
VCL International
VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING CONFERENCE

SEEKING FORGIVENESS

Lesson Transcript by Ted Sellers

I'd like to read an actual transcript of a radio conversation between a United States Naval warship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland recorded in October of 1995. Here's the conversation:

U.S. ship: "Please divert your course 5 degrees to the south to avoid a collision."

Canadian reply: "Recommend that you divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision."

U.S. ship: "This is the captain of a United States Navy ship. I say again, divert your course."

Canadian reply: "No. I say again, divert your course."

U.S. warship: "We are a large warship of the United States Navy. Divert your course now."

Canadian reply: "This is a lighthouse . . . your call."

Now, that was an actual radio conversation. After the captain of that warship heard that reply I'm wondering if he said, "Oh my goodness! Would you please forgive me, please, Canadian authorities? I am so sorry for being so pompous and pushy. We will definitely divert our course." Do you think he did that? I don't think he did that. No . . . he did not seek that person's forgiveness. Probably what happened after that last communication was just dead silence and the captain, off the air, saying something like, "About hard right ruder,

let's get out of here and never tell anyone what we did." But somehow it was recovered and picked up on the internet.

Seeking forgiveness is not something that's a common practice of people who are in the world. In fact, it's not even a common activity for people who are Christians . . . that we quickly go and seek someone's forgiveness as soon as we know that we've hurt another person. I remember one time when an athlete came on the sidelines of a basketball game and kicked a photographer. Afterwards, do you think he sought his forgiveness? Do you think he said, "Oh, how clumsy of me, or how pushy or rude of me to do that. Would you please forgive me?" No. He paid him money, but he didn't seek his forgiveness. It's not something that happens too much in the world. Yet, the Lord is very desirous that we in the church be able to live together in harmony and unity.

Let me read to you from what I call "The Lord's Prayer." The Lord's prayer is not what He taught His disciples in Matthew Chapter 6. The Lord's prayer is found in John 17, and part of that starts with verse 21 and continues for the next couple of verses. Listen to what Jesus says as He prays to His Father: "That all may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. 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" (John 17:21-23 NIV). That's the prayer of

Jesus, that there would be oneness and unity. The one thing that can divert unity from happening and that can destroy harmony in the church is people offending other people and doing nothing about it. Instead, they just say: “Well, it will blow over” or “I don’t know, I don’t know what happened. But I’m sure that I don’t need to do anything about it.” No. We do need to do something about it. When I have hurt another person and harmony is broken, I need to go and seek forgiveness.

If you look at the verse here on page 1 it says, “Leave your offering there before the altar, and go . . . be reconciled to your brother” (Matthew 5:24). That word reconciled means to “unite or bring back into harmony” if there was harmony and it was disrupted. Go and restore that harmony or bring that harmony back. The *Living Bible* says, “Go and apologize and be reconciled to him.” Luke 17:4 gives an interesting, almost unbelievable text. It says, “Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him.” Seven times in one day. Usually once a day is enough for most people. I can take one abuse or one rejection a day from someone. But imagine, seven times in one day. And if he comes back seven times and asks you to forgive him, forgive him.

It’s interesting in this idea of reconciliation that it’s always my move. If you have offended me, it’s my move to extend forgiveness to you; but if I have offended you, then it’s my move to go and seek forgiveness from you. In order to seek forgiveness, I do need to go to you. I cannot do that in my room all by myself. I need to go and talk to you to seek your forgiveness.

THE CROSS OF FORGIVENESS (Diagram 210-A)

Let’s look at our first diagram on page 2A. As you look at this you see the cross right in the center. As you think about the cross, there’s a vertical beam and a horizontal beam. You put

those two together and you make the cross. The vertical beam is our reconciliation to God, and God is the initiator of reconciliation. John 3:16 (paraphrase): “For God so loved the world that He initiated the process to bring about our reconciliation with Him.” Jesus went to the cross for that purpose. Then the arms that go horizontally represent reconciliation between people—women to women, man to man, man to woman. I believe that just as God was an initiator of reconciliation to us, we should be initiators of reconciliation with other people.

Have you ever known, or maybe seen in a movie, where two people have hurt each other? You can see that neither one of them is going to budge and, as the movie progresses, they drift farther and farther apart. By the end of the movie they go off in two different directions, the sun sets and they pass the kleenex. You could say, “If I could only get into that movie and tell them, ‘Hey, he’ll forgive you. He’ll forgive you if you would just go and seek forgiveness! WOULD SOMEBODY BREAK THIS STALEMATE—THIS MEXICAN STANDOFF WITH TWO GUNS NOBODY’S GOING TO SHOOT!! Nobody’s going to do anything. Please somebody stop it by going and seeking forgiveness.’”

Many times what stops that is pride. “Well, I’ll move if he moves.” “I’ll move if she moves, but I’m not going to start it. I’ll wait to see. They’re not doing anything so why should I?” No, that’s not what God did. Aren’t you glad that He was the initiator. He’s the one that took the first step. When it comes to horizontal relationships, why don’t you be the one to be the initiator, to take the first steps, so you are committed to being reconciled to each other?

Look at 1 John 1:7. It says, “If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” I always thought it said we’d have fellowship with God, but it doesn’t. It says, “If we walk in the light,” that’s

the fellowship, that's the relationship with God. Then we will "have fellowship with one another" as we walk in the light. What does it mean to walk in the light? Walking in the light means not walking in the darkness or hiding in the darkness. How do we do that? By keeping everything open and honest.

I remember I was counseling a man one time and we were in the last phases of discipleship and I said, "Now, is there anything else that you sense the Lord wants to deal with in your life?" He said, "Well there's one thing but it's . . . it's pretty much already taken care of." I said, "Really, what's that?" He said, "Well I've been smoking for the last couple of months, and I'm pretty sure I'm going to quit. In fact there are a couple of guys at work and we're all quitting together. We're all Christians. You know, as Christians we go out for a smoke break and talk about how we're going to quit smoking, and so we're gonna be doing that probably by the end of the month." I said, "Well that's great that you're quitting. That's neat. Have you told your wife?" "No." "Really! Why, I think she would like to rejoice with you!" "She doesn't know I'm smoking." "Really! You were that good?" "I am that good. I have breath deodorant, I have a spray that I spray on my clothing, I air everything out, I do everything outside, I smoke outside, nothing sticks, I don't do it in the car." I mean this guy was sharp! I said, "Well, why can't you tell your wife? I think that would be important." He said, "Let me explain to you the situation." He said, "When I got married to my wife, she told me in no uncertain terms that she didn't want me to ever, ever, ever smoke and at that time it wasn't a big deal. I said sure. She said, 'The reason that I'm telling you this is that my father died of lung cancer and I watched him die. It was not a pretty picture. I don't want to go through that with you. So buddy, you start smoking and you can kiss me good-bye!' So you can see why I wouldn't tell her." So what do you think his assignment was?

Under God, I did not tell him what to do, but I said, "I think God would want you to share that. That would be walking in the light and not hiding out in the darkness." He said, "Boy, that's the hardest thing I'll ever have to do." He said, "I know it's the right thing to do, God's really going to have to strengthen me." And God did strengthen him and he went and told his wife. And do you know what she was more upset about than the fact that he was smoking? Yeah, not telling her! She was deceived. He was living a lie and doing a good job at it. She was very hurt that he wouldn't even tell her. And so he had to seek her forgiveness for living a lie and being deceitful, and then, for smoking.

Well, one of the interesting little side notes about this particular couple: they had been married about five years at that point and had really wanted to have a child and for some reason they couldn't. Very soon after he disclosed what he was doing and sought her forgiveness they had a greater degree of unity and oneness. She then became pregnant and had their first child. Since then she's had another one. I think that was somehow connected to walking in the light . . . as we walk in the light by not hiding what's going on in our life and being willing to be reconciled.

Acts 24:16 describes how Paul lived his life: "Herein do I exercise myself, to have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man" (KJV). That's just a neat way to live—void of offense toward God and toward man. Whenever there was an offense toward someone, Paul would deal with it. He wrote in Romans 12:18, ". . . Be at peace with all men." How can you be at peace? Well, whenever there's not peace, whenever there's turmoil, and I'm the one who has caused it, then I need to go and seek forgiveness so that I can, in fact, be at peace with you.

One of the things that I've thought about recently, when there's conflict between two

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people and there's no harmony and no unity, is that the people are not really focusing on the most important thing. I've heard it put like this: "We need to major on the majors and minor on the minors." When there's conflict it's because we're majoring on a minor or minoring on a major. What's a major? The major is this relationship. This relationship is too important to let this minor thing destroy it. What happens is we're more committed to being right than we are committed to that relationship.

"I'm right, you're wrong. You're going to lose, I'm going to win and I'm going to show you where you're messed up. Your thinking is way off base or you don't have any concern or feeling for what I care about."

Majoring on the majors, what's important, what's really important. That's what should be considered when you're in a relationship. So don't major on the minors, major on the majors.

When you do sow to the flesh, there are laws of sowing and reaping. How do you sow to the flesh? By having unreconciled relationships and not doing anything about it. If you'll notice, we have four laws of sowing and reaping.

The *first* law is: "You reap what you sow" (Galatians 1:7). For those people here that are farmers, you understand that when you plant wheat you reap wheat.

But when you plant one little kernel of wheat you don't just get one little kernel of wheat. You get a whole stock of wheat. That's the *second* law: You reap more than you sow. So, if you sow the wind, what will you reap? The whirlwind. Yeah, that's a lot more than you sowed.

The *third* law says: You reap in proportion to what you sow. Second Corinthians 9:6 says (paraphrase): "If you sow sparingly you'll reap

sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you'll reap bountifully."

The *fourth* law is: You reap in a different season. So you don't plant the seed and overnight it grows up. You plant the seed and you wait for the harvest. Many times we plant bad seeds by not being reconciled with someone and the harvest comes up years later, or months later, and we see a bad harvest. How did that get there? How did that child turn out like that? Years of bad sowing, years of not being reconciled, then we have a bad harvest over here.

For example, think about King David. Here was a guy who sowed to his flesh. One night, he was alone. Where was his army? Out fighting, protecting him so he could be at home watching videos. After he got tired of doing that he went and looked out on the porch. He looked around and saw someone taking a bath. In fact she did that so much they nicknamed her "Bath-sheba." She's out there and he's looking at her and realizes that she's a very attractive woman, and he wants to explain some Proverbs to her. So he invites her over and they talk about Proverbs, and eventually they have an affair.

Now, what should have happened as soon as the army and her husband, Uriah, got back home? What would be the very first thing King David should have done? He should have gone and said, "Uriah, come here, man. I need to talk to you. You won't believe what I've done. I am so sorry. I feel so guilty. While you were out there defending me, I was messing around with your wife. Would you please forgive me? I don't know what you want me to do to make some kind of amends for this, but I'll do whatever it takes. I am just so embarrassed. I feel horrible about what I've done." Is that what he did? No! He figured out a way that he wouldn't have to do that. Isn't that interesting? Instead of figuring out what the easiest thing would be, we think of something a little more difficult that doesn't hurt our pride. So he

figured out a way to get rid of Uriah and you probably know the story. He eliminated the guy instead of seeking his forgiveness. He, in effect, killed him. That's bad sowing! That's bad! That's stinkweed man! That's nasty!

Now what was the crop? What did the crop look like? What happened to the little baby? Oh, that's bad reaping. The harvest came up nine months later—bad harvest. Now what else happened to David's children, even his older children? What happened to some of those? There we had some bad scenes, didn't we? We have a brother raping a daughter, and then Absalom decides he'll fix that. He goes to his brother, Amnon, and kills him. Bad sowing, bad reaping. Then we've got Absalom, trying to replace David as the king. That's a kind of kid you want to have around, right?

"I want to throw you out! I'm going to embarrass you, Dad! I'm going to do the same kinds of things to you. I want to be just like you Dad."

Absalom was also very proud. He had a hang-up with his hair and ended up in a tree. Joab comes along and stabs him and kills him. David is just mortified. That's one more bad crop. All of that happened because of David's bad sowing, when he didn't deal with it.

I remember a man that a pastor told me about. He said this man came and talked to him and said, "Pastor, you gotta pray for me. I am sick." The pastor asked, "What's the matter?" The man said: "I don't know. It's just that my stomach is hurting. It's just gives me so much pain. I'm getting tired of taking Tums." The pastor said, "Well sure, I'll pray for you." So he prayed for the man.

He checked with him a couple weeks later, "How ya doing?" "Oh, I'm not doing good at all," he said, "I'm gonna go see the doctor." So he went and saw the doctor, who gave him a

complete physical and said, "I can't find anything wrong with you." This continued for several more weeks and he didn't get any better. Finally, he decided to check into the Mayo Clinic and get all of the high tech testing. They ran all the battery of tests, and you know what they found? Nothing. Nothing was wrong with him.

About a week later he went to see his pastor and said: "I just need to talk with you. I've been really feeling convicted by the Holy Spirit. A while back I started having an affair. My wife doesn't know about it and I need to seek her forgiveness, but I'm just petrified. I don't know what she's going to do or what she's going to say." And the pastor said, "Okay, we'll set it up." So the pastor got the husband and wife together and they had several sessions and he sought his wife's forgiveness. She was very hurt and wept, but finally was able to forgive him. What do you think happened to his tummy ache? Yeah, it went away . . . it was healed. Well, he was healed because he did what he should have done probably a couple months earlier. Not seeking forgiveness, not being obedient to the Lord, will make you sick.

What to do with an unreconciled relationship? Did you ever wake up in the morning and feel this pit in your stomach because you know there's somebody you need to talk to and you don't want to do it? You know there's someone you've offended and you just try to put it off or just not think about it. "I've got a busy day, I'll think about that later." And the Holy Spirit faithfully reminds you, "Let's deal with it. Let's deal with it so that there can be reconciliation."

FLESH—SOWING AND REAPING (Diagram 210-B)

Let's go on to the next diagram because it explores more sowing and reaping. Notice the seasons. You have zero through eight and these seasons can refer to years, months, days, or

hours. It's just a way of breaking up the time frame from when you began to sow to when you began to reap. If I sow to the flesh by violating God's word, by having unreconciled conflicts, I will reap corruption. You can see it gets pretty dark at the end.

Let's consider some of these violations of God's word. Colossians 3:9 says, "Lie not at all" (paraphrase). Don't tell lies. If I've told a lie to someone, I need to seek the person's forgiveness. I don't need to let that continue any longer. If I do, then I'll start to wait for the harvest. See, when these seeds of disobeying God toward other people happen, when those seeds hit the ground, I want to get down and pick them up quickly before they take root, sprout, and I have a harvest on my hands.

Have you ever played a game called "Alligators"? I've played it with my little boy. Six alligators go in and out in an arcade game and you hit them on the head. When you hit them on the head they back and say, "Oww, oww." My son just loves to do that because he loves to hit things. Then you get so many points, you win tickets and you use them to buy a plastic thing that breaks before you get home. He loves that game and I think that's kind of like seeking forgiveness. As soon as I see that I've offended someone, I deal with it. "Oww!" Let's hit it, let's drive it back, let's not let it take root and grow into a bad harvest. As soon as I'm convicted, I go and deal with an unreconciled conflict.

"For this is the will of God . . . abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This uses a key phrase that many Christians get excited about, and that's "the will of God." It is the will of God that you avoid sexual immorality. That's the will of God. But when I do violate someone in that way, I need to go and seek that person's forgiveness.

"Do not judge . . ." (Matthew 7:1). Don't judge. When I know that I've judged someone,

I need to go and seek that person's forgiveness right away. Not long ago, my sister-in-law and brother-in-law from South Dakota visited. They have two daughters. While they were here we were talking about the accident that one daughter had had with her car. In South Dakota you can get a driver's license when you're 14. That's pretty young. Why do you think they do that? South Dakota was a rural area. They needed the boys to drive the trucks and tractors into town to gas up, so they let them have a driver's license at 14. Neither one of these girls are driving tractors, but they still got a driver's license when they were 14. This daughter got a license when she was 14, then her parents got her a car. Within a couple of weeks she was in a collision, was knocked cold, and really could have been hurt. The car was all mashed up. I said, "I heard about your daughter's accident." She said, "Yeah boy, that was really something." I said, "You know, my daughters didn't get a driver's license until they were 16 because a lot can happen between the time you're 14 and you're 16. People grow up a little more. They also went to Driver's Ed school."

"Yeah, but you know, that really is the law. They can get it when they're 14."

I said, "Another thing, when my daughters did turn 16 and got a driver's license, I didn't buy them a car." She said: "What are you going to do? Everybody's got a car, you know, and she wanted a car and we could afford it, so we did." I went on and said something else and she said, "You know, I don't know if I want to keep talking about this." And so I quit.

The next morning as I was having my devotions and being spiritual, the Lord seemed to speak to me about judging and He said: "Who made you the driver's license cop of the world that you know when people ought to have a driver's license? What is your deal? You see what you're doing? You're judging and you're setting a standard. All you're wanting her to do is do it the right way—the way you did it, the

way God does it. Do it like I did it and then you'll do it right." I said, "Ahhh man! That's what I did, didn't I?"

"Hummm."

Then I realized that she was leaving the next day to go back to South Dakota, where they give people a driver's license at 14. So I called her up and I said, "Hello Patty," and she said, "Yeeaah." Like maybe I wasn't done, but had one more dig. I said: "This is Ted. I wanted to talk to you about our conversation yesterday. I was actually very critical and judgmental."

"Oh no! No you weren't." She's very nice so she probably didn't take it badly. I said, "Yeah, I was really trying to make you do things the way I did them."

"Well everybody has their own opinion."

I said, "I know, but I was trying to make my opinion, your opinion. I was trying to change you to believe like I do and that was wrong. Would you please forgive me?" She said, "Oh, of course! I didn't think any more about it."

About a week later I was talking with my mother-in-law, Patty's mother, and she said, "Isn't it wonderful." I said, "What?" She said: "You know, what happened with you and Patty? Everybody's talking about it. You called her and sought her forgiveness. We don't do that. That's neat. I like that. No one's ever done that. We're Norwegian. You know, Norwegian people don't do things like that."

Now I think it just showed me again that this is something that just doesn't happen, especially among families, let alone among people in the church, the family of God.

If I sow unreconciled conflicts, and I don't jerk them up like weeds by seeking forgiveness, then I'm going to reap corruption. As I'm going along, I'm wondering if the Lord brought

anyone to your mind that you've hurt or offended? Think about that and ask yourself these questions: "Have I had withdrawal or feelings of depression? Or outbursts of anger and I thought, 'Where'd that outburst of anger come from? Could that have anything to do with the unreconciled relationship I have over here?'" It could. It could definitely be connected. Or fears or anxiety or even sleeplessness. When you can't sleep and you're waking up thinking about that person you've hurt, that could be connected. Obsessive thoughts, drug abuse and even feelings of guilt. I remember one man who was counseling with me and he said, "You know why I use drugs?" He used speed. He said, "I use it very intelligently." He said, "I use drugs to shut up the Holy Spirit because I can hear what he's telling me. I don't want to hear it and I know how to shut him up." So he used drugs. With him it was being unreconciled with his wife.

It's interesting how Solomon could write these Proverbs. "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, / And he will be held with the cords of his sin" (Proverbs 5:22). Isn't that good. Held with the cords of his own sin. In Colossians 3:25 we read, "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." Receive the consequences—yet, many, many times people who know they need to go and seek forgiveness don't do it.

I always remember counseling a man who explained to me how he had called someone up on the telephone. They were having an argument and it got more and more heated, and he began to curse this person, calling him everything in the book. I said, "Do you think that was a godly thing to do?" He said, "Nope, but he had it coming."

"Oh. Okay. Well, when you've hurt someone or offended someone like that, what do you think you ought to do?"

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“I don’t know.”

“Well what do you think God would like you to do?”

“I don’t know. But I’ll tell you one thing I’m *not* going to do. I’m not going to seek his forgiveness.”

I said, “Really?” “Yeah,” he said, “He had it coming to him and so I’d probably do it again, and use the same words.” I said, “Well, I think that’s important.” He said, “Yeah, it sure was, it was an important conversation.” “No,” I said, “The fact that you don’t want to do what you know God wants you to do.” And he said, “Yeah, so?” I said, “In fact, it’s probably so important that, until you do that, we won’t really need to meet again.” He said, “That’s cool.” We have never met since. That’s how committed he was to not seeking forgiveness. It wasn’t a big deal, but he wasn’t going to do it, and he didn’t. I’d hate to see the crop that comes up in his life.

SPIRIT—SOWING AND REAPING **(Diagram 210-C)**

Look at the next diagram “Spirit—Sowing and Reaping,”—being obedient. You see, even when there’s a bad crop coming up and we’re in this dark area, what do we do? We start sowing to the Spirit. We start reconciling relationships, even when we get bad crops from other relationships. It’s never too late to go and seek forgiveness; it’s never too late to be reconciled. What can happen as I reap life by reconciling past or even new conflicts by seeking forgiveness? Life gets better. I have an orderly life; there are godly responses. I can love other people. I can respond with the mind of Christ. I have peace and not turmoil. There’s freedom from feeling guilty, confidence in Christ, and there’s inner security. So I ask you this? Where are you sowing today? Are you sowing to the flesh? Are you sowing to the Spirit in your relationships with other people?

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(Diagram 210-D)

If you look at the next diagram, you’ll see how the process should work. You have the offender and the person who’s been offended. The offender seeks forgiveness from the offended and the offended forgives and they are reconciled. There’s something I need to add here. Write down Psalm 51:4. Before I even go and seek forgiveness from you, I need to go to the Lord. David said in Psalms 51:4, “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned.” You know, it’s interesting as I read that because David was willing to admit that to God, but he didn’t admit that to Uriah. He did the first step. He did that just fine, but he didn’t do the second step. He talked to God, but he didn’t talk to the person. Some people are very spiritual and they talk to God. They think that’s all they need to do.

“Yep, everything’s okay! I talked to God and I asked Him to forgive me because I was really mean to that person.”

“But what about that person you offended?”

“Well, that’s not a big deal.”

No, you have to do that also. That’s the next step. So let’s look at what that process looks like as we spell it out.

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PROCESS (Diagram 210-E)

If you notice on this sheet, there’s a definition of seeking forgiveness. What is it? It’s honestly seeing how I hurt another person by my words or actions. You may have to have someone help you do that. Many times I’ve had parents in counseling who know they’ve hurt their children because their children are alienated from them. I’ve had to help them see what they did to hurt them. All they know is their children don’t want to talk to them. They don’t want to have anything to do with them, but they don’t know why. They don’t have a clue. And

it's good to have another person to say: "Is this what happened? Did you do that? Did you not do this?" And they start to see, "Oh my goodness, that's what I've done." So when they go to seek forgiveness it's more than just "Would you forgive me for being a lousy parent?" It's more specific: "Would you forgive me for never encouraging you? Would you forgive me for never going to your games? Would you forgive me for never saying something positive to you? Would you forgive me for never holding you or saying I love you?" That's more specific. So, it's honestly seeing how I hurt another person by my words or actions. Then I go to that person and say I was wrong for what I did and ask that person to forgive me.

Before I go to seek forgiveness, I need to forgive anything I'm holding against that person. I refer you to the lesson on "Extending Forgiveness" so that you can extend forgiveness first. Then when you go to that person you won't have anything against them. You're not coming to say, "I'm going to seek your forgiveness, but I'm going to wait because you better seek my forgiveness." No, you've already extended forgiveness to them. So Matthew 5:23-24 says, "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Those two words, be reconciled, are in the imperative tense in the original language. In other words, it's a command, do it at once. Make a decisive and effective choice. Don't put it off. Make it happen. Let's look at these 12 keys to seeking forgiveness. Let me ask you again. Has the Lord brought someone to your mind, from whom you need to seek forgiveness? If so, these would be the steps to follow.

1. Reexamine what forgiveness or seeking forgiveness is not. It's not apologizing or just

being sorry and it's not trying to make up to someone or be nice to them. It's admitting what you did.

2. You're reminded by the Holy Spirit. You don't have to go on some sort of an archeological dig into your past and think, "I have heard this lesson on seeking forgiveness. I'm sure there's probably lots and lots of people that I've hurt. I don't even know where to start. Probably 4th grade, that's where it all started. I have to think back to Johnny Bumgardner that I hit with my little satchel." No, it is just the people that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind.

3. Remembered by the other person. In other words, the other person should know what you're talking about. Now there are times when you go and seek forgiveness and they remember the incident, but it may not have offended them as much as you thought. And then you think, "Why did I even do that?" I would rather do that than nothing at all. I'd rather go and seek forgiveness and the person say, "Oh yeah, I remember that, but no, I didn't take offense." I'd rather do that than not do anything. I'd rather err on the side of doing it too much than not doing it at all. However, you don't seek forgiveness for jealousy. That's an internal thing, like lustful or angry thoughts or feelings. In other words, let's say that you're a man and you're at the grocery store and you're at aisle 9 and you go up to a lady and say, "Ma'am, excuse me." And she says, "Yes." You say, "I don't really know you, but we're in aisle 9 and around aisle 2 is when I first noticed you and had lustful thoughts, and for the last 7 aisles I have had these problems. I just wanted you to forgive me, will you please do that?"

You don't do that.

There are exceptions when you have stolen something or slandered someone. Now, you go to someone and say, "I would like you to forgive me, if you would please, because I stole something from you."

“I didn’t know that.”

I remember one counselee who actually went back to a U-Haul place that he robbed and sought their forgiveness. That was neat. The Lord used that in his life.

Another possibility is when you slander someone. Now that gets real tricky, but you don’t want to go around slandering people and abusing them in the form of gossip or malice. There may be a time, and I’ve had to do that myself, where I went back and sought someone’s forgiveness, because I had talked to another person in a slanderous way. I talked to one of the people on staff here and said, “You know this other guy.” And he said, “Yeah, I know him.” And I said, “Let me tell you about him.” And I said some things that weren’t very kind. The next day the Lord convicted me and I went to him and I said, “You know what I said about the other guy yesterday? I shouldn’t have done that, would you please forgive me?” He said, “Of course I will. Now why don’t you go and seek his forgiveness.”

“Oh no, I sought your forgiveness, that’s enough isn’t it?”

“No, you need to talk to him.”

I did. We went out to breakfast and it wasn’t comfortable, but it sure put the skids on me doing that kind of thing again.

4. Respond quickly. Don’t wait. As soon as you know, what does that verse say? “Leave your gift right there, don’t even go through with any kind of religious service, just leave your gift and go do it.”

5. Review the offense clearly. We’ve talked about that.

6. Rehearse only as much detail as necessary. Especially if you’re going to seek forgiveness

from a teenager, it should last about 42 seconds. You just go and say, “Yesterday when you didn’t take out the garbage when I asked you to and I called you a sluggard and a lazy person, I was wrong for that. But you know I don’t ask you to do much around here. I try to do as much as I can and the few things that I ask are always met with resistance.” Now wait a minute, we’ve gone into something else and that’s next, number 7.

7. Blame and defense. Don’t do that, because as you do that with a teenager, after you go over 42 seconds, their eyes glaze over and they know it’s a lecture and it’s not seeking forgiveness.

8. Very important. Circle number 8—that’s the key one. You rapidly move to ask this question or this statement: “I was wrong regarding (you fill in whatever the offense was), will you forgive me?” You have to use those 3 hardest words in the English language, “I was wrong.” It’s not “Would you forgive me if what I did offended you? If it was an offense to you, would you please forgive me because, you know, every thing I do offends you. You have your feelings on your sleeve. I can’t say or do anything without you being offended.” No. Don’t do that. Say, “I was wrong, will you please forgive me?”

By the way, can you demand someone to forgive you? “You must forgive me, that’s what the guy said, so I’m doing it so you gotta do that.” No, this is a humble thing. It’s not a demanding thing.

9. Right timing is vital. “Is this a good time to talk?” When I want to talk is a good time, right? It may not be. It may not be at all. This is important. We have to have a good time to talk and then do it in person.

10. Request in person. However, you don’t request in person if it was an immoral relationship. I had a man in counseling one time and

the Lord finally got through to him and he was convicted about this relationship and he said, "I'll go over to her house tonight and I'll tell her that it's over." I said, "You don't have to do that. We can make a phone call." You don't go to the person's house. However, you don't use the telephone if you live in the house. You don't go down to the Circle K and make a phone call. You do that one face to face.

11. But do not write a letter. If you write a letter with today's technology, with e-mail and the internet, your letter could be all over the world in a matter of seconds. Do you want that to happen? **Don't write a letter.** Plus, there's no sense of closure. The only person you ever really get to know well is your mail carrier, as you wait for an answer. It can fall into the wrong hands.

12. Finally, if you have taken something from someone, restitution needs to be offered. If you have taken money, return it. If you have taken someone's property, return it. The person may say it is not necessary to return it. In that case you are not obligated. What is important is that you make the attempt to do what is right.

What if you seek forgiveness and the person does not forgive you? Do you need to keep going back again, again, and again? No, just pray that the Lord would allow the person to forgive you.

What do you do after you seek forgiveness? You work toward reconciliation. There are three parts to reconciliation: seeking forgiveness, extending forgiveness, and rebuilding the relationship.

REBUILD RELATIONSHIPS (Diagram 210-F)

Doesn't it take longer to rebuild something than to build it? Last year my wife took her fingernail and scratched one of our kitchen cabinets and said: "Oh look. Look at that beautiful wood

under that ugly white paint. Wouldn't it be fun to strip all these cabinets and be able to see that wood?" And I said, "Yeah." That was not a good answer. It was not fun. To this day if we walk through Home Depot and we go through the Paint Department and I say, "Look hun, stripper!" AGHHH!!! Stripper!! I hate the sound of that word, I hate that! We bought so much of that stuff we were asphyxiated by that stuff. We stripped all those cabinets. It was a lot of work, but they do look nice. It takes a lot to rebuild something or redo something, but it is worth it. And it's worth it to rebuild the relationship that's been damaged because trust has been broken.

What do you need to do if you're the offender? You need to listen to the other person's hurts and go out of your way to demonstrate that you are trustworthy. You say, "I feel like I'm bending over backwards." You may have to. You were the one that broke the trust. Don't get upset about it. Trust God to give you the patience to go through it. Remember Zacchaeus? He said, "I'll give back half of all my money to the poor and if I've overcharged anyone four times more goes back." He was willing to reestablish trust with the people that didn't trust him.

If you're the person that's been offended, you need to turn the other cheek. You need to do good to the offender. You need to pray for and love the person. Now, you do not need to be reconciled with some people. If there has been abuse or rape or something like that, you don't need to be reconciled to that person. We're talking about a relationship that already existed. Remember the definition of reconcile? To reunite, to bring harmony again into that relationship.

REVIEW

Let's review. Are you crashing into lighthouses because you refuse to divert your course? Are you refusing to seek forgiveness? Are you

SEEK
FORGIVE

damaging relationships by pride? Are you unwilling to say, "I was wrong"? It's time to divert your course. It's time to admit pride or selfishness because it's impossible to live with people without hurting or offending them. But as soon as you feel the Lord's direction to seek forgiveness, it's time to act. It is very humbling to go to another person and say, "I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" It's essential if you're going to live with people who are impossible to live with, and seeking forgiveness should be a way of life, not something that you do once or twice. It's a way of life. Who has God brought to your mind that you need to seek forgiveness?

For me it's often the people in my own family. I've had to seek forgiveness from my wife and from my little boy. Who is it that the Lord's speaking to you about today?

Let's pray. "Father, I pray that You would make us ministers of reconciliation, that we would be quick to initiate reconciliation by seeking forgiveness and not waiting for the other person. I pray that You would give each one who's thinking about it now, the courage to go and seek forgiveness. Give them the love, the humility, and the words to say, and the right timing to say those most difficult words, 'I was wrong. Would You please forgive me?' We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."