

10 Sermon Illustrations About Confession

by Taylor Johnson



1

The Lie Detective

A reoccurring bit on Jimmy Kimmel's late night talk show has him hooking children up to a "lie detector" and asking them a series of questions. The lie detector is actually fake and Jimmy controls the alarm that sounds whenever the child lies with his foot. It's hilarious.

WATCH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMBeQpor0IQ>

2

The Confessional Sketch

This comedy sketch from Studio C is about a unfortunate mixup at a Catholic confessional.

WATCH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50asedhHpBQ>

True confession is risky. It's awkward. You're being honest about who you are even when others might think you're someone else entirely.

3

Spill Your Guts or Fill Your Guts

Try recreating this popular segment from James Corden's late night talk show at the beginning of your sermon.

WATCH: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sh9giaTKbv4>

You and another leader or pastor sit on stage with several gross foods between you. Take turns asking each other funny and incredibly personal questions. If you don't want to answer the question you're forced to eat whatever horrible food the other leader picks.

Being 100% honest about ourselves is scary and uncomfortable. A lot of us would do whatever it takes to avoid it, even if it means eating something disgusting.

4

Have You Ever?

Ask a series of “have you ever” questions to the congregation. Anyone who can answer yes to that question raises their hand. You’ll probably have at least a few people with a hand up each question that’ll surprise you. Take a mic over to them and, if they’re willing, have them quickly tell the story of whatever happened.

Some answers are going to be funny, others will be somber. It’s ok. Go with the flow. The point is to be surprised by the truth.

- Have you ever left a job without quitting?
- Have you ever had a near death experience?
- Have you ever fallen for a scam?
- Have you ever been on TV?
- Do you ever fake laugh at people’s jokes?

There’s so much to know about a person that you can’t tell by looking at them. Everyone in your church is FILLED with stories. Often we feel like we can’t talk to anyone about what we’re going through because we think we’re the only one with a story. Everyone else in church looks perfect, has it all figured out. But we need to remember that everyone has stories. Everyone has had embarrassing, heartbreaking, and surprising experiences. We’re not alone.

5

Confession Quotes

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

-Mister Rogers

Source: <https://parade.com/379451/hthompson/12-life-lessons-from-mister-rogers/>

“We’re only as sick as our secrets.”

This is a popular saying within the AA community.

Source: <https://www.recovery.org/were-only-as-sick-as-our-secrets/>

6

Buzz Lightyear's Confession

“For to confess is not simply to change but to first face and fully deny the false person you were trying to be.”

This is a quote from Josh Larsen's book Movies are Prayers. In his chapter on how movies can be prayers of confession he looks at Buzz Lightyear's journey in TOY STORY. For the majority of the film Buzz believes he is actually a real life space ranger and not just a toy. This all comes crumbling down when he happens to see a commercial advertising other Buzz Lightyear toys.

Here is that scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vddEvqS6M4o>

Feeling at his lowest, Woody tries to cheer up Buzz by saying “being a toy is a lot better than being a space ranger.”

On this scene Josh Larsen writes “Glancing from the corporate stamp on his wrist (“Made in Taiwan”) the hand-lettered inscription on the bottom of his foot (“ANDY”), Buzz comes to understand that his true identity lies not in the facade of a factious hero but in being claimed by someone else, someone who loves him despite his faults.”

Post Secret

Post Secret is a community art project created by Frank Warren. Every week hundreds of people anonymously mail him postcards covered in their very personal secrets.

The most shocking example I've ever seen is one that simply says "Everyone who knew me before 9/11 thinks I'm dead."

There are dozens of apps and websites for people who want to confess their secrets anonymously. There is a real need and desire to be open and 100% honest but all of these people must feel there's no one in their life they can trust with their true selves. They feel the need to do it anonymously on the internet.

Frank Warren, the creator of Post Secret, said this about the pattern he sees in many of postcards he reads:

"It's basically a story about trying to find that one person who you can tell all your secrets to. There's that common thread, that search for intimacy, that search for the one person we can be our whole and true selves with." That's what the church is supposed to be.

Source: https://www.buzzfeed.com/jenniferschaffer/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-postsecret?utm_term=.yvyEdDmpd#.vip4NnoMN

Confession Should be Risky

In his article “The Perils of Confession as a Public Act” Wilfred M. McCay highlights a major problem with confession in today’s culture. It’s too shallow and cheap. McCay believes the kind of confession talked about in John 1 should be risky. He says:

“We are talking about selfdisclosures that are costly, that carry with them the fear of a kind of social death, a self-exposure that runs the risk of rejection and ostracism, or at least a profound loss of respectability in the eyes of others, if we undertake to disclose to them something painful, personal, and humiliating. It is a wrenching experience. And yet the promise offered in John's words is real, the release is genuine. We see here a fractal representation of the great and perpetually astonishing logic of the gospel itself; it is in dying to self that we are born again to righteousness, to being-right-with God and others.”

Source: <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/5115/the-perils-of-confession-as-a-public-act/>

Giving Directions

In order for you to give someone directions, you obviously need to know where they're trying to go. But just as important is knowing where they are currently. If you don't know where they're starting from you're not going to be much help.

Simply knowing someone wants to go to Disney World isn't enough information. Are they down the road from it? A few cities over? Are they on the other side of the country?

Confession is how we admit to ourselves, and those discipling us, where we are.

Every 12 Step program begins with confession. It's the only place to start.

A lot of times we're frustrated with our walk with Christ because we want everyone else to think we're just a few blocks from Disney World when really we're not in the same city and the directions aren't getting us anywhere.

It's ok to confess. It's the only way to get where you're going.

Naked in Church

When we confess we are making ourselves 100% vulnerable.

This is the dumbest illustration (that's why I saved it for the end) but it's like being naked in front of someone.

Confessing is like being naked. You don't want to do that in front of just anyone. We're afraid to do it, partly because we don't want someone freaking out and never looking at us the same ever again. We feel like there's no good time to do it. You don't want to be out at lunch or having a casual conversation in the church parking lot and then POW you're naked.

This illustration is more for us as pastors and leaders to keep in mind. We need to remember how delicate of a situation it is for the person opening up. We need to be careful to treat the moment with care.

Also, we need to make sure that our church has the kind of culture where people feel like they can perform this kind of confession. I created a free video series that trains leaders on this topic.

Watch How to Lead a Culture of Confession here: <https://www.taylorjohnsononline.com/how-to-lead-a-culture-of-confession>

Taylor Johnson is a Christian comedian, speaker, and writer.

His goals when performing at a church are to make people laugh, tell embarrassing stories, promote honesty & confession, and to equip churches to help those opening up for the first time.

For more information go to <https://www.taylorjohnsononline.com>

