

## Seeking Forgiveness from Others

Adapted from *The First Responder Healing Manual* by Chris & Rahnella Adsit<sup>1</sup>

The 9<sup>th</sup> Week in Firstline focuses on receiving God's forgiveness, and forgiving those who have hurt us. But what about those we have hurt? How do we go about seeking *their* forgiveness? That's the subject of this article.

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Hal was surprised when he was introduced to his new partner – Gail. Although he wasn't worried about being partnered with a woman, he knew his wife wouldn't be too thrilled with it. But what could he do?

The first few weeks were strictly professional, but as the weeks turned into months and they ran out of shop-talk topics, conversations gradually drifted towards more personal areas: family, hobbies, childhood memories, future dreams. Hal was careful not to get intimate in their discussions.

**THE ACCIDENT.** That all changed one rainy afternoon. A family – father, mother, and three kids all under the age of seven – had been T-boned by a semi. None survived the impact. The resulting carnage shook Hal to the core, haunting his dreams and his daytime thoughts. He couldn't talk to his wife about it – how could he expose her to the horrific details of body parts and the innocent, lifeless, open eyes he'd encountered? His wife was a young mother herself. No, he'd just have to man up, stuff it, and move on. But try as he might, the images, sounds, and smells just wouldn't go away.

About three weeks later, Hal and Gail had taken a Code 7 for a quick bite to eat. Out of nowhere, she started to tear up. Initially alarmed by her distress, he inquired and quickly found it had to do with what had happened three weeks prior. The memories were eating her alive. Slipping out of the restaurant and back into their patrol unit, Gail's emotions poured out. She couldn't shake off the sadness, the images that relentlessly plagued her, the increased anxiety she now felt for her own children. It all spilled out amongst the tears and crying.

Before he realized it, Hal was pouring out his own raw emotions, identifying with the same struggles Gail had been wrestling with. He had never been so vulnerable with another person before – not even his wife.

**UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES.** That was the beginning. As time went on and more difficult incidents were encountered, they knew they weren't alone. There was someone there who truly understood; someone they each could talk to, laugh with, even cry with. And as the emotional barriers fell, so did the physical ones. A comforting arm around the shoulder, a brief, reassuring hug, the covert grabbing of one another's hand after experiencing something particularly disturbing. Before either of them knew it or intended it they shared the ultimate comfort and oneness found in sharing a bed.

It didn't take long for Hal's feelings of guilt to knock him for a loop. He didn't love Gail, he loved his wife and kids. But he had blown it badly. With Gail's agreement, they cut off the affair and requested different partners. But it wasn't enough for Hal. The emotional hurricane in his heart was worse than anything generated by the accident. His wife was sensing it. Hal knew he needed God's forgiveness, but also his wife's. Was that even possible?<sup>2</sup>



When we sin against someone, our relationship with that person suffers harm – directly proportional to the severity of the sin. Hal’s betrayal of his wife pretty much buries the needle, and we don’t mean to suggest that a simple request for, and granting of, forgiveness will cure *that* wound. It will take time, work, grace, mercy and the intervention of God Himself. But in addition, we also do great harm to *ourselves*. Both wounds require intentionally seeking the forgiveness of the one wounded.

For some people, the idea of admitting a wrong to another person and asking for their forgiveness would produce more anxiety than going on foot patrol through the roughest part of town in your underwear with no weapon. But Jesus makes the point that this issue is so important that you should even put worshipping God on hold until you settle things:

*This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.* – **Matthew 5:23,24 (MSG)**

**Here are six steps you can take to help you in the process of seeking forgiveness from another.**

### **1. ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU WHO YOU HAVE HURT.**

Consider praying the prayer that David prayed:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*  
– **Psalms 139:23,24 (NLT)**

If you’re filled with the Holy Spirit, and if there *is* someone you’ve hurt, God will bring it to your mind pretty quickly. Be open to whatever He has to say to you.

### **2. ASK GOD TO FORGIVE YOU FOR THE PAIN YOU INFLICTED**

This is like a “double sin.” You’ve sinned against the person, but also against God for breaking one of His laws. Go through the process of confession and repentance regarding this incident. Get right with God first.

### **3. PRAY FOR THE ONE YOU’VE HURT**

If you’ve wounded someone either physically or emotionally, how do you think they feel toward you? You’re probably not their favorite person on earth. So, spend some time praying for that person, asking God to heal the wound that you caused. Ask Him to perform a miracle: that the hard feelings your wounded acquaintance probably holds toward you would be mitigated by God’s supernatural love. Ask God to make a way for you to meet with him or her with a minimum of misunderstanding and vitriol. And ask God to make him or her receptive to your request for forgiveness.

### **4. TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND GO TO THE ONE YOU’VE HURT**

Here comes that walk through the rough part of town in your underwear! But God will give you the courage to do it. He’ll be right by your side in this, because He will be *very* pleased about what you’re

doing. It'll probably start with a phone call or an email. Let them know you want to talk to them about something, and try to get an appointment with them. If you can't get face-to-face, you'll have to deal with it over the phone, but talking in person is the best way to go. They will probably know from the tone of your voice what it's about and that you feel bad about it.

## 5. IN HUMILITY, RECOUNT TO THE PERSON WHAT YOU DID AND ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

You could say something along these lines: "Joe, remember that time that ... Well, I've thought a lot about what happened since then, and I want to tell you that I'm sorry for what I did. I was wrong. Do you think you could forgive me?"

Don't try to put yourself in a better light, or try to explain or defend your actions. "I want you to know that the reason I said those things was because of what you said to me first." No. Now you're taking the spotlight off *your* responsibility and pointing out theirs. That's between them and God, and you don't need to do God's job for Him. Just take responsibility for what *you* did. Go to them totally unarmed.

And don't say, "If what I did offended you, I'm sorry." No "ifs" about it. You did. God said so, and so did the damaged relationship. To say "if" is to say, "My actions may or may not have been wrong and offensive." That's no confession. You already know they were offensive.

## 6. WORK ON REBUILDING TRUST WITH THAT PERSON

They may or may not say they forgive you at that time. In either case, you can't expect your relationship to go immediately back to how it was before. You broke trust with that person. It's going to take some time to re-establish it. And it's going to take some initiative on your part to demonstrate that you meant what you said, and that you've changed. Ask God to give you some creative ideas about how to do that.



## REALISTIC AND UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

**CAN THEY FORGET?** Deep hurts can rarely be wiped out of one's memory. In all likelihood, the person you wounded will always remember the wound – but they *can* look past it. Your hope is for their forgiveness, not their forgetting.

**CAN THEY FORGIVE?** They may not even be willing to forgive you at this point. Maybe later. But this is something you have no control over. As Nazi concentration camp survivor Simon Wiesenthal wrote, "Forgetting is something that time alone can take care of, but forgiveness is an act of volition, and only the sufferer is qualified to make the decision."<sup>3</sup> But if you obey God and take care of *your* obligation in this matter, it releases you from any further condemnation. You've done the right thing.

Realize that it might take the offended person a while to really forgive you from their heart. In fact, they may have to forgive you at deeper and deeper levels over a long period. Give them time, and in the interim, continue to work at rebuilding trust. Don't let yourself resent the person as they slowly process your wound and confession. "Why can't they just get over this? I said I was sorry!" Healing takes time. The deeper the wound, the longer the convalescence. Whenever you start to feel impatient, just remember: You put that wound there.

**CAN WE BE RECONCILED?** You may have done your best to mend fences between you and the one you hurt, and they may have forgiven you the best they could. But that doesn't mean that the two of you are going to be best pals from now on. You can only control what happens on your side of the ledger. Keep reaching out to them in love, keep praying for them and perhaps the Lord will do a miracle.

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<sup>1</sup> Adsit, Chris & Rahnella, *The First Responder Healing Manual* (Eugene, OR: Branches of Valor, 2015). pp 85-88.

<sup>2</sup> Fictitious story from Chaplain Bret Truax based on actual events. Brett is a 55 year old pastor who has served throughout the Midwest and who currently serves in Salem, Oregon. He also is a nine-year volunteer law enforcement chaplain with various agencies in Michigan and Colorado.

<sup>3</sup> Quote by Simon Wiesenthal, survivor of Nazi concentration camp in Lemberg, Poland, from his book *The Sunflower*. Quoted by Os Guinness in *Unspeakable* (HarperCollins, 2005), page 172.