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# revive

Volume 48. Issue 1

IMPATIENCE

# PRIDEGREED ANGERSELFISHNESS LUST STEALING HATE DISOBEDIENCE

BITTERNESS



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#### **LEAVE YOUR GIFT AND GO!**

Our pragmatic way of thinking would say, "Let me finish my worship, and then I'll go make things right." But following Jesus' way leads us down a different and sometimes inconvenient path!



#### **ONE WORD**

Have you ever gone to church on Sunday and heard the pastor preach a one-word sermon? What if you were present the next Sunday, and the pastor preached the same sermon as last Sunday?



#### RESTITUTION LEADS TO RESTORATION

How does God feel about people we have wronged in the past? What does He want us to do, and what does He do if needed steps are not taken?



#### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Sometimes there are seemingly legitimate obstacles in our way toward gaining a clear conscience. Here's some advice on what to do when going back to make things right seems impossible or infeasible.

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#### SEVEN WORDS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

► When God comes in genuine revival, He lovingly presses for the hardest steps of obedience, because He knows the joy and power that lie on the other side.

No way! No way . . . I can't! No way . . . I won't!

As the conviction of God's Spirit escalated, pressing me to clear my conscience with others, so did my resistance. What God was asking of me was just too much! The level of honesty and humility required would devastate me. My reputation and ministry career were on the line.

But when God comes in genuine revival, He lovingly presses for the hardest steps of obedience. He knows what lies on the other side—internal power that produces fullness and fruitfulness. In the ways of God, death to self brings forth resurrection.

There was more at stake than I even knew. I was focused on the possible negative consequences for my actions now. God wanted to bring real freedom to my heart forever.

Everything that interfered with having a clear conscience needed to be identified and dealt with. Why? Because according to Scripture, one of the virtues to be cultivated in my life is "love that [comes] from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5).

Slowly, I began to understand that God's purposes for my having a clear conscience went beyond dealing with guilt. There was an extraordinary grace and power available to me that only came through radical humility and obedience. A vision of the good I was missing—by hiding and harboring my sin—began to drive me to open the doors of my heart and to clear the slate.

Finally, I said, "Yes, Lord, I will!" I was amazed at how He reminded me of sins that had been stockpiled in my conscience, defiling it and desensitizing it until I had become numb to the promptings of God's Spirit. I was shocked that my list of offenses was two full pages of single-spaced lines, filled with ways I had wronged, hurt, and offended others and not gone back to make it right. It included . . .

 stealing a small pack of caps from a dime store in junior high school.

- devastating my loving parents (after they would not let me go out with my friends) by highlighting Psalm 27:10 and leaving it where my mother would read: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up."
- sexual immorality in dating relationships in high school and college.
- cheating in almost every class I could remember in college.
- hating my grandparents for "killing" my brother who died in Vietnam after they encouraged him to enlist.
- pretending I was an obedient Christian as I served in leadership positions in my church, even though I knew I had not surrendered my life to Christ.

Clearing my conscience was hard. It required me to make restitution for what I stole, to admit my disrespect to my parents, to seek out previous girlfriends to confess sexual sin, to return my college diploma, to humbly beg for reconciliation after introducing myself to my grandparents whom I had avoided since age ten, and to stand before my home church to ask their forgiveness for my hypocrisy.

But there were also rewards that went beyond anything I ever anticipated. Making the hard decisions to obtain and maintain a clear conscience before God and man was, and has continued to be, one of the most liberating practices of my life.

Thirty years later, I believe it laid the foundation for an intimate marriage, enabled good relationships with my children (and now grandchildren), and time and time again renewed my relationship with God with power, freedom, and indescribable joy.

Seven words changed my life: I WAS WRONG. WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

As you read this issue of *Revive*, I pray those will become treasured words in your Christian walk and ministry, propelling you to depths of love you never knew possible!



#### SPIRIT OF REVIVAL

**Byron Paulus**President of Life
Action Ministries

Seven words changed my life: I was wrong.
Will you forgive me?





# RESOURCES

#### FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY

At Life Action, we've created helpful resources with your entire family in mind. From audio dramas to devotional books, each and every resource is designed to help you and your family thrive in Christ!



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## THE CASE FOR CONFESSION

► Sometimes our best witness for Christ begins with an admission of our own need for forgiveness. In our painful weakness, the power and light of the gospel shine the brightest.

A clear conscience is the ability to say that there is not a single person I have ever wronged, hurt, or offended that I have not gone back to and asked forgiveness and sought to make it right.

When Rick heard this definition of a clear conscience, he knew he was in trouble. A successful engineer and family man, Rick's life seemed far removed from his reckless college years marred by poor choices, including cheating, stealing, and recreational drug use.

But now Rick sat squirming in his seat as two scenes kept replaying in his mind. There were the items he had stolen from the school bookstore when running low on money. And, most damaging for his career, the lies about past drug use he had told on his application in order to get coveted security clearance for the government project he now worked on.

How would confessing the truth help anyone? Why should he throw away his reputation and risk his career? Wasn't it possible simply to tell God (again) how sorry he was, and just determine to be a better man in the future?

After several sleepless nights, the conviction of God became so intense that no consequence seemed too great in order know that he had been obedient to God. He longed for a clear conscience before God *and man*.

Rick knew what he had to do. He mailed a letter to the campus store, confessing his theft and including a check with interest for what he had stolen. But the hardest move was yet to come.

With prayer and a deep breath, Rick knocked on the door to his boss's office. When his boss heard the reason for his visit, he quickly shut the door: "Rick, the Pentagon doesn't take kindly to fraud. If they suspend your security clearance, you will be completely locked out of this project! And you're the supervisor!"

But Rick explained that this wasn't about his career; it was about being right with God

and becoming the kind of man he wanted to be. After putting his confession in writing, he walked away, uncertain of his future but empowered by the exhilarating realization that he was totally abandoned to God's will for his life.

What happened next surprised everyone involved. The Pentagon's investigation took several months, making it impossible for Rick to physically enter the wing where his engineering team did their work. But his company decided not to fire Rick before the investigation was completed.

In the meantime, Rick's desk was put in the hallway outside the entrance to the secured work area. Of course, the sight of a supervisor working in the hallway raised lots of questions, giving Rick hundreds of opportunities to share his faith.

The Pentagon took so long rendering a verdict on his case that his company eventually decided to transfer him to another project. Ironically, the military contract Rick had been working on was abruptly canceled by the government months later, meaning he would have lost his job if he had stayed.

Meanwhile, the school newspaper ran a story about the man who had returned items stolen years before. Rick was reading the *USA Today* on an airplane when he realized he was reading his own story! Unbeknownst to him, the Associated Press had picked up the article from the campus paper, and now it was national news! Once again, the gospel was on wide display through Rick's humble confession.

And Rick himself learned an unexpected lesson: Sometimes our best witness for Christ actually begins with an honest confession of our personal need for forgiveness.

I guess that's not too surprising when we think about it. After all, the story of Christianity is not about moral people achieving perfection, but sinful people finding redemption through Jesus Christ.



**CONVERSATIONS** 

**Del Fehsenfeld III** Senior Editor

The story of Christianity is about sinful people finding redemption.



# LEAVE YOUR GIFT AND GO!

SOMETIMES OBEYING
GOD CAN BE REALLY
INCONVENIENT.

BY GREGG SIMMONS



uring Jesus' day, people would travel from long distances from their homes to make sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Imagine for a moment that you are one of those travelers, and let's say you came from a nearby city—a few days' walk from Jerusalem.

You've taken appropriate leave of your responsibilities at home, you've arranged for travel, and you've secured a place to stay near the city. Your family is likely with you, and perhaps others from your community who made the journey.

Once you arrive at the temple itself, you wait in line to purchase an animal that has been approved by the priests for sacrifice. You may have to deal with the infamous "money changers" to convert your currency. You may feel like you're over-paying for your animal, but since you've come all this way, you really don't have a choice. Good deal or not, you proceed.

Next, you wait in another line, since you can't offer that sacrifice on your own. You need a priest to assist you in following the customs outlined in the law of Moses, and there could be hundreds of other people seeking the same help.

Finally, the priest motions you over, and you bring your offering with you to the altar. The priest is dressed in white, but his robe is likely splattered in blood. As he begins the rituals associated with sacrifice, something pops into your mind that you haven't thought about for months. You recall that someone has something against you.

#### **ACCORDING TO JESUS, WHAT SHOULD** YOU DO IN THAT MOMENT?

"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

What? Really, Lord?

I've discovered something over the years: Obeying God can be terribly inconvenient. In my human thinking, I would of course vote to go ahead and offer the sacrifice, then go and make things right with that offended person. But, as in many other areas of life where human instinct points in an obvious direction, Jesus asks us to go a different way!

#### THE GOAL OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

The pursuit of being right with others, at least as far as it depends on us, is what the Bible calls the pursuit of a "clear conscience." Paul mentioned it frequently, and throughout the Scriptures we see examples of those who had to make amends for their sins, offer restitution for their wrongdoing, publicly confess something, etc.

Here's the definition I use when teaching about the need for a clear conscience: The ability to say there's no one alive that I have knowingly wronged, offended, or hurt in any way, that I have not gone back to and attempted to make things right with God and with them.

Now, is that a realistic goal or just preacher-speak? Could our conscience ever be entirely clear, as far as we know, as much as it is in our power?

Paul certainly aspired to that standard, as he noted in Acts 24: "I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man" (v. 16).

Yet what would it really take for us to get to that place? Or to even begin that journey? Promises made to children still not kept, hurtful words spoken to a spouse, items stolen from employers, cheating, dishonesty, lies, slander . . .

There could be a whole host of things that need to be accounted for-situations where our "debt to justice" is still outstanding. If we were going to sort through it all, "leaving our gift at the altar" and working toward restitution and reconciliation, where would we even begin?

Here is a simple process I have found to be helpful and revealing:

1. Confess your sin to God and repent. A process like this always starts with God, since every sin is ultimately against Him, and since He knows the depths of our hearts even better than we do. The Psalmist prayed in Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (vv. 23-24).

If you are humble and willing, I believe God will prompt your heart about issues that need to be confessed, both in your relationship with Him and in your relationships with other people.

2. Seek forgiveness from those you've wronged. It's important that this comes out as, "Here is how I sinned against you; will you forgive me?" instead of the less-specific, "I'm sorry if I hurt you."

I was leading a Life Action conference in Jefferson City, Missouri, when a couple came forward during the testimony time who demonstrated this principle well. The woman began speaking:



# Before we even bother giving a gift to God, or serving Him somehow, we should make past wrongs right.

"God found me with an unforgiving heart. He showed me the reason I could not forgive others was because I was the one who needed to seek forgiveness. My husband and I are newlyweds, just shy of one year. While we were dating, I was unfaithful to him. That was four years ago, and until this week, I had not confessed to him. There were several times over the years I felt compelled to confess, but I always found some justification or reason not

to. During the teaching on clear conscience, God called me out. I spent the majority of that night bargaining with God to let me out of this. Finally, around 1:00 AM, I gave in, woke my husband up, and confessed this thing that I knew would break his heart. I was terrified that this would be the end. After a few moments of silence, he prayed over me. He asked God to clear my conscience and bring me peace. I was blown away. I know God will help us to be healed in our marriage, and He has better things in store for our future than would have been possible if I had not sought his forgiveness."

Then the husband stepped to the microphone and affirmed that he had fully forgiven his wife.

**3.** Where necessary, make restitution for any damage you have caused. All of this is part of the process. It really isn't appropriate to ask someone to forgive a debt that I could readily pay! Restitution is paying back, in part or in full, the debt that is owed (or the damage that was done, etc.).

For example, if I've slandered you or gossiped about you, of course I need to come to you first. But I may also need to go to those other individuals and clear up the record—admitting humbly that I have entangled them in my sin. I would need to seek their forgiveness as well. Or, as a more concrete example, if I have stolen something from you, then I need to pay you back (probably with interest, depending on the situation).

Remember the story of the "wee little man," Zacchaeus? Jesus was coming into Jericho to minister, and up in the tree was short-statured Zacchaeus, who had found a branch from which he could see over the crowd. Jesus called him by name: "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."

And in that place, Zacchaeus met Jesus. He confessed Him as Lord. "Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:5-9).

4. Where possible, seek to restore the relationship. Romans 12:18 explains, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Depending on the nature of the hurt, the time that has elapsed, the damage that has been caused, and the willingness of the other party to forgive (and/ or trust), it may not be possible to reach a point of full relationship restoration. In situations where you aren't sure whether or not to re-engage in a relationship with the person you hurt, I recommend talking with your church leaders, to gain their wisdom and perspective on your specific situation.

**5. Go forward with a sense of urgency.** Remember, Jesus was suggesting that before we even bother giving a gift to God, or serving Him somehow, we should make past wrongs right. We should go and clear our conscience, and then come to offer whatever it is we wish to offer.

I don't pretend that the process of gaining and maintaining a clear conscience will be easy, for you or for anyone else. In all likelihood, it will require humility, honesty, inconvenience, and perhaps even sacrifice. But freedom is well worth the work!

Gregg Simmons is an experienced pastor, family counselor, family life speaker, and Bible conference speaker with a great passion to see spiritual renewal in the home, church, and nation. He has served full time as a Revivalist on Life Action road teams since 2013.

# WHY THE **URGENCY?**

An unclear conscience is hindering your relationship with God.

An unclear conscience means you may have become a stumbling block to another person.

The longer you wait to clear your conscience, the harder it will be to finally do the right thing.

This is a high priority in the eyes of God.

# ONE WORD

FIVE MARKS OF REPENTANCE

by james macdonald



would love it if I could preach a oneword message, the way the Old Testament prophets sometimes did.

"Good morning. Repent. Let's pray."

How fantastic would that be? And they all preached the same thing every guy. It was plagiarism to the max:

"Good morning. Repent."

Then they'd get in their chariot and ride across town:

"Hello. Repent."

Why was this the message on the lips of the prophets? Because they knew that the good things God is longing to give, willing to give, and ready to give are released into your life when you repent. You say, "Well, that's the Old Testament, Pastor James. I have studied the Bible, and things were different back then."

You should study more.

Look at John the Baptist, for example. His message in Matthew 3:2? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Or, think of Jesus sending out the disciples in Mark 6:12: "They went out and proclaimed that people should repent."

Then there's the early church in Acts 2, and the very first message preached by the apostle Peter as the Holy Spirit came. Can you guess what his message was about? He preached about amazing grace, right? No, he preached about repentance.

Then, in Acts 3, Peter preached again. Surely he won't preach the same message two Sundays in a row, right? Wrong again! In Acts 3:19, Peter says, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

So, if that single-word message is so important, in both the Old Testament and the New, what does the word actually mean? And how would I know it if I see it?

In 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, Paul writes to the Corinthian church, regarding his confrontation with them about their sin:

> As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!

I see in this text five marks of repentance.

#### REPENTANCE LEADS TO GRIEF OVER SIN.

Second Corinthians 7:9 says, "You felt a godly grief." And following that: "Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation."

When you're convicted of sin and you repent of it, you're going to feel grief about the choices you've made. It's interesting because, as you study the Scriptures, people who make real contact with God do feel kind of low. When you see God for who He is, you're kind of instantly done with the smug "I think I mostly have it together" routine.

In Genesis 18:27, Abraham said to God, "I who am but dust and ashes." That's what a person who really meets with God feels like! Or look at Job 42. Job was a righteous man by any earthly standard, but he met with God and said, "I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (v. 6). Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, and what did he say? "Woe is me!"-which means that calamity has fallen or is about to fall-"I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). That sense of unworthiness comes from really meeting with God.

When Jesus miraculously provided the fish in Luke 5, Peter said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8). John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day in Revelation 1, and he said, "When I saw [the Lord], I fell at his feet as though dead" (v. 17). That's what it means to be with God. When you really see your sin and begin to repent, you grieve about it.

Now, notice how Paul mentions that not all grief over sin is godly. Sometimes it's a grief that leads to repentance, but sometimes it's a worldly grief—the kind that is more sorry about the consequences than about the actual offense. Worldly sorrow is still about me, not about God.

We could look at it this way: There is a rejection of God in all sin. Repentance involves feeling grief about that. How could I slap the hand of grace? How could I spit in the face of mercy?

#### GRIEF OVER SIN LEADS TO REPULSION OF SIN.

Notice in verse 11: "For **see** what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you." The truly repentant heart is obvious. "Look at it," Paul says.

And then there's the word *earnestness*. Earnestness is haste. It's diligence. And if repentance is forming in you right now, there's an increased sense of urgency. It produces an earnestness in you, or an energy to get this business done with God.

Notice he also says in verse 11, "what indignation." That means a feeling of strong displeasure, of opposition. The thing once desired is now repulsive.

That's the key word, repulsive. It's like: I don't want that in my life. I don't want to act like that. I don't want to say those things. I'm so tired of being a gossip. When will my mouth finally shut up? I'm so sick and tired of my sensitivity and hurt feelings over little perceived slights from everybody. When will I grow up and be done with that kind of person?

When a person is really repentant, he is a bit like the prodigal son, waking up in a pig yard. He was like: Bleh, what am I doing here? I don't want to live this life. I don't want to be this person. I am so out of here! I am so done with this. It's only brought me misery. When we repent, sin loses its attraction to us—it's just not desirable!

#### REPENTANCE LEADS TO RESTITUTION TOWARD OTHERS.

Notice in verse 11 that phrase "what punishment." The New American Standard says, "what avenging of wrong!" The NIV says, "what readiness to see justice done."

When repentance is happening in your life, there is an energetic pursuit to fix the fallout of your sin. Zacchaeus is kind of the poster boy for this. He was a tax collector who used his position to steal from people. But when he was repentant, what was the first thing he wanted to do? Give it all back! He wanted to make right what had been wrong.

That's repentance. That's restitution—I'm going to make it right.

Notice also the phrase "what eagerness to clear yourselves." The word *clear* is *apologia*, from

which we get our word *apologetic*. It means "to give an explanation or a reason." So when I'm really repentant, I go to someone and say: "What I said to you was wrong, and I'm sorry that I did that. I don't have any excuses. I just want to ask for your forgiveness."

To say those words from your heart to another person is a big part of repentance. You see, when repentance is happening in your heart, you can't wait to pick up the phone, or go make a visit, or write a letter. You can't wait to dispense with the excuses, the blame-shifting, the silly games. You want to make things right with everyone, as much as possible, and then leave the rest with God!

Watch out for the people who say, "I'm right with God," but have no interest in being reconciled to the people their sins have injured. If your heart is really repentant—if you see sin for what it is—then you're grieved not only about how it affects God but about how it affects others.

#### REPENTANCE LEADS TO A REVIVAL TOWARD GOD.

Like a river rushing down a mountainside, like a waterfall from a cool stream, God's mercy will begin to wash over your life, and there will be a renewing of joy and a restoration of your relationship with the Lord. When you repent, you step onto the road of revival.

That's what Paul is observing in the Corinthians when he says, "what fear." Before, they were involved in all sorts of sin, and the Corinthians didn't care what God thought. But now they care deeply about what God thinks! "What fear," he says. You've changed.

Fear is the attitude of heart that seeks a right relationship with the fear source. If I'm afraid of fire, I stand back. If I'm afraid of water, I don't get in over my head. If I'm afraid of God, I'm very careful to do exactly as He has asked. The fear of God is a good thing. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," Proverbs 9:10 says. It all starts there.

And repentance gives to me a fresh start. I used to care nothing about what God thought; I just did what I wanted. But then I repented, and now I fear God. Remember what the criminal on the cross said to the criminal on the other cross? "Do you not fear God?"

Then Paul uses two more words: "what longing." What longing! When repentance happens to you, you're like: I can't wait to get up and get in God's Word. I can't wait to get with God's people. I can't wait to share my faith. I used to be so caught up in my problems and my burdens and my uncertain future, but now the joy of the Lord is back!

What fear. What longing. And notice a final phrase in verse 11: "what zeal." When I repent, my overall passion for the things of God returns! That's revival, friends, which I define as "a renewed interest after indifference or decline." I'm excited for more of God in my life, experienced and enjoyed.

#### REPENTANCE LEADS TO MOVING FORWARD.

Here's the final mark of genuine repentance: moving forward rather than looking back. So many people spend so much of their life looking in the rearview mirror. Oh, if I could just have chosen differently when I was in college. Oh, if I just hadn't decided . . . if I just hadn't quit . . . if I just hadn't gone there . . . Their whole life is about what they wish they'd done differently. That's one of the symptoms of worldly sorrow!

Notice in verse 10 Paul says that godly sorrow is "without regret," whereas worldly grief "produces death." Worldly sorrow produces regrets: Why did I do this? Why don't I learn? Why am I like this? But when my grief is God-focused, I experience grace and cleansing. That's why he says in verse 9, "so that you suffered no loss through us."

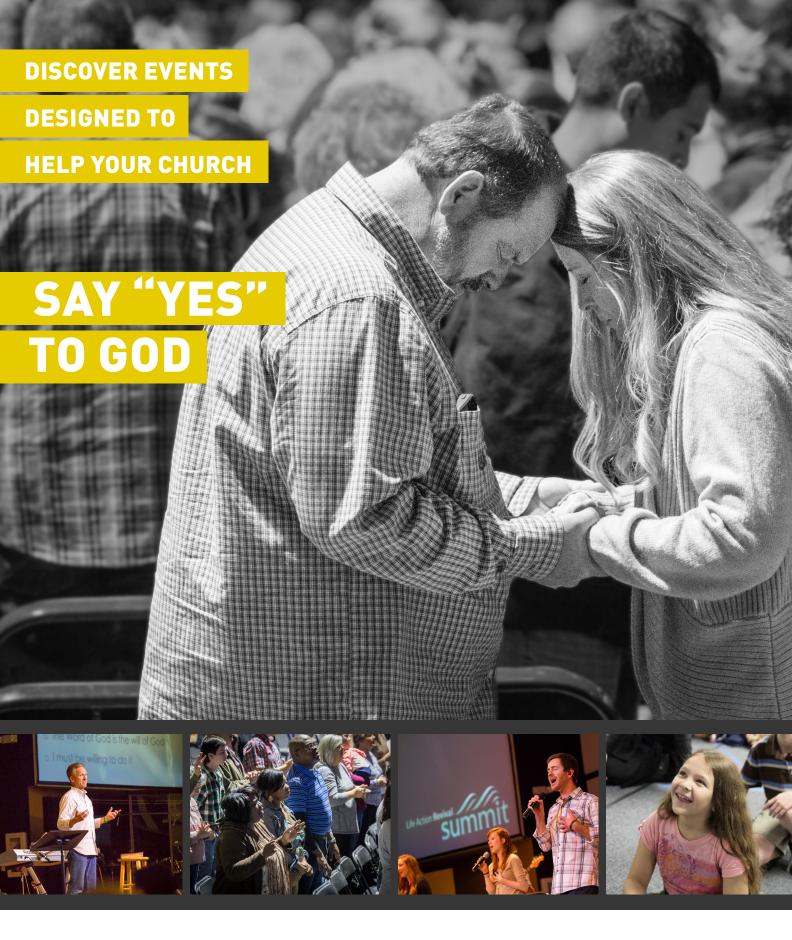
One word: *Repent*. It will take you to a better place with others and a better place with God.

Did you get the message?

"Good morning. Repent. Let's pray." @

This article has been condensed from the full version of James MacDonald's message "Self in the Dirt: A Picture of Repentance," available at Preaching Today.com. Preaching Today offers inspiration that takes your preaching to the next level with sermon transcripts, preaching outlines, and thousands of sermon illustrations. Visit OrderPTnow.com/revive and receive \$20 off an annual membership.

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# clear\_

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me now let me rejoice.

#### **PSALM 51:7-8**

#### X

By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

#### **HEBREWS 10:20-22**



I have the same hope in God that these men have, that he will raise both the righteous and the unrighteous. Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people.

ACTS 24:15-16

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD."

And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

**PSALM 32:1-5** 



God's Word deals specifically with sin, guilt, conscience, justice, cleansing, and forgiveness in nearly every account, from humanity's fall in the Garden of Eden to the final vision of heaven in Revelation 22. These selected verses help cast a vision that a clean, liberated, clear conscience is possible—by God's grace!

Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!"

#### **ACTS 23:1**



The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons.

#### **ROMANS 13:4-6**



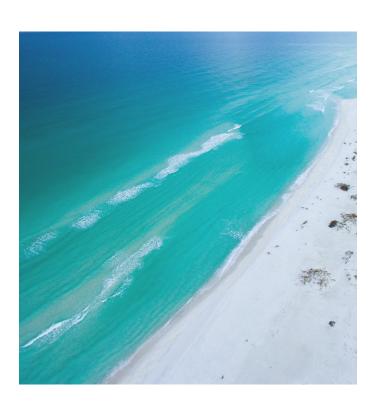
We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12



Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.

#### 1 TIMOTHY 1:19



Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"

#### **LUKE 19:8**



The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions.

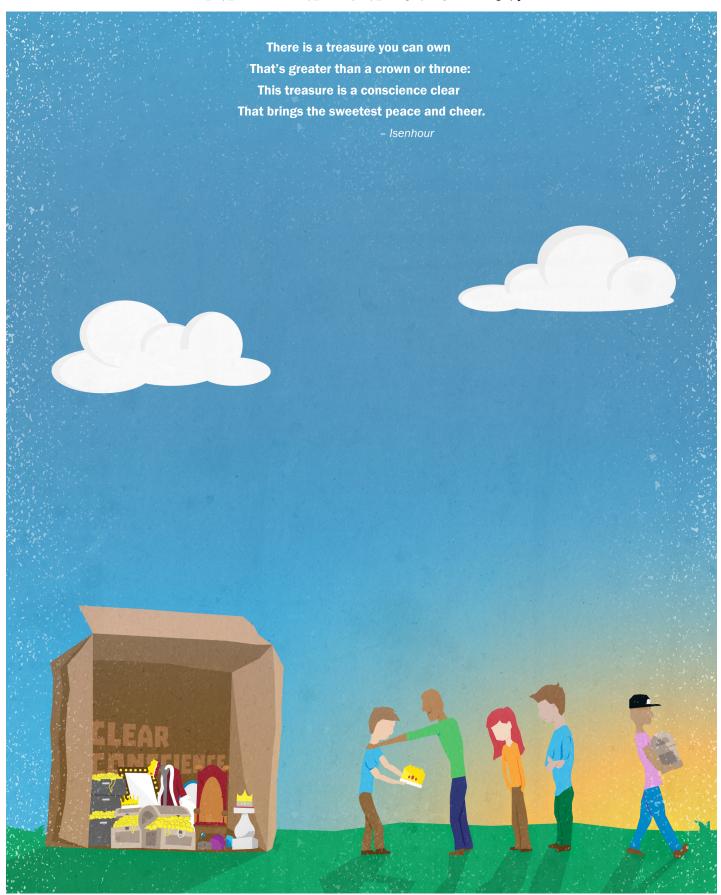
#### 1 TIMOTHY 1:5-6



If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

#### 1 JOHN 1:9

## THERE IS A TREASURE YOU CAN OWN



# A GREEN LIGHT FOR THE SOUL

▶ Jesus takes personally what we do or say to other people. When God's people are reconciled to each other, they make the gospel believable.

Would you lie to Jesus? Would you steal from Him? Would you believe unfounded rumors about Him, then spread them as truth? Would you get angry at Christ? Would you belittle or criticize Him? Would you hold a grudge against Him or give Him the silent treatment?

Yet Jesus says, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). According to this passage, Jesus takes personally what we do or say to other people. The good and the evil that we do to others, we do to Jesus! This truth alone should provide reason enough for us to always strive to maintain a clear conscience.

However, there's more: Revival and reconciliation are inseparable. We cannot be right with God, and not be right with our fellow man. When our relationship with God is revived, our relationships with others are impacted. Broken relationships are mended; bitterness, grudges, critical spirits, anger, and conflict are replaced by genuine love, forgiveness, humility, and oneness.

Consider the revival that swept much of Canada and portions of the United States in the early 1970s. The epicenter of this movement was Ebenezer Baptist Church of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. During the initial days of this revival, two brothers were marvelously reconciled. Prior to that, they had not spoken to one another for two years, even though they attended the same church!

However, one evening God broke through their hardness and pride, and they fell into each other's arms, sobbing. The church could not help but notice the drastic change in them, and God greatly used their testimony to spread and deepen the work of revival.

Right relationships—especially within the family of God—are one of the most powerful

means of communicating the gospel to a lost world. Our God is a reconciling God, and when believers cannot get along with each other, or when we fail to resolve conflicts biblically, we actually discredit the gospel. When God's people are reconciled to each other, we demonstrate the power of the gospel and make it believable.

In Ephesians 2, Paul explains that because Christ has reconciled us to God, we can now be reconciled to others. Here Paul is referring specifically to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to God and to each other. However, the principle applies to other relationships as well.

Through the cross of Christ, those who were once separated from God can draw near to Him. And through that same cross, the "dividing wall of hostility" that exists between us and others has been broken down, making it possible for us to be reconciled and to live at peace with each other.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus tells us to leave our gift at the altar in order to first be reconciled with a brother or sister we have offended. Do you have a broken or strained relationship with any other person? Are there currently any hurt feelings, unresolved conflict, bitterness, or anger in your heart? Are you holding a grudge against anyone?

With this Scripture in mind, reflect on the various ways you are currently serving God (teaching a class, giving, attending worship services, witnessing, etc.). Now visualize a traffic signal hanging between you and that activity.

Is God giving you the green light because your conscience is clear? Or has He turned the light red, indicating that you need to be reconciled with someone before your worship and service should proceed?



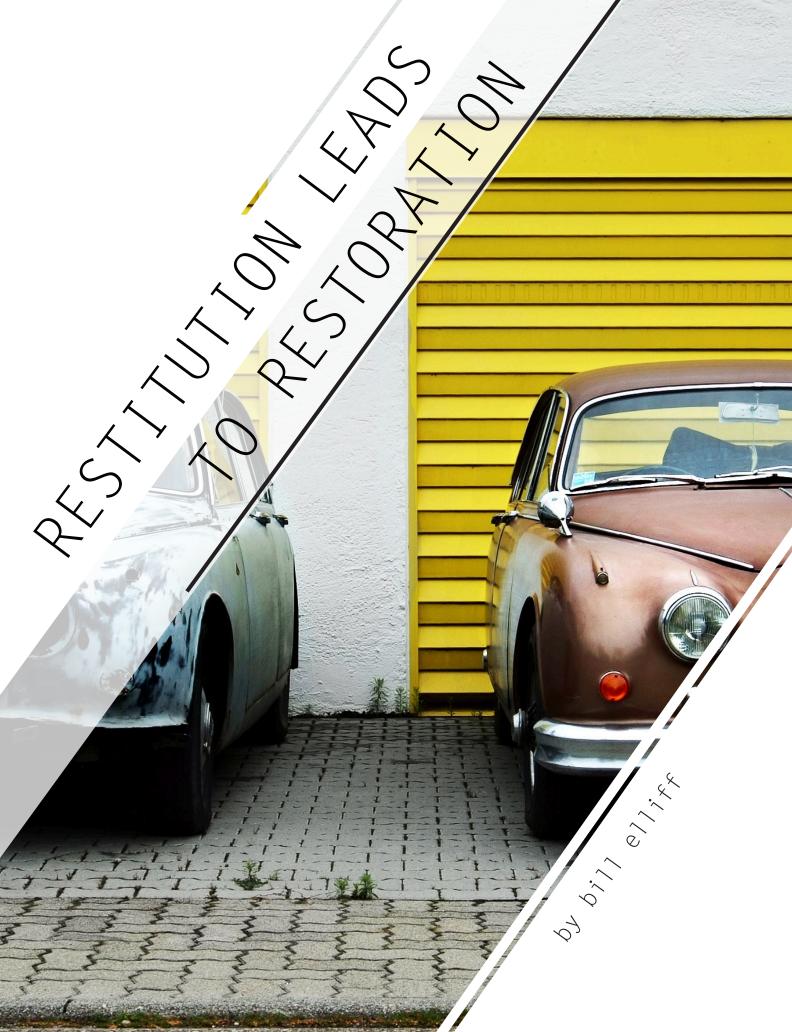
#### FROM THE HEART

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth Revive Our Hearts Radio Host

Right relationships are one of the most powerful means of communicating the gospel.









A Famine That Revealed God's Passion

The Bible tells the story of a famine God sent into the land of Israel for Saul's past sins against the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21). Saul had broken a covenant he had made, and he had never rectified his wrong.

us to do, and what does He do if needed steps are not taken?

Saul was now dead and gone; but the Lord, who loves unity and longs to show everyone His love and righteousness, wanted this broken promise resolved. He wanted to show the Gibeonites that God's people keep their word.

David, the current king, inquired of God and discovered why the famine had come. It was intended to get their attention, to cause them to turn to the Lord and listen. (Spiritual and physical famines may often be about this. God often dries up His resources so we'll look to Him afresh.) When they did, He told them the reason for the famine:

"There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death" (v. 1).

What was David's response? If he were like us, I imagine he would have said, "That's old news," or, "What's past is past," or, "That wasn't even something I did."

Not David. The next phrase records,

So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them (v. 2).

David immediately took steps to clear their national conscience and provide restitution for this wrong. And, the story has a happy ending:

They did all that the king commanded. And after that God responded to the plea for the land (v. 14).

God was waiting on His people's response to release His blessing. The famine had accomplished its purpose. And the Gibeonites surely realized that God is a God of faithfulness and righteousness.

#### The Power of Restitution

Is a murderer forgiven instantly when he comes to Christ? Absolutely. But he still took someone's life. There is a wave of broken people in his past. He should do everything God instructs to seek, as far as it lies within him, to be at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18) and to make restitution for past wrongs.

What if the survivor's family heard that the man who murdered their relative had come to Christ? Wonderful; but they would be skeptical.

But what if the murderer came to them, in humility and brokenness, and sought their forgiveness and made any needed restitution? They would know that God had done something real and that Jesus changes people. And that's just one way God is glorified through this process!

#### The Result of Restitution

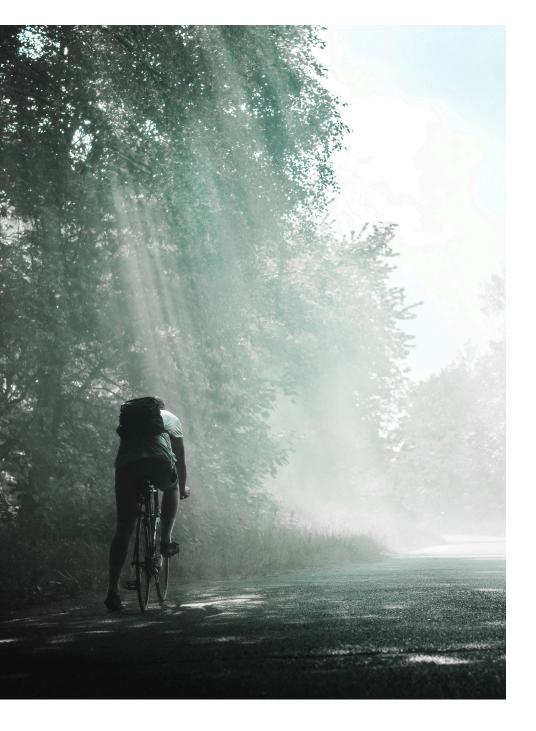
It's interesting that seasons of biblical and historical revival are always marked by restitution. Apparently, one of the primary ways God's name is honored and the gospel spread is by His people clearing their past. This provides a path to real and lasting restoration, demonstrating that people who *are* right with God *do* right because of His reviving and rectifying presence.

I have seen a man, in a moment of God's reviving power, give \$20,000 to the church, because he said he had been more faithful to pay his taxes to the government than his tithe to the church. I've watched husbands go back to the wives and children they'd divorced to seek their forgiveness for the covenant they'd broken.

I was in a meeting once where a man returned tools worth \$5,000 to his employer. For years he had justified his stealing with "everybody takes tools home." His restitution stunned his boss and co-workers and opened gospel conversations.

These accounts go on and on. When Christ is on the throne, He makes us better men and women, and the world takes notice. I believe this is part of God's agenda for restoration, as He prompts us to make needed restitution!

Bill Elliff is a pastor in Arkansas and co-author of the book *OneCry: A Nationwide Call for Spiritual Awakening*. Bill is also a frequent author of Life Action's PastorConnect emails, available at LifeAction.org/pastoral-leadership.



### THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

These testimonies, collected from Life Action events, demonstrate why pursuing a clear conscience could be the first step toward freedom and restoration.

Several years ago, with the help of some very godly influences in my life, I was able to forgive my family members for some childhood miseries that included neglect and abuse. On Tuesday night during the Life Action Summit, I heard about a clear conscience. The Holy Spirit began to convict me of my continued disrespect,

distrust, and bad temperament with my father and brother.

I knew what I had to do, after spending some time in prayer. I called my dad and brother to ask for their forgiveness for the way I had treated them over the years. I did not dredge up the past; I just dealt with what I felt God asked me to deal with. I think I lost a great deal of "weight" through this experience — I am now 42 and have carried so much baggage around for 36 years! I am a free woman today.

- Jill

thought everything was going great in my life. And yet, I was harboring a private sin that I had battled throughout the first ten years of my marriage. Through God's grace, I'm now victorious over that sin, but I had never told my wife. The second night of the conference, I was led to confess this sin to my wife. I obeyed, and I know it hurt her deeply.

Two nights later, my wife affirmed her forgiveness toward me, and God began to miraculously heal that wound. I feel as though our relationship is restored, and now we are even closer than we thought we could be! Thank You, God!

- Corey

felt like God had two areas He wanted to repair: my marriage, and my relationship with my mom. Following the messages on brokenness, I felt led to confess a sin to my husband, which had kept me from being one with him. The confession was immediate and Spirit-led.

The next night, after the message on clear conscience, I knew that I had to ask forgiveness of my mom for anger, resentment, and not respecting her position. She was going to be the most difficult one to ask, but the revivalist told us that whichever conversation seems the most difficult is the one we should pursue first!

The next morning, I realized I had left my keys in my husband's car, and he'd already left for his hour commute. Guess who had the extra set? My mom! She came over, and I spent a few minutes asking her to forgive me. I am so relieved and encouraged that I have made the choice to do this!

- Kristen

Before the conference, God found me struggling with a sin I had not confessed. Six years ago, we attended the Life Action revival meetings at First Baptist Church in Rincon, GA. During that time, God convicted my heart about the fact that I cheated on two independent study classes I took while I was in college in 1999. The tests I took were supposed to be administered by a proctor, but I took them with an open book, without a proctor present.

Over the past six years, I have neglected to deal with that sin. This week, God was once again convicting me. Finally, I called the Dean of Business at the university to confess. Through this, I was able to share my faith in Jesus Christ and the fact that what was wrong then is wrong now. Praise God for releasing me from this burden! The dean was very gracious toward me and appreciated the honesty.

I lost a great deal
of "weight" through
this experience.
I have carried so
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free woman today.

About two years ago, my sister and I had a dispute, which caused our relationship to crumble. No matter how hard I tried to make contact with her, she refused to speak with me or even acknowledge that I was her sister! I finally gave up trying to communicate.

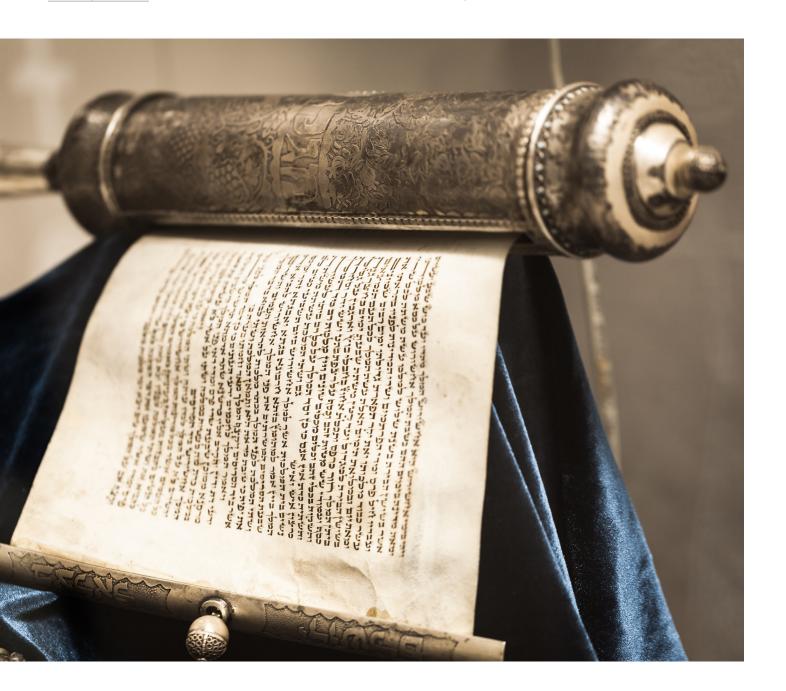
A few months ago, my mother needed emergency surgery, and in that moment I had to face my sister. We started to "talk," but not as the sisters and friends we once were. The day after the sermon on gaining a clear conscience, I had the opportunity to spend time with my sister again. The Lord opened the door for us to talk, and we restored our relationship. I feel like I have my sister back, and that our relationship is being healed!

- Michelle

had been disrespectful and rude to my high school basketball coach. I would not listen to him whenever he would try to teach me something. On Thursday night, the youth leader talked about loving others (including people I hate), and it stuck with me. Through the revivalist's sermon later on clear conscience, God kept putting my coach on my mind. On Friday I went to him and apologized. I knew it was going to be hard, and it was; but after our talk, I felt better. My conscience was cleared. From now on, I feel that our relationship will be better.

- Khristina

#### HARDQUESTIONS



#### **HOW DID PEOPLE FIND FORGIVENESS BEFORE JESUS?**

Did sacrifices and law-keeping cleanse the conscience?

#### DR. RICHARD FISHER

Our God-given conscience accuses us when its standard is broken in one instance. and commends us for a deed well done in another. We all hear its inner voice as we engage in life's struggles-the inner angst of what to do and what to be. It is the internal guide and judge of truth from which our hearts operate!

In the beginning, we were created with a conscience that was connected to the heart and Word of God. God created humanity "in his own image" (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7-8). He communicated with mankind and even gave them the Law—a common standard to guide the conscience for thinking and living in the created world. Although the conscience can be seared and reconfigured to reflect a cultural or personal identity, its real purpose was to help us interact with God's Spirit in the decisions of life.

As Christians, we understand that we need not live in shame or guilt regarding sins that have been forgiven by God. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, our consciences have been cleansed, and our sins are removed forever (Hebrews 10:19-23)!

But what about those who lived before Christ came to earth? How did the Old Testament person free himself of the depressing self-harassment of an unforgiven conscience?

What about David, whose tabloid affair with Bathsheba is published in 2 Samuel 11–12? What about the many other Old Testament characters whose dastardly misdeeds are unblushingly displayed on the pages of the Bible? Did they ever get to experience that sort of joy, or were they always consigned to carrying a heavy burden of accumulated sin around with them?

After all, the Law could not be fully kept, and the atoning sacrifices . . . were just animals. Hebrews 10 explains:

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.

But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year

after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (vv. 1-4).

So, was any relief available to a suffering soul in those times?

#### Freedom from Guilt

Upon careful examination, we discover that the consciences of Old Testament sinners could only be cleared in the same way ours can be today—by faith in the grace that would come through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. While we look *back* with faith at what occurred, the Old Testament believers had to look forward and put their faith in the future Christ who would come to save them. It was the same gospel, just on the other side of history!

This was foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Consider what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 52 and 53:

- · We are all sinners, estranged from God.
- God, in grace and love, will send His "servant," who will deliver us by bearing our shame and sin as the sacrificial lamb.
- The servant will die for us and then resurrect to see the redemption of many who accept the salvation wrought by His sacrificial death.
- The gift of salvation must be accepted or embraced fully for the cleansing and clearing of the conscience. If you don't really believe in the love and power of God to pardon you, you will remain in the prison of guilt.

Freedom from guilt was not, as many assume, accomplished by keeping the Law in the Old Testament. That was never the Law's role in the plan of redemption; it only served to reveal, not to cleanse.

No, in every era of history, the answer has been the same: **Consciences are cleansed when people believe the gospel**—the promise of God to provide forgiveness of sins and deliverance from evil through a substitutionary sacrifice.

Paul interacts with this theme as he builds the case against human righteousness in Romans 3, and explains how God was able to justly provide forgiveness of sin during the Old Testament era:

God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law (vv. 25-28).

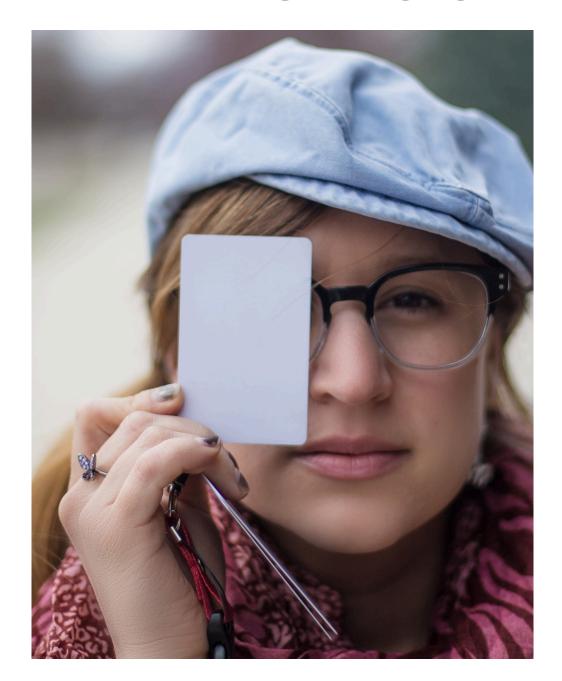
Believers long ago took hold of God's promise of redemption and opened their hearts to His cleansing power. They placed their faith in God, letting the peace of God guard their minds and hearts.

Faith allowed them (just as it allows us) to follow God into the fullness of hope, joy, and peace. Faith in God's promises is the victory that overcomes the world and brings freedom to the soul.



Dr. Richard Fisher retired from Moody Bible Institute as a Professor of Biblical Studies. He presently serves on the pastoral staff of Grace Church near Akron, Ohio.

# WHAT'S YOUR



# EXCUSE?

Clearing our consciences can be hard work, and there are always plenty of reasons not to do it! Here are a few of the most common:

#### "It happened a really long time ago."

Where does the Bible teach that time turns wrong things into right things?

#### "They have moved away."

Hmmm. Have you heard of the Internet?

#### "It was such a small thing."

If it's so small, why do you still remember it? The size of an offense isn't the issue.

#### "Things have gotten better."

Good feelings are no substitute for justice, forgiveness, and restitution.

#### "It will harm my reputation."

Humility 101 usually involves this. But take heart, God gives grace to the humble!

#### "It will cost me money."

That means it is costing someone else money. Think about it: They had to pay since you didn't!

#### "I'll do it later."

There's no good reason to stay in bondage longer than you have to!

#### "I don't think they'll understand."

You might be surprised. At any rate, you won't know until you try.

#### "The other person was mostly wrong."

Even if you were only 10% wrong, you can still ask forgiveness and make restitution for your 10%.

#### "The people I wronged are not Christians."

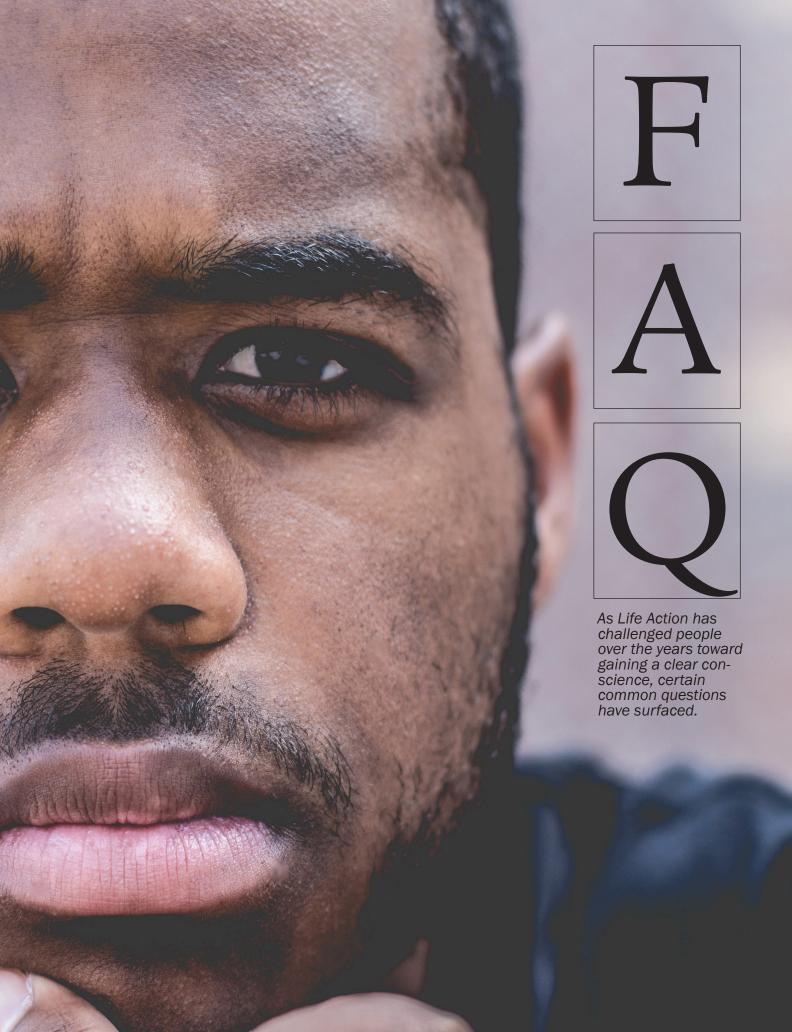
An even better reason you should get on this right away and take care of the offense!

#### don't think the person would remember."

YOU remember . . .

#### "It happened before I was saved."

Imagine that a bank robber steals \$1 million. The next day, he repents and believes the gospel! At what point in this story did that money become his?





#### When should I confess publicly, and when should I keep it private?

A: The scope of the confession should be as large, but only as large, as the scope of the transgression. For example, if your sin was only in your mind, your confession would be only to God. However, if you sinned against an individual or a family, your confession should be to God and the parties involved. And if your sin was against a group, there may be a need for public confession.



## What if I know that clearing my conscience will result in harm to others?

A: Situations that have potential to implicate or harm others demand greater care and wisdom. If the confession could create harm to anyone in your church fellowship, seek a pastor's counsel before proceeding. God works through spiritual authority, and you should submit to the direction of your church leadership.

Confessing sexual immorality is perhaps the most difficult type of confession. We should never confess adultery just because a person tells us to; we should only respond when we sense that God is calling us to. Here are several points of wisdom to consider before clearing your conscience for sexual sin:

- If the person with whom you committed sexual sin is someone in your church, always seek pastoral counsel regarding making the confession, in order to invite needed accountability and pastoral care for the parties involved.
- 2. When making a confession, seek God about the place and timing of the confession, in order not to make the problem worse. It is important to consider the unintended consequences of a confession, especially if the person with whom you had an affair is married. There are cases when a confession should be made only to God *until* He provides a clearly appropriate place and timing to make your confession (especially to someone who is married).
- Do not go into unnecessary or explicit details about the sexual sin during your confession.
- 4. When confessing an sexual immorality to your spouse, keep in mind the following:
  - a. Seek God regarding the timing, and consider having a trusted third party present, such as your pastor.
  - b. Confess completely the first time. If you confess in stages, it will further destroy trust.
  - c. Realize that you are likely to feel a sense of freedom and release at getting the weight of hidden sin out in the open. However, your spouse will likely feel frustration and rejection.
  - d. After hearing your confession, your spouse will need much more time to grieve, process, and rebuild trust than you will as the confessor. Part of true confession is bearing patiently (for however long it takes) with the pain your spouse will feel in struggling to extend forgiveness and rebuild the relationship.



### What if my list is too long and seems practically impossible?

A: If the list of people you have offended is long, or if you have lost contact with people on your list, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and paralyzed by where to start. The important thing is to begin. Start with the first person you can locate, and then pray for God to direct you to the next. Take one step at a time, with prayer that God will help you find those He wants you to reach.

Once you have done everything in your power to obey, you can walk in the freedom of knowing the rest is in God's hands. Don't be surprised if He works miracles along the way to bring people across your path, to honor your commitment to clear your conscience.



#### The person I wronged has died... but I still feel guilty. What should I do?

A: Consider writing a letter of confession to the deceased as if the person were still alive. This will deepen the spirit of confession in you. You may even want to address the letter to God as a means of finding closure, expressing trust that you are now turning over to Him what is beyond your control.

# What if clearing my conscience also involves accusing someone else of doing wrong (e.g. we were both involved in the same wrongdoing)?

A: Never reflect negatively on another person in a confession. For example, don't say, "We were both wrong, but would you forgive me for my part?" Instead, take 100% responsibility for your actions, and leave the rest with the other person and God. Remember, you are clearing your own conscience, not theirs.

In the extremely rare case when your confession will implicate another person of committing a crime, simply trust God's sovereignty over their lives. Just because you or someone else might get into legal trouble is not a reason to not confess your own sin. However, as in many of these circumstances, seeking pastoral counsel first would be a wise step.

# What if my sin against someone has been mostly in my own head, as in bad attitudes or negative thoughts? Should I tell them?

A: Not usually. For the most part, it is only appropriate to confess that wrongdoing to God. If you feel that your attitude toward a person has affected your relationship, simply ask their forgiveness for not loving them like you know you should. (Don't say, "I don't like you" or "I've been thinking mean thoughts about you.") Remember, the purpose for clearing your conscience is that God is doing a work of brokenness and humility in your life; it's not to make problems worse.

GAINING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE begins with a heart of humility toward God, as we repent and make right our relationship with Him through Jesus. However, the process is only complete when we also make things right with other people—the people we've sinned against. This quide can help you begin that journey.

## STEP 1: MAKE A LIST.

As you pray about clearing your conscience, make a list of each person God brings to your mind-people you have offended, hurt, or wronged in any way. Be as specific as possible on your list, noting specific sins, items stolen, hurtful words spoken, etc., as God reminds you. Include organizations or groups that may also need to be addressed.

#### My Clear Conscience List

#### STEP 2: SEEK GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

Take time to pray over the list you've made, asking for God's forgiveness and help for each item. After all, every sin against another person is first a sin against God (2 Samuel 12:13). Also pray for God's grace and power as you seek forgiveness from the people involved and seek to make amends.

#### STEP 3: **DETERMINE WHAT** CAN BE DONE.

When it comes to restitution, some sins are easier to "calculate" than others. Stolen items can be returned, money can be repaid, etc. But when it comes to emotional hurt, harmful behaviors, gossip, and other personal sins, it's harder to know how to "repay." This is where wisdom from God's Word, and the counsel of a pastor, could be helpful.

Forgiveness, by definition, is asking for a debt to be canceled. So it may be that seeking forgiveness is all you really can do-even though a debt is owed, there may be no way for you to repay it. If that is the case, admit it humbly. Even in the case where you can make financial or relational restitution, you should still seek forgiveness for the sin itself.

Examples of how a conversation might sound:

Stolen items: "I am coming to ask for your forgiveness for stealing \_\_\_\_\_ from you. Here is [the item, or an equivalent amount of money] in return. Would you be willing to take this as restitution, and would you be willing to forgive me for what I have done?"

Hurtful words: "God has been working in my heart, and I've realized that the things I said to you at [specific time/place] were wrong, and hurtful. I am coming to ask if you would be willing to forgive me for that?"

Betrayal: "I know I have been very wrong in the way I have treated you [reference specifics if appropriate]. I believe God wants me to admit to you how wrong I was and seek your forgiveness. I am not expecting

you to forget the whole thing, or to trust me just yet, but I really want to let you know that I am sorry. Would you consider forgiving me?"



In most circumstances, a personal visit is the best-case scenario for clearing your conscience and truly seeking forgiveness from another person. If that's impossible, a phone call would usually be the next best option, or perhaps a physical letter. In any event, you want to communicate genuine humility rather than take the easiest way out.

Some types of sin (for example, immorality in a previous relationship) might not be appropriate to confess in person. Or, you may believe that attempting a confession or restitution could lead to further problems. In these cases, discuss your situation with a church leader prior to initiating contact.

#### STEP 5: TAKE ACTION!

Like Zacchaeus in Luke 19, don't delay. The sooner you clear your list, the sooner you can move forward with the mission and vision God has for your life—the sooner your heart can be free!

That being said, do not expect an overwhelmingly positive response from the person you are approaching. It may take them time to process your request, or they may not be interested in reconciliation. Still, the process is worth the effort. It will take courage to do the right thing, and God's grace will empower and sustain you.

#### A PERSONAL CONSCIENCE INVENTORY

Use the following questions as a guideline for praying about your conscience.

#### YES NO

HOME			Have I broken any promises to my family?
			Have I broken my marriage vows?
			Am I deceiving my family in any way?
			Am I slothful or negligent in my duties at home?
			Do I have any habits that irritate or frustrate my family?
			Am I angry, resentful, or abusive toward any family member?
			Have I wounded the spirit of someone I love?
			Have I withheld love from my mate or any of my children?
			Have I dishonored my parents or my in-laws?
			Have I failed to provide for my family?
WORKPLACE COMMUNITY CHURCH			Have I been guilty of gossip, slander, or a critical spirit toward my pastor or any of the leaders of my church?
			Has God placed any area of service on my heart that I have been unwilling to perform?
	٥	٥	Do I have critical thoughts and attitudes toward anyone in my church? Have I verbalized those thoughts to others?
			Do I portray a "better-than-thou" attitude to my church family?
			Have I failed to give some of my income back to the Lord?
			Have I failed to follow the Lord in believer's baptism?
			Have I abused my role of leadership in the church in any way?
	٥	٥	Have I been a hypocrite—serving in the church, leaving an impression of being spiritual, while covering up disobedience or lack of a heart for God?
			Have I stirred up or contributed to any disputes in my neighborhood or community?
			Have I stolen from any place of business?
			Do I obey traffic laws, building codes, and other laws?
			Is my name well-spoken of by my neighbors and the vendors with whom I conduct business?
			Would the people in my community conclude that I am a Christian by observing my lifestyle?
			Have I committed any crime that I have never confessed to the proper authorities?
			Have I lied to anyone about anything in an attempt to avoid consequences for some wrong I have done?
			Have I cheated on my income taxes? or my education?
			Have I shared the gospel with those God has prompted me to speak with?
			Have I spoken disrespectfully to or about my supervisors?
			Do I have any unresolved disputes with fellow workers?
	۵		When I do have a disagreement at work, do I seek to resolve it quickly and biblically, or do I display anger and bring others in on it needlessly?
		۵	Do I work faithfully and diligently? Am I always honest about why I am taking time off?
			Do I abuse or neglect company policies?
		۵	Have I stolen any items or money from my employer or cheated on expense reports?

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# YOUR STADIUM SPEECH

► What if you had an opportunity to meet with everyone you've ever encountered in your entire life? Would you be able to share with each one freely, or would there be past offenses standing in the way?

**Imagine with me** that you were able to rent the biggest arena in your city. Perhaps it's a concert hall that seats 5,000, a football stadium that seats 50,000, or even a racetrack that seats 100,000!

You sign the rental agreement and start sending out invitations. There aren't going to be any rock stars, celebrities, or prizes on the agenda. Just a short speech, by you.

People start arriving—from everywhere! From work, from your neighborhood. From your second grade class, from your first job. From your hometown. From your college dorm. From the stores you frequented, the churches you attended, the teams you played on, and the clubs you joined. The person who sat next to you on the bus ten years ago and the waitress who refilled your coffee at breakfast last week.

Every person you've ever encountered.

You watch the masses filling the seats—thousands upon thousands, seating themselves in curious quiet. The bright lights on the upper deck beat down on you as you near the microphone, which stands alone in center field. Your mind races to recalculate one last time: Should I really do what I'm about to do?

Shaking off doubts, you lean in and speak: "Thank you for coming. I recently learned what it means to have a clear conscience, and about what it means to make things right. I really believe God wants me to make peace wherever I can, to pay back anything I've stolen, to seek forgiveness for any hurt I may have caused.

"That's why I've asked you to come . . . to think about my relationship with you, the business I've conducted, the words I've spoken, the things I've done, the attitudes I've displayed. And I'd like to ask: If any of you has something against me, or if you know of some wrong I've committed that I've never attempted to make right, would you come down to the field right now so we can clear that up?"

Stunned silence. You wait patiently, then notice a bit of movement off to the side. Then, a bit more.

How many people do you think would move? Would it be a handful, or perhaps a few hundred? Or would that moment look like the invitation at an old-fashioned Billy Graham Crusade, with thousands of people streaming down front from every which way?

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have lived with a God-given holiness and sincerity in all our dealings. We have depended on God's grace, not on our own human wisdom. That is how we have conducted ourselves before the world, and especially toward you. (2 Corinthians 1:12).

I can report from personal experience that the freedom of a clear conscience is well worth the effort involved in securing it. I've had to pay back forgotten debts, seek forgiveness for harsh words, and even repay something I stole back in fourth grade, decades after the fact!

Is that your story as well? Peter wrote that "if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

You see, when your conscience is clear, you can step in front of that crowd for a different purpose. With no secrets to hide. With no skeletons in the closet. In the stadium of people surrounding your life, you can share the gospel without fear, and without holding back.



NEXT STEP

Dan Jarvis

Managing Editor

The freedom of a clear conscience is well worth the effort involved in securing it.







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