



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

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### 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.

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### 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.** *Our neighbor was going on vacation for several days and realized she hadn’t gotten someone to look after her animals. She called us the night before and asked if we could take care of them (dogs, cats, chickens, a pig, and a guinea pig).*

*We said no problem. She said she would email instructions.*

*The next night when we went over (time pressured because of her late notice), nothing was prepared. There was no food for any of the animals. Nothing was where she said it would be. We texted. We called. No answer.*

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## 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. *We are “do the right thing” kind of people. We keep our word. We do what we commit we will do. We committed to feed the animals, we were damn sure going to feed the animals!*

*But there was no food. So even under time pressure, we drove to town to get chicken and pig food. We got behind somebody on a pleasure drive, and by the time we got to town, Petco was closed. We drove to PetSmart. Same thing (Walmart, shockingly, doesn't carry pig food.)*

*I am trying to do the right thing (I am telling myself) when the neighbor texts back. The pig food was hidden and she told us the secret place. The chicken food was out, so “don't worry about it.”*

*By now, I've had to cancel my plans for the evening (a family movie night), but dammit! If you commit to feed the animals, you feed the animals!*

*That's what good people do!*

- 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. *People take advantage of me. That's the story I tell myself.*
- People are irresponsible. They don't do what they should do, and I get stuck picking up the slack.*
- People don't care about my needs, even though I try to be very sensitive of theirs.*
- People are ungrateful. I work long hours and even give my free time, but end up being used by someone who doesn't even value my effort.*

## Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

*I try to be a good person but being involved with other people keeps backfiring.*

- 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. *It's going to be weird with my neighbor now. I will resent her for disrespecting my time, and she will know she did wrong by me.*

*I'd just be better off avoid people. (I'm an enneagram 5, so that is usually a good approach.)*

- 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 same thing happens at work all the time. I try really hard to be conscientious. I work hard to do my work to specs, and to do it under budget and on time. I do whatever is needed to make sure that happens . . . but others tend to slack off or take shortcuts.*

*So I get stuck holding the bag for other people's laziness.*

*It happens all the time.*

- 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 made a promise to my neighbor. I wanted to honor it. However, I felt powerless to solve the problem.*

*I ran scenarios in my mind...*

*if only the guy in front of me had gotten out of our way instead of driving 30 in a 45. If only the Petco lady would have sold me what I needed instead of locking me out.*

*But as it stood, I disappointed my family, and the neighbor, and myself.*

*I felt weak. I felt inadequate. I felt taken advantage of.*

## Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

*I had a lot of “blame somebody else” thoughts going on too, of course. But if I look under the surface, that “not powerful enough” thought was pretty strong.*

- 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.** *Not much in the story I tell myself affects my security or safety. The pig isn't very threatening, even when eating a banana. I don't think my neighbors will hurt me, so safety/security, it's not a significant issue in this case.*

- 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.** *But worth and value!?! This energy center is kind of a big deal.*

*I often get my sense of worth and value from perform what is expected of me, usually better than it is expected. My goodness as a person is often tied to my accomplishment of tasks.*

*This task felt easy. Go next door and feed some animals. How hard is that?*

*But when it didn't happen, even though it was my neighbor's fault – and my neighbor's problem (they were her animals, after all), even so, it felt like it reflected badly on me.*

*Even though I didn't do anything wrong, I felt unvalued. First, I felt like my neighbor didn't value me, my time, or the fact that I was trying to help them. I got the impression that helping them actually irritated them.*

*But second, I felt like my value was diminished because my primary strategy for earning worth (accomplishing things effectively) didn't happen – couldn't happen.*

- Q.** When you strip this current episode down, what is the thing that most disrupts your inner peace, your sense of well-being?

## Dig into the Story You Tell Yourself About the Episode

- A. *Failure. I think that's the most difficult thing. It was a simple task, but no matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't succeed at it.*

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## 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. *I've got a strategy for making myself a good person. I perform. It's what I do. I find out the job that needs doing, and I do it. I do it better than everybody expects. And when I do, I feel good about myself. I tell myself an unconscious story that I am a good person.*

*And when somebody, or some set of circumstances conspire to keep me from fulfilling my strategy, I get really upset – at the person, to be sure, but surprisingly, at myself as well (even though it wasn't my fault).*

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### 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 I feel resentment. My neighbor presumed on my time and good will, but didn’t do the basics necessary to help me succeed.*

*I feel disrespected and devalued. She didn’t think my time was worth the simple preparation necessary to help me do her job for her.*

*I feel dispirited. This kind of thing happens a lot. I set out to do what needs to be done, but people let me down all the time. Again and again.*

*I feel shame. What is wrong with me, that I allow myself to be put in these kinds of situations. What is wrong with me, that I can’t get simple, stupid tasks done successfully.*

*I feel withdrawn (I’m not sure that’s an emotion). I feel hurt, and the hurt makes me feel self-protective. Withdrawing feels self-protective. I’d just as soon not have anything to do with my neighbors in the future. It will be a good long time before I agree to something like this again.*

*I feel thwarted. The world just seems against me. I try to do right, but so often it doesn’t work out.*

### **Naming the Emotions this Episode Has Evoked**

- 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*



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## 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. *This pattern is almost a constant in my life.*

*The most important thing in my life is my family. But because work long hours (to support my family) I don't get as much time with them as I would like. When I do, it seems like stuff always comes up – meetings, helping others, the house falling apart, cars breaking down, crises with the dog, or the kids, or the parents, some political issue at work, or even parties I feel compelled to go to.*

*Some people like the hurly-burly, go-go lifestyle but not me. I just want things to go smoothly so I can perform successfully at my tasks, and get home to my family, and my free time.*

*Obstacles happen. I know that. They are part of life. However, it seems that they never stop! And over time, they add up and feel like a combined and constant assault that wears me down. When will I ever just be able to succeed at the task, have the world go smoothly, and just be able to be the good person that my task-performing story tells me I should be?*

- 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. I'm good at getting stuff done. I do it better than most.

But the title I'd give this pattern...

*Will "Good" ever be "Good Enough?"*

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## 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.*

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## 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.** *It's true that I have constant demands on me, but such is life.*

*It is also true that my life is very good. I do get things done. Sometimes life does go smoothly. It's not always, that I have to pick up the slack for others.*

*Because there is always a tradeoff between doing what I want (free time with the family) and being the kind of person I want to be (the master task accomplisher), I sometimes feel like I fail at both. I give up family time for the task, but have such a poor attitude that I don't do the task well. My resentment and disillusionment makes me exaggerate the significance of demands on my time.*

*So, my story. It's a little bit true. It's also a little bit not true.*

**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?

**A.** *Not really.*

*I would like to be more decisive. I would like to say no to tasks more often, and give myself more free time with the family. However, my "performing makes me a good person" story doesn't serve me that well.*

*In fact, because the world will never line up for smooth, efficient, well-done tasks 100% of the time, even though I do better than most, I am looking down*

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

*the line at a lifetime of disappointment, frustration, irritation, and negative attitudes.*

*If I said “no” to tasks more often, I might not make people as happy with me as I do when I say “yes,” but I might have less resentment.*

*But in any event, all my frustration and anger hasn’t been producing any changes in my behavior, so they are surely not serving any useful purpose*

**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.** *If it isn’t helpful, it isn’t necessary.*

*I could argue that between my personality (enneagram 5), and having had a father who was prone to angry outbursts, an angry personality might be a necessary part of my psyche. But that seems kind of like an excuse.*

*It is easier for me to feel like I am the victim and controlled by others than it is for me to say “no” when I need to.*

*It’s easier for me to withdraw, than it is to stop defining my worth as a person, in terms of how well I perform my tasks.*

*I do feel my sense of responsibility and commitment to the people who depend on me. I do feel that I can’t let them down. However, some of that is also an inner desire to please them. One is really important. The other eventually leads to resentment.*

*I either need to decide I won’t sacrifice as much time for the tasks . . . or I need to realize that I am the one making the choice so I shouldn’t be resentful – but much like a toddler I want it all now.*

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

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### 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 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 tend to see the bad "out there." It's the slacker people. It's the conspiring circumstances.*

*This exercise helped me see that my life strategy...  
"I am good to the degree I perform my tasks well..."  
...That may not be the most effective life strategy for me.*

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### 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