



February Connection Guide

I'm Sorry

CROSSWORDS OVERVIEW

This ministry year we want to emphasize these important “CrossWords” in our vocabulary, letting the language and ideas of scripture shape our relationship with God and with others.

Month	Relational Words	Worship Words	Related Psalm
September	I’m listening	Illumination	Psalm 119: 9-11
October	Bless you	Blessing	Psalm 103
November	Thank you	Thanksgiving	Psalm 136
December	Advent		
January	Help	Supplication	Psalm 86
February	I’m sorry	Confession	Psalm 51
March	Why	Lament	Psalm 13
April	I love you	Praise	Psalm 95
May	What can I do?	Service	Psalm 116

We
are
here

WHAT’S IN THIS GUIDE

In each monthly guide you will find resources that can be used in many ways: personal reflection, small group discussion, or family devotions.

There are four main sections:

- CrossWords in Scripture – Read and respond to biblical texts related to the theme of the month
- CrossWords in Our Tradition – Learn more about our church’s related teachings
- CrossWords in Community – Engage and discuss with a group using prompts and questions
- CrossWords in Action – Put the word into practice with action prompts and adventures for all ages

THIS MONTH – I’M SORRY

CONFESSION

Our God longs for honesty and holiness within the promise-based relationship God has established with us in Christ. In a culture that avoids talk of sin and culpability, regular prayers of confession foster honesty and openness in our relationship with God. Just as a marriage cannot flourish without honest confession, so our marriage-like relationship with God cannot flourish unless we freely and honestly express all facets of our life: hopes, fears, sins, desires, thanksgiving and praise.

Blessed by God’s providence, we don’t offer our prayers of confession in a spiritual vacuum with a remote hope that some god or higher power will listen and forgive. We confess sin in the context of the covenant Lord’s love shown to us through Jesus Christ. We offer our confession as part of a covenantal relationship. For this reason, the confession and assurance part of a worship service is often the most explicitly dialogic, alternating between God’s words to us and our words to God. We confess sin when prompted by God’s gracious invitation. Then we hear the strong declaration of God’s forgiveness in Christ. And we respond in joyful gratitude with praise and dedication.

The confession part of the service is like a picture of our relationship with God. Participating in this alternating pattern of God’s words and our response each week shapes our faith over time to highlight the tenacity and graciousness of God’s covenantal love.

(Worship Sourcebook, page 18)

CROSSWORDS IN SCRIPTURE

BIBLE READINGS FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY AND YOUR RESPONSE

Feb.	Text	Your one sentence takeaway
1	Luke 7:36-50	
2	Isaiah 6:1-7	
3	1 John 1:8-10	
4	Isaiah 1:18-20	
5	James 5:13-16	
6	Proverbs 28:13	
7	Psalms 130	
8	Hebrews 4:14-16	
9	Ecclesiastes 4:20	
10	Leviticus 5:1-6	
11	Psalms 32: 1-5	
12	2 Chronicles 6:22-23	
13	Acts 3:17-21	
14	Ezra 9	
15	Ezra 10:1-6	
16	Mark 1:1-8	
17	Psalms 139:23-24	
18	Psalms 32: 6-11	
19	Ephesians 1:1-22	
20	Psalms 39	
21	Hebrews 10:19-25	
22	Psalms 6	
23	Nehemiah 1:4-11	
24	Nehemiah 9:29-37	
25	Isaiah 59:12-15	
26	Genesis 50:15-21	
27	Luke 11:1-4	
28	Romans 5:1-8	
29	Romans 6:1-14	

CROSSWORDS IN OUR TRADITION

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, LORD'S DAY (Q&A 88-90)

Q. What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the rising-to-life of the new.

Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

A. To be genuinely sorry for sin and more and more to hate and run away from it.

Q. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God by doing every kind of good work.

OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD, PARAGRAPH 39-40

39. The church is a gathering of forgiven sinners called to be holy. Saved by the patient grace of God, we deal patiently with others and together confess our need for grace and forgiveness. Restored in Christ's presence, shaped by his life, this new community lives out the ongoing story of God's reconciling love, announces the new creation, and works for a world of justice and peace.

40. We grieve that the church, which shares one Spirit, one faith, one hope, and spans all time, place, race, and language, has become a broken communion in a broken world. When we struggle for the truth of the gospel and for the righteousness God demands, we pray for wisdom and courage. When our pride or blindness hinders the unity of God's household, we seek forgiveness. We marvel that the Lord gathers the broken pieces to do his work and that he blesses us still with joy, new members, and surprising evidences of unity. We commit ourselves to seeking and expressing the oneness of all who follow Jesus, and we pray for brothers and sisters who suffer for the faith.

ARTICLE 61 CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH, CHURCH ORDER

The public prayers in the worship service shall include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession

CONFESSION FROM THE SERVICE OF WORD AND SACREMENT, SYNOD OF 1981

Most holy and merciful Father,

We confess to you and to one another, that we have sinned against you by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not fully loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not always had in us the mind of Christ. You alone know how often we have grieved you by wasting your gifts, by wandering from your ways, by forgetting your love. Forgive us, we pray you, most merciful Father, and free us from our sin.

Renew in us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ your son, our Savior, Amen

- *Our tradition calls us to corporately confess our mistakes and declare our need for grace and forgiveness. Why is it important to do this as a group? Why not simply let individuals confess their own sin?*
- *In what ways have we as individuals or as a church...*
 - *...wasted God's gifts?*
 - *...wandered from God's ways?*
 - *...forgotten God's love?*



SAYING "I'M SORRY" TO GOD

THE WISDOM OF CORPORATE CONFESSION—REV. JOYCE BORGER

"Covenant renewal happens in community.

Wise is the preacher who invites hearers to receive God's lavish grace, to repent from sin and evil, to turn toward Christ. . . .

Wise is the church that . . . encourages honest and trusting prayers to God that express the full range of human experience . . . prayers of celebration and lament, trust and desperation, supplication and intercession, thanksgiving and confession, healing and hope."

—from *Worshipping the Triune God*, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Why did a 2010 gathering of Reformed denominations from around the world think it wise to include confession of sin and the assurance of pardon in worship? Why has confession found a place in worship liturgies, from the early church, to the Roman Mass, to the Reformers? Even our own denomination's Church Order stipulates the inclusion of prayers of confession (see Art. 61). After a time of dwindling use, they seem to be on the rise. But what is the wisdom behind the practice?

As Reformed Christians we see worship as a reenactment of our covenant with God, a renewal ceremony with God and those gathered in dialogue. God calls us to worship; we respond with praise. Faced with God's holiness, we become aware of our own sinfulness and our need to confess—to which God responds with words of forgiveness. Then, desiring to live a life that more fully emulates the life of Christ, we turn to the Word to hear God's message to us. Week after week we respond to that message and are sent out with God's blessing to be a blessing to others. The practice of confessing our sin in worship is wise, first of all, because it is based in Scripture and is part of the rhythm of all relationships, especially our relationship with a holy God.

While we can certainly confess and experience forgiveness on our own, covenant renewal occurs within community. God is never in relationship with us only as individuals but also within a community of believers. In our baptism we are united with Christ and with one another. When one person rejoices, we all rejoice; when one mourns, we all mourn. And when one sins, it becomes our sin. And so we come as God's united people confessing our sin together: individual and corporate sin, actions we have done and things we have failed to do. It is a wise practice because it places us in a community of believers honestly struggling in Christ to overcome temptation, to challenge unjust systems of which we are a part, to declare that Jesus is victor over our idols, and to be assured of our pardon.

We need regular reminders of our sinfulness and God's abundant grace. While we don't want to focus on our depravity, without the act of confession and forgiveness we won't fully understand or experience God's grace. In worship we are reoriented; we are reminded that we have been set apart for holy living. Confession is a wise practice because it forms our faith and identity.

Within the regular practice of confession, there is plenty of room for variation. We might want to begin worship with it, for example, or respond to a sermon with a time of confession, or include it in our preparation for the Lord's Supper. The context will suggest whether the prayer of confession should be read by the pastor, recited by the congregation, or spoken extemporaneously. It may or may not include a spoken or sung response. It may be a part of a song or offered during an extended time of silence. Various postures may be employed: from bowing to kneeling or even lying prostrate before God. It may also be instructive to lead from the baptismal font.

Far from being an empty ritual, the regular confession of sin and the assurance of pardon are packed with meaning. We are a sinful people, and we need the weekly reminder of our dependence on God's grace.

In that there is great wisdom.



- *What place does confession of sin have in our worship liturgies?*
- *If we may and should confess our sins personally and privately, why do we also do so in public worship?*
- *What is “covenant renewal?” How does that relate to worship? What place does confession of sin play in it?*
- *Does it matter what posture we take as we confess our sin? For example, is kneeling better than standing or sitting? And is a spoken prayer of confession better than one we sing together?*
- *What are “corporate sins”? Do they differ from the sins we commit as individuals? Are we personally responsible for them?*
- *Why do we need to be constantly reminded of the fact that “we are a sinful people”? Does that do full justice to the gospel and to the new life we have in Christ?*

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE OF PARDON-

Gracious God,
our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo.
Forgive what our lips tremble to name,
what our hearts can no longer bear,
and what has become for us a
consuming fire of judgment.
Set us free from a past
that we cannot change;
open us to a future in
which we can be changed;
and grant us grace
to grow more and more
in your likeness and image;
through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

This saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance:
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
He bore our sins in his body on the cross,
so that free from sins, we might live for righteousness.
By his wounds we are healed.
Alleuia! Amen.

*Prayer: Book of Worship, United Church of Christ © 1986, 2002 United Church of Christ
Text: from 1 Tm. 1:15; 1 Pet. 2:24*

Perdón, Señor/Forgive Us, Lord

Spanish:

Perdón, Señor. Por tantas injusticias,
Perdón, Señor. Por tanta indiferencia,
Perdón, Señor

English:

Forgive us, Lord. For all the world’s injustice
Forgive us, Lord. For all of our indifference.
Forgive us, Lord

Jorge Lockward



PSALMS: THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER, A PRAYER OF CONFESSION, VIDEO 45:38 - https://youtu.be/Zba6_Bv40cY

Pastor and scholar Tim Mackie explores how we might process and pray through experiences of real failure.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

God, be merciful to me
On your grace I rest my plea.
My transgressions I confess;
Grief and guilt my soul oppress.
Wash me, make me pure within;
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin
From Psalm 51, 1912 Psalter

The Book of Common Prayer

SAYING "I'M SORRY" TO OTHERS

GIVING THE GIFT OF REGRET – ALAN BANDSTRA

"What did I do?"

"Why are you always punishing me?"

Parents and teachers lament two troubling trends among today's youth: greater disregard for others and a weakened sense of remorse when confronted about wrongdoing. How should we discipline when these tendencies appear in our children?

'Doing remorse' with grace

Remember that showing regret is painful. When we're sorry, we admit we were wrong. Worse, if the mistake was motivated by unkindness, we're faced with the reality that our problem runs deeper than behavior; it resides within our hearts.

On the other hand, remorse is also a gift if the painful feeling leads us to do something. For example, regret should send us running to Jesus, where we grasp his atonement and move beyond our guilt. Grace-inspired remorse should also prompt us to apologize and make amends. Finally, we might think of regret as an elbow in the ribs to help us turn the other way when we're tempted to repeat our mistakes.

How can mentors give the gift of regret to guilty young people? Let's acknowledge that remorse cannot be forced; it's a gift. Adults preoccupied with making children feel sorry activate defensiveness or shame. Defensiveness makes offenders sorry they were caught, but not always regretful about what they did. And shame might leave wrongdoers thinking they have fallen beyond redemption. Only God's Spirit can assess true repentance and

prompt inward change, the sort King David desired after his affair with Bathsheba: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). However, adults can participate in the Spirit’s work by leading children through doors that open their hearts to repentance.

Teaching regret by way of empathy

Healthy regret flows out of empathy. Children who empathize with others need less “help” to feel guilty, and their apologies are usually more sincere.

Bringing about empathy requires waiting for calmness. Brain research shows that distress activates the limbic system, which spurs us to fight back or run away (i.e., sassing or denying). Gentleness in an environment of felt safety mobilizes the prefrontal cortex, that brain area that identifies with others. Remaining calm also encourages honesty: children who trust their caregivers won’t pounce on them are more likely to admit their guilt.

Also, use the term “disrespect” sparingly. When others prod us, searching for the unloving attitudes inside, pulling away is not intentional; it’s a reflex. Lead young people to own guilt through the eyes of the offended rather than through talk of negative attitudes like disrespect.

Now, say you’re sorry

Not long ago, I grew irritated with a student who belittled a science demonstration I gave in my classroom. Even though he deserved to experience my anger and to pay for his dismissive attitude, I spoke with him instead, after his classmates had exited. I explained how he had diminished my work and caused others to miss the wonder of creation I was highlighting. Considering his nature, I didn’t expect an apology; I just wanted him to know how I felt. Surprisingly, he turned and said he was sorry.

Conversations about wrong don’t always lead to apologies, though. Should we then require children to show contrition? Perhaps. Consider these questions first:

- Can the person trust that you hold his or her best interests in mind?
- Do you set an example by acknowledging your own mistakes?
- Have you spoken calmly and listened well?

If yes, you might gently lead the youth through the steps. Teaching the actions of regret is befitting as long as we don’t fixate on making the child feel repentant. In short, parents and mentors “start children off on the way they should go,” but we leave the work of creating new hearts up to God (Prov. 22:6; Ps. 51:10).



- *In what ways are we like the students in Mr. Bandstra’s classes?*
- *When are regret and remorse helpful? In what ways can they be damaging?*

GETTING THE LAST WORLD WITH APOLOGY – DR. JENNIFER THOMAS



[TED Talk](https://youtu.be/FiiPNPLWXSM) -17:05 <https://youtu.be/FiiPNPLWXSM>

A “Love Languages” based guide to apologizing. Dr. Thomas explains five key ideas that connect with people when offering an apology.

1. Expressing regret
2. Accepting responsibility
3. Making restitution
4. Revising the plan
5. Requesting forgiveness



- What is most important to you when someone offers an apology?
- What aspect of apologizing is most difficult for you?

BOOK IDEAS

- *When Sorry Isn't Enough: Making Things Right with Those You Love* by Gary D. Chapman [Link](#)
- *The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships* by Gary Chapman and Jennifer M. Thomas - [Link](#)
- *Why Won't You Apologize?: Healing Big Betrayals and Everyday Hurts* by Harriet Lerner PhD - [Link](#)
- *Effective Apology: Mending Fences, Building Bridges, and Restoring Trust* by John Kador - [Link](#)
- *On Apology* by Aaron Lazare M.D. – [Link](#)
- *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies* by Nick Smith - [Link](#)
- *The Power of Apology: Healing Steps to Transform All Your Relationships* by Beverly Engel - [Link](#)

Children's Books:

- *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes - [Link](#)
- *Otter and Owl Say I'm Sorry* by Crystal Bowman - [Link](#)
- *Sorry (Really Sorry)* by Joanna Cotler – [Link](#) - [Video](#)

"I'M SORRY" - CONFESSION

CROSSWORDS THEME FOR FEBRUARY

SCRIPTURE

↑ 1 John 1:9 | "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

↔ James 5:16 | "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."

ADVENTURE

Gather some sidewalk chalk and set up a garden hose with a nozzle.

On a driveway or sidewalk write or draw things that you are sorry for. Maybe it was something that you did that wasn't right, or something you wished you had done, but didn't.

When you are done with your writing or drawing. Confess those things to God.

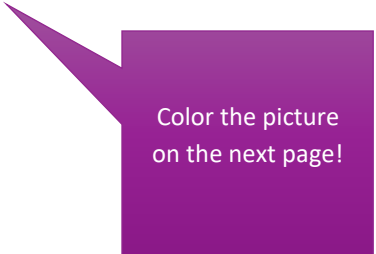
Then let someone spray the hose over your drawing and wash it all away. Remember the water of your baptism and God's promise to wash us clean and restore us.

RESPONSE

Remember the story of Zacchaeus? You can find it in Luke 19:1-10.

You can follow the steps Zacchaeus took in the story:

1. Find a tree and climb it! When you do, think about how you want to see Jesus and follow him.
2. Say you're sorry for the things you have done and remember Jesus' promise to forgive.
3. Come down and try to make things right! Perhaps it's saying "I'm sorry" to someone or maybe it means returning something you took or replacing something you broke.



Color the picture
on the next page!



Scripture: Genesis 33

In our home, we try to nurture sensitivity to the fact that we have tend to hurt those we love most. This is not a comfortable understanding, but it seems to ring true to experience.

Sometimes my kids are the best of friends. They will protect each other, look out for one another, and will know intuitively what the other is feeling even if their parents are still guessing. Yet, given the "right" conditions, those same intimate siblings can say and do things to one another that is nothing short of a "cheap shot". Knowing one another intimately is a good thing - until sin distorts such knowing so that you strike your loved one's vulnerability.

In our home, sometimes we ask one another to do more than say, "'m sorry". We say, "will you forgive me?" Doing so is much more vulnerable for the person who did the damage and this vulnerability is important. We also try to advance a culture in our home that does not settle with a response of "that's okay". Whatever has been done is *not* okay. What we call one another to say is something like, "thank you, all is forgiven".

It is extra work doing relationships this way, but it makes for a better life. It is too easy for us to shortcut one another by sweeping unresolved pains under the carpet. It also teaches us to deal with one another directly rather than trying to distance ourselves from our sins. We hear celebrities and politicians doing this all the time when they say, "well, mistakes were made". This, it seems to me, is much less penitent than, "I screwed up big time."

When the coronavirus is behind us, we are going to have to sharpen our skills around saying, "'m Sorry". Better yet, we should probably start now; in family, in church, in community, and in God's world.

We don't get an "'m sorry" in the Jacob and Esau story. What we do get is Jacob sending lavish gifts to his estranged brother. More than this, Jacob bows to the ground seven times before his brother - a demonstration of profound humility. Esau's response of open arms and tears seem to say, "all is forgiven".

To say "I'm sorry" - whether it is to God or to human beings - takes work, it takes discipline, and it takes practice. This is why confession in worship is such an important time. Confession gives us skills for life; life with God and life with other people. Opening ourselves to our failings with God opens up God's possibilities to use us in the world around us. Our vulnerability in the face of who we are and who God is ought to make Christians the best practitioners of "I'm sorry". The News in this text and in our life is that when we are at the "I'm sorry" point, we are best positioned to see the "face of God".

O God,
open our hearts to take responsibility
for what we have done and what we have left undone.
We are not only sorry, but we truly want to change.
Give us courageous humility
that we might embrace your strength in us
because we have seen our weakness and failings.
We pray this in the strong Name of Jesus whose blood addresses all our sin.
Amen.