



God's Plan When This Happens

Have You Ever Blown It?

When I was finishing college, my mom made plans to come to my graduation. My school was nearly 2,000 miles from where my family lived and so she needed to take a flight to come. My sister was young and still depended on our mom. It was a big deal for her to be gone, a significant sacrifice. What is more, my mom had cancer and it was weakening her significantly. She just stayed a few days. She only had me that she came to see. I was shocked by how frail my mom looked; she was still in her early forties. Yet my mom loved me very much and she was one of the kindest people I have ever known. She was determined to be there when I graduated. My mom deserved to be treated like a queen and yet I didn't. I was almost embarrassed to have her around me. It is not possible that she did not feel the lack of affection I showed her. Why was I so cold toward my mother? Why did I not show her off to all my friends and give her the royal treatment. Honestly, and I am quite embarrassed to admit it, I was almost relieved when my mom left for home. I was no longer responsible for her entertainment. I did not have to have her around my friends. It took me several years before I realized how shabbily I treated my mother and to my regret, I never asked her forgiveness for the way I was during her visit.

We tend to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. It's much easier to see the mistakes others make than the sins we commit. It is human nature. Remember both Adam and Eve making excuses for their sin of taking the fruit God commanded them not to eat. Adam blamed his wife for his sin. Eve blamed Satan. We all do this. We are more likely to excuse our own bad behavior than that of others. It is universally experienced, the propensity to not notice the plank in your eye and see the little sliver in the eyes of others. Or even more likely, to downplay the magnitude of your own wrong and accentuate in your mind the badness of the motives and actions of others, particularly those you don't really like. Some of course feel irrational levels of guilt, feeling shame when they have no reason for it. Most of us though tend to ignore or avoid the guilt we should feel for being wrong. James says the Christian response to wrongdoing is simple. **Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.** (James 5: 16a NIV)

James has a relationship upgrade for us. Confess your sins to each other. This is a command of James, and it is to be a constant habit of yours. It is not a once or twice sort of response to egregious wrongdoing. It is a pattern of living. Now some have misinterpreted this as a directive to let God know you have sinned against Him. That of course is what 1 John 1: 8-9 tells you. **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** (1 John 1: 8-9 NIV) That is all about making it clear to God that you know you have wronged Him by your actions and want to repent. James's emphasis on confession is different. When you sin against your friends, neighbors, family members or even enemies, you let them know how you have wronged them. This is non-negotiable. You admit to others the sins you commit against them.

Some only apologize because they are desperate to be shown mercy. You admit to your boss that you blew it because you know she found out about it anyway and your only hope for not getting fired is if you tell her

what you did and plead for grace. Shimei, who when King David was fleeing for his life, pelted the king with stones and tossed dirt on him while all the time mocking him. Shimei though was in a tough place when David returned triumphantly to Jerusalem, restored to his full imperial power as king. Fearing for his life, Shimei confessed his sin of insulting and assaulting the king. **When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king and said to him, "May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I your servant know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first of the whole house of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king."** (2 Samuel 19:18b-20 NIV) Children are well known for doing this, admitting their sins after you already know and doing so just to avoid punishment. Don't we adults do the same thing? Yet are such "confessions" genuine and do they have the effect God intends?

The problem is that many have not developed their conscience to a level that is spiritually healthy. Conscience is often misunderstood in Christian circles. Your conscience is not some special part of you that is defining like your spirit or your body. It is not your soul. Conscience is not a fixed entity that is universally experienced. Your conscience is merely the highest level of moral understanding you have developed. However far you have come with your understanding of right and wrong is as much as your conscience will do for you. That is why cannibals did not experience pangs of conscience when they ate the brains of their enemies. They truly did not know any better. You may wonder why serial killers feel no remorse. It is because they don't have a conscience like yours...it feels nothing like yours. Their life experiences have shaped their consciences in bizarrely convoluted ways. It is critical for you to take good care of your conscience, feeding it the scriptures and protecting it from the damage caused by going against it. Paul said we must never violate the consciences of others by encouraging them to do something their conscience forbids. **But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience's—the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?** (1 Corinthians 10: 28-29) Do not go against someone else's conscience because if you do, it will tear down moral defenses they have against doing wrong. If someone's conscience fights against drinking wine or listening to rock music or killing a deer, then don't try to entice them to violate their boundaries. God in the Scripture can straighten things out for them but once a moral boundary is broken down by someone other than Christ, morally, "all hell" can break loose. It is quite dangerous spiritually to violate someone else's conscience and to do the same to yours.

Let me give a beautiful example of confession found in the Bible. Previously I mentioned the parable of the loving father, more widely known as the parable of the prodigal son. In it the younger son famously demanded his father hand over his part of his inheritance that he would have received upon his dad's death. His father acquiesced and off the son went to a foreign land where he squandered what he was given on prostitutes and wild living. Finding himself homeless and starving, the young man returned home, hoping his dad would let him be his slave. The son, despite being lavishly welcomed by his father with a kiss and a warm embrace, still made his heart-felt confession to his dad. **"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"** (Luke 15: 21 NIV) Now that is an honest and open confession. I was wrong. I'm not saying this to get you to show me favor. I haven't done this to avoid punishment. I was wrong and I want to change. Every relationship under heaven needs this to be happening. For your mental health, your spiritual development, and your growth as God's own, you need to make it a habit of admitting to others when you have treated them wrongly and let the chips fall where they may. If you lose some face when you confess your sins, if you are seen as less moral, less good, so be it. But you will grow in your life with God, your conscience will be clear, and joy in your spirit will return. Don't hesitate to admit when you have been wrong. God will bless you for it.