



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. Guard confidentiality carefully. It is essential for this process to unfold.
2. This is a difficult practice. It rewires deeply established brain patterns. Give yourself time. Start with small episodes to help you learn the practice. We’re rewiring our brains!
3. The *Community Care* and *Conflict Resolution Teams* have been doing the 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 that happened on a day, at a time. Be **specific and objective**.
Recount the episode in 2-3 sentences, as if you were a third party witnessing it.
- A. *We are selling my father’s house out of state. The first offer came from a woman who wanted a substantial discount on the house. My brother negotiated to an agreed on price and offered her an “AS IS” contract because of the much lower price. After the inspection, she proceeded to ask for a much lower price after the signing of the contract, then wanted the dining room set in trade, then wanted the stump in the front yard removed, then a hundred dollars from each realtor because she thought we had included the dryer.*

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 is it about this episode that has me worked up?
- A.** *This was my parents' home. There are a lot of memories and stories tied up in that house. This woman has made insulting offers. There was no rhyme or reason to them—so random. Even knowing there was a security camera, we watched the inspection through the security camera and saw her plotting to get more money from us as it was happening. I find that kind of negotiating to be wearisome and insulting. It felt mean-spirited and insulting to my brother, my parents and me.*
- Q.** Presumably, since the emotion is afflictive, your story is that something bad happened.
Carefully explore what is bad about the situation.
Did someone do something bad to you? If so, why do you think so?
What motive or intent are you assigning to this person?
Or, did *you* do something bad? Did *you* create this bad circumstance?
If so, why? What were the forces in play? The reasons? The causes?
- A.** *This woman insulted our family with her money-grubbing offers and need for one more discount.*
- Q.** In the story you tell yourself, what further bad thing(s) will this episode cause you?
Now that this has happened, what future threat does it pose?
To your environment? Your prospects? Your relationships?
- A.** *The negotiations are over, but I'm still afraid she will come back with something else and then cancel. That probably won't happen since she put \$5,000 down, but I'm anxious. My brother and I have a good relationship now and I don't want the stress and pressure to jeopardize that.*
- Q.** How is *this* bad thing like some *other* bad thing that has happened in your past?
Does another similar experience come to mind? Another episode like this one?
Remember it. Picture it. What parts are similar to this episode? What parts are different?
- A.** *I am just now learning to set good and consistent boundaries with toxic people. I'm a novice, actually. I can think of several situations like this where I've let others mow me down and I felt powerless to do anything about it—even when I know that it is really wrong for me to let them do it.*

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

I feel kind of tentative with my boundary-setting. I worry I might fold to this woman's hyper-pushiness. I might sacrifice what's good for me, good for our family, under the pressure of her driving, forceful, demands.

- Q. Does this episode affect your sense of personal empowerment? If so, how?
Does it diminish the control you need to make your life work? If so, how?
Does it make you feel weak? Powerless? Impotent? If so, how?

- A. *I think my story of empowerment is a big part of why this is an afflictive episode. I tell myself a story in which I'm powerless to stand up to forceful people. I tell myself a story in which I am fragile – and other people (like this woman) are tough.*

They aren't really good people. I am actually the good person. I'm sensitive to others. I'm caring. I consider other people's feelings, their needs. They (she) on the other hand, are all about selfish ambition. They want what they want, and they're willing to do whatever is required to get it.

However, even though I'm in the right (I tell myself) I also tell myself that based on past experiences, there's a good chance I'll fold, because I'm too weak to stand up against forceful people.

- Q. Does this episode leave you feeling less secure? Less safe? If so, how?
Do you feel more vulnerable than you did? If so, how?
Do you feel more in danger than you did? If so, how?

- A. *I guess I do feel vulnerable. If other people can ride roughshod over me, then yes! That threatens my security. Who knows how much I will give up. Who knows how much they will take.*

My emotions are telling me that this woman and people like her, are not to be trusted. I worry that all her aggressive strategies will end up taking advantage of us. I fear that she won't be trustworthy in our deal, and will do something I the end, that will cost us money, and turn out to her advantage. Because I'm a good person (again, I tell myself), I don't consider all the ways people do this kind of underhanded dealing, and I might not see it coming.

I tell myself that we are vulnerable here. We are in a dangerous position and our good will might be a weakness she would exploit.

Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- Q. Does this episode diminish your sense of worth? If so, how?
Do you feel you need to fight harder to feel your own goodness? If so, how?
Is guilt in play? Shame? Disappointment in yourself? Again, how?
- A. *I know I'm taking this woman's insulting offers very personally. I tell myself an unconscious story, that it is a personal attack on me and my family. I tell myself that her meanness is directed at us as a direct disregard for our worth.*
- Part of me knows that this isn't true. Part of me knows that she's just got a different way of making deals that is all about saving money. However, it feels personal. It feels like it's not a business deal, but an insult to my, and my family's worth and value as human beings.*
- I tell myself that she is a mean-spirited and greedy person, who has no regard for our worth. That is an assault on my sense of self-worth by itself. But the feeling is compounded when I think that I (or we) might buckle to her pressure, and let her get away with it. What does that say about my worth? What kind of person let's this kind of bully get away with their selfish deeds?*
- I wish my brain would allow me to handle this without all the emotion, without all the internal stories. I wish I was strong enough to not take it personally.*
- Q. When you strip this current episode down, what is the thing that most disrupts your inner peace, your sense of well-being?
- A. *I hate the prospect of being taken advantage of by someone of low character, someone of selfishness and greed. I hate the prospect of being taken advantage of by someone who doesn't treasure my parents' home, and thinks only of personal gain.*

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.

High-Level Summary

Remove some of the detail. Try to see the crux of the story.

Use more abstract words – try 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. *I tell myself a story of being a doormat – that I am the kind of person people take advantage of.*

I tell myself that I’m just not a person who can handle conflict. I must be too weak. I tell myself that when I come up against aggressive, forceful, greedy people – they always win, and I always lose.

I also tell myself a story that the world doesn’t value the important things I do — like the precious memories tied up in my parents’ home.

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. *My feelings are all over the place on this one.*

It certainly pinged all the things that I try to hide from myself and others.

I feel badgered by this woman.

I feel coerced by her trying to get us to give the house away.

Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked

I feel manipulated by her. She wants what is not hers.

I feel weak, and frail, and small, and anemic

I feel kind of pathetic

(I really hate writing all these emotions down.)

And, I feel unimportant and invisible. My life, my hopes, my dreams are insignificant in the scope of life. Other people's lives matter more. Other people's lives are NOT trivial, like mine is.

After feeling those pathetic, self-deleting feelings long enough, I start to feel defiant and vengeful and ruthless and merciless. I get vindictive and bitter.

Those feelings seem even worse than the "manipulated" feelings. Once I acknowledge them, I start telling myself a story of not being a good person. I tell myself that now, I've gotten down in the gutter with her. Now I'm no better than she is.

(So, I hate writing the resentment feelings down even more.)

- Q.** Now, go over your list again and explore 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 found 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.** *No. The feelings I have been able to access do connect to the story I'm telling myself.*

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 lives, 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.*

Self-Awareness and Recurring Life Themes

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. *In my lifetime, I've told myself the story of powerlessness and helplessness a lot of times. I've told myself the story of "big, bad, greedy, aggressive, insensitive" people many times (in business dealings, with friends, even family members). I've told myself the "I am weak" story many times.*

It happens whenever someone asserts their will, asserts their "truth" about a matter. I feel an almost automatic response to believe or value their story over my own. It's almost automatic to subject my own thoughts, needs, and feelings to theirs. It's how I maintain my own sense of being a good person, a valuable person, a moral person.

But hey! Look at me, being able to write this down. That means I'm seeing it. It isn't the real me. It's just a deeply engrained pattern I follow.

I have deeply engrained feeling-habits that feel invisible and unappreciated. The Enneagram has helped me understand why I tell myself those stories, and why I feel those feelings. The problem is, often the pattern kicks in a long, long time, before I see it happening. I'll be deep into the pattern, but still unaware that it's carrying me where it always carries me.

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

NOTE: This part is tough too, but 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).

- A. *A good title for this pattern could be...*

"My story of what a good person is, tells me I shouldn't stand up for myself. And then I get squashed."

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 may sanitize our stories until we begin to feel safe together. But over time, 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 network of spiritual friends, our Community Care and Conflict Resolution Teams would love to do the practice with you. Text or voicemail **919-762-6722**.*

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, and history, and 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 essential part of it – the part that is engrained in habit...

Is it true?

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

A. *NOTE: I'm filling in this part after having met with my spiritual friend.*

Parts of the story I tell myself are true. It is at least partly true, that some people try to take advantage of other people. It's true that good people don't try to do that. Good people are sensitive to others.

But maybe there is also part of my story that isn't true. My spiritual friend has a very different personality than I do – more assertive, more direct. He/she helped me see that some people just negotiate and try to get a good deal as a way of having fun. It's not personal to them. It's not an insult. It's not greedy. It's just "making a good deal."

Yeah. I can see that. But I sure don't "feel" it.

Also, it may not be true that when I dig in my heels and get all resentful and reactionary – that that's a bad thing. Again, it sure feels like a bad thing. My personality type defines goodness by how well I serve, and am accepted by the people I want to connect with. That may be a blind spot.

Sticking up for myself – that feels so aggressive and selfish – may be a healthy way to be human. There may be a balancing point between caring for others, and caring for myself. It may be, that I am a little too far on the "caring for others" side. It's a pitfall of my personality type, I've learned.

Again, it's hard to feel that, even though I've seen how it can be true.

Q. Is it helpful?

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

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?

- A. *The pattern of feeling helpless, and then getting all vengeful... that is not helpful in about any situation I can think of. Neither of those options makes for a very clear mind for negotiating a price for a house, but neither to they help me think and feel clearly in about any situation in life.*

So no. Not helpful.

Having felt helpless, badgered, and exploited in my life, has kept me from having honest relationships with people. I put up walls, where I want to connect. Even those I want to reach, I can't reach past my inner pattern.

Again, not helpful on so many levels.

- 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. *Again, not necessary either. A lot of people don't get stuck in this internal habit pattern in their lives. They don't suffer the toxic effects of this pattern. If they can do it, even though I have a different personality type, it means it is humanly possible to think and react according to different patterns. It means I could train my inner world to respond differently too.*

So no, it is not necessary. I am learning slowly that this story I tell myself does not benefit anyone, including me. Yes, it is still my automatic "go to", but now I can see it and work to change.

By studying the way other personalities handle the same thing, I realize I don't have to put all the same emotional energy into I have been. I can see and respond a different way.

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

Watching my brother has been an eye-opener. Talking this episode through with spiritual friends has done the same. I see there is a way forward that is freer from this kind of locked-in reactionary pattern I follow so often.

There's a lot to learn, but I'm getting it!

PART 5: SELF-DISCLOSURE (WHAT DID YOU SEE YOU HADN'T SEEN?)

This Hurts! Why Do It?

This 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 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 can control my reactions. I can challenge my go-to story of powerlessness and revenge. It's not easy. It's a deep habit. But it's possible. Change is possible. If I can see the pattern, I can short-circuit it a little sooner each time – each time I feel it coming on.*

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

Affirming what is Good

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