



Forgiveness: How to Ask for It

Excerpted from [Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility](#)

One of the most overlooked aspects of forgiveness is how to ask for it. Asking for forgiveness should not be done according to human wisdom nor simply generated by emotional intensity. Asking for forgiveness should, instead, be based on biblical truth, especially with regard to personal responsibility and esteeming others as more important than one's self. Any important endeavor of life requires planning, and forgiveness is certainly one of those undertakings.

If you are a believer in Christ and ask another person to forgive you, be sure to speak the truth about your sin(s). Truth means "bringing everything to light." In the Bible, this is described as being verifiable, indisputable, without pretense or deception, devoid of any hint of falsehood, unconcealed, and complete with all the facts.

For further study on this topic, see [Truth is Personal, Not Merely a Concept](#)

Ephesians 4:25, Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

The following examples demonstrate how scriptural guidelines can help you realize God's purposes through biblical forgiveness. The examples demonstrate that there is more to biblical forgiveness than the question, "Will you forgive me?"

- Since asking for forgiveness involves your mention of personal wrongdoings, do not judge or bring up another person's failures in your confession. For example, you could say, "Please forgive me for slamming the door in your face." Do not say, "Please forgive me for slamming the door in your face when you called me stupid." Since there is no valid excuse for sinning, do not give excuses for failing to be Christ-like. For example, you could say "Please forgive me for using unwholesome words." Don't say, "Please forgive me for using unwholesome words, but I was having a bad day."¹

1 Corinthians 10:13, No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

- A presentation that includes the Lord, personal responsibility, specific sins(s), repentance, Christ-honoring intentions for the future, and asking for forgiveness might be stated: "I recognize that I have sinned against the Lord and you by (*name the specific sins*). It is my intention never again to repeat this offense against you or anyone else. I repent and will change by doing the following. (*Explain your specific plan for change*). I have asked the Lord to forgive me, and I want you to know that I desire your forgiveness as well. Will you please forgive me?"¹

1 John 1:7-8, But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Matthew 7:12, So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

James 5:16, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

- It is often helpful to practice asking for forgiveness by first writing it and, then, saying it out loud. In addition to practicing what you will say, prepare for various responses from the other person by writing and rehearsing what you would do and say if the other person replies with statements such as "Oh, that's all right" (minimizing sin) or "Don't worry about it" (avoiding a commitment to forgive) or "People do that all the time" (making excuses for sinful behavior) or "I will not forgive you" (refusing to reconcile) or "I'll forgive you, but I won't forget it" (harboring a grudge).¹
- As a believer, when you ask for forgiveness, stay focused on Christ (Hebrews 12:1-2) and be ready to explain the difference Jesus has made in your life (1 Peter 3:13-17).

Hebrews 12:1-2, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the

right hand of the throne of God.

1 Peter 3:13-17, Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect*, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.
[Emphasis added]

- In response to “Oh, that’s all right” or “Don’t worry about it” or “People do that all the time,” you might say, “Even though my actions may not have bothered or offended you, I recognize that my actions toward you were unloving, contrary to what the Bible teaches, and not pleasing to God. Since my desire is to be more Christ-like and to love you God’s way, would you please forgive me?”¹
- If the offended person says, “I won’t forgive you,” you might respond with, “I am deeply sorry that I have so offended you. I regret that I was unloving to you and not acting as the Bible teaches me to do. I have made a commitment to live in a more Christ-like manner in our relationship and will be praying that our future interaction will demonstrate that commitment.”¹
- If you ask for forgiveness and hear a response similar to, “I will forgive you but I won’t forget it,” you might say, “I regret being part of such a painful memory in your life. My behavior was certainly unloving. I commit to act and speak in such a way that our future relationship will, hopefully, be surrounded by much better remembrances.”¹

The above examples of “how to respond” are based on numerous verses in God’s Word, some of which are listed below:

Matthew 5:9, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:16, In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:23-24, So 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.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Romans 12:17-18, Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Ephesians 4:29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

James 3:17-18, But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

After developing and reviewing your plan to ask for forgiveness, consider the best time to approach the person whom you have wronged. When the person is not busy, ask if you can discuss your failure. If that time is not appropriate for the other person, ask if there is another time in which a conversation may take place. When the meeting takes place, the objective is to confess your sin(s) and ask for forgiveness.¹

Proverbs 25:11, A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Proverbs 15:23, To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!

Philippians 2:4, Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Romans 14:19, So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Since some sins impact many people, you can meet separately with each person or, if appropriate, with everyone as a group.

As you follow scriptural guidelines when asking another for forgiveness, you honor the Lord and demonstrate the difference that Jesus Christ has made in your life.

¹All footnotes in the text of the article refer to material from *Self-Confrontation, A Manual for In-Depth Biblical Discipleship*, 1991 printing, pages 451-452, under Guidelines: Victory Over Failures Worksheet. We greatly appreciate the Biblical Counseling Foundation’s (BCF) permission to include this material. The BCF website: <http://www.bcfministries.org/>