

# Bringing a Sinner to Repentance

## Forgiveness part 4 Selected Passages 11-28-10

Our natural response to those in sin is to either be hostile toward them or ignore the sin to avoid an uncomfortable conversation. Both are unloving. God requires us to work at bringing the person to repentance, and this message is all about the various ways to accomplish that. Perhaps the most helpful and most neglected principles are in the second half of the sermon—the list of dangers we must warn them of, and the reminder of the superiority of God’s way.

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**Luke 15:11-32** 11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. 13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. 17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on

his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. 25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

## Introduction: The Basis for Forgiveness

If you do a search online for the idea of unconditional forgiveness you will discover something that may come as a surprise. The sources that promote the idea of unconditional forgiveness tend to be new age sources, or secular psychology sources, or Christian counseling sources that integrate psychology with the Bible – sources that have a high view of human wisdom. But if you look at sources that are more committed to the sufficiency of Scripture, they tend to be against the idea of unconditional forgiveness. Does that strike you as odd? It seems odd because unconditional forgiveness seems like a higher moral standard than conditional forgiveness. Those who are willing to forgive unconditionally seem to be more gracious, more kind, more benevolent than those who require repentance.

Is that really the way it is? Are the people who forgive automatically and unconditionally more gracious and more benevolent than those who require repentance? If so, then those people are more gracious and loving and benevolent than God, since he also requires repentance. Hopefully, we all understand that nobody is more gracious and kind than God, which means that conditional forgiveness is kinder and more benevolent than unconditional forgiveness. Telling people, “You have to repent first, otherwise I won’t forgive you” – is more loving and kind than saying, “I’ll automatically forgive you even if you don’t repent.” And the reason for that is very simple – saying “I forgive you” when there is no repentance leaves the person in the disaster of his sin. And on top of that, it is a lie. “I forgive you” means “the relationship is healed.” But if they are continuing in their sin it is not healed. It is like giving morphine to someone with a compound fracture and telling them that their leg is healed. That is a lie – it is not healed. And if you say, “I refuse to tell the person his leg is healed until it actually is healed,” that is not unloving. What is unloving is telling the person a lie.

So why is it that the world is so enamored with the idea of unconditional forgiveness? Two reasons. First, they want unconditional forgiveness from God. They want to be absolved of their sin without having to turn from their sin. A god who would do that is their idea of a really wonderful god, so they invent that god in their minds, and he becomes the standard for what forgiveness ought to be.

Secondly, fallen humanity can promote unconditional forgiveness because they have their head in the sand about the seriousness of a compound fracture. They have a weak view of sin. When Christian counselors want to integrate psychology with the Bible for counseling, the school of psychology they tend to borrow the most from is Rogerian psychology. Carl Rogers taught that man, at the core, is essentially good. So Rogers taught what he called “unconditional positive regard” as a virtue. You accept everyone without condition, because they are essentially good. Sin is not an infinite, eternal offence against a holy God, so it is really not that big a deal. It does not have to be dealt with. It is not a compound fracture – it is just a scratch. It can be tolerated and ignored – nothing has to be done about it. So the highest virtue becomes pleasantness and staying positive all the time rather than holiness and righteousness. That is the spirit of our age.

But if God is indeed holy, then sin becomes a much more serious matter. The more worthy God is to be honored, the more serious a matter it is to dishonor Him. If you punch a rapist in the nose you get in a little bit of trouble, but if you assault the President of the United States you are in a world of trouble. The greater the person you sin against the greater the sin. So sin against an infinitely holy God incurs infinite guilt.

So if you are a good person you will take sin seriously. Taking sin lightly, ignoring it, tolerating it, sweeping it under the rug, blowing it off – only an evil person can do that. If someone comes along and sins against your wife in some terrible way, and that does not bother you at all, then you do not love your wife. And if someone sins against God and you don't think it is any big deal, you do not love God.

That is why the world likes the idea of unconditional forgiveness, and those who love God believe sin must be dealt with. We found last week that when someone commits a sin, that sin is ongoing continuously from the moment they commit it until the moment they repent. And those of us who love God and take offenses against God seriously will want that sin to come to an end. And the matter cannot really ever be completely closed until it does. If someone has a compound fracture, if you love that person you will want them to stop taking a sledgehammer to their leg, and you will not tell them it is healed while they are still taking a sledgehammer to it.

### **Christ's provision**

Another difference between us and the world is our understanding of what actually does the healing. What is the basis for forgiveness? The world thinks the basis of forgiveness – the thing that heals the broken relationship is the good-heartedness of the one doing the forgiving. I have so much kindness and goodness in my soul; I am at liberty to grant you forgiveness. Forgiveness comes from me. The goodness of my heart is what repairs that which was broken.

That is a man-centered fantasy. The grace of Darrell does not have the power to heal anything. Only the grace of God has that power. And besides that – I cannot forgive sin that was committed against someone else anyway. If you punch my neighbor in the nose I cannot forgive you for that – only my neighbor can. All sin is sin against God, so if I tell you that I am granting you forgiveness, what good is that if God does not forgive you?

You see the basis for forgiveness is not the kindness and goodness of my heart. The basis for forgiveness is the Cross. We said if you are a good person you have to take sin seriously, and the more goodness you have the more seriously you will take it. So how good is God? And how seriously does He take sin? He is a forgiving God, we know that. But what is the basis for that forgiveness? The brutal beating of His Son followed by death by crucifixion. That is the price that had to be paid. That is how serious sin is.

Christ died for us while we were still sinners; does that mean His forgiveness was unconditional? No. Dying for our sin and forgiving our sin is not the same thing. Christ died for us and paid the price for our sins two thousand years ago, but we were not forgiven two thousand years ago. That payment of the price on our behalf is only applied to our account when we repent. But if a person will not repent then that person's sin is not paid for, it has not been dealt with, and it cannot be swept under the rug. People who forgive unconditionally can do that not because they have a huge heart, but because they have a tiny view of the holiness of God and therefore a tiny view of the seriousness of sin. Those of us who understand something of the awesome holiness of God know that sin cannot be forgiven unless it is covered by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only the Cross is enough to make up for what they did. And the payment on the Cross is only applied when there is repentance.

### **Life or Death**

So repentance is a matter of life and death.

**Luke 13:5 Unless you repent, you too will all perish.**

**2 Peter 3:9 The Lord ... is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

Those are the only two options—repent or perish in hell. That is why there is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

## **How to bring a person to repentance**

So when someone sins against you, priority one is to bring them to repentance so you can forgive. Now immediately some people will object at this point and say, “Isn’t that the Holy Spirit’s job?” If you ever do anything to try to bring someone to repent over sin it will not be long before someone will accuse you of playing Holy Spirit. Is it our job to convict people of sin and draw them toward repentance, or should we leave that up to God and keep our hands off?

**Hebrews 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.**

Every one of us is at risk of being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness, and the solution in this verse is not to sit around and wait for the Spirit to work without the involvement of the saints. The solution is for us to **encourage one another daily**. Is it God who rescues us from sin? Yes, but the tool God uses is His people. Our regular, routine encouragement of one another through Scripture is the solution to a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

This is most certainly our job.

**Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is overtaken by a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

When some sin gets the better of someone and he falls, it is our responsibility to restore that person. The word **restore** means to repair. It is the word used of mending the fish nets in the Gospels. When someone in the church is damaged, it is your job to fix them.

Keep this in mind the next time you feel led by the Spirit to complain about someone in the Church.

“Boy, that \_\_\_\_, he sure is irresponsible.”

“Their children are sure out of control.”

“That guy is so prideful and arrogant.”

“That woman is such a gossip.”

The next time you find yourself saying or thinking something like that realize that you are indicting yourself. Complaining about other people’s spiritual problems is like an auto mechanic complaining about how the cars in his shop do not run. The more he complains the more he just advertises the fact that he is a lousy mechanic.

It is his job to repair them; not to complain about them. Nor is it his job to throw them away. When the Disciples repaired their nets it was because those nets were too valuable to throw away. And people are even more valuable than nets. Our tendency is to notice a deficiency in someone, and cast them aside like a piece of garbage. “You struggle with that sin? I hate that particular sin. So I think I’ll just sweep you out to the fringe of my life.” And instead of restoring the person – mending the net – we just throw it in the trash.

If you have a complaint about someone, you do not discard that person, you do not complain or gossip – you go and restore that person. Sin does damage, and it is our job to repair that damage.

And there are a lot of things we do to restore the person, but for our purposes today I just want to focus on the first one. The first step in restoring them to spiritual health is to stop the bleeding. All the damage is being done by the sin, so you have got to put a stop to that sin, which means you have got to bring them to repentance. And that is our subject this morning. How do you make someone willing to repent? I thought I was going to say a few words about this and then preach mostly on how to forgive once they have repented, but the more I thought about it the more convinced I was of the importance of not rushing past this part. So hopefully, we will get to how to forgive next time, but for today – how do you get an unrepentant person to repent?

## **1. Repent of your sin**

When you have a conflict with someone the biggest obstacle to their repentance is very often their belief that you are sinning against them.

**Matthew 7:3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

The log and the speck both refer to unrepentant sin. Jesus is not saying you have to overcome all your sin problems before confronting someone. The only thing you ever have to confront someone over is unrepentant sin. And it is hypocritical to confront someone for their unrepentant sin when you have unrepentant sin of your own. But once you have repented over your sin, it is not hypocritical for you to confront someone else who is not repentant.

A minute ago I read Galatians 6:1, about repairing a brother damaged by sin. In that verse, who is in danger? Some brother has fallen into sin, and spiritual people – people who are filled by the Spirit and who are bearing the fruit of the Spirit – are called to restore this sinning brother. So who is in danger?

**Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

We, the obedient, godly, Spirit-filled people are in danger. When we are dealing with someone else's sin that is one of the prime moments when we are especially vulnerable to the enemy. Focusing on someone else's sin is always a very, very dangerous and perilous thing to do.

Is that an excuse not to do it? No – Scripture commands us to deal with the brother's sin. But when we do so we must have the utmost caution, watching ourselves lest we become proud and fall into sin ourselves.

So before confronting someone with his sin, ask him if he believes you are in sin. And if so, do not answer his accusations right away. Go home and pray about what he says and give it serious, honest consideration. You cannot confess anything as sin if you do not believe it to be sin – that would be dishonest. But if you can find any kernel of truth at all in what they said, confess that and repent of it.

And when you confess, make it a real confession and not an excuse. If you say, "I'm sorry" make sure it is not followed by the words "if" or "but." "I am sorry but" means "I am not sorry." "I am sorry I yelled at you, but you just make me so mad sometimes." That is not a confession – it is an excuse. You cannot confess and make excuses at the same time, because if you think your behavior is excusable, why would you confess it as sin? And what does "I am sorry if" mean? "I'm sorry if I hurt

you.” What does that mean? It means maybe I am sorry; maybe I am not. Or I am sorry that you are responding the way you are responding. That is not a confession.

If you must keep speaking after the word sorry, the best thing to say next is just “I was wrong” or “I should have ...”

“Honey, I am sorry I snapped at you. I was wrong. I should have thought more about what you were going through.”

So the first step is to repent of the sin in your life to the satisfaction of the other person as much as possible. In fact, not only do you repent of your sin, but you do anything you can do (without violating your conscience) to be at peace with the person.

**Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

## **2. Pray for the person**

Repentance is their decision, but it is also sovereignly granted by God.

**2 Timothy 2:25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance....**

Ask God to soften the person’s heart toward His Word.

## **3. Be Patient**

We saw last week that it is God’s patience that leads to repentance (Ro.2:4). So be patient – show compassion, kindness, gentleness, and love.

**Romans 12:21 Overcome evil with good**

When you are in a conflict with someone, you are in a war, and you are commanded to win. You are commanded to overcome the enemy. But the enemy is not the other person; it is the evil. And the only weaponry you are permitted to use is “good.”

The person hurts you, and the war has begun. You are never to fight against that person, but you do declare all out war on the evil. And you defeat it not by adding more evil of your own, but by only using good. So he hurts you; you blast him with kindness. He does not accept your kindness and fires off some more evil – time to pull out the big guns. Now you double and triple your kindness and acts of love. As much as he escalates evil, you escalate the good until the evil is annihilated, and you win your brother’s heart.

But notice it does not say “Overcome evil with kindness.” It says **Overcome evil with good**. And what is good for them is not always just softness and pleasantness. The statement, “Love must be tough” has become a cliché, but it is really true. Just as the remedy for cancer might be painful surgery, so the solution to sin can involve some very painful and invasive measures.

## **4. Expose**

**Matthew 18:15 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault**

You have to show them from Scripture that what they are doing is sin.

**Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.**

You take them to Scripture and show them from God's word exactly what principle they are violating, so they can see the wrongness of their action. But it is not just a matter of giving him information. The purpose is to convince him that he is guilty. In 1 Corinthians 14:24 it says when a sinner hears the Word of God **he will be convinced ... that he is a sinner.**

"But what if it is just something minor?" Usually if you tell a gossip to go confront the person he will say, "Oh, no. It's not worth making a fuss over. It's no big deal." If it is too minor to confront it is too minor to gossip about or be bothered about or even think about. If it is not a sin, it should not bother you. And if it is a sin, you need to expose it.

### ***Be Careful!***

But be very careful with this. This is not a time for clumsiness or thoughtlessness. Just because the person is in sin does not mean it is OK to be rude, insensitive, or unnecessarily harsh. This is such a crucial moment. The way you present it at this point can push them toward defensiveness and denial or it can draw them into humble repentance. If you push them into a corner and tempt them to become defensive in the way you present it, you have just made his condition much worse. If you present it in a way that makes it especially embarrassing to admit the sin, so that he denies it, now his heart is moving in the wrong direction and it is that much harder for him to repent. Pushing a person toward a bad response by having a poorly thought out approach is the height of cruelty. So use the golden rule. When someone sees a sin in your life, wouldn't you want that person to present it to you in a way that would make you open to receive correction, rather than in a way that would be likely to push you toward a response that would make your sin permanent?

### **5. Rebuke**

Hopefully, once you expose the person's sin he will repent.

**Matthew 18:15 show him his fault ... If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.**

But if he digs in his heels and refuses to repent, then you move to the Luke 17:3 approach.

**Luke 17:3 If your brother sins, rebuke him.**

A rebuke is a command that calls for action (Mt.8:26).

### **6. Admonish**

And sometimes that takes some instruction. You cannot just say, "You have to change!" Very often the person wishes he could change, but all his efforts have failed. He does not know how to change. Or worse than that, maybe he thinks changing will be a piece of cake. He is under the illusion that all it will take is a little resolve and trying harder and the problem will disappear. In either case the person needs some instruction. The word for that is *admonish*.<sup>1</sup> That word means to instruct or warn in an effort to correct behavior. Like every other step in the process, the way to do this is with God's Word. Human wisdom will not cut it.

**Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom....**

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<sup>1</sup> Gr. *noutheteo*

Admonition gets its power from God's Word. Just pointing a finger and prattling on about what you do not like about the person's behavior will not have divine power to bring about heart change. But showing a person what the Bible says infuses divine power and grace into the situation.

### *The difference between shaming and admonishing*

And if you want to know what this looks like – in some cases it looks like shaming. Admonishing is not the same as shaming—but it is similar enough that they can be confused. When Paul admonished the Corinthians he had to clarify that what he was doing was admonition and not shaming.

**1 Corinthians 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to admonish you, as my dear children.**

The word translated **shame** means to cause someone to look down on himself. Shaming is when you make a person feel defeated and discouraged, and that is not a good thing. But true admonition can look very similar to shaming. Look at Paul's admonition:

**1 Corinthians 4:10,13 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ... Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.**

That is sarcasm. He did not want to shame them, but sometimes admonition has to be harsh in order to be effective. When that happens, though, it should break your heart. You keep reading and you can tell it really pains Paul to have to do this. He calls them his **dear children**. He wishes he could be gentler, but he cannot because, according to verse 18, they had become arrogant. When the person becomes desensitized to the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, gentle words just do not get their attention. They need a kick in the seat of the pants. And that requires courage and strength on your part combined with the wisdom and love to know the difference between admonishing and shaming.

## **7. Warn**

So now you have shown the person his guilt, you have rebuked and admonished him, but he still will not repent. So now you pull out the next tool: warning. Sin causes a person to lose perspective and forget about the long-term consequences. So he needs you to come along and remind him of the terrifying warnings God's Word gives to those continuing in unrepentant sin, it can help to snap the person out of his folly. Here are some passages you could use:

### *Warnings about persisting in sin*

**Deuteronomy 29:19 When such a person ... thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." This will bring disaster ... 20 The Lord will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him.**

**Hebrews 10:26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ... 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

### *Warnings about dabbling near the door of temptation*

**Proverbs 5:22 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.**



**Ecclesiastes 7:26 I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.**

*The effect on one's nearness to God*

**Jonah 2:8 Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.**

**Proverbs 28:9 If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.**

*Punishment*

**2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

**Proverbs 15:10 Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path; he who hates correction will die.**

**Hebrews 13:4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.**

*Destruction and Death*

**Hosea 9:10 ... they became as vile as the thing they loved.**

**Romans 6:21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!**

**Job 31:1 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. 2 For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? 3 Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong?**

**Proverbs 7:21 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. 22 All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose 23 till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.**

And one of the most important warnings is to warn them about church discipline. If they do not repent, it forces you to follow through with the steps of church discipline in Matthew 18. Tell the person, "Jesus requires that I would have to bring one or two witnesses to confront you, and if you still do not repent to tell it to the whole church. And if you do not listen even then, the church would have to put you out." And that is a lot more than just excommunication from a particular fellowship. It is a turning over to Satan.

**1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.**

When someone is put out of the church on church discipline the Lord takes Satan off his leash and lets him ravage the person. There is a great spiritual protection that Christians do not even notice, but when it is removed the result is horrible destruction at the hands of the devil.

I think warning is one of the most neglected responsibilities of the church. It is everywhere in Scripture, and yet how often we fail to carry out this responsibility.

## **8. Provoke**

The goal of all this is to target the will.

**Hebrews 10:24 let us consider how we may provoke one another on toward love and good deeds.**

Usually the word “provoke” is used in a negative way – to provoke anger. But just as doing irritating things provokes anger, we need to strive to provoke love and good deeds. Inflammate the person - not to wrath, but to righteousness. Figure out how to “push his buttons” – not buttons that activate sin but buttons that stimulate holiness. Find out how to make the godly response seem attractive and appealing to him.

Remind him of God’s promises. Promise him that God will make it worth his while if he obeys. Whatever benefit he thinks he is going to get from this sin is small compared to the benefits of obedience. There are two ways to resist a temptation – one that honors God and one that honors the person doing the resisting. If I really desire the pleasure of some sin, but I grit my teeth and resist out of pure self-discipline, that honors me. It shows how disciplined I am. But if I resist it because I actually prefer something better, that honors that better thing. For example, if a guy is tempted to go to some drinking party or some sinful activity, but he decides against it because he would really rather spend the evening with his best friend – he thinks of an evening with him as being more enjoyable and fulfilling, so he says no to the party not out of self-denial, but because he prefers hanging out with his buddy – that honors that buddy.

God wants His children to obey Him in ways that honor Him – actually preferring what He offers over what sin offers. That is when people will see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. They will see our good deeds and say, “Wow, those people love their God so much they actually prefer nearness to Him over the pleasures of this world. God must really be amazing.” So if the ideal kind of obedience is the obedience of preferring, one of the most important ways to persuade someone to give up a sin is by calling to his mind what is so much better about closeness to God.

That is not easy because obviously this sin has a grip on their heart. Sin can offer some pretty intense pleasures. And when a person allows himself to be deceived by sin, the benefits of that sin seem impossible to give up. It seems like there is no way he can be happy without this sin. So it is an uphill battle persuading him about the superior joy of nearness to Christ.

So once again, it is Scripture that has the power to accomplish this.

**Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on what is not food and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fair.**

**Psalms 36:7, 8 How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men ... feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.**

Explain to them that even though this sin seems like it will be so satisfying, in the long run it will not be. It will leave them dry and broken and empty. It seems like bread, but it is not bread. But if they listen to God, their soul will delight in the riches, most satisfying delights from God.

**Psalms 63:3 Your love is better than life ... 5 My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods.**

God’s favor is more enjoyable and more satisfying than life at its best.

**Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart**

Right now obedience to God seems like self-denial. It feels like a sacrifice. But it is not. It is like denying yourself some junk food an hour before Thanksgiving dinner. The decision to obey will be a decision that will result in joy and happiness.

**Psalm 89:15 Blessed are those who ... walk in the light of Your presence. 16 They rejoice in Your name all day long**

It will result in greater happiness in this life, and much, much greater happiness when Christ returns.

**1 Peter 4:13 rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.**

Now you need to be careful here. Do not lead them to think of obedience as a tool they can use to get God to give them what they want. If they are obeying just to manipulate God into giving them the things they think they need to be happy, that is misguided. The reward is not a Jeannie in a bottle. It is the presence of God Himself.

**Psalm 16:11 in Your presence is abundant joy**

*Teach them what repentance is*

Remember, the goal of all this is to bring the person to repentance. And to do that you have to make sure they know what repentance is. And repentance is not mainly ceasing a sinful activity. The clearest picture of what repentance looks like is found in Luke 15.<sup>2</sup> In Luke 15 Jesus tells a story of a son who abandons his father, takes all the money and blows it on prostitutes and riotous living. And he ends up starving to death in a pig sty. And that is where his repentance begins – in verse 17.

**Luke 15:17 When he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’”**

His sin ends in disaster, and part of his repentance was realizing that the disaster in his life was due to being away from his father. He does not say, “I am starving because I have been a poor money manager.” The whole issue is being separated from the father. So the solution is obvious. He does not say, “Look at my budget; I’ve got to cut back on the prostitutes” or “From now on, I am going to try hard not to be so wild and promiscuous.” None of that was the real issue.

**18 I will set out and go back to my father**

The real issue was that he had walked away from his father, and the solution was to go back to his father. If repentance is nothing but reforming behavior, it is not true repentance. Repentance is not turning from a sin to something else. Repentance is turning from sin to God. It is a return to the Father you turned your back on.

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<sup>2</sup> That entire chapter is all about how God rejoices when a sinner repents. Jesus told three stories about the happiness of God over repentance. The first one compared it to the happiness of a shepherd over finding a lost sheep. That story ends this way: Luke 15:7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. The second story compares it to the happiness of a woman who finds a lost coin. Luke 15:10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And then the third story is a long story about a prodigal son who leaves his father and then repents, and the father celebrates. The story of the Prodigal Son is a story Jesus made up to illustrate repentance, so it is a perfect picture of what Jesus regarded as the most important components of repentance. And it is especially helpful because Jesus actually describes the thought process of the sinner as he repents.

According to 2 Corinthians 7:10 there are two different kinds of sorrow over sin.

**2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.**

There is a kind of sorrow over sin that pushes you toward God – makes you run to Him – and there is a kind of sorrow over sin that makes you retreat from Him.

So when you reprove the person do not just try to make them feel bad. Make them feel the kind of sorrow that makes them want to return to God. And the way to do that is to remind him that the catastrophic consequences of sin are so horrible because of the removal of God's favorable presence. And the only solution is to return to the Father because of His goodness and kindness and love and wisdom and the delightfulness that comes from the nearness of His presence.

**Benediction: 2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

## Summary

Unconditional forgiveness comes from the worldly belief that forgiveness comes from us and that our goodness is the basis for forgiveness. It comes from a weak view of sin. The basis for forgiveness is nothing less than the cross. It is our job to repair broken saints, the first step of which is bringing them to repentance, which is done with these eight steps.

## Q&A

- 1) Will these principles work for bringing unbelievers to repentance?
- 2) Won't the warnings of judgment risk turning the person off?
- 3) If you try this and the person becomes angry, at which point do you give up?
- 4) Why do some passages call us to forgive without mentioning repentance and other passages require repentance?
- 5) What if it is impossible for you to confess to the person you sinned against?