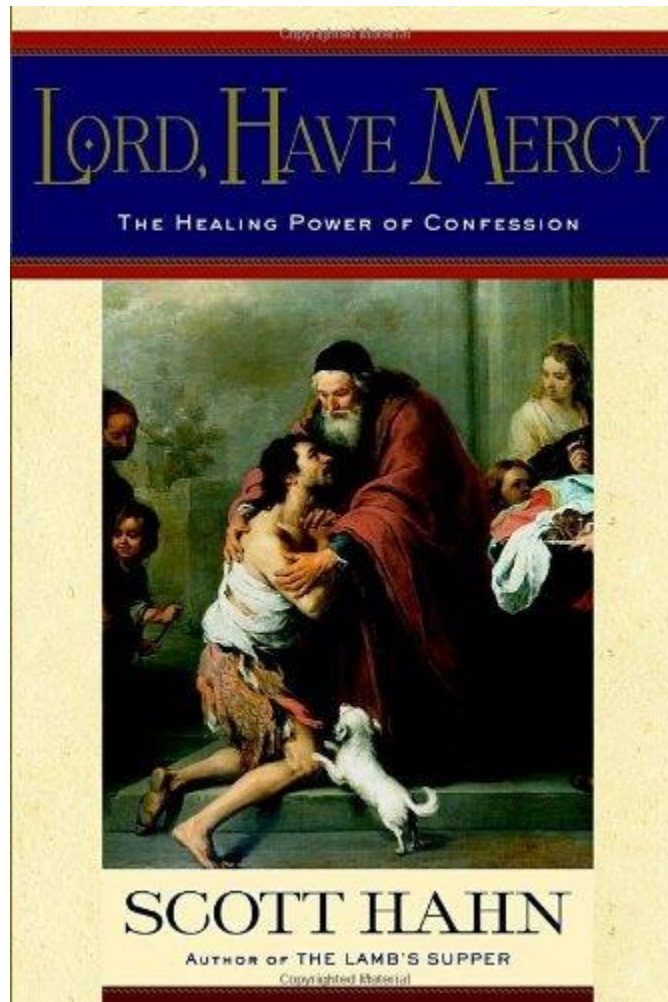


A Summary of *Lord, Have Mercy* by Scott Hahn



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About the Author

Scott Hahn, a popular speaker, teacher, and personality, was born in 1957. He married Kimberly in 1979, and has six homeschooled children. After triple-majoring at Grove City College, PA, in 1979, Hahn went on to receive his Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1982 and his Ph.D. in Biblical Theology from Marquette University, WI, in 1995. He was a pastoral minister and Professor of Theology at Chesapeake Theological Seminary before being ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1982. He entered the Catholic Church in 1986, and has taught Theology and Scripture at Franciscan University of Steubenville since 1990. Hahn is a much sought-after lecturer and author.

General Overview

Human beings have a tendency to make up excuses, believe their own lies, and labor under their own delusions. We instinctively react to the world by attempting to alter it to our own comfortability, rather than changing ourselves. This fundamental denial of reality is immensely destructive, both to us and our relationships.

Our spiritual life, which can be called our relationship with God, is the most fundamental and important relationship we can have. This bond can only remain healthy through constant communication, and, if need be, reconciliation. Although we often fail to apologize for our own faults, we *are* the only ones who can be at fault in a relationship with God, who is perfect. His mercy is so great that He accepts and reaccepts our apologies, continuously offering us His open arms. His mercy is our salvation and our model.

CHAPTER 1 Getting Our Stories Straight

Although we humans have a natural tendency to cover up our failures, sin is the one failure that we ought to be ashamed over. Although we shrink from disclosing our weaknesses, sins are direct rejections of the love of God (at some level), and God already knows those sins.

RAISED FROM THE DREAD

The natural thing is to view confession with trepidation, but we need to be reminded that natural things cannot of themselves raise us to the supernatural. We naturally shun pain, but ageless sages say: “No pain, no gain.” For to deny our sins (from pride or fear) is to begin the process of self-deception, which affects reality and relationships for the worse.

PITTSBURGH STEALER / SCOTT-FREE

Scott Hahn relates a story from his youth: While with unsavory friends, he stole some record albums but was caught by security. He lied his way out of the situation, and continued the lie to a gullible police officer. Later, at home, Scott’s father asked him straight questions, looking for honesty. Scott continued his lie, even upon realizing that his father had figured out the truth.

FOREST CLUMP

In his lie, Scott had said that he had been forced by older thugs to steal the record albums and dump them in a hollow stump. When pressed by his father, he could not find any stumps. Unable to continue the lie, he expected his father to explode, but what happened was that his father quietly led them home. Scott had broken his father’s heart, and that was even worse than weathering his rage. The disruption of their relationship and the discovery of conscience were the lessons that began to teach him the dangers of lying.

SETTING THE RECORDS STRAIGHT

People say that it is “perfectly natural” to make alibis, or exaggerate our troubles or successes, or gloss over our faults, or embellish the faults of others, and so on. But the problem with this is that we may grow to believe these falsehoods ourselves, or convince others to believe them. This actually distorts “what-is” into “what-I-want-it-to-be.”

FORGOTTEN, NOT FORGIVEN

We act all our lives in the view of God our Father, but often we act like the toddler who thinks, “If I can’t see Mommy, then Mommy can’t see me.” But God, in his Fatherhood, does not act like a stern magistrate. He loves and judges as a father does: demanding, but merciful.

THE ROAD MOST TRAVELED

We long for our Father, but we all have a dark side which tells us to disobey him.

CHAPTER 2 Acts of Contrition: The Deepest Roots of Penance

Although Confession is a New Testament Sacrament, and thus instituted by Jesus for the Catholic Church, even the Israelites participated in a rudimentary form. Confession is the new blossom of the ancient cycle of confession, penance, and reconciliation. The first foreshadowing of the confessional is found with Adam and Eve.

THE NAKED TRUTH

The first humans sinned and disobeyed God, and their first reaction was to hide behind bushes as though God would not be able to find them. God does not strike them down, but plays along by calling, “Where are you?” Adam’s response expresses fear and shame, but noticeably lacks contrition. God continues the conversation, and Adam blames Eve. God then asks Eve a question, making it His fourth question. Why is He asking questions, when He clearly knows the answers? He is giving them the opportunity to confess their sins with sorrow.

CAIN’S NOT ABLE

Cain was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, and continues their lack of contrition after committing the first murder. Recall that God’s first comment to Cain is a question again: “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain also deflects the question like Adam, and remains unrepentant and unconfessed. Psychologically speaking, Cain assumes Abel’s victimhood himself, projecting his own guilt onto God. Cain assumes that his vice is shared by every other person, saying that he is fearful of being killed himself. He refuses to admit guilt.

REPENT OR RESENT

Cain’s behavior is familiar: those who refuse to accuse themselves of sin will excuse themselves instead. And their excuses can be extraordinarily inventive. If we blame our environment or our circumstances, we are really blaming the God who created our environment or circumstances.

GOD MAKES IT RITE

God continued to invite his people to confession in His many covenants, even giving His people specific ritual ways to cleanse themselves. Rituals and routines are essential to human behavior. Even in the Old Testament, these rituals were of two parts: the sinner must *do* something, and it must be done with the help and intercession of a priest (i.e. offering a lamb at the Temple). True love insists upon action, and not just words.

A MESS TO CONFESS

God made man's confession mode understandable, but not easy. To sacrifice a lamb was costly, and took valuable time and sacrifice. This "act" of contrition was intended to be arduous and unforgettable. In comparison, modern liturgical ritual seems too easy.

MOURNING HAS BROKEN

Confession has taken on mourning symbols and actions over time: sackcloth, ashes, weeping, falling prostrate, et cetera. Since sin causes spiritual death, these signs are perfect metaphors.

CHAPTER 3 A New Order in the Court: The Full Flowering of the Sacrament

The Old Testament did not fade away at the coming of Jesus Christ, but is perfected and brought to new life. For example, the Old Testament Passover was pivotal and essential, but pales in comparison with the New Testament Passover of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. For, since man continued to sin repeatedly, God would have to administer the sacraments Himself.

LAME OF GOD

When Jesus said to the paralytic, "Rise, take up your pallet, and go home," He was also claiming the divine ability to absolve sins ("My son, your sins are forgiven."). He healed the soul before healing the body, showing His priority. His action also called His disciples to a decision: accept Jesus' divinity or reject Him altogether.

LOOSE CANONS

One of the first things Jesus did after rising from the dead was to appear to His disciples, breathe upon them, and give them the power to forgive sins. Jesus established them as priests (to administer a sacrament) and judges (to determine when to absolve). And the priestly office was uniquely divine, since it assumed divine authority. But before the priests could administer their new power over souls, they would naturally need to hear sins confessed aloud.

ON COMMON GROUND

Jesus and all His disciples were faithful Jews, interpreting confession in the light of common symbols and meanings. Saints John, Paul, and James specifically mention the need to confess, specifically to a presbyter (father figure, again).

FIRST CONFESSIONS

It is important to remember that Christianity was not a complete break from Judaism, but a completion of it. Christians in the first generations were going to Confession, as a natural outgrowth of their Old Testament spirituality (cf. the *Didache*). The implication is actually that Old Testament confession took place publicly!

LAPSE-SIDED DEVELOPMENT

The Sacrament of Confession has existed from the time of Christ, though the doctrine and practices of confession have evolved over the ages. Some early bishops had taught that certain sins could not be absolved in this life, and some Christians were reluctant to allow absolved sinners back.

THE BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

In the Old Testament, the “mercy seat” of God in the Holiest of Holies was empty, but now it is occupied by the High Priest, Jesus Christ. He summons all to approach His throne in confidence. Mercy does not abolish punishment nor give us a “free pass”, but ensures justice.

CHAPTER 4 True Confessions: Sealed With a Sacrament

Some elements of Confession have changed through the centuries: increased frequency of the Sacrament, public versus private practice, and lessened severity of penances. The Church allows more flexibility for this Sacrament than any other, but its essence has always remained constant.

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

The seven sacraments of the Church (i.e. Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession, Extreme Unction, Matrimony, and Holy Orders) are “outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace.” They are the signs of the New Covenant, just as every covenant in the Old Testament was marked by signs. These Sacraments point to the Eucharist: Confession prepares us to receive the Eucharist.

TRADITION’S CONDITIONS

The Sacrament of Penance has two components: the work the sinner has to do and the work God does through the Church. The sinner’s part is divided into three actions: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Whatever the motivation, we must have genuine sorrow for our sins. We must confess all mortal sins at every confession, and it is recommended that we confess venial sins. Our penances are pitifully small, but Christ makes up for what is lacking in our reconciliation.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SCREEN

The priest on the receiving end of the confession personifies Jesus Christ, and, importantly, speaks the words of absolution. Absolution is not formulaic, but the word of God raising a Lazarus from the death of mortal sin.

WHO NEEDS A PRIEST?

The Scriptural evidence for confession has been established, as has Jesus’ establishment of the priesthood in remittance of sins. Christ is still the Priest behind the priest, so we go to the Priest.

CHAPTER 5 What’s Wrong with the World: A Synthesis

“What’s wrong with the world?” G. K. Chesterton’s answer to this question was: “I am.” This witty response is the heart of confession: to admit blame, accept responsibility, no excuses.

SIN-CERITY

When the prophet Isaiah found himself in God's throne room surrounded by angels, his confession was practically ripped from his lips. Likewise was Peter's first interaction with Jesus. Sin is simply described, yet can be complexly categorized.

GRACEFUL HABITS

In Baptism, we receive divine life called sanctifying grace. We are always free to accept or reject that grace, and sin is just such a rejection since it offends God.

THE GREAT OMISSION

We can sin either by doing something that offends God (i.e. sin of commission) or neglecting to do something that ought to be done (i.e. sin of omission). Neglect, as in failing to attend Sunday Mass, can even be a mortal sin.

MORTALITY RATES

For a confession to be valid, all mortal sins since one's last confession must be confessed. The three conditions for a sin to be considered mortal are grave matter, full knowledge, and intent.

HARDENED, NOT PARDONED

The Church teaches that we can reject forgiveness, but also that God's forgiveness is boundless.

NO SMALL MATTER / NO SIN IS AN ISLAND

Venial sins are of less gravity than mortal sin, but they still wound our spirit. They can be forgiven in Confession, but also in other ways such as the Reception of the Eucharist, sincere Acts of Contrition, or even intercession from others. Persistence in eradicating these venial sins is necessary, but discouragement at falling into them is counterproductive. Sins affect our moral compass, and make it easier to sin again and in other ways. Sins can even encourage other people to sin. We are influenced by the sins of others, and are responsible for social sins if we fail to be concerned with sins around us.

DEAD WRONG

The Hebrew text of the Genesis passage where God tells Adam not to eat of the tree of the garden actually translates as "you shall die." The odd repetition of the word "die" indicates the death of the body and the soul as well as the entrance of wickedness. Adam chose that death.

SERPENTINE SLIDE

Adam chose spiritual death because he feared physical death more. In order for Adam to share the Trinitarian life of heaven, he had to show that he could offer himself in sacrifice for his wife and for God. So his refusal to sacrifice himself was his original sin.

FAULT LINES

Although we can speak of original sin as being hereditary and common to all, it is a mistake to think of original sin as a *thing* that is biologically or psychologically conducted. Original sin means the loss of sanctifying grace, but it is our actual sin which necessitates Confession.

THE LAW OF (MORAL) GRAVITY

Sin breaks laws, but, more importantly, it breaks lives. Even if a person is unaware of God's laws, they can still break them all the same. God's moral laws are fixed and immovable.

CHAPTER 6 Sacramental Confection: What's So Sweet About Sinning?

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, spends seven chapters tirelessly reviewing an incident in his youth, when he and friends stole pears from an orchard. He had not been hungry, the pears were inferior, and they even discarded the pears without eating them. Why had he stolen them?

GOODNESS GRACIOUS

Augustine says that people only desire what is good, or at least what they perceive as good. His conclusion is that he desired the "good" of his companions' approval and camaraderie. What made this action a sin is that he desired this "good" in place of following God's laws.

A NEW, WHIRLED ORDER

The tree in the Garden of Eden was good, of course, because God had made it, but God had asked Adam and Eve to forego it as an offering of sacrifice. The fruit was not evil, but rather their disobedience was evil, an immoderate desire for earthly things. They caused a reversal: instead of the souls driving the body, their bodies drove their souls (i.e. the rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, as St. Paul says). Due to original sin, we have *concupiscence*, or disordered human desires. Concupiscence is not rational, but resists reason.

UNSOUND EFFECTS

Baptism takes away original sin, but not concupiscence. Concupiscence has three effects: it darkens the intellect, weakens the will, and disorders the appetites. It causes a self-perpetuating cycle of sin, should our reason succumb to it.

PUNISHED BY PLEASURE

God's punishment for sin rarely looks like a thunderbolt from heaven, but it is rather our dependence on that sin. Evil becomes good; good becomes evil since it hinders our grasp on sin. Disasters are not God's wrath, but are occasions of His mercy saving the sinner from a worse fate.

WRATH AS METAPHOR, WRATH AS REAL / TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

God does not "get angry" or show emotions like humans, for He is steady and unchanging. The term "God's wrath" refers to our perception of God's fatherly, loving chastisement. God's punishments are not arbitrary or vindictive, but the just consequence of our concupiscence.

CHAPTER 7 The Themes from Deliverance: Confession as Covenant

Deliverance from concupiscence (atonement, salvation) makes sense in the notion of "covenant."

PACT HOUSE

In ancient Israel, clans and families were bound together by a covenant. These extended families acted as an economic unit, a military unit, a religious unit, and was self-governed by courts.

IN OTHER WORDS / SUBSTITUTE TEACHING

Scripture covenantal language used these meanings: “bought”, “adoption”, “deliver”, “justified”. Some evangelists say that when Jesus took on our sins, God smote them (and Jesus with them).

MUTUAL SAVINGS

But if Christ was our substitute, he was not guilty and falsely punished, and we should no longer have to still suffer and die. Rather, he acted as our legal representative in paying our debt.

RITE TURNS / THE SON SET

People are now brought into this covenant through sacraments, which also renew and restore the covenant. Throughout Church history, reconciliation is necessary before receiving Communion. In confession, we are saved from sin and for sonship: we are forgiven, adopted, and divinized.

CHAPTER 8 Clearing the Heir: Secrets of the Prodigal Son

A WAYWARD SON CARRIES ON

Christians tend to speak of confession as it particularly relates to the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

SAME OLD STORY?

We need to examine the parable carefully, filtering out our familiarity and first impressions.

WHAT THE PHARISEE SAW

This parable is Jesus’ response to the Pharisees who grumble about Jesus’ dinner companions.

LOST AND FOUND

To show the Pharisees the value of mercy, Jesus’ three parables concern a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son (who can place a value on a son?). The Prodigal Son places a value on himself by asking for a certain amount as an early inheritance, and breaks the covenant by leaving the land. The son, after squandering all, has to take the worst job a Jew could imagine: a swineherd.

HOMEWARD BOUND

The son’s moral and financial ruin “coincided” with a famine, but the famine is most likely God’s mercy which brought about the son’s conversion. His contrition is highly imperfect, but it is enough. His father then brought him home, restoring his full sonship after his confession

A RINGING ENDORSEMENT

The ring placed on the son's finger is the symbol of the covenant family, and the other gifts also bear great symbolic value. And immediately following is "communion" during the feast. It appears that the father, like Jesus, "receives sinners and eats with them."

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING / PERPETUAL PROBLEM

The bitter older brother reflects the Pharisees, and uses the rhetoric of slavery, not sonship. Many early heresies of the Church were continually "Pharisaical", or hyperpuritanical.

NO FEAR

As the father humbled himself for the son, God continues to meet us halfway in the confessional.

CHAPTER 9 Exiles on Main Street: No True Home Away from Home

In this world, we return to the Father, but sin again. We do not yet know our final destination.

SOJOURNERS' TRUTH

We live as if in exile from heaven, but God Himself has created our good place of exile. But because of concupiscence, the earthly things designed to excite us for heaven can bewitch us.

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN?

The Israelites seemed continually in exile or pilgrimage. God's people are always "on the way."

UN-BULL-LEAVING ISRAELITES

The Israelites' captivity in Egypt represented original sin, for they were enslaved from birth. To find the Promised Land, the Israelites had to defeat seven pagan nations: the seven deadly sins.

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Judah's later captivity in Babylon also proved distracting and deadly to the spiritual life, and was representative of actual sin. The captives grew to enjoy their exile and grew rich, but at a cost.

COMING ATTRACTIONS / A TEST FOR THE BLESSED

Only by turning away from earth through fasting and by accepting suffering can we glimpse heaven. The more detached we are, the more we can master our desires, and God can become our master.

NO BULL

No longer does sacrifice require bloody animals. The grace-filled sacrifice begins at Confession.

CHAPTER 10 Know Pain, Know Gain: The Secrets of Winning Penance

While confession is the telling of one's sins, penance describes both an attitude and an action.

HATE CRIMES

Rarely do we have perfect contrition (i.e. when we hate our sins because they offend God). Imperfect contrition comes from a variety of motives: shame, doubt, fear of being punished, et cetera. Acts of penance are not reserved solely for Confession, but ought to become a daily virtue of self-denial by putting other persons first in choices, conversations, and mundane tasks.

PAINFUL TRUTH

Christian self-denial is not a psychological disease, nor a denial of the goodness of the world, nor is pain valuable in its own right. We can indeed find blessing in pain, but we do not seek pain.

IDOL TALK / DIETING IS NOT FAST ENOUGH

Mortification and penance destroy the idols of our life, so the road is clear to loving God. Dieting, abstinence, and chastity can actually become idols themselves if we are not careful. We must supernaturalize our self-denial by making it penance.

THE BIG PICTURE

Importantly, the context for our sacrifice is always a relationship, since sacrifices always occur for the sake of someone else. We can sacrifice for our beloved, and also for our Beloved.

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN / REMOVING OBSTACLES TO GOD'S LOVE

Sacrifice is not just negative, since we give ourselves as well. The Trinity is our model of love.

CHAPTER 11 Thinking Outside the Box: Habits of Highly Effective Penitents

Frequent confession must be integrated into a strong and healthy prayer life.

WHEN I AM WEEKLY, THEN I AM STRONG

Although the Church requires one Confession a year, almost all the saints have frequented Confession to create good habits, confess fewer sins at one time, and defeat habitual sins.

FINDING A CONFESSOR

A relationship with a regular confessor can be the best way to progressively defeat sinful habits.

GET READY, GET SET...AND...GO!

Although a regular general and particular examination of conscience is recommended, certainly the penitent should examine their conscience prior to entering the confessional. When in the confessional, the penitent ought to make their confession complete, contrite, clear, and concise.

CHAPTER 12 The Home Front: Confession as Combat

LIFE DURING WARTIME

A popular Christian metaphor has been to compare the spiritual life with warfare. Certainly our soul is at stake, and soldier's discipline is necessary to overcome sin. Some mortal sins, like some combat situations, need to be fled immediately as the better part of valor.

MYSTICAL BODIES

This combat is not individualized, for the saints before us and the co-sojourners with us battle alongside. Our sins wound the entire church, and our virtues build up the whole church.

LOGS AND SPECKS

We should hate our own sins, no matter how small, since it is so easy to hate others' sins more.

THE ODDS ARE GOD'S

Since only Christ is truly victorious, we must use Confession if we wish to fight on His side.

YOUR HEART'S DESIRE

Through penance, God alters our desires to reflect what we truly need (i.e. heaven).

CHAPTER 13 The Open Door

Confession is necessary for the human condition: even Martin Luther sought to retain it, and C. S. Lewis admitted the need for it.

UNPAID BILLS

As a Protestant, Scott had experienced the cleansing power of reconciliation when he sought to repay stores for all of the record albums that he had pilfered as a teenager.

BRING IT ON HOME

If we are to be merciful as God is merciful, our experience of His mercy is our guide.

LOW FREQUENCY

Even though Confession seems to have fallen into general disuse, the need for it is still strong.

THE HEALING POWER OF MERCY

Confession is the key to our spiritual life, and our pit stop of peace on life's journey.