

“Confession: Sins of the Tongue”

**James 3, 5:16, 1 John
1:9, and Psalm 32**



Rhythm Practice: Repentance

Leader's Notes:

This session is not like our regular routines. This is a practice session — a night set apart for your group to do something God's people are called to do but that most small groups rarely make space for: confess to one another, receive grace, and leave lighter than you came.

Your role tonight is less facilitator and more shepherd. You are creating a safe, unhurried space. You are not responsible for what the Holy Spirit does in that space — only for protecting it. Read through this entire guide before your group meets. Know the flow. Lead with confidence and gentleness.

Make a copy of the **“Sins of the Tongue reference sheet”** for each person in your group.

Tonight's session moves in four parts:

- 1. Scripture Study** — A brief look at James 3 and the power and purpose of confession. (~15 minutes)
- 2. Quiet Reflection** — Men and women separate. Each person privately reviews the “Sins of the Tongue” list and asks God to reveal what to confess. (~15 minutes)
- 3. Confession Time** — In gender-separated groups, each person confesses, and the group responds with Scripture, prayer, and encouragement. (~25–30 minutes)
- 4. Reassembly & Celebration** — The full group reunites to celebrate God's forgiveness and Christ's finished work together. (~5 minutes)

READ IT | *Scripture & Foundation* • ~15 minutes

Leaders Note: Read the “SAY IT” sections yourself and ask someone else to read the Bible passages.

SAY IT:

James opens his third chapter with a warning that sounds extreme until you start paying attention to your own words for a single day.

- James 3:2-6, 9-10

SAY IT:

James uses three images — a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a spark in a forest. Each one is tiny. Each one controls or destroys something vastly larger than itself. The point is that the tongue is not a small problem. It's a small instrument with enormous consequences — for good or for destruction. What we say reveals what is in us, shapes how others experience us, and either builds or tears down the communities we are part of.

But James doesn't leave us with only the problem. Later in his letter, he points to the practice that brings healing:

- James 5:16
- 1 John 1:9
- Psalm 32:1-5

SAY IT:

Notice what Psalm 32 describes: when David kept his sin hidden, his body felt it. His bones wasted away. His strength was spent. Unconfessed sin is a physical and emotional weight, not just a spiritual one. Confession isn't weakness — it's the relief that comes when you stop carrying something you were never meant to carry alone. And James 5:16 places that confession in community — not just privately to God, but to one another. Tonight we practice both.

THINK ABOUT IT | *Group Reflection • ~3 minutes*

Leaders Note: Don't enter into full-on discussion mode here. Keep these questions brief — one or two responses each. You're not trying to do the confession here. You're warming the room and helping people move from their heads toward their hearts before the quiet time begins.

1. **When you think about your words this past week — spoken or typed — what's your honest assessment? Were they mostly building or tearing down?**

2. David describes a physical weight that came from keeping sin hidden. Have you ever experienced that? What happened when you finally named it?

QUIET REFLECTION | *Sins of the Tongue* • ~15 minutes

Leaders Note: Before you begin, explain that men and women will be separated into two different spaces — different rooms if possible, or opposite ends of the same room with enough distance for privacy. Distribute the **Sins of the Tongue Reference Sheet** (attached) to each person. Read the following instructions aloud to the whole group before they separate, so everyone understands the process.

Music Note: Soft instrumental or worship music playing quietly in the background during the quiet time helps create an atmosphere of openness and reduces the self-consciousness people feel in silence. A simple search for “peaceful worship instrumental” on YouTube or Spotify will give you good options. Prepare this before the group arrives.

SAY IT:

In a moment we’re going to spend about 15 minutes alone in quiet reflection. Men and women will separate into two groups. You’ll each have a copy of a list called Sins of the Tongue — 18 ways our words can wound, deceive, or dishonor God and the people around us.

Here’s what I want you to do during that time: Read slowly through the list. For each one, pause and ask God honestly: Is this me? Don’t rush. You’re not trying to identify everything — you’re listening for the one or two that the Holy Spirit brings to the surface. When something lands, pay attention to it.

Each item on the list includes a convicting Scripture, an encouraging Scripture, and a story from the Bible connected to that sin. If something resonates, read the encouraging verse slowly. Let it speak to what you’re feeling. Try to go deeper by finding and reading the Bible story on your own during this time or sometime later this week.

After the quiet time, we’ll move into confession within your smaller group. You’ll each have a turn to share what God surfaced for you. The rest of the group will listen without interrupting, and when you’re finished, someone will read the encouraging Scripture for that sin over you and pray for you.

This is a safe space. What is shared in your group stays there. You don’t have to share everything — only what you feel ready to bring before God and your community. And

when someone confesses to you, receive it as a gift. They are trusting you with something real.

Leaders Note: After reading the instructions, ask the groups to separate. Start the music softly. Allow 15 minutes of uninterrupted quiet time. When the time is up, quietly let each group know it's time to begin confessing to one another.

CONFESSION TIME | *In Gender-Separated Groups • ~25-30 minutes*

LEADER NOTE: Each gender group will have its own leader — either you or another trusted person you've identified in advance. Before the session, identify who will lead each group and make sure they have read these instructions. Brief them privately before the evening begins.

The leader of each group should read the following instructions aloud once the quiet time has ended and the groups are settled:

SAY IT:

We're going to take turns now. There's no right way to do this — just an honest way. When it's your turn, share what God brought to the surface during the quiet time. It might be one thing. It might be two. You don't have to explain everything or give a lot of background. Just name it honestly before God and before us.

While one person is confessing, everyone else listens. No interrupting. No fixing. No advice. Just receive what they're sharing with the same grace you'd want if it were you. When someone finishes, we'll pause for a moment. Then someone in the group — anyone who feels led — will find the encouraging Scripture that corresponds with that sin on the list and read it aloud over them. Then someone else will pray a brief prayer of blessing and forgiveness over them. It doesn't have to be long. It just has to be sincere.

Then we'll move to the next person until everyone has had the chance to confess and be prayed for. I'll go first.

IMPORTANT — Leaders go first:

This is not optional. The leader going first is what gives the group permission to be honest. If you share something real, they will too. If you share something safe and surface-level, that's what you'll get from everyone else. Prepare your own confession before the evening begins. Ask God what he wants you to bring. Then bring it.

Leaders Notes:

After each confession:

Allow a brief moment of quiet before anyone responds. Then invite someone to read the encouraging verse from the list. Then invite a brief prayer. Keep the responses warm but not performative — a sentence or two of prayer is enough. The goal is that the person who confessed feels heard, covered by Scripture, and prayed for. Then move to the next person.

If someone doesn't know what to confess:

That's okay. They can say: "I'm not sure what to bring tonight, but I want to be here."

That's its own kind of honesty. Don't force anything. Pray briefly for them anyway — that God would open their eyes to see what he sees.

If someone shares something significant:

Receive it with care and without alarm. You don't need to counsel them in the moment. A sincere prayer and the encouraging verse is enough for tonight. If something comes up that requires pastoral follow-up, make a note and bring it to your leaders (Steve or Erin) this week.

REASSEMBLY & CELEBRATION | Whole Group • ~5 minutes

Leaders Note: When both groups have finished, bring everyone back together. Don't ask anyone to share what was said in the smaller groups — what happened there stays there. Simply acknowledge what has taken place and close with the prayer below. Keep your voice warm and unhurried. This is a moment of celebration, not a debrief.

SAY IT:

Something happened here tonight. Real things were named. Real grace was extended. What was heavy when you walked in is lighter now — not because you performed a ritual, but because you did what James 5 says: you confessed to one another, and you were prayed for. That's not a small thing. That's the church being the church. Let's close by celebrating the God who makes this possible.

PRAY IT | *Closing Prayer* • ~3 minutes

LEADER NOTE: Read this prayer aloud over the assembled group. Let it land slowly. This is both a prayer of gratitude and a declaration of what is now true of everyone in the room.

Father, thank you. Thank you that you do not turn away from the things we finally find the courage to name. Thank you that your faithfulness is not contingent on our consistency, and that your forgiveness is not reluctant — it is the most natural expression of who you are.

Tonight these people brought you something real. They said hard things out loud. They trusted one another with what they usually carry alone. And you were here for all of it — not as a judge waiting to condemn, but as a Father who has already paid the price for everything that was confessed in this room.

We declare over every person here what 1 John 1:9 says is true: they are forgiven. They are purified. Not because of what they felt tonight or how well they confessed, but because of what Jesus did on a cross and what he declared from an empty tomb. May the lightness they feel tonight not be a fleeting emotion but a settled truth they carry into tomorrow — and the day after that, and the day after that. May their words, having been brought before you and their community, be different now. Slower. Kinder. More true.

You are a good Father. You are a faithful God. And this group of people is loved by you — completely, irreversibly, and at great cost. May they never stop being astonished by that. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SINS OF THE TONGUE REFERENCE SHEET | *for quiet reflection*

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP MEMBERS: Read slowly through this list. For each item, ask God honestly: Is this me? When something resonates, stop and read the encouraging verse. Let it speak. You are looking for the one or two things the Holy Spirit brings to the surface — not a comprehensive catalogue of your failures.

1. Lying / Deception

Conviction: Proverbs 12:22 — “The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.”

Encouragement: John 8:32 — “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Connection: Deception binds. Truth liberates. The freedom you’ve been looking for is found not in managing what people know about you, but in letting the truth be what it actually is.

Story: Acts 5:1–11 — Ananias and Sapphira lied about their offering and faced the full weight of God’s response to deception in the community of believers.

2. Gossip/Slander

Conviction: Proverbs 16:28 — “A gossip separates close friends.”

Encouragement: Proverbs 17:9 — “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”

Connection: The antidote to gossip isn’t silence — it’s love that covers. You can’t foster love and repeat what was told to you in confidence at the same time.

Story: Numbers 12:1–15 — Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. Miriam was struck with leprosy. Words spoken against God’s people have consequences the speaker rarely anticipates.

3. Harsh or Angry Speech

Conviction: Proverbs 15:1 — “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Encouragement: Ephesians 4:26 — “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

Connection: Anger itself is not the sin — what you do with it is. Paul gives anger a deadline. Deal with it before it festers into something that damages the people around you.

Story: Numbers 20:10–12 — Moses struck the rock in anger and spoke rashly to the Israelites. It cost him the Promised Land. Angry words exact a price we rarely see coming.

4. Boasting/Prideful Speech

Conviction: James 4:16 — “As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.”

Encouragement: Jeremiah 9:23–24 — “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they understand and know me.”

Connection: There is only one thing worth boasting about. If your words are regularly circling back to your own achievements, you’ve misidentified the source of your worth.

Story: Daniel 4:28–37 — Nebuchadnezzar’s proud words led directly to his humbling. God let him live as an animal until he acknowledged that every good thing came from above.

5. Flattery (Insincere Praise)

Conviction: Psalm 12:2–3 — “Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips but harbor deception in their hearts. May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue.”

Encouragement: Proverbs 27:5 — “Better is open rebuke than hidden love.”

Connection: Flattery protects you at the expense of the other person. It tells them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. Genuine love is honest even when honesty is uncomfortable.

Story: Matthew 22:15–22 — The religious leaders flattered Jesus before trying to trap him. He saw through it immediately. Flattery rarely fools anyone for long.

6. Complaining/Grumbling

Conviction: Philippians 2:14 — “Do everything without grumbling or arguing.”

Encouragement: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 — “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Connection: Gratitude and grumbling cannot occupy the same space. Thanksgiving is not a feeling you wait for — it’s a practice that reshapes how you see everything.

Story: Exodus 16–17 — Israel grumbled in the wilderness despite daily miraculous provision. Their words revealed what they actually believed about God’s character and intentions toward them.

7. Quarreling/Argumentative Speech

Conviction: 2 Timothy 2:23 — “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.”

Encouragement: Romans 12:18 — “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Connection: Not every argument is worth winning. The question is not whether you’re right — it’s whether winning this particular argument is worth what it will cost the relationship.

Story: Acts 15:36–41 — Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement that split their missionary partnership. Even in service of good things, our argumentative nature can divide what God intended to remain together.

8. Cursing/Destructive Speech

Conviction: James 3:9–10 — “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”

Encouragement: Proverbs 18:21 — “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Connection: Your words have power. Not metaphorical power — actual power to build life or bring death in the people who hear them. That’s not poetry. That’s Paul’s sober assessment of what the tongue can do.

Story: James 3:1–12 — The whole passage is the story. A spring cannot produce both fresh and salt water. Neither should a mouth that praises God be the same mouth that tears down the people made in his image.

10. Idle/Careless Words

Conviction: Matthew 12:36 — “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”

Encouragement: Colossians 4:6 — “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Connection: Even throwaway words matter more than we think. The standard Paul describes isn’t silence — it’s speech that is full of grace and purposeful. Words worth saying rather than words that merely fill the air.

Story: Matthew 12:33–37 — Jesus connects careless words to the heart that produces them. What overflows from the mouth reveals what is stored up inside. Idle words are never just idle.

11. Mocking/Ridiculing

Conviction: Proverbs 21:24 — “The proud and arrogant person — ‘Mocker’ is his name — behaves with insolent fury.”

Encouragement: Ephesians 4:29 — “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.”

Connection: Mockery is pride wearing a joke. It positions you above the person you’re laughing at. Paul’s standard for your words isn’t simply “not harmful” — it’s actively helpful according to the other person’s needs.

Story: 2 Kings 2:23–25 — Youths mocked Elisha. The consequences were severe and swift. God takes the mocking of his people and his servants more seriously than we tend to.

12. Betraying Confidence/Breaking Trust

Conviction: Proverbs 11:13 — “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.”

Encouragement: Proverbs 20:19 — “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.”

Connection: Trust is built in years and broken in seconds. When someone trusts you with something they haven’t shared with others, they are handing you something fragile. Handle it that way.

Story: 2 Samuel 15–16 — Ahithophel betrayed David’s trust by joining Absalom’s rebellion and giving counsel against the man he had served. Betrayal by a trusted voice is among the deepest wounds a person can receive.

13. Hypocrisy (Saying One Thing, Living Another)

Conviction: Matthew 15:8 — “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Encouragement: Romans 12:9 — “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”

Connection: Sincerity is not a small virtue. Words that are not connected to the life behind them lose their weight — not just with people, but before God. Love that is performed rather than real is not love at all.

Story: Matthew 23:1–28 — Jesus delivers his most pointed confrontation to the Pharisees — people whose words about God were correct and whose lives contradicted everything they said.

14. Discouraging/Tearing Down Others

Conviction: Proverbs 12:18 — “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Encouragement: 1 Thessalonians 5:11 — “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Connection: You have the power to heal or to wound with the same instrument. Paul’s call to encourage isn’t a suggestion — it’s the active alternative to a silence that fails and words that destroy.

Story: Numbers 13:25–14:4 — The ten spies who brought a discouraging report caused an entire nation to lose heart. Words that tear down can stop whole communities from entering what God has prepared for them.

15. Denying Christ/Failing to Speak Truth about Him

Conviction: Luke 12:9 — “But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God.”

Encouragement: Romans 1:16 — “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

Connection: Sometimes the sin isn’t what we say — it’s what we refuse to say when it counts. The gospel is not something to be embarrassed about. It is the most important thing you know.

Story: Luke 22:54–62 — Peter denied Jesus three times in a single night. Jesus restored him completely. If Peter’s failure didn’t disqualify him, yours doesn’t either.

16. Withholding Needed Truth

Conviction: Proverbs 27:5 — “Better is open rebuke than hidden love.”

Encouragement: Ephesians 4:15 — “Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

Connection: Silence that protects your comfort at the cost of someone else’s growth is its own kind of failure. Truth spoken in love is not cruelty — it is one of the most Christlike things you can offer another person. Our responsibility is to share the “truth in love,” not fix them.

Story: 1 Samuel 2:22–25; 3:13 — Eli knew what his sons were doing and rebuked them too gently, too late. God held him accountable not only for what his sons did but for what Eli failed to say.

17. Exaggeration

Conviction: Matthew 5:37 — “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Encouragement: Colossians 3:9–10 — “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Connection: Exaggeration is a habit of the old self — the version of you that needed to impress, to be believed, to be taken seriously. The new self can afford to be exact. It has nothing to prove.

Story: Acts 5:1–11 — Ananias and Sapphira’s sin wasn’t refusing to give — it was misrepresenting what they gave. Even a small stretch of the truth carries weight before God.

18. Using Words to Control or Manipulate

Conviction: Proverbs 29:5 — “Those who flatter their neighbors are spreading nets for their feet.”

Encouragement: Galatians 5:1 — “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Connection: Manipulation places a yoke on the people it is used against. Christ sets people free. Words that reflect him do the same. If your words regularly maneuver people rather than communicate with them, they are working against the freedom Christ intends.

Story: Judges 16:4–20 — Delilah used persistent emotional pressure — ‘If you loved me, you would tell me’ — to extract from Samson what she wanted. Manipulation through words is patient, relentless, and deeply destructive.