUMP)

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. What does this episode mean to me?
What is the story I am telling myself about it?
Why am I worked up about it?
- A. *For me, this issue has to do with the quality of life for impoverished children, their families, and our country's future.*

The story I'm telling myself is that I may need to take action to defend them, and that my actions could be very costly to me -- maybe even costing my job.

The story I tell myself, is that Donald Trump's administration will do the things he said he would -- things that will hurt immigrants and Muslims. I tell myself a story of mass deportation, a Muslim registry. I tell my story about horrors from the past -- and how propaganda incites people during economically tough times. I tell myself a story about past human atrocities being here, now.

I tell myself a story about how hard it already is for the families of my students. They are already "free lunch" kids. Their families are poor. Their parents work 2-3 jobs to provide their children a better life. They do a better job in their commitment to each other and their community, than richer families do. They are brave people. They are great neighbors.

And the story I tell myself is that they will be in danger in the new administration.

Already, my students are saying "Donald Trump says my family is bad." "He said we are rapists and murders." "Donald Trump doesn't like brown people." "I'm scared." "We aren't going anywhere for Christmas this year because we have to save our money in case Donald Trump does something bad to our family."

I have a Saudi friend in the process of emigrating here. He knows that if he is deported back to his small town in Saudi Arabia he will be murdered because he questions the Muslim faith. His family mortgaged their house and made significant sacrifices so he could go to college and come to America. He is a good person! He loves America.

And the story I tell myself is that he is in danger of having to return to Saudi Arabia.

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. Presumably, since the emotion is afflictive, your story is that something bad happened. Carefully explore what is bad about the situation.

Did someone or something do something bad to you? If so, ask yourself why. Why do you imagine they did? Why do you imagine this circumstance happened?

Did you do something bad? Did you create a bad circumstance? If so, why? What were the forces in play? The reasons? The causes?

- A. *Nothing bad has happened yet. However, Mr. Trump has not yet taken office.*

But what has happened is my own rising awareness of disparity in the triangle. I live in Raleigh but work in Durham. I feel safe to go for a walk any time in my neighborhood. However, my students tell me they can't play outside because people have been shot in their apartment complex.

The bad thing is my own bad thing.

I've turned a blind eye to this for far too long.

I tell myself a story about lacking in conviction and courage.

I tell myself a story that I might not have the courage to stand up to protect these children and their families. I wonder if I would risk my own comfort to hide my Muslim friend if he was required to return to Saudi Arabia. I wonder if the state came for these illegal immigrant children, if I would/could stand as their protector?

I wonder how far I would be willing to go to stand for what I believe.

- Q. In the story you tell yourself, what further bad thing(s) will this episode cause you? Now that this thing has happened, what future threat does it pose? To your environment? Your prospects? Your relationships?

- A. *I am afraid Mr. Trump will manipulate the fears of people who are struggling economically, to blame "my" people -- immigrants and Muslims. I'm afraid things will get worse for them because the government will begin to round them up, deport them, put them on lists, limit civil liberty, and in general create an environment of fear and punitive exclusion.*

I'm afraid America will be deprived of some people who are bringing a richness to our community.

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. How is *this* bad thing like some *other* bad thing that has happened in your past?
Does another similar experience bubble up in your mind? Another episode like this one?
Place yourself there. Remember it. Picture it. Where were you? Who was there?
What parts were similar to this episode? What parts were different?
- A. *The story I'm telling myself reminds me of what it was like when I was a child in an abusive home. I didn't feel safe. I didn't have control over when things would go crazy in the home. Bad things could happen any time -- at the drop of the hat, for reasons I couldn't control.*

It also reminds me of groups I've seen who disparage other, less powerful groups. In history, there are extreme examples -- Rwanda, Balkans, etc. But even in everyday teenager life, one group often bullies another. One group often makes life hellish for another.

It's a toxic strategy, but it does help alleviate their own pain, their own fears, by transferring that pain to another group.

- Q. Does this episode affect your sense of personal empowerment? If so, describe how.
Does it diminish the control you need to make your life work? If so, describe how.
Does it make you feel weak? Powerless? Impotent? If so, describe how.
- A. *I don't tend to feel like a powerful person. In the past when I am in a tense or difficult situation, I tend to simply removed myself from the negative situation. Now, I find myself keenly aware of the difficult lives people I have come to love are having to live. Now, power, or empowerment is becoming an issue. Do I have the power I need? Do I have the courage I need? Will I have the internal power to take action when action is required?*
- Q. Does this episode leave you feeling less secure? Less safe? If so, describe how.
Do you feel more vulnerable than you did? If so, describe how.
Do you feel more in danger than you did? If so, describe how.
- A. *I feel a little bit of concern about my own safety and security. If I speak up, or if I act out, I might lose my job. But honestly, the story I tell myself is less about my own security or safety. I'm white. I'm a citizen. I'm relatively well off. If something bad happens, most likely, it won't be to me.*
- My concern is really about the security and safety of those with little power.*

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

Again, "my" kids. My story is that there is an increased risk of unsafety, and insecurity in their lives, their futures.

And then, in my story, I have a hope that if things got bad for them, I would stand up. But another part of my story, is that I might default to the safe path (standing by and doing nothing) instead.

- Q.** Does this episode diminish your sense of yourself? If so, describe how.
Do you feel you need to fight harder to feel worth, goodness? If so, describe how.
Is guilt in play? Shame? If so, describe how.
Are you disappointed with yourself? If so, describe how.
- A.** *A little bit! (See above.) 😊*
- Q.** When you strip this current episode down, what is the thing that most disrupts your inner peace, your sense of well-being?
- A.** *The future may become dangerous for people I care about. I may have to make some tough choices about standing up for them. I am concerned that my typical pattern would be lacking in the courage to stand up and make the necessary sacrifice.*

PART 2: THE STORY I TELL MYSELF (SUMMARY STATEMENT)

High-Level Summary

- Q.** Try to put into words, the essence of the story you tell yourself.
Remove some of the detail. Try to see the crux of the story.
Try to use abstract words – to capture the heart of the story.
- NOTE: This part is difficult when we first start. It may help to check out examples in the case studies on our website. Find them on the "self-awareness, self-disclosure" page under the "resources" tab.*
- A.** *This episode is made difficult for me as I've more clearly seen how our*

High-Level Summary

society's wealth and race gap causes pain for people I care about. I have seen in this political season more willingness for one group to cause hurt to another. I see social unraveling having the potential to make matters even worse going forward.

This is causing me to reflect on how far I will be willing to go to do the right thing, the courageous thing. It causes me to question the quality of person I believe myself to be. Am I too afraid? Will I stand up and defend what I believe? Will I make the necessary sacrifices for the people I care about?

PART 3: UNEARTHING THE FEELINGS I FEEL

Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked

Our culture has trained us to ignore emotion. Consequently, we tend to settle for “mad,” “irritated,” or “frustrated” to describe afflictive emotions. However, anger is often a meta-emotion – a kind of “circuit-breaker” emotion. When an underlying feeling has been ignored long enough, it eventually bubbles up, and “breaks the circuit,” surging up inside us, and coming out as anger.

To help us relearn the subtle feelings that register in our bodies, we use a list of feeling words. Look over the appendix at the end of this worksheet, or one of the several resources online.

Feeling our feelings – and then wrestling them up from our guts and putting them into words... This is hard work. So give yourself time. Don't hurry. Talk it over with a trusted spiritual friend.

Q. What emotions did you feel?

Read through a comprehensive list of feeling words. When one of the words nudges you, write it down. You needn't understand why it nudged you, just list it.

Then go over your list word by word. Why did that word ping you?
Does it capture what you are feeling/felt? Does it evoke a related word?

Again, take your time. We're relearning to feel our feelings.

A. *I feel powerless and helpless. I don't know how to stop people from hurting other people.*

I feel voiceless. I don't know how to communicate in a meaningful way the pain those who hurt others are causing to those they hurt. They seem blind and I don't know how to help them see.

I feel ashamed at the potential, that I will fail to act on my convictions regarding the safety of others.

I feel judgmental toward people who seem so heartless and uncaring. Maybe there is more to their story than I understand, but I've asked my Trump supporting friends to help me understand. None of their answers seem valid to me. In order to not pay higher insurance premiums, they are willing to vote for danger for those I care about.

I feel anxious. I suspect more suffering is coming for those I care about, and I am worried there is nothing I can do to stop it.

I feel alone. People I know, people I love, people I respect, don't share my concerns. It just doesn't seem to matter to them.

I feel sad. The kids in my school suffer with toothaches and other health issues, but can't afford to get help. And instead of getting better, this election

Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked
will make it worse for them.

- Q.** Now, go over your list again. Ask yourself this question...
*“What is the link between each feeling you listed, and the story you tell yourself (part 2)?
How did you get from your story – to that feeling?”*

Often, we can't find the link.

Which doesn't mean the emotion isn't valid. More likely, it means we haven't fully unearthed the deepest version of story we tell ourselves. It invites more work on our story.

Assuming the emotion on your list is valid, begin to backfill your story.

What story are you telling yourself about this episode – that produces this feeling, this emotion?

- A.** *See above*

PART 4: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PATTERN BEFORE?

Self-Awareness and Recurring Life Themes

- Q. When we notice patterns in our thoughts and feelings, it gives a window into the unseen inner habits that run our lives. Thoughts are just thoughts. Feelings are just feelings. But we experience them as the *one-and-true-truth* about all reality. But when we see the scripts that run our daily experience, we begin to see their power over us. Simply *seeing* the patterns helps us dissociate from them. *Seeing* them, helps us step back from the power they hold over us.

So... Have you seen this pattern before?

If you remove the person or circumstance that precipitated this episode...

- Have you told yourself this story before?
- Have you felt un-empowered like this before? Insecure? Afraid of the same kinds of things?
- Have you felt invisible this way before? Or less important? Or un-wonderful?
- This configuration of thoughts, stories, and feelings . . . Have you seen it before?
- When? Where? In what circumstances?

- A. *Maybe because of my personality, maybe because I grew up in an abusive household where I was frequently beaten or belittled into submission, whenever I enter into conflict with others, I tend to default to the other person having more power than I do.*

I often feel overpowered by others.

I have recurring nightmares about powerful people forcing me to do things against my will -- especially things that hurt other people.

So while I'm great at encouraging others to stand up for themselves, I rarely feel like I can or should stand up for myself.

This situation is emotionally charged because these are children who are suffering – and may suffer more. These are people I love who may suffer. The emotional power of the situation pokes at my internal sense of inadequacy all the more.

- Q. What name would you give the pattern?
If you take out the specifics of this episode, what would be a fitting title for the pattern?

NOTE: This part is tough too. Try your best to wrestle up a title for the pattern. Assigning labels to our unconscious patterns helps distance us from them. And again, if you'd like help, text or voicemail a team member (919-762-6722).

Self-Awareness and Recurring Life Themes

A. Several titles...

I am powerless and alone.

Enemies are smarter, stronger, and better than me.

Nobody seems as horrified about these concerns as I am.

But the main title:

I'm powerless and alone.

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (TELLING YOUR STORY)

Sharing Your Self-Awareness with a Spiritual Friend

“Spiritual Friend” is an ancient term, full of meaning. It speaks of partners, intimately sharing the spiritual journey. Together, we create safe space for one another, to be exactly where we are on the journey, and to help each other keep stretching forward.

Spiritual friends hold one another’s self-disclosure in highest confidence. We do not speak about what has been shared with us. We just do not. Only in the case of imminent self-harm or harm to others, do we break a confidence, and even then, we inform one another before we do.

Doing this practice together is a powerful way to build a spiritual friendship. We start out tentatively. We sanitize our stories at first – until we begin to feel safe together. But doing the practice forms deep, abiding, safe, and strong spiritual friendships.

Advice-giving is a normal and healthy part of friendship. However, when doing this practice, we don’t advise one another. We don’t try to fix one another’s problems. No. We simply listen and ask questions for clarification. We tell our partner what we heard, so they can hear their own words back. We simply understand, and create space for self-awareness, self-understanding.

Q. Who will be your spiritual friend to share this practice with?

*NOTE: While you are building your spiritual friend network, our Community Care and Conflict Resolution Teams have done this a while and would love to help. Again, text or voicemail “worksheet” to **919-762-6722**. A team member would love to do the practice with you.*

A. *Done.*

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (CHALLENGING YOUR STORY)

Is It True? Is It Helpful? Is It Necessary?

One of the gifts we give one another in spiritual friendship is the gift of *not* being inside one another's heads. When I hear your story, and you hear mine, we hear it from *outside* the emotion, *outside* the history, *outside* the fear and hurt and insecurity the episode has evoked.

Because we see one another's episodes differently we can ask probing questions that inform this last part of the practice – challenging the stories we tell ourselves. We do that with three questions.

Q. Is it true?

Is the story you tell yourself – the deepest part of it – the part about who you are, and why you do what you do, and why you react the way you react...

Is it true?

Are there other ways you could tell the story? Other truths that mitigate your truth?

A. *There are competing truths as I think through this issue.*

On the one hand, human atrocities have happened. They could happen again. It is true that there is a large gap of economic and racial disparity in our country.

It is true that a strain of fear and harshness was unleashed during this election season.

It is true that people must constantly stand against tyranny and make sacrifices to protect the marginalized and hurt.

But it is also true that more people are aware of the problem than ever before.

It is also true that protests are arising all around the country.

People are taking action. Awareness is on the rise.

It is true that I feel alone -- but it may not be true that I am alone.

It is true that I feel my enemies are more powerful -- but that may not whole story.

It is true that am easily frightened -- but it is also true that I have courage.

Q. Is it helpful?

When you tell yourself this story... when your thoughts and emotions follow these well-worn patterns... when your beliefs, and values, and inner narratives kick in...

Is it helping you? Is producing peace and well-being?

Is it deepening your relationships? Expanding your connection to others and to the Divine?

Is It True? Is It Helpful? Is It Necessary?

A. *Worrying is not helpful.*

But being aware and prepared is.

Not being as alone as I feel - this would be helpful.

It would be helpful to explore my own courage, and to develop a greater sense of bravery.

I look forward to standing up for what I believe.

I look forward to proving to myself that I can be the person I want to be.

(This could also be a selfish desire to be recognized as a hero. I'll need to be careful about that.)

Q. Is it necessary?

Do you *have* to tell yourself this story? Do you *have* to have the emotional reaction you do? Does your story contain such inviolate truth that you *must* continue telling it?

Because if not, maybe the next time a trigger like this comes up, you could challenge the pattern. You could recognize that thoughts are just thoughts, and feelings are just feelings. They are not the whole truth. If it's not necessary, maybe you could explore *other* interpretations, *other* stories, *other* truths, *other* responses.

A. *Fear keeps us safe, so it's necessary to allow fear.*

Fear keeps us aware, but it doesn't have to cause action or inaction.

I need to focus on one of my favorite sayings (Elizabeth Gilbert)...

"Fear is allowed to come along on my road trip but is not allowed to drive."

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (WHY PICK AT THIS WOUND?)

This Hurts! Why Do It?

This prayer practice isn't about directly fixing our problems. In the long run, it is powerfully transformative, but sometimes it feels like we scrape off a scab but don't bandage it afterward.

The power of this process is in *seeing* the things that usually remain hidden under the surface of

This Hurts! Why Do It?

our awareness. The power of this practice isn't that it makes us feel better afterward. Sometimes it doesn't. But *seeing* things once hidden – this changes us. When we become aware of how powerfully our thought and emotion habits dictate our lives, we are prepared to question those automatic responses as they shape our responses in the future.

- Q.** Make sure your spiritual partner asks this question...
What have you seen in telling your story, that you had not seen before?
And having seen it, how could you live differently the next time you have this afflictive emotion?

- A.** *I've seen that I am intuitive.*

I am aware (sometimes more than others).

I am capable.

This exploration helped me see that I often allow fear to keep me a "sheep" when I could actually do something.

This exploration helped me see that things are more balanced than I often believe.

I'm safer than I usually think I am.

I'm more courageous than I usually think I am.

I am able to do more than I usually think I can.

After this exercise, I feel a little more empowered to take risks when they seem important.

EPILOGUE: AFFIRMATION

Affirming what is Good

As you realize by now, this practice is hard work. At the close of our time together, it is a good idea for the listener to note something good that emerged. Maybe an insight, perhaps a part of the story that wasn't easy to surface, perhaps simply the supportive role of community.

We look for the good – and acknowledge it together before we go.

APPENDIX: AFFLICTIVE EMOTION WORDS

Abandoned	Cautious	Devalued	Fragmented	Judgmental	Pressured
Abused	Cheapened	Diminished	Friendless	Kept out	Punished
Accused	Cheated	Disappointed	Frustrated	Lacking Lazy	Pushed away
Accusing	Childish	Disapproved of	Grief	Loathed	Regretful
Afraid	Claustrophobic	Disapproving	Groveling	Loathing	Rejected
Alienated	Clingy	Discarded	Guilt	Lonely Longing	Rejecting
Alienated	Clumsy	Disdained	Hard-hearted	Lorded over	Replaced
Alone	Codependent	Disempowered	Hated	Manipulated	Resentful
Ambivalent	Coerced	Disenfranchised	Hateful	Manipulative	Restless
Ambushed	Cold-hearted	Disgraced	Heavy	Mediocre	Revulsion
Anguished	Common	Disgusted	Helpless	Melancholy	Run over
Anxious	Concern	Disillusioned	Henpecked	Mistreated	Sad
Ashamed	Confused	Disliked	Hindered	Mistrusted	Scapegoated
Avoided	Conquered	Disoriented	Hopeless	Mistrustful	Scared
Awkward	Constricted	Disowned	Humiliated	Misunderstood	Scuffed at
Badgered	Contempt	Disrespected	Hurt	Nagged	Scolded
Banished	Contemptible	Distrusting	Ignored	Needy	Scorned
Beaten down	Cowardly	Dominated	Impotent	Negated	Scornful
Begrudged	Criticized	Dread	Impugned	Neglected	Self-conscious
Behind	Cursed	Dreading	Inadequate	Nervous	Set up
Beholden	Damned	Emasculated	Incompetent	Numb	Shamed
Below average	Dead inside	Embarrassed	Indifferent	Outnumbered	Slandered
Bested	Deceived	Empty	Inept	Outraged	Sorrow
Betrayed	Deceptive	Envious	Inferior	Overcome	Spiteful
Bitter	Defeated	Exasperated	Insecure	Overloaded	Stifled
Blamed	Defenseless	Exhausted	Insufficient	Overwhelmed	Stupid
Bored	Defiant	Exiled	Insulted	Overworked	Subordinated
Bossed-around	Deficient	Exploited	Invalidated	Panicked	Subservient
Boxed-in	Demonized	Fearful	Invisible	Passed over	Suspicious
Boxed-out	Dependent	Fearful	Irresponsible	Picked on	Uncertain
Browbeaten	Depressed	Floundering	Isolated	Pitiful	Uncomfortable
Burdened	Despair	Foolish	Jealous	Pity	Vengeful
Burdensome	Desperate	Forced	Jealous	Powerless	Weary
Caged	Despised	Fragile	Judged	Powerless	Worried