

HOW YOU CAN EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

The Forgiveness God Offers

Do you sometimes find it difficult to believe that you have total forgiveness for your sins in Jesus Christ? Intellectually you believe it, but how about deep within your heart?

Imagine yourself in the crowd as this story takes place as recorded in the Book of Luke:

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "My friend, your sins are forgiven!"

"Who does this fellow think he is?" the Pharisees and teachers of the Law exclaimed among themselves. "This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking, and He replied, "Why is it blasphemy? I, the Messiah, have the authority on earth to forgive sins...I'll prove it to you by healing this man." Then, turning to the paralyzed man, he commanded, "Pick up your stretcher and go on home, for you are healed!" (Luke 5:18-20,24, TLB).

What a marvelous illustration of God's willingness to forgive.

God's holy Word tells us that Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, has set us free - free from sin, free from the Law, free from the bondage of guilt that sin and the Law bring.

Maybe you are finding it difficult to believe in your heart that your sin has been paid for. Perhaps you are thinking, "I have lustful thoughts toward another person." Or, "I've been taking the Lord's name in vain. God won't forgive that, will He?"

The fact is, He has forgiven you. You simply need to claim His forgiveness and believe His promise. And what a promise it is:

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11,12).

That's the forgiveness God offers. And think of it! It became yours the moment you believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior and as an act of your will received Him by faith into your life as your Lord and Master.

The Greatest Relationship You Will Ever Experience

Jesus of Nazareth is the most remarkable, the most powerful, the most unique, and the most attractive personality of all time. To know Him personally as your Savior and Lord is the basis of the greatest relationship you can ever have, because only through Jesus can you experience God's love and forgiveness. Let me explain why.

Jesus Claimed to Be God

One winter during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), Jesus was walking in Solomon's Colonnade of the temple in Jerusalem. A crowd gathered around Him

demanding, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

"I did tell you," He answered, "but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me...I and the Father are one" (John 10:22-25,30).

Our Lord's claim is reinforced by the fact that He fulfilled prophecy. Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, various prophets of Israel foretold His miraculous birth, the place of His birth, His divine character, the purpose of His ministry, how He would die, and that He would be raised to life. These prophecies represent only a few of the many predictions made about Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. And He fulfilled every one down to the very last detail.

After His cruel crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated that He was God by rising from death and appearing to hundreds of people over a period of forty days, as many as five hundred in a single meeting. Then, as His followers watched in wonder, Jesus returned to heaven, having promised a continuing relationship with those who love Him.

God's holy, inspired Word also affirms Jesus' claim. The apostle Paul records, "He promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:2-4).

Jesus Came to Provide the Life You Need

Jesus didn't live on earth just to prove He is God. He came to give you eternal life, to offer you forgiveness and set you free from sin and guilt, to give you a full and meaningful life here on earth. And it's because Jesus is God that He can provide forgiveness from sin and enable you to live abundantly.

In a conversation with a religious leader of His day, Jesus said, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16,17).

Paul wrote, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1,2).

A rich and satisfying life is the heritage of every Christian. Jesus intended the Christian life to be an exciting, abundant adventure. He promised, "I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). When you walk in a close relationship with our Lord, and in the control of God's Holy Spirit, every day is filled with wonder, meaning, and purpose-your life overflows with desirable qualities:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23).

But most Christians don't experience the abundant life. The life of joy and victory modeled and promised by our Lord is strangely foreign to them. Instead, they consider the Christian life a burden, a chore, a terrible cross to bear. They endure

their Christianity on earth, hoping at last for relief in heaven. Jesus never intended for you to live a defeated, dreadful existence. He called you to a life of joy and victory. Whatever the circumstance you are in - comfort or conflict, abundance or need, health or sickness, freedom or persecution - our Lord promises peace (John 14:27; 16:33). He said He would never leave you, and if you ask anything in His name, He will do it (Hebrews 13:5, Matthew 28:20; John 14:14).

As a Christian, God has promised you a legacy of support, abundance, and joy. Why, then, are so few Christians really enjoying their inheritance? Let me ask you: Are you living a joyous, fruitful life?

In his Introduction to the New Testament Epistles, J. B. Phillips writes:

There is a vast difference between the Christianity of the first century and the [Christianity of today]. To us, Christianity is all too often a code of ethics, a philosophy of life, a standard of performance, but to those first-century Christians, it was a new quality of life altogether, and they did not hesitate to describe this as Christ living in them. Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we could achieve what they achieved.

The first-century church rocked their world. Filled with the Spirit and compelled by the love of God, the early church took the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to the entire known world. Never before had any small body of ordinary men and women made such an impact on the world.

Those Christians were a group of ordinary people, like you and me, who knew the love and forgiveness of God. Controlled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit, they reached out in love to people living under the tyranny of an evil empire.

If you have experienced God's love and forgiveness in your life, you too can influence your world.

The world today is filled with anxiety, fear, and crisis. So much of the world is in a state of chaos. Nothing so characterizes the mood of our day more than the word "upheaval." In every facet of society and in every country of the world, there is upheaval - politically, socially, economically, even religiously.

In America, for example, we are witnessing epidemics of crime, drug addiction and alcoholism, pornography, AIDS and venereal disease, abortion, and broken homes and divorce - just to mention some of the serious problems facing our nation.

Countless human solutions have been proposed, and yet the crisis becomes increasingly worse. People are searching as never before for peace in their troubled relationships, for answers to the gnawing emptiness in their lives, for something more.

Through the process of elimination, many are now beginning to turn back to God. Never before has there been such an ideal climate for presenting the claims of Christ. The Spirit of God has created an unprecedented hunger in hearts. People are turning to Christ in increasing numbers and are experiencing God's marvelous love and forgiveness.

Even so, a relatively small number of Christians are involved in this great harvest. In the midst of these tremendous opportunities, most Christians have not entered

into the joy of reaping the harvest God has prepared. The vast majority of believers live in spiritual impotence, defeat, and sterility. The average lay person and even many pastors seldom, if ever, introduce another person to Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians do not display a quality of life that encourages others to desire a relationship with our Lord. Some believers do not even display a quality of life that encourages others to have a relationship with them. Jesus of Nazareth is the most remarkable, the most powerful, the most unique, and the most attractive personality of all time. To know Him personally as your Savior and Lord is the basis of the greatest relationship you can ever have, because only through Jesus can you experience God's love and forgiveness. Let me explain why.

You Can Change From Living a Fruitless Life

In speaking to millions of Christians around the world, I have found that most defeated, frustrated, fruitless believers want to change, but they do not know what to do. I have a message of hope and help for them and for you: You can change from living a defeated, fruitless life. You can experience the full and abundant life God has promised to all of His children through Jesus Christ.

One day as I was driving in an unfamiliar city, I made a wrong turn and found myself driving against traffic on a one-way street. People on the sidewalk called to me that I was going the wrong direction. But I had already realized that in the split-second after I turned. My problem was not to decide whether I was going in the right direction - it was how to get turned around! Soon, through the help of a friendly policeman, I succeeded in changing my direction and went on my way relieved and happy, driving with the traffic. It is the same in the Christian life. If you make a wrong turn and find yourself defeated and frustrated, you do not just need to be told you are traveling in the wrong direction, you need someone to help you get turned around. In this booklet, I want to show you how you can get turned around.

The Bible, God's holy, inspired Word, provides this guidance. Paul wrote:

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God's way of making us prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone (2 Timothy 3:16,17,TLB).

The Bible not only instructs you, but it can show where you have turned in the wrong direction, give you assistance in making your course correction, and then train you to continue in the right way.

To understand the problem of misguided, unfruitful Christians, it is important to know what the Bible says about the problem. It reveals that there are three kinds of people in the world: the natural person, the spiritual man, and the worldly believer. Let me share briefly the characteristics of these types of people.

1. The Natural Person

Before you became a Christian, you were what the Scripture calls a "natural" person:

The circle represents your life, and the throne represents your control center or will.

You were living under Satan's dominance, and your fleshly nature - directed by Satan - was "on the throne," controlling your life. Christ was outside of your life, knocking at the door, wanting to liberate you from Satan's dominance by bringing you His love, forgiveness, and eternal life.

The natural person considers things of the Spirit of God as foolishness. Paul writes:

The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14, NKJ).

Relying entirely on your own resources, you were spiritually dead to God and separated from Him because of sin.

Then you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ:

2. The Spiritual Man

At your invitation, Christ entered your life and took the throne to guide you and strengthen you to live for Him. At that moment, His Holy Spirit indwelt you, gave you new birth, sealed you for heaven, and baptized you into the body of believers. With Christ (Spirit) on the throne, you are "filled" (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit.

The spiritual man understands the things of God. The apostle Paul records:

The spiritual man has insight into everything, and that bothers and baffles the man of the world, who can't understand him at all. How could he? For certainly he has never been one to know the Lord's thoughts, or to discuss them with him, or to move the hands of God by prayer. But, strange as it seems, we Christians actually do have within us a portion of the very thoughts and mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:15,16, TLB).

The act of staying "filled" with the Spirit is the act of deliberately keeping Christ on the throne of your life. He will not demand control against your will. If, despite His guidance and warning, you wish to yield to the influence of your flesh and wrest control away from Him for a period of overt or covert sin, He will sorrowfully step down. When you are in this state of unconfessed sin, God's Word describes you as one who is "worldly" or "carnal".

3. The Worldly Believer

There is a vast difference between a Christian and a non-Christian. The Scripture clearly teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Also, "Anyone who says he is a Christian should live as Christ did" (1 John 2:6, TLB). But often, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3, the worldly Christian acts like the non-believer, and it is very difficult to tell the difference between them.

The worldly Christian is one who has received Christ but who also has allowed his sinful nature to reclaim the throne through sin. God still has possession of this person, and Christ is still in his life, but the individual has fallen into sin in one or more areas of his life. Not yielded to God, the worldly believer is in a period of stunted spiritual growth because he is not confessing and repenting of his sins, and Satan has succeeded in influencing and controlling him through the flesh.

Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth:

Dear brothers, I have been talking to you as though you were still just babies in the Christian life, who are not following the Lord, but your own desires; I cannot talk to you as I would to healthy Christians, who are filled with the Spirit. I have had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't digest anything stronger. And even now you still have to be fed on milk. For you are still only baby Christians, controlled by your own desires, not God's...In fact, you are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord at all (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, TLB).

The worldly or carnal Christian certainly experiences the conviction of the Holy Spirit and will not continue in his sins indefinitely; otherwise, he is possibly not a Christian at all. But defeated and fruitless, he depends on self-effort and energy to live the Christian life instead of drawing on the supernatural, inexhaustible resources of the Holy Spirit. Grasping self-interest in one hand and groping for God's blessing with the other, this person fails again and again to live the Christian life in the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit.

The state of carnality, or unconfessed sin, is a miserable existence. Yet, sadly, this is where millions of Christians rest today - back on the throne of their lives - and they often don't realize that they are in this fleshly category. One man told me he had heard his pastor talk about worldly Christians all of his life, but he always thought his pastor meant somebody else. It surprised and shocked him to discover that he was a worldly Christian.

Paul knew what it meant to be worldly. In Romans chapter seven he records:

The law is good, then, and the trouble is not there but with me, because I am sold into slavery with Sin as my owner.

I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to - what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can't help myself, because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things.

I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is; sin still has me in its evil grasp (Romans 7:14-20, TLB).

Does this passage of Scripture describe your present relationship with God?

In Detroit, Michigan, an elderly couple was taken to the hospital, suffering from malnutrition and starvation. When police began to search through their rubbish-cluttered home, they discovered \$40,000 in cash hidden away among their belongings. They had long since forgotten that they possessed such wealth.

In a similar manner, the worldly Christian lives in spiritual poverty, much like a practicing atheist: Professing to believe in God, he acts as though God doesn't exist or is unwilling to help. He fails to understand the significance of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Christ not only paid the price for his sins,

but actually broke the power of sin in his life.

Paul understood the anguish and frustration of attempting to live the Christian life in the energy of self-effort. He records:

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.

So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in. Who will free me from my slavery to this deadly lower nature? (Romans 7:21-24, TLB).

Have you ever asked, "Who will free me from my ugly self, my failures and defeats?" There is good news! Look at Paul's answer:

Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord. He has set me free (Romans 7:25, TLB).

A pastor of a large church came to talk to me after I had presented a message on how to experience God's love and forgiveness. He was filled with hatred and resentment toward the lay leaders of his previous church because he felt they had done him great harm and had even tried to destroy his ministry.

The pastor had now realized that in his attempts to get even he had turned into a mean, critical, worldly Christian. He had come to the point of either getting right with God or getting out of the pastorate. As he put it, "This cancerous worldliness is destroying my life and ministry."

As we knelt together to claim the love and forgiveness of God, his tears of repentance were followed by tears of joy. Several days later he went to visit the church leaders whom he had hated before, and when he told them that he loved them and asked them to forgive him, the leaders responded with joy and Christian love. This dear pastor returned to his second church with a heart burning with love and zeal for our Lord.

A businessman from another church came to see me one day, greatly distressed because his church was splitting.

"Half of our members are going to move out and start another church," he said.

This distressed me, too, because I cannot think of anything more tragic than for a body of Christians to be divided.

As we talked, the man discovered and admitted that he was a worldly Christian. I explained to him how God had made provision for him to be a spiritual person. He did not need to continue to live as a worldly, carnal Christian. Finally, we knelt together and prayed. He asked forgiveness for his sins and invited God to fill and control his life by the Holy Spirit. As we rejoiced together over what God had done, he said, "You know, there won't be any problems in my church now. You see, I'm the one who has been causing all the trouble."

Unfortunately, the acid of worldliness doesn't just burn into churches. It also dissolves marriages, homes, families, and jobs. You may have felt its affect in your life as relationships with loved ones have deteriorated and friends have become mere acquaintances.

You Are Free To Live As A Spiritual Person

You can discover the same freedom Paul found. And you can enjoy the victory he wrote about in Romans chapter 8:

So there is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit - and this power is mine through Christ Jesus - has freed me from the vicious circle of sin and death.

We aren't saved from sin's grasp by knowing the commandments of God, because we can't and don't keep them, but God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours - except that ours are sinful - and destroyed sin's control over us by giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins. So now we can obey God's laws if we follow after the Holy Spirit and no longer obey the old evil nature within us (Romans 8:1-4, TLB).

The Holy Spirit supplies power for you to live as a spiritual person. For years I had sought God with all of my heart. I tried all kinds of self-imposed discipline, including days of fasting and prayer, begging God for His power. The more I tried, the more frustrated I became. Then one day, as I was studying this passage in the book of Romans, I read a verse that changed my perspective:

The old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God's laws and it never will (Romans 8:7, TLB).

What a relief to discover that I could never be able to live the Christian life through my own efforts. I must trust Christ to live His resurrection life through me. He alone could enable me to live as I should. You see, the Christian life is a supernatural life and only Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can enable you to live it.

Self-imposed religious disciplines lead only to defeat and frustration. The Holy Spirit liberates you from the vicious power of sin and death. Only the power of the Holy Spirit gives victory!

By faith you can experience God's love and forgiveness and live as a spiritual person. Faith, not your own effort, pleases God.

But it isn't enough to just have faith in faith itself. On a winter day, a man can have great faith that the ice on a lake would support his weight. With great faith he can boldly walk out on thin ice - and get very wet.

You must place your faith, weak or strong, in an object worth trusting. The object of a Christian's faith is the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy, inspired Word. Only our Lord has the power to deliver you from a worldly life to a relationship of great joy and fruitful blessings.

You must place your faith in a trustworthy God and His Word. The better you get to know God, the more you will trust Him. And the more you trust Him, the more you will experience His selfless love and limitless power.

The Forgiveness God Offers

Have you ever questioned Christ's forgiveness? If so, I have good news for you. Christ's death, in your place, is the basis for your forgiveness. Because of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross, your forgiveness is not merely a hope. It is fact!

Christ paid the price for all of your sins - totally, once and for all. If you are a Christian, all of your sins - past, present, and future - have been forgiven. You cannot add anything to what Christ has already done for you. Pleadings, tears, personal efforts, and religious ritual cannot reconcile you to God. That has already taken place - the moment you confessed your sins and placed your faith in Christ as your Savior and Lord.

Hebrews 10 proclaims:

Under this new plan we have been forgiven and made clean by Christ's dying for us once and for all. For by that one offering he made forever perfect in the sight of God all those whom he is making holy. Now, when sins have once been forever forgiven and forgotten, there is no need to offer more sacrifices to get rid of them (Hebrews 10:10,14,18 TLB).

To receive God's forgiveness, simply confess your sin and accept his forgiveness by faith. I call this process "Spiritual Breathing."

Just as you exhale and inhale physically, so you must also breathe spiritually.

You exhale spiritually when you confess your sins. The Bible promises that if you confess your sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive you and to purify you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). To confess your sins means to agree with God about your sins. Your agreement is threefold.

First, you agree that your sins are wrong and grieve God. God is holy and will have nothing to do with sin. Although He loves you even though you may have unconfessed sin in your life, you must consider your sin as seriously as He does to receive His forgiveness. Without acknowledging your sin, you have no hope of salvation. Proverbs 14:9 says, "Fools mock at making amends for sin." John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1 John 1:8,10).

Second, you recognize that God has already forgiven your sins through Christ's death and the shedding of His blood on the cross.

Confession, then, is an expression of faith and an act of obedience, which results in God making real in your experience what He has already done for you through the death of His Son. This real and ongoing experience of God's forgiveness helps you remain an open channel through which God's love and power can flow.

Unconfessed sin short-circuits the flow of God's power in your life. Let me illustrate. One day, as I was operating the controls of my son's electric train, it suddenly stopped running. I could not figure out what was wrong. I took the train apart, and put it back together. I pushed the plug in and out of the socket; nothing happened. Then I discovered that a little piece of metal - a "No Left Turn" sign - had fallen across the tracks, short-circuiting all the electrical power.

To maintain a victorious Christian life and live as a spiritual Christian, you must keep short accounts with God. By that I mean, you confess any sin that enters your life the moment God's Holy Spirit reveals it to you. If you refuse to confess your sin, you become carnal and walk in the shadow instead of in the light of God's love and forgiveness.

Third, you repent. You change your attitude, which results in a change of action. Through the strength of the Holy Spirit, you turn from your sins and change your conduct. Instead of giving in to the compulsion to what your worldly, fleshly nature wants to do, you now do what God wants in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through confessing your sins, you begin the process of "Spiritual Breathing" by exhaling. You change from a worldly Christian to a spiritual Christian by inhaling, appropriating the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit by faith. Many people today deny the stain of sin in their lives. Others attempt to ignore sin's smudge by saying, "It's not so bad." Some try to excuse their blemish claiming, "I'm no worse than anyone else." And many others attempt their own methods to overcome sin's blot in their lives. But the only hope anyone has to overcome sin is a supernatural cleansing - the cleansing that only God can perform through His Son, the Lord Jesus, who died and shed His blood for our sins.

King David was well acquainted with sin. Psalm 51 was written after Nathan the prophet had come to inform David of God's judgment against him because of his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, her husband. Yet David is described as a man after God's own heart because he was repentant. "O loving and kind God, have mercy," he wrote. "Have pity upon me and take away the awful stain of my transgressions. Oh, wash me, cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again. For I admit my shameful deed..." (Psalm 51:1-3, TLB).

And in Psalm 32 he expresses the joy he felt over God's love and forgiveness:

What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.

There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration. All day and all night your hand was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess them to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone (Psalm 32:1-5, TLB).

David, from the depths of his experience, shares this admonition from his heart: "Now I say that each believer should confess his sins to God when he is aware of them, while there is time to be forgiven. Judgment will not touch him if he does" (Psalm 32:6, TLB). I am concerned about multitudes of Christians who are being disciplined by God because they do not confess their sins. They have financial reverses, physical illnesses, and all kinds of difficulties - all because they are being disobedient to Him, and He is trying to get their attention so that He can bless and enrich their lives.

I encourage you to do what I do when I experience difficulties - turn to the Lord

and ask, "Lord, is there sin in my life that is making it necessary for You to discipline me?" The Scriptures say those whom God loves, He disciplines (Hebrews 12:6). When you experience difficulties, it is important to look into the mirror of God's Word and to confess any sin that He reveals.

God's cleansing from the sins that hinder you opens the way to the abundant, fulfilling life to which Jesus has called you.

By faith you can simply claim as true what Jesus Christ has said and done for you. By faith you can view yourself as God views you, as His child - loved, forgiven, and cleansed. By faith you can confess your sins and repent. And by faith you can accept God's forgiveness and cleansing. Now you may wonder, "If Christ has already paid the penalty for my sins, why should I confess then?" By confessing your sin, you act on your faith in God and His Word. Confession does not give you more forgiveness. Christ has already forgiven you once and for all. But by admitting your sins, you establish in your experience what God has done for you through the death of His Son.

Jesus told a story to illustrate confession and God's forgiveness (condensed from Luke 15:11-32). At the insistence of his younger son, a father gave the boy his share of the family estate. The son left home and wasted his inheritance on parties and prostitutes. Later, the son returned home destitute, hungry, and feeling he was no longer worthy to be considered a son. But his father ran to meet him, embraced and kissed him, put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet, and held a banquet in his honor.

Through this parable, Jesus was teaching that God loves you not "when," "if," or "because" you deserve it, but even when you are disobedient and rebellious. One of my most moving discoveries in the study of Scripture was a statement Jesus made in a prayer recorded in John 17:22,23:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Think of it! God loves you as much as He loves His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's true. When you confess your sins, God, in His unconditional love, welcomes you back and eagerly forgives you. Instead of running away from Him in fear, you can run to His loving arms, confident that He forgives you.

But if you refuse to deal honestly with God by ignoring your sins, you become worldly and are living in the shadows instead of walking in God's light. As 1 John 1:6,7 says:

If we say we are his friends, but go on living in spiritual darkness and sin, we are lying. But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin (TLB).

Perhaps you are aware of sins that you haven't confessed to God. As a result, you have left your first love for Him. You may feel resentment toward someone. Your relationship with Christ may seem mechanical and routine. Your prayers do not seem to reach God. You read the Bible, but you do not remember what you have

read. You may even attempt to witness for Christ, but no one responds.

One day I was speaking to a friend on a cellular car phone. At one point in our conversation, all I could hear was loud static. Some obstruction had interrupted the radio signal, and I missed a portion of what my friend had said. After the car had cleared the obstacle, I could once again hear his voice clearly, and we were able to continue our conversation.

Sin obstructs your communication and relationship with God. When you tolerate sin in your life, you can't hear God. You become discouraged and confused. Soon, you may find yourself operating on your memories of God instead of living in vital interaction with Him.

All you need to do to experience God's forgiveness is to confess your sins - exhale spiritually. That cleansing breath restores your fellowship with Him.

A Spiritual Formula

Let me share a simple process, a spiritual formula, that has helped thousands of people to experience God's love and forgiveness.

1. List Your Sins

It begins by asking the Holy Spirit to reveal every sin in your life. Take a pencil and paper and list every sin He brings to mind. As you write, confess each one of them to God.

I encourage you to humble yourself before God as you do this. Give him time to reveal everything in your life that is displeasing to Him. This list is just between you and God, so be completely honest. Tell Him everything that's wrong.

Your list may include (to name a few):

- Leaving your first love for God
- Spending little or no time praying or reading and studying God's Word
- Seldom, if ever, witnessing for Christ
- Lacking faith in God
- Having a jealous attitude
- Lusting after material things
- Dealing with others in a spirit of pride
- Acting selfishly
- Being dishonest, lying
- Talking about others behind their back
- Entertaining immoral thoughts
- Committing sexual sins

Whatever your sin, write it down and remember: you have a loving God who forgives you - who even gave His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for you.

A young man said to me after an evening meeting, "I didn't believe I needed to

make a list. I couldn't think of anything seriously wrong in my life. But when I saw others making their lists, the Spirit of God told me to do the same."

While there were no major areas of disobedience in his life, he said, a lot of little things had dulled the cutting edge of his love and witness for Christ.

He encouraged me, "If you ever speak on this subject again, be sure to insist that everyone, including those who think there are no major sins in their lives, make a list of their sins. If I had not made my list, I would have missed a special blessing from God."

2. Write God's Promise Across the List

After you have written the sins that God reveals to you, write God's promise of forgiveness from 1 John 1:9 across the list:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

3. Destroy the List

When you have completed your time of prayer and confession, accept His forgiveness by faith, then destroy the list as an illustration of the forgiveness God has granted you. You may want to tear it into pieces or burn it to show how completely God has forgiven you.

4. Make Restitution

The final step in the process is to ask God if you need to make restitution to someone. You may need to apologize for having a bad attitude toward someone. You may need to ask someone to forgive you for the way you have treated him or her. You may need to return something you have stolen.

It's important for you to make restitution to others because you cannot maintain a clear conscience before God if you still have a guilty conscience before people. Confession often includes making restitution.

At the conclusion of a Christian medical meeting where I had spoken on the subject of forgiveness, a doctor accepted my challenge to make his list. He was very excited when he came to see me early the next morning.

"Last night about midnight," he said, "a doctor friend of mine came to my room and told me that he had hated me for years while pretending to be my friend. As he was making his list, God told him that he should come and tell me and ask me to forgive him. We had the most wonderful time of prayer, and God met us in a special way."

He encouraged me to keep telling Christians to confess their sins to God and, if necessary, to ask forgiveness of those whom they have wronged as the Holy Spirit leads them.

If, after you have fully confessed all of your known sins to God, you still feel a sense of guilt, it may be because you have not been completely honest with God by making a full disclosure. So be sure you are honest with God.

Are you weighed down by heavy burdens of guilt? Do you sometimes wonder if you will ever experience the love and forgiveness of God that other Christians joyfully

profess?

Perhaps you feel like the man who was stumbling along the road with a heavy pack on his back. Soon, a wagon stopped, and the driver offered to give him a ride. Joyfully, the weary traveler accepted. But when he climbed onto the wagon, he continued to strain under his heavy load.

"Why don't you take off your pack and rest?" the driver asked.

The discouraged traveler replied, "Oh, I couldn't do that! It would be too much to ask you to carry my load as well as me."

"How foolish," you say. We wouldn't think of responding like that to such an offer, would we? Yet many Christians continue to carry heavy burdens of guilt even after they have entrusted their lives to the Lord Jesus and received His forgiveness.

Frequently we experience hostility or punishment from our friends or family when we fall short of their expectations. If you have truly wronged another person, confessing it and making restitution when necessary will release the guilt. But feelings of guilt will linger if you do not forgive yourself or if you try to live up to the unrealistic expectations of others.

None of us is perfect. But as Christians we do not live in condemnation. As one who has been forgiven, you are righteous before God in Jesus Christ.

When you have completed this simple process, any feelings of guilt that remain are not from God. They are from your enemy Satan. Your sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). They are buried in the deepest sea (Micah 7:19). God has put them behind His back and remembers them against you no more (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17).

There was a young boy who had a pet bird, and one day the bird died. The boy was broken-hearted, and his father and mother decided that instead of allowing their son to be downcast, they would make something memorable of the occasion.

They said, "Let's have a funeral." Calling all the neighbor children together, they dug a little hole in the ground, put the bird in a box, and buried it with a ceremony. Instead of being downcast, the boy was excited.

But the next day, he went out and dug up the bird to see how it was getting along. His father, however, insisted that he bury it. So he did. A few days later, the boy went out and dug up the bird again. This happened several times, and each time the father would reprimand him. Finally, the father became angry and said, "Now look, you leave that bird in the ground, and don't ever dig it up again!"

Are you confessing your sins over and over again - out of a sense of guilt - like the little boy digging up that old dead bird?

All of your sins have been forgiven by God on the basis of Christ's death on the cross and the shedding of His blood for your sins. Whenever Satan accuses you of some act in your past that has grieved or quenched the Holy Spirit, you can say with great joy, "I have confessed that sin and I know God has forgiven me and cleansed me as He promised."

I challenge you to examine your life right now. Are you experiencing the fullness of

the Christian life? Are you carrying a load of guilt over past sins in you life? I urge you to begin the process of Spiritual Breathing today. It has helped millions of other Christians, and I know it will also help you.

God's forgiveness is complete. Thank Him for canceling your guilt and cleansing you. Claim victory over those negative feelings and move on in faith to be a fruitful disciple and witness for our Lord.

Now you are free to experience the abundant life that He promised. Now you can encourage and serve your brothers and sisters in Christ. And now you can enter the harvest fields to enjoy bringing other people to the Lord Jesus who has done so much for you.

Remember, How You Can Experience God's Love and Forgiveness is a transferable concept. You can master it by reading it six times; then pass it on to others as our Lord commands us in Matthew 28:20, "Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you." The apostle Paul encouraged us to do the same: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2).

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<http://www.transferableconcepts.org/index.html>