

1 The Healing Power of Confession by Dr Scott Hahn

2 **(S1) Confession** for many Catholics is a rather mixed-up matter, and we know why. Because **the more you**
3 **need it, the less you want it.** But that's only because we don't understand the merciful love of GOD and
4 the healing power of His mercy. And it isn't just us. It isn't just here and now. It's been this way since the
5 dawn of history. So, as proof let's open our Bibles and look at the dawn of history and turn to **Genesis 3.**
6 I think we all know the story: GOD has spoken to our first parents and made it very clear. *You can eat*
7 *from every tree except one and if you do, on the very day you eat it you shall surely die.* That was very
8 specific. The serpent said, "You won't die." And they went ahead and ate and what happened? Did they
9 **(S2) die?** No. They ran and they hid. So, GOD didn't really mean what He said. The serpent said, *No you*
10 *won't.* And they ate and they didn't die. One fall I wrote an article entitled; *Did the Serpent get it right?*
11 The story is a kind of riddle. We know the serpent is the liar, not the Lord GOD and yet the Lord GOD was
12 so specific, *Even on the day you eat it, you'll be sentenced to death, or you will begin to die or* I'm going
13 to have the right to kill you. But that's not what He said, "On the day you eat it, you will surely die". So
14 how is it that He said it and didn't mean it? Or at least didn't do it? Or did it He? You see, when man was
15 made, he was made on day six just like the animals but when he drew his first breath, he knew it was no
16 ordinary breath like dogs and cats and horses. **GOD breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and**
17 **(S3) so he became a living a soul, a rational soul, exalted above the cats and the dogs and all of the**
18 **other animals.** Because **GOD's breath is the SPIRIT.** We don't just have natural human life. We were
19 endowed with supernatural divine life. Which means there are two ways to live even though we
20 experience it in unity. There are also two ways to die. What poison does to your body, a bullet does to
21 your brain; **mortal sin snuffs out divine life. It takes us out of eternal blessings.** So, what did GOD mean
22 when He said, *On the day you eat of it, you will surely die.*? Was He simply talking about natural life? Or
23 physical body and its life OR was He talking about the supernatural life that *HE* had breathed into our
24 soul; **that very divine and eternal existence which makes us more than humans; that makes us**
25 **partakers of the divine nature?** The day they ate the fruit, they committed **mortal sin. GOD's life died**
26 **within them;** that isn't less of a death. That's infinitely more of a death. Because **the gift of divine life is**
27 **(S4) even more valuable than the gift of human life.** The two are closely intertwined. But when we
28 deliberately commit mortal sin, the one is snuffed out, even if our bodies are in good health. So, there's a
29 mystery here that man didn't grasp, and you can tell because when GOD showed up, what did Adam do
30 to help? He ran, he hid, he covered himself in fig leaves.

31 That reminds me of a story. A third grader in CCD, hearing about Adam and Eve for the first time,
32 couldn't wait to get home and read it for himself. So, he opened up this big old family Bible that was
33 there on the table in the living room, blew off the dust and began turning these big pages. Suddenly his
34 eyes fell upon something he'd never seen, an old, pressed leaf. He gasped. Then he shouted, *Mother,*
35 *come quickly,* and she came in from the kitchen and asked. *What is it?* He picked up the leaf and said, "I
36 think I found Adam's underwear!"

37 **(S5)** Well, we often misunderstand what we find in the Bible. I think we misunderstand what happened
38 in Genesis 3. I think we read about GOD showing up in the garden and Adam hiding and we assumed just
39 like Adam did, that it's sort of like a police interrogation. But it's not. They heard **the sound of the LORD**
40 **GOD walking in the garden** in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves in the
41 presence of the Lord. And then GOD proceeds to ask a series of four questions. He says, 1) Where are
42 you? And you're almost tempted to feel sorry for GOD, you know, but before you give into the
43 temptation, to take pity on the deity, realize that GOD wasn't asking Adam for his geographical
44 whereabouts, his coordinates in space and time. Almighty GOD knows where we are better than we do.
45 When He asked Adam, *Where are you?* He wasn't just talking about where you are located, it is where
46 are you in relation to me. And Adam replies, it's a rather wordy response, *I heard the sound of You in the*
47 *garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And so, I hid myself.* He says four things in response to one
48 question; he does everything but answer. If Adam had only said, *I'm over here behind the bush, I'm*
49 *hiding. I'm naked. I'm ashamed. I blew it big time. Can you possibly show me mercy?* **He could have**

50 **changed the course of history.** But instead, he says, **I heard you coming.** A very wordy response but he
51 never got around to answering the question. And you know, GOD could have done a Wizard of Oz. *I am*
52 *the greatest and terrible GOD*, and just blast him there on the spot but He's so gracious and patient with
53 us and forbearing toward Adam. And so, He replies, *Who told you that you were naked?* And before he
54 even has a chance to answer, He says, 2) *Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to*
55 *eat?* As though GOD needs anybody to tell Him what Adam did. What is GOD doing? He's not trying to
56 coerce a confession. He's trying to **coax out of Adam an act of contrition...** *Adam, just repeat after me.*
57 *Adam: Yes, Lord, I ate of the tree of which you commanded me not to eat.* Only instead of an act of
58 contrition, instead of accusing himself, what does he say? *The woman Thou gave to be with me gave me*
59 **(S6) fruit of the tree and I ate it.** What's he doing? He's passing the buck. He's excusing himself by
60 accusing his spouse. You see, that's what they used to do in the ancient world. We don't do that
61 anymore of course. He is really blaming his wife. He says *the woman that you gave to be with me...* some
62 helper she's turned out to be, you know, **he's not just accusing his bride he's accusing his maker.**
63 *Neither of you understand my needs.* And the Lord GOD turns to Eve, 3) *What is this that you've done?*
64 And she gives the shortest answer, but it's a straight one. She said, *"The serpent beguiled me.* Ah, that's
65 the truth, the simple truth. *The serpent beguiled me, and I ate...* and that proved to be just enough for
66 GOD to work with. Because the **next thing out of GOD's mouth is the promise of world redemption**
67 **through the woman, not the man** through her seed and not his, crushing the head of the serpent. We
68 don't understand the ways of GOD. We feel so easily threatened and we get defensive. And so, we
69 reclus ourselves, and **we resent instead of repenting,** and we project our guilt on to others instead of
70 accepting it for ourselves.

71 **(S7)** I can relate to this because it brings back to my mind an experience I had as a young teenager; I
72 hadn't experienced the grace of conversion yet. I was far from it in fact. My friend and I were on a
73 shopping spree or to be more precise, a *shoplifting* spree and it lasted almost a month, and we kept
74 stealing more record albums and more. He was about 5'10" I was not quite 5'3". I was the smallest kid in
75 my class. That's why to this day, I don't understand what they did. There were four store detectives. We
76 both had about 20 albums apiece in our bags. We were walking quickly out the door when three of them
77 tackled little old me and sprayed mace in my eyes while the woman detective went after my friend, and
78 he got away. Go figure. They dragged me upstairs to this room for interrogation. They were trying to
79 squeeze my best friend's name out of me. I wasn't about to give him up. Then woman got up there. She
80 looked at me and she said, *You know, he looks too young to be stealing.* (Like, you know, I was so upset. I
81 didn't even feel insulted.) And then she went on and she asked me, *"Were you forced to steal for*
82 *somebody else."* I realized she's serious. And I looked up. I gave her the meekest expression I could. And
83 she said, *Go on.* And I said, *Well, last weekend,* (and I began with a true story), *My friend and I were up in*
84 *the woods with our bikes. It was raining. It was a bad storm last Saturday and these kids sniffing glue and*
85 *smoking pot came up to try to steal our bikes, but they were too bogged down with mud. So, they threw*
86 *them over the hill, then they told us that we had to steal record albums and leave them by the tree stump*
87 *or else they'd hunt us down and beat us up.* And she said, *Why didn't you tell somebody? We were*
88 *scared,* I said. And she said, *"You should have told somebody."* A moment later the door opens and in
89 walks in Bethel Park Police officer to take me down to the station. He's taking me out and the woman
90 officer said, *There's something you need to know.* And she went ahead and volunteered my alibi. What
91 was I to do but corroborate? And so, he said, *What happened?* Again, I told him the same tale. And he
92 looked at me a little skeptical and he asked if I knew the names of the guys. I said well only two of them,
93 they are brothers Gary and Jackson. So, he said, *"That sounds like something they would do. That's a*
94 *shame. We got to go to the station anyway. Your mom's going to be meeting us.*" So, we drove and got
95 out and sat in his office for about five minutes, and then I watched as my enraged mom came in. She
96 looks at me glaring. She sits down and before she can say a word, the officer volunteers my alibi. *Mrs.*
97 *Hahn, there's something I think you need to hear. This is not an ordinary situation. He was forced to steal.*
98 And so, I felt ever so dutiful and told her what had happened to me. She looked at me and her eyes just

99 got so soft. And she said, *Scott, Why didn't you tell me?* (Boy, was I scared.) And the policeman said,
100 *Young people these days are easily intimidated and frightened by these older kids.* Well, a moment later,
101 she is on my side. Sympathy. Oh, I'm on a roll. And then he asks the infamous question of my Mom. *I*
102 *hope you know who he was with.* (Mom, please don't tell...) *Dave so and so. Do you know his number*
103 *please?* (Mom don't.) I'll never forget those digits 835-0746 because they were my undoing. And he went
104 ahead and called his mom and explained that she had to come down with him to the police station. Ten
105 minutes later, they walked in, and I realized the jig was up. He doesn't know the alibi. As soon as he sat
106 down, I blurted out, *So that's how it happened. You know we were up there with our bikes in the rain.*
107 *They were trying to steal our bikes and they were bogged down, and they were sniffing glue and they*
108 *told us to steal items and leave by the trees or they would track us down and beat us up.* And I said it so
109 that he could take it all in. I was watching him as he listened. And then suddenly I saw his shoulders
110 racking; I thought he was crying. He was suppressing laughter. He thought it was the dumbest alibi he'd
111 ever heard, but then when he realized that the policeman had swallowed hook, line and sinker, he
112 looked up and joined right in. *Yeah.* And his mom said, *Why didn't you tell us?* and I said, *"We were*
113 *scared."* They let us go on our own recognizance in less than 10 minutes. On the way out the door he
114 looked at me and said, we got off scot free. I thought he was mad. He was just so relieved. But I went on
115 not to talk to him for a week. I got home and I was just really feeling good until I heard that sound. I had
116 dreaded it. I'd forgotten my dad. The garage door was going up, inside the walls, I heard the murmuring
117 on the first floor. He's coming up to the second floor, he knocks on the door, I opened it, and he looks
118 right at me and right through me. And he said *I hear they were making you steal records, Scott.* *Yeah,*
119 *that's right. They were making us steal. Yeah.* As his eyes drift into that expanding stack of albums in the
120 corner of my room. *And leaving them by the tree stump. Yeah, in the woods, behind the mall. You want*
121 *Show to me?* *Yeah, I could do that. Now. You mean now? Yeah. Now, Scott. Before dinner? NOW. Okay.*
122 So, I got on my jacket. He got his on. We walked in all three blocks and found the woods. We got about a
123 half mile I'm leading the way going down the path. My eyes are darting furtively in every direction
124 looking for tree stumps thinking *I'll have stumps to choose from,* you know. I'm halfway through the
125 woods. There isn't a stump anywhere! I mean, somebody must have come earlier that day and uprooted
126 them. I don't know to this day what happened? And now I'm running out of woods. I've got about 10
127 feet left and the mall is looming large before us on the horizon. And all I see is this big mound of dirt
128 where they stopped and I said, That's the clump right over there. He said, *I thought you said a "stump".* *I*
129 *said "clump". No, they said "stump". Scott, I think it's time to go home.* And he turned around at this
130 time and he led the way back down the path through the woods. Well, I was bracing myself for the
131 explosion of that volcanic German temper I had encountered more than once. We were halfway through
132 the woods, and he hadn't said a peep. We are almost all the way out of the woods and he still hadn't
133 shouted or screamed and the silence was killing me. I was hoping he would start yelling. Instead, he was
134 walking slower and slower. His shoulders were drooping. I didn't understand why he wouldn't say
135 anything. I didn't realize what I had done in lying to his face and breaking his heart. He didn't say a word.
136 We got home and walked to the front door. He looked at me and turned away and he didn't even eat
137 dinner that night and neither did I. I went upstairs to my room, waiting for the barrage and punishment.
138 But he couldn't talk to me, he couldn't look at me. And instead of feeling any pride, suddenly my
139 conscience woke up like Rip Van Winkle. And I'm thinking what a shameful, selfish jerk lying to
140 **(S8)** everybody, that just thinking it's fine to get away with. It was like that little opening was just enough
141 for GOD to work with, because in less than a week's time, I ended up deciding to go for the first time in
142 many, many years to a youth meeting and then a retreat. That weekend I ended up on a retreat Friday
143 night hearing all about Jesus dying on the cross for sinners like me, and I knew for the first time then I
144 was a selfish sinner. As a friend of mine says, *I'm not much but I'm all I think about*
145 *Yeah, me too.* This speaker talked to about 200 of us high school kids, and said, *If you're ever tempted to*
146 *treat your sin lightly, look at the Cross and look at the price that Jesus paid for your sin. If you're ever*
147 *tempted to treat GOD's love lightly look at the Cross because it's GOD's love that sent Him there.* I was

148 trying to assimilate this and then he said words I'll never forget he said, **Christ paid a debt He didn't owe**
149 **because we owed a debt we couldn't pay.** And I knew he was right. And I was ashamed, and I knew I
150 needed a savior that week and I made a decision to give my life to our Lord. And my friends figured it out
151 very quickly and had nothing to do with me in a matter of days. But that was more than enough for the
152 Lord to work with because in the next few months, I found a new set of friends, real friends, and we had
153 a real interest in common in *growing together in virtue, not just vice*. And so, I just went on with my life,
154 leaving my old friends behind. It was an interesting experience for me because by the time I was done
155 with high school, I was convinced that GOD was calling me to the ministry. And I was especially
156 concerned about, I'm sorry to say this but you Catholics, you just seem not to get it because all my old
157 friends it seemed were Catholics, like the Catholics were the only ones who've been out drinking, you
158 (S9) know, swearing and do those things better than I could. I remember because in my senior year in my
159 last week, I'm passing by my old friend's house late. I hadn't seen him for three years. He was on
160 probation. He was sent away. And then I see the light on and his shadow moving that bedroom where I'd
161 spent hundreds of hours a few years earlier. I'm getting ready to leave in a week after graduation, to play
162 guitar in a band where we toured the states in Europe for a month. I'm thinking I'll never see him again.
163 So, on an impulse, I knocked on his door and his mom answered. She smiled. She must have heard I
164 found religion or something. *Oh, come in. Dave will be happy to see you.* I'm like, I'm not so sure. Well, as
165 soon as I stepped in, he was walking down the stairs putting on a jacket. He stops halfway down the
166 stairs. He looks at me, *Scott? Dave? Come on in.* So, I walked in, walked up and went into his bedroom
167 where we sat down. It took about two minutes before the ice melted. And suddenly it was like old times.
168 We were talking about the good old days and the bad old things we did and all of that. And then
169 suddenly I looked at my watch and two hours had elapsed. I had completely forgotten about the
170 rehearsal. I was walking toward the school and like I blew it off. I completely missed it. And he suddenly
171 turned to me, and he said, *Why did you come here tonight? Like I saw the light on I hadn't seen it for like*
172 *two or three years. I just wanted to say goodbye. Have a nice life. I don't want to get upset.* He said, *"But*
173 *why tonight?" I don't know. I just walked past, and I saw the light on. Did I make you miss something*
174 *important?* I mean, I'm only thinking about my rehearsal. I realized he was putting his coat on to go
175 outside when I came in. *Like where were you headed?* And he wouldn't speak. He started trembling. And
176 he reached across his bed, and he picked up his jacket. He reached into the pocket and pulled out about
177 10 feet of rope. He says, *I was going out to the apple orchard behind the house to hang myself.* And then
178 suddenly his eyes welled up with tears. I've never seen him cry before. And all he could say was, *Can you*
179 *pray for me?* And so, I prayed for him. I just stuck around for a while longer. Then we talked, we prayed.
180 He told me how he'd been up there in the afternoon to hang himself, but two girls walked by, and he
181 thought *I ruined my life. I don't want to ruin theirs. I'm going to do it when it's dark.* And then he said,
182 Please pray for me. I've been back in touch with him for the first time in 28 years in the last 10 months or
183 so and through a lot of circumstances, he's kind of revisiting his life. But that night I left his house looking
184 up into the stars and thinking, **GOD you knew all along.** I remember even walking out of his front door
185 and seeing the crucifix on the wall by the entrance thinking, *They're Catholics, Lord, you must help them.*
186 *You can use me to help them.* Little did I know what GOD had in mind. But I say that again because *for me*
187 *it was a simple matter of believing Jesus and everything is taken care of.* All you need is faith. Faith alone
188 and your saved that once saved, always saved - no need good works. You don't need obedience. So, I
189 went off to college with that same theology. And it was interesting because in studying scripture I began
190 to realize that I didn't have all the answers. By the time I went to seminary, newly married, I was really
191 getting more serious and confronting the big gaps in my own thoughts, my own theology. I remember
192 one day in particular feeling very unsettled because my Old Testament professor was going on and on in
193 **Leviticus five.** And it wasn't boring. It was bothering me. Because in Leviticus 5:5-6, he was reading,
194 *When a man is guilty in any of these sins, (and He identified the categories), he must confess the sins he's*
195 *committed to a priest, and he shall bring a **guilt offering** to the Lord for the sin, which is committed a*
196 *lamb a goat, perhaps a bull as a sin offering, depending on how serious or light the sin was. Do you think*

197 it's like you bring up a lamb? The priests could say that's a serious sin, but you need to get a bull and he
198 was saying you know, *What do we do with this in the New Testament?* I'm thinking, you know, thank GOD
199 that we're out of the Old Testament and into the New Testament, Be don't have to go to priests and
200 confess anymore. And he could read my mind he said, *Before you assume that this was only true in the*
201 *old and not in the new,* (he looked at numbers five and he said), *Look with me in Numbers five, verses*
202 *five through seven.* He went on, *When a man or woman commits any sin by breaking faith with the Lord*
203 *and that person is guilty. He must confess his sin* like Leviticus required, but he also must make full
204 restitution for his wrong and he said, *this isn't just old, this is new too, in the Gospel of Luke,* and he told
205 the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector and how he hosted Jesus for lunch. And in the end, he not only
206 gave away things to the poor, but he made **restitution** for those who defrauded, and he said, **We are**
207 **(S10) responsible to the natural moral law to undo what we've done in restitution.** And he went on to
208 another subject, but I didn't follow him. All I could think of was what I had done when I was a young teen
209 and how free I felt, but I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord, and suddenly I realize that wasn't
210 enough. For Jesus or Zacchaeus something else remained. How could I miss that? That night at dinner,
211 Kimberly was reading me like a book. She said, *What's bothering you? Oh, nothing. Oh, come on.* So, I
212 told her. And she said, *So what relevance is restitution for us?* And I said, *There's something I never told*
213 *you about my past life. Like what? Like...* and I told her the whole story of the shoplifting spree and the
214 lie and how I got away with it, and yet how our Lord used it to kind of open my heart to conversion and
215 yet now I am facing the truth and GOD's word about restitution. *And right now,* I said, *we're dirt poor, we*
216 *got nothing. We're struggling grad students, you know, we hardly have anything in the bank,* and she
217 challenged me she said, *So what are you saying? That you're not going to live out what you're learning*
218 *and GOD's word?* Like GOD, *No, I'm not saying that. Good.* Like, I'm not sure you realize how much I
219 took; how much restitution we're talking about. She said, *Whatever it is, you can't outgive the Lord.*
220 *Whatever He gives you, you have to respond. You can't sin against the light. That's why I love you. That's*
221 *why I married you. And let GOD, okay?* Now, when I shared with her what amounts we were talking
222 about, she said, *We're going to have to make all of the Christmas gifts this season.* We couldn't afford
223 anything at that point. After Christmas, I finally got up enough courage to drive to the mall. I sat down in
224 Sears with an accountant. He was staring at me across the desk in disbelief. *You did what? When? How*
225 *much Oh, thank you for coming in. But you're going to screw up our books now more than you did then.*
226 I'm like, That's okay. I just had to get out. *Oh, get out of here. Yeah, no problem.* But I've only taken
227 maybe four or five records from Sears. I had to now confront the store from which I'd taken most of
228 them. I sat down with their accountant. A few minutes later, he was staring at me across the desk in
229 shock. *You did what when? How much?* He laughed. He said so many of you born-again types are coming
230 in and fessing up, we set up a Restitution Fund *How much do you owe?*
231 So I wrote a check for \$1,000, handed it to him, drove home, told Kimberly, we were cleaned out; we
232 had nothing in the bank and she said, *The Lord is never outdone in generosity if you don't sin against the*
233 *light, He'll give us more.* And GOD bless her, I married a princess of a woman of GOD. It was that next
234 semester that she discovered through Scripture, the truth of the Catholic Church's teaching on openness
235 to life. For us, it wasn't a question of whether to contraception or not, it was just what form and then we
236 found out that all of the founders of Protestantism were in total agreement with the Catholic Church and
237 the Pope until 1930 and the same denominations in our Protestant background that opened up to
238 contraception, we're now favoring federally funded abortions. And we knew that was wrong. We just
239 traced it back. That next semester, Kimberly changed her mind and then convinced me and that changed
240 our lives forever and we have six kids to prove it. Thank GOD for all of them and the cesareans and the
241 three miscarriage that she has suffered. It's amazing to me what a wife GOD has given me. She never
242 looked back, and she never reminded me of it. I didn't really think much more about it until my first year
243 as an ordained pastor because after preaching, you have to do pastoral counseling and when I
244 confronted it in my parish, it was startling. Some of the leaders in my parish came in for counseling and
245 telling me about the fraud and the theft and the infidelity. And I would say, *You know, we have to find*

246 some way to make it right. And over and over again, they throw it back in my face. *No, I don't. I have*
 247 *believed in faith alone is all I need, once saved, always saved.* And they were using my theology as a club
 248 to kind of beat me over the head so that they wouldn't have to take responsibility. And after about a
 249 year of this, it finally gets to you *there's something wrong*, maybe with my counseling, but certainly with
 250 **a theology that is used to justify a refusal to take responsibility and make restitution**. I was watching
 251 family businesses disintegrate. I was watching marriages crumble because these guys would rather be
 252 clever than clean and come clean with their partners. After over a year of this, I resigned, and searched
 253 for the church.

254 **(S11)** I discovered the Eucharist and then the Blessed Virgin Mary. I discovered the saints as well. And
 255 when I was in Milwaukee, beginning to meet regularly with Monsignor Bruskewitz (who was the local
 256 priest, who's now the bishop in Lincoln, Nebraska), he could tell from our conversations that there was
 257 one out of seven sacraments I just didn't really want to talk about, you'll never guess which one,
 258 Confession. I didn't study it very much, and I didn't want to talk about it very much. And so, after the
 259 second or third meeting, I could tell that he was deliberately inserting it into the conversation. You know,
 260 it's like putting a hook in front of a fish without any bait. It wasn't about the bite. By the third or fourth
 261 meeting, he asked me point blank, *Do you have any struggles with confessions?* I'm like, Why? He said
 262 what because you brought up the prospect of entering the church and you know, that's one of those
 263 steps and prerequisites. Really? Oh, yeah. Well, I do have some questions. He said, Go ahead and fire
 264 away. So, I said, The first question is, why do I have to go to a priest, when as a Protestant I can go to
 265 Christ. He said, *It isn't one or the other.* I go to Christ every night. I make an **examination of conscience**
 266 and then I make an **Act of Contrition**. That was all new for me like an - *Examination of what?* And he
 267 handed me a card. This is what I asked myself and I looked at the questions, talk about your ruthless self-
 268 inventory! Wow. I don't think I'd ever asked myself those questions, you know. And then he said, *Then I*
 269 *go to Christ in prayer, and I tell him, I'm sorry and I'd make an Act of Contrition.* What's that? And he
 270 handed me one of them. I never really read one much less memorized or used. And he said, *Keep them,*
 271 *they might come in handy.* I could see where this was headed. So, he went on, *I don't go to a priest*
 272 *instead of Christ, I go to Christ first and then I go to a priest, because that's what Christ has instituted as*
 273 *a sacrament. And when I go there, it's Christ that I meet, just like in the Eucharist that you've been*
 274 *attending. I don't say this is HIS body and I look up there. I don't say this is YOUR body and look up to*
 275 *Jesus. I look out at you and say, This is MY body because when I became a priest, I gave my lips and my*
 276 *lungs and my life to our Lord, so that He would use me and speak through me. And in the confessional,*
 277 *when I say or another priest (confessor) says, I absolve you, that is Jesus speaking through His priest.* I
 278 never thought that way and always kind of pitted one against the other and chose the one I go to Christ,
 279 not to a priest. He said, *It was that way in the Old Covenant, but in the New Covenant, it doesn't abolish,*
 280 *but fulfills the Old. So, you have new priests who are more powerful than the old priests, who are less.*
 281 Okay, I was making progress. And I said,
 282 Wait a second, you know, I can see going to a priest like you, or, you know, this other priest who was
 283 there at the parish, because they're both devout. I've encountered priests who are anything but devout
 284 and I'd encountered priests that were profane or just kind of, you know, worldly and vulgar. And he said,
 285 *I'm sorry that you have, but I know that it's true. Like so why would you go to a priest like that?* And he
 286 said, *Well, you don't have to, but you could like heaven.* And he said, *You probably have a physician*
 287 *family doctor.* Well, I didn't know doctor so and so was a member of Monsignor's parish, he looked at me
 288 smiled. He said, *You ever notice anything about that particular physician? Like what? Like you could stand*
 289 *to lose 40 or 50 pounds? And then give up you know, chain smoking? Like yeah, okay.* Obviously, he said,
 290 *but that doesn't stop your family from going to him. Why should it be because he's got lousy health, but*
 291 *the fact is, as a physician in lousy health, he can write prescriptions that you can fill, and they're going to*
 292 *work anyway. X over eight oh, Corrado. (inaudible) because that's the way medicine works in our body,*
 293 *regardless of the physician's health. That's the way spiritual medicine works through confession because*
 294 *Christ is the high priest who works through His earthly priests regardless of their spiritual health.* These

295 were good answers. And then I put up the old Protestant line of defense that I used to use years before
296 like, but where do you find in the Bible? I said, You know, Jesus, maybe but not the Church. I don't find
297 proof in the Scriptures. He said, Okay, let's talk about this again next time. But before you leave, (he
298 jotted down some verses on a note card) and he handed them to me. He said, take a look at these and
299 we'll come back and discuss them later next week.

300 **(S12)** So, I went home, and I looked up these texts, and I could figure out very quickly what he was up to.
301 The first text was taken from Luke 5:17-25 to a familiar story that I think you all know, beginning in 17,
302 where these four friends bring a paralytic to Jesus but can't get through the door. So, what do they do?
303 They open up the ceiling and they lower him down. Jesus sees that and what does he say? *My son Your*
304 *sins are forgiven*, and that paralytic is lying there thinking, *That's not what I came for.* And those poor
305 friends out there, *That's not what he needs*, you know. And the people around him are thinking to
306 themselves, *That's not what you can do for him.* Anyway, only GOD can forgive sins, and He could read
307 their minds. And so, He turned to these opponents in the room and said, *Which is easier to say, Your sins*
308 *are forgiven or Rise, take up, take your palate and go home?* And before they respond, He answers, *So*
309 *that you may know but the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins* He turned on the man and
310 said, *Rise. Take up your palate and go home. And he did it.* And as I'm thinking about it, I wanted to check
311 St. Augustine. I was always learning so much from him, and what he helped me to see was that Jesus
312 didn't perform a miracle that day he performed to and as far as our Lord was concerned, the healing of
313 the man's paralysis was the lesser miracle. **The greater (sin) and more important one was the healing of**
314 **that man's soul through the forgiveness of his sins.** Why else would our Lord have bothered to say, *My*
315 *son, your sins are forgiven?* The opponents are thinking, *Nobody but GOD has authority to do that!* And
316 Jesus would have said, *You know what, I agree. It's just that in the New Covenant, you've got more than*
317 *a mere man standing in your midst.* **The GOD man was now there, the Son of Man and The Son of GOD.**
318 And so He **performed the external miracle to validate the fact that He had the power and the authority**
319 **to perform the first one (internal miracle, healing that man soul restoring to find life through the**
320 **forgiveness of sins), and the outward sign confirms the internal reality** and as far as our Lord was
321 concerned, **healing our bodies is a lesser miracle than healing and restoring divine life to our souls.**
322 That man's body would have been functional for another 30, 40 maybe 50 or 60 years but the divine life
323 and our soul last 40, 50,60,70,80,90 trillion years. And what is that compared to less than a century?
324 So, for Jesus, **divine life that is eternal, has even greater value than the natural life that is temporal on**
325 **Earth.** We're pro-life, but there's no end; there is only life. **There is death, and then there is death**
326 **through mortal sin. And through forgiveness, we are resurrected in our souls, even more than just in**
327 **our bodies.** I liked that. I mean, it showed me that Jesus introduced something *radical* and *new in the*
328 *New Covenant*, but I'm thinking to myself as a Protestant, I can easily come back and just say, *That's*
329 *Jesus. It wasn't the 12 apostles. He sent them out preaching and teaching and healing, but there were*
330 *only physical miracles that are wants to the apostles.* Performed forgiveness of sins during his public
331 ministry. And so, I was ready. I had my gun loaded to come back with him. And then I looked at the note
332 card, and there was a second text from **John 20**. So, I looked it up beginning in **verse 21**. And it's a
333 resurrection appearance where Jesus suddenly appears in the upper room with the doors locked, and
334 the disciples are somewhat surprised. And He turns to them, and He says, *Peace be with you. As the*
335 *Father sent me, so now I send you.* How did the Father send the son with all authority in heaven on
336 earth? *As the Father sent me so now, I am going to send you...* what do the disciples now receive for the
337 first time, **divine authority, divine power**, such like they never possessed during his public ministry only
338 after the resurrection? **And when He said this, He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.**
339 **He whose sins you forgive, are forgiven, but if you retain the sins of any, they will be retained.** And
340 suddenly it occurred to me what He was giving to them after the resurrection, what they never got
341 before during the public ministry...the power that only Jesus had wielded up until now, **forgiving sin.**
342 **How could they differentiate between which sins to forgive and which sins to retain, unless the sinner has**
343 **specifically told them which sins, they have committed? This is why confession was a universal** practice

344 in the early church without any debate, because Jesus didn't reserve it to Himself, He gave it to His
345 apostles after the resurrection. And my only thought was, *Well, okay, as a Protestant I would come and*
346 *say, Yeah, okay, Jesus had it and the apostle shared it, but when the death of the last apostle occurred, it*
347 *was over.* Where do you find it being given anybody else besides the apostles, and then I looked at on a
348 notecard, **James 5:14-16**. So, I turned to James 5, and I read verses that were pretty familiar because I
349 memorized verse 16 in high school. ...**Confess your sins to one another..** (We used to use that as a proof
350 text to show you don't need to go to a priest. You just confess your sins to one another if you want to
351 confess. One of my professors said that, *If you take a text out of context and use it as a **proof text**, that's*
352 *a **pretext**.* And that day, I learned what I had been doing was a *pretext*, because you can't understand
353 **James 5:16** without looking at verses 15 and 14 in the context and that's what Monsignor asked me to
354 do in verse 15. I read, quote, *Is any among you sick? Let them call for the presbyters (priests) of the*
355 *church* (Greek word for elders is presbyter - where we get the word presbytery shortened in English to
356 "priest"; shortened form of *Presbyterian*, the Greek) *Is any one among you sick?*
357 *Let him call for the presbyters, (the priests) of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with*
358 *oil in the name of the Lord.* Hmm. How did I miss that? There's another second. You know when I got
359 sick, who administers to the priests, the presbyters, the elders and **the prayer of faith will save the sick**
360 **man. So, if he's committed any sins, he will be forgiven.** Where have we seen this before? **The physical**
361 **healing of the body, accompanied by the spiritual healing of the soul through the forgiveness of sins,**
362 but now it isn't Jesus or the 12. Now, it's just all of the presbyters, the priests in the early church. How
363 did I miss this for so many years? When I came back to meet with Monsignor, I was feeling somewhat
364 docile, put in my place. It felt at that point he wanted to get practical. He shared with me about the
365 practice of confession and how he's been going regularly. I said, *What do you mean regularly like once a*
366 *year?* He said, *No, that's the minimum requirement. Regular is like at least monthly. And the Pope goes*
367 *at least weekly. **John Paul II?*** He said, *Yes. What would he have to confess every week?* And he said, *Well,*
368 *his confessor can never say because of the seal. And um, what does that mean? The seal?*
369 **(S14)** *Have you heard of the seal the confessional? No,* he explained it to me. I liked that very much. Well,
370 you can't divulge any information, or you will be stripped of your priestly faculties. Suddenly, you know,
371 where there was a red light there was a blinking yellow. Okay, I might just proceed with caution here.
372 And as we talked further, it became clear to me that this was not an impossible task. He asked me, *Well,*
373 *why does it feel so hard?* I said, *because you know, all **post baptismal sin.** I was baptized as an infant,*
374 *and I had quite a crime spree going there for a while. I wouldn't even know how to begin,* and he said,
375 *Here, take this examination of conscience. Here's a prayer to the Holy Spirit. No, you don't confess your*
376 *sins to GOD to let him know what you've done. He knows better than you do. Like it's true. So why do I*
377 *need to confess? So that you will know all that He has to heal and how He'll go about it? The same*
378 *reason you have to tell everything you've got to a physician so it can help you understand the medicines*
379 *you need. Okay, and then he went on to explain about asking the Holy Spirit to help me remember what I*
380 *had done. And he said, Don't get into anxiety. Because if you confess and then you remember something,*
381 *just make a resolution to mention the next time you go.* And that's all he said. Yes, you're sincere. You're
382 humble. You're like a child. You're like a beggar. That's how the Pope does it. It almost seems simple. And
383 then I made that prayer to the Holy Spirit. And I followed his advice. I carried around a note card, where I
384 began to jot down the sins that the Holy Spirit helped me to remember. I tell you I wrote those things in
385 the most undecipherable hieroglyphics, and it became easy for me to remember number and kind. And
386 as I drew closer to the time of the Easter Vigil, the last time I met with him, he said, *By the way, you*
387 *know, we don't have to do this, you and me. You know, we've got this retired priest, Monsignor so-and-*
388 *so if you'd like, you know, he could hear your confession. I'd like that, yeah, that's great. Good suggestion,*
389 *you know.* He said, *Yeah, but believe me, neither of us are going to hear you say anything we haven't*
390 *heard many times before. There was only one original sin and Adam committed that and I laughed. It was*
391 *a very funny joke. You know, I was feeling more and more nervous at this point. But I took that card into*
392 *that confessional that Saturday. I walked in, and I was there for a little less than a half hour. He asked me*

393 some questions. And then he leaned over and whispered, *Welcome home, Scott*. And then he went
394 ahead and gave me a penance in the words of absolution. And when I heard a Catholic priest pronounce
395 the words absolution, I walked out feeling 10,000 pounds lighter, freer than I'd ever felt freedom and all
396 my life as a believer, knowing that Jesus had paid a debt he didn't owe because I had a debt, I couldn't
397 pay but now I could hear it. Now our Lord was reaching down to me where I was and working through
398 the members of his mystical body. It was wonderful. And I remember what made it so special is right
399 **(S15)** before I left, Monsignor said, ***When you walk out of that confessional, he said better yet when***
400 ***you hear the words absolution, realize this, that those words are more powerful than the words Jesus***
401 ***spoke outside the tomb of his friend when he said, Lazarus come forth, because Jesus only restored***
402 ***physical human natural life. Whereas what Jesus will do through that priest is to restore divine eternal***
403 ***supernatural life, which lasts forever***. That's a greater work of GOD, that merely restoring a man's body
404 from death. And that's what I heard when the priests pronounced the words and absolution. That's why I
405 felt so incredibly free and so light and so healed and by the time a week had passed, I remembered what
406 Monsignor had said about the Holy Father, going weekly. And so, I made a call and an appointment, and I
407 went in, and a week after I joined the church, I went back to confession. And then the next week, after
408 two months of this, it had become somewhat of a habit. And then we came to final exams and papers.
409 We are doing our best. One Saturday, Kimberly turned to me, and she said, *When was the last time*
410 *you've been to confession?* I'm like, What's it to you? You don't even think it's a sacrament. She's like,
411 *Sorry, I don't know what it is. All I know is that when you come back, you're so much gentler and kinder*
412 *and more patient with me and the kids*. I said, Three and a half weeks. I made the call and went that
413 afternoon. It occurred to me that afternoon when I came home, you know if I'd gone three and a half
414 weeks without a shower would they have noticed? If I go three and a half weeks without brushing my
415 teeth would have noticed the course you know, so *why do I value my physical life so much more than my*
416 *spiritual?* It occurred to me that what doctors and dentists and dietitians and therapists and pharmacists
417 do for our bodies, that's what the **priests through confession does for our souls**.
418 Can you imagine what would happen to our lives if suddenly the government announced comprehensive
419 health care, free coverage for every member of your family from the cradle to the grave? It comes with a
420 guarantee and all the doctors are part of this program, including the best I know what I would do, I
421 would go in for a regular checkup and then some and I'd be sure to bring my kids you know and Kimberly
422 to I think all of us when we work our physicians, you know, to the bone. Why? Because **life has value**.
423 **Health is important to us. But why do we value physical, natural life so much more than the spiritual**
424 **supernatural life which alone will last for all eternity?** What's wrong with this picture? And so, I started
425 going weekly, even when I had papers and pressures, in fact, to be sure to go because of how short my
426 temper is and how easily I snap when I feel a lot of stress. And so now I've been a Catholic for 20 years,
427 and I have been following Monsignor and John Paul's advice and going at least weekly, at least just about
428 for the last 20 years. In fact, my confessor is such a good friend, he's like one of those old-time
429 physicians. He makes house calls on Fridays because he knows that if I have like a plumber or an
430 electrician, we had contractors fixing our basement for three or four months, almost all on were
431 Catholics. So, I would let him use my office and we would have all these checkups to these guys who
432 have not been to Confession for months or years. We're going every week, you know, and all my kids as
433 well. Again, comprehensive health care for every member of the family was the divine guarantee and it's
434 free of charge, who wouldn't? If you really believed it. And so, it's been, and I tell you the example of
435 Monsignor, that example of Pope John Paul and I've heard that Pope Benedict follows the same pattern.
436 This is real. I mean we only have to go once a year. But I would really recommend you consider going
437 more often. It's free, and it's divinely powerful. And I tell you, my marriage has been transformed. And so
438 has my family, I've learned that it's not just about being right. It's about having the right relations. It's not
439 just excusing yourself and accusing others, it's accusing yourself and making excuses for your loved ones,
440 to give them a line of credit that you typically demand for yourself.

441 **(S16)** I remember learning about GOD forgiving debts every 49 years in what they call it in ancient Israel,
442 the year of Jubilee. So about 15 years ago, after being a Catholic and going for every week, I announced
443 at breakfast one morning, today is a day of Jubilee. And kids said, *What?* Well, it's like a year - Jubilee.
444 But today, if you come to me and admit anything you've done wrong, you will go unpunished. I will
445 forgive you, but it's a day apart. You will not get punished; not to worry about getting caught. They are
446 choking on Rice Krispies, right? Well, after lunch, my eldest son comes to me. *This day of Jubilee. Were*
447 *you kidding?* I'm like, No and he closed my door. And he said, Okay, and out it came in like, whoa, whoa.
448 Does he know it? Of course, no wonder you're at odds with your brother. He said, *Now what are you*
449 *going to do?* I'm going to forgive you, and we can pray together. And after I prayed, I said, Is there
450 anything you think you ought to do to make things right? And he said, *I will return the baseball cards for*
451 *one. Like, yeah, that's a good start,* and he did. After dinner, a knock at my door and I watched his
452 younger brother come in. *Did you mean it?* Like yeah. Okay, and he closed the door and out it came.
453 Suddenly I realized why they were at each other's throats for the last month. And he apologized and they
454 became friends. And I decided just about every month or every two or three weeks to announce a day of
455 Jubilee. After five or 10 years of this, we were getting through major blockage, every impasse, a day. Now
456 my kids know they can come to me and say, *Dad, can I have a jubilee?* And I never turned them down.
457 Why? Because **all I'm doing is sharing the mercy that I receive every week. Every time I go to**
458 **confession, it's a day of Jubilee.** I'm not a convict, caught and interrogated. punished and sentenced. I'm
459 a penitent come in to the doctor. Hey, Doc, I'm sick. I'm weak. I'm wayward. I'm wounded, please heal
460 me. And I don't want to be clever. I want to be clean. And so instead of just proving I am right, getting
461 back into its right relation is much more than being right and my kids and my wife, we've all begun to
462 catch on to this. And I tell you, it makes a big difference. We're still sinners. We're still wounded and
463 weak and wayward. But a weekly visit is a good thing for a marriage or for a family. Let me tell you, and I
464 think my wife would be the first to back me up, I must admit, after about 15 years of being a Catholic
465 about five years ago, it hit me one night. I came to my confessor, and I said, Father, so and so you know,
466 I'm a little frustrated. *Why is that?* I said because, *You know, we met last week and the week before and*
467 *all that and here again, and I might as well just photocopy my list from last week.* And he said, *Well, if*
468 *you want, I don't want to know. I don't want you to know: I'm just wondering what difference the*
469 sacrament makes. He said, *What are you saying?* I'm wondering what difference it makes in my life if I'm
470 repeating the same things coming back and confirming my weaknesses the same weekend and week
471 out? And he looked at me and he smiled. What's so funny? He said, *Well, what do you want new sins?*
472 New sins? No. He said, *Well, that's good because you'd be committing new ones if you weren't coming*
473 *back every week confessing the old ones.* And I knew he was right. He was dead right And he said,
474 *Besides, this is not a quick fix. This is a long-term therapy. Because sin is more than what we do. It's who*
475 *we are because of pride.* And I just sat there listening as he explained. He said, **The source of all of our**
476 **sins is pride.** *And the fact that you find it humbling to come in week after week and confess the same sins*
477 *takes sin out at the source because Humility is the virtue that takes out the vise of pride.* *So don't stop*
478 *returning. I won't.* And I finished and I went back the next week with the same list and I've been there
479 many times. What a difference it makes to have someone who you really allow to get to know you
480 instead of playing games.
481 I tell you though, about four years ago, I had an experience that we'll never forget. We went to Rome,
482 Kimberley and the six kids. And at the time, David was only like two and a half. We had this private
483 audience with the Pope and when John Paul saw little David, he asked for him and he was so weak we
484 had to help him hold him and then he kissed him on the cheek and their eyes is locked. We got a
485 photograph and then when we left, we just kind of slowed down in St Peter's and we didn't need a plane
486 to get home across it. We could have floated home. A month later, I'm walking through the kitchen after
487 dinner, little David's in the highchair. I'd bent over and I gave him a peck on the cheek, and I took a step
488 and said, Who here? I'm expecting, DADDY... he says, **POPE!** First childhood memory Pope kissed my
489 cheek. Wow. Thanks be to GOD.

490 Later on, I met my priest friend and said What a Pope we have! My kid's first memory is being kissed on
491 the cheek by none other than John Paul the Great, and we laughed, and he said, *You know, I've got a*
492 *story to tell you about John Paul.*

493 **(18)** The second I'm like, well, it wasn't you know, can you top this? He said *No, I'm not playing the game.*
494 *But a few months ago, a friend of mine in the Archdiocese of New York was over in Rome for a week. He*
495 *had this conference. And on the last day of the conference after lunch, he went up to a parish to make his*
496 *afternoon prayer. He walked up the stairs and he passed about a half a dozen beggars, which is common*
497 *in Rome, you know in the parishes. But as he walked through the doors, he thought he recognized one of*
498 *the beggars and he sat down. He tried to pray but was so distracted he went back out. And he said to the*
499 *beggar, "Do I know you?" and the guy looked up and turned to him and said, "Yes. We went to seminary*
500 *here in Rome together. We were ordained." What happened? And the beggar said, *Don't ask. I crashed*
501 *and burned leave me alone. Oh no, I'll pray for you.* And then he realized he was already running late for
502 the last meeting of the conference in St. Peter's. And so, he hightailed it over to St. Peters. And on that
503 afternoon, at the end of the conference, they actually had a chance to meet with John Paul to share the
504 results of their conference. And so, in such private meetings, each person that goes has a chance to go
505 off and kiss his ring and get the rosary from the Pope's secretary and you say something like *thank you, I*
506 *love you. I pray for you, Holy Father,* and then the next in line comes forward. Well, this priest was so
507 taken by what he had just encountered that when he went to kiss the Pope's ring, he said, ***I love you.***
508 ***Please pray for my friend*** and he blew it out, but it just happened and after he left the audience, he
509 went back to the parish in the city (looking for his friend). And only two or three were left but one of
510 them was this guy. And he said, *I met with the Pope and he's praying for you and there was a lot of good*
511 *that'll do it and that's not all. He had his bishop Secretary issue an invitation for the two of us to join*
512 *them for dinner at the papal apartment tonight.* And the beggar said, *Not a chance. Look at me. I don't*
513 *have clothes or showered like you.* And the priest said, *You don't understand, you're my ticket. If I don't*
514 *have you, I don't get in. I've got a hotel room where you can shower. I got clothes that'll fit.* So reluctantly
515 this beggar went along with the priest and showered and shaved and got dressed. They were outside
516 that bronze doors, the Swiss guard let them in at 7pm. Up the marble stairs, the bishop Secretary Chivas
517 was waiting for them outside the apartment, brought them in. The Pope was already seated. He shook
518 their hands. They sat down and they began the conversation. You know the first course, the second of
519 the main course was served, and after the main course, the Pope kept looking at the priest and
520 motioning with his hand. What the priest didn't understand but the bishop Secretary did he stood up
521 and said, *Let's walk outside* and so they walk into the hallway. And the priests turned the Secretary and
522 said, *What's going on in there?* *No one ever knows.* So, they stood out there for three, four or five. It was
523 more than 10 minutes later, that some signal was heard, and the bishop opened the door. They walked
524 back and they sat down. It was quiet and then they brought dessert in, and they finished dessert. They
525 exchanged their farewells, and they went out into the night and when he finally got down to the St.
526 Peter's Square outside, the priests turns to the beggar and said, *What went on in there?* And the beggar
527 said, *I don't think you'd believe me. Well, try me!* And he said, *As soon as you left, the Pope clasp my*
528 ***(S19) hands and said, Father, would you hear my confession? He said to you? That's right. What did you***
529 ***say? Well, what could I say? I'm a beggar. What'd he say? He looked at my eyes and said, No mind. Your,***
530 ***Holiness, I'm not a priest anymore. And he used the line "once a priest always a priest". But I'm not in***
531 ***right with the Church. And he assured me that as the Bishop of Rome, he could reinstate me if that was***
532 ***my concern. How can I withhold consent? So, I consented. And you heard the Pope's confession. Yeah.***
533 ***And he had to help me with the words of absolution; it had been so long.*** And then the priest said, *We*
534 *were out there for more than 10 minutes. Did it really take the pope that long to confess? And he said*
535 *No, no, because when I was done, I fell to my knees, and I begged him to hear my confession. That's what*
536 *took most of that time. And before you came back, he asked me where he would find me and I told him*
537 *the name of the parish, and he gave me my first assignment. He said, "I want you to go out to that**

538 *neighborhood. And I want you to reach out to all of our fellow beggars, because that's what we all are,*
539 *the beggars that GOD has adopted and named his sons and daughters".*
540 That's the kind of grace we've been given. Not only in Pope John Paul and Benedict, but in the
541 **Sacrament of Mercy**, the healing power of confession, in a sacrament of healing that all of us knew, all of
542 our marriages can be strengthened, all of our families could be healed. If only we were humble enough
543 to realize it isn't about a police lineup, or an interrogation. GOD isn't trying to extract anything from us.
544 **He's trying to pour into us His mercy, His love and His power.** Talk about a bargain. Let's go to Him now
545 and ask Him for grace to make more of this great **Sacrament of Mercy.**
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548