

# *My Miracle of Forgiveness*

*- Faithful and Just  
to Forgive*



## **Introduction:**

I was excited to attend Patricia's Bible Study; but I never could have guessed what I was in for. I never realized how much God's Word has to say about the topic of forgiveness! The Bible study was to encompass six weeks as the women met one evening a week for a couple hours. We actually took seven weeks, but that was because of my participation – as you will see if you read on. While Patricia was the leader, the other women took turns hosting the meeting in their homes.

I was nervous about going – never having done anything like that. I was also uneasy because my church background was so different from theirs. But as it turned out one of the women, Connie, shared my background. She had also been born and raised LDS. She had left the church some 10 years earlier when she was in her mid-thirties. She was a big help because she could help explain my questions in words the others would understand and she foresaw when I was likely to get confused because their definitions of words were different from the definitions used in the LDS church.

Right from the start I was presented with concepts new to me. But the ladies were eager to take my questions. And between meetings my friend Patricia was always available to talk. Our walks around the block had taken on a whole new flavor!

As I record my thoughts concerning the **Faithful and Just to Forgive** Bible study I've adopted the same headings. The four major sections of this Bible study are titled:

**How Serious Is Sin? (Why Do We Need Forgiveness?)**

**What Is Forgiveness?**

**How Are We Forgiven?**

**What Happens When We Believe We Are Fully Forgiven?**

This will make it easier to follow along with the Bible Study. The Bible Study spanned six weeks. I've written about each week's lesson in a separate installment. Use the menu on the right to access each article in turn or click the link below to proceed directly to the first installment. Each article provides a link to download that week's Bible study lesson which will provide you with pertinent Bible passages.

## **Lesson One: How Serious Is Sin? (Why Do We Need Forgiveness?)**

The first meeting was by far the hardest. Not only was I nervous, but the topic was difficult to sit still through. I had only recently discovered I was forgiven for the sin I had committed so long ago. This knowledge freed me from my dark prison cell. But even though I had wrestled with guilt for over twenty years I had no idea just how guilty I actually was and just how desperate a need I had for unconditional, unqualified, unlimited and undeserved forgiveness.

I guess it is precisely because I was so focused on that one 'big' sin that I failed to see my many other sins, or to understand the seriousness of each one. As we went through this first part of the Bible study I came to see my sins differently. This change was not pleasant. In fact it was frankly intimidating.

I learned that all sin is rebellion against God and breaks the greatest commandment: **To love God with all your heart, mind and soul.** It wasn't just my 'big' sin that made me unfit to come into Heavenly Father's presence. When I was resentful of what God had brought into my life, when I talked bad about people behind their backs, when I failed to stick up for someone --- whenever I failed to be perfect I proved myself unfit. I learned that just one 'little' sin brought the same punishment and the same condemnation as all the 'big' ones put together.

As a Mormon I had been conditioned to worry only about the sins that stood out. I focused mostly on the ones that could be 'abandoned'. As I now read Heavenly Father's words concerning the breadth and depth of sin I realize I had always looked at my sin in a relative and not an absolute way. Jesus' command to **Be Perfect** had become merely to **Be Valiant**; to do all I could do. Even though Jesus held Heavenly Father up as our standard, I and my fellow Mormons strove for something far less. As long as I wasn't more sinful than my peers I had to be pretty good, right? Wrong. Terribly wrong. This caused me to fail to see the real danger I was in, to see how very, very far I was from Heavenly Father's ideal. I never even considered how few of my sins could actually be abandoned. I needed forgiveness much more than I had ever recognized.

It was strange listening to these women talk about their sins. They focused on 'little' persistent sins instead of the 'big' sins I would have expected. For one it was coveting the physical possessions of her neighbors and relatives, for another it was being intolerant of her husband and children, another talked about avoiding her housework by watching TV and talking on the phone. Gossiping, overeating, resentment, bitterness, envy, deceit, lust were all mentioned.

At first I thought maybe they had never committed any truly grievous sin. So, I tentatively asked. I was surprised to hear most **had** committed serious sins. One who used to be a drug addict explained that since these sins were past and she was assured of their forgiveness they were no longer a source of pain. As she put it "If God has forgotten and forgiven them; why should I dwell on them? That would seem to be the ultimate 'looking the gift horse in the mouth'! It would be questioning whether God had truly forgiven me." Another woman added "It is the sins of the present and future that grieve me. I live in a state of sinfulness and yet God has forgiven every sin. But since I know how much my forgiveness cost Jesus, I also live in a state of both continual repentance for my sins and continual gratefulness for my forgiveness. While I hate the fact that I can't abandon sin; when I confess my sins I am filled with love for God because I don't deserve to be forgiven for even one of them."

As the discussion continued it was as if a veil was being lifted from a mirror. I used to see myself in that mirror as a valiant church member flawed only by one major transgression. I had thought “*If I could only remove that one blemish I would be well on my way.*” But this Bible class caused me to see the sewer of sin that runs through me. My image of myself had become truly hideous. Yet the amazing thing is: my recognition of how sinful I am does not cause me to despair! This is because I now know each and every sin has already been forgiven. Looking again in the mirror armed with this knowledge I see what my Heavenly Father sent his Son to secure; a radiant and sinless child of God. I left the meeting eager for the next week’s lesson and astonished that I had gained such comfort and strength from recognizing the extent and seriousness of my sin!

## **Lesson Two: What Is Forgiveness?**

At the end of the first week’s study Patricia introduced the topic of the second week’s lesson: “**What is Forgiveness?**”. Initially it struck me as a trivial question. Forgiveness is just that – forgiveness. As I considered the question during the week I came to the realization that all through the years I was seeking forgiveness I had never really stopped to consider what exactly forgiveness is; that is, what changes when a person is forgiven. I had always been more focused on what I had to do to work the process of repentance in order to be forgiven.

As I attempted to answer the question for myself I thought of what Patricia had asked me during our walk: “What would unlock your dark prison cell? What would take away your guilt and pain?” I had answered: “A pardon. To have my sin erased.” In my dream my sin was represented by a stain. I pictured forgiveness as the removal of that stain. I found myself looking forward to the next Bible study and the insights I would obtain.

At the Bible study I was surprised by the variety of illustrations Heavenly Father has used to portray forgiveness. His imagery highlighted the profound way in which forgiveness changes a person. One such image is God separating the person from the sin; casting the sin irretrievably away – forgetting the sin forever. This aspect of forgiveness is reinforced by the illustrations of a scapegoat (upon whom all the sins of the people had been laid) being led out into the desert, of casting the sin to the bottom of the ocean, and of separating the sin and the sinner “*as far as the east from the west*”.

The next image of forgiveness we covered in the lesson was Heavenly Father not counting (‘imputing’) sins against a person. I said “If a sin is not counted against you; it is like it never happened”. To which Patricia replied “Exactly the point Rachel! Forgiveness results in the forgiven being just as if they had never sinned! Forgiveness fixes one’s guilty status before God. Forgiveness reconciles one’s relationship with our Father in Heaven.”

Next came a particularly powerful portrayal of forgiveness: Christ’s freely sacrificed blood washing away one’s sin leaving him/her radiant, cleansed, **without sin**. Then was the picture I had offered to Patricia; being pardoned.

As we explored these wonderful illustrations of forgiveness a question arose in me. I was amazed to recognize the question had always been in my periphery; yet I had never been able to put it into words --- before now. I offered the question up for discussion. “I’ve always been taught that if a person has been forgiven of a sin and then repeats the sin that God will in effect cancel His forgiveness. How could the LDS prophets make such a claim if God has forgotten the sin? Isn’t the whole point of a pardon that the transgression can never be held against the person again?” As I looked at my new friends they all wore confused expressions as if I had just spoken Greek; all of them but one. Connie, the former LDS member, was smiling warmly. She answered my question by saying:

“The concept of revoking forgiveness is uniquely LDS. Your question is one I had as well. As we go through the rest of today’s lesson I believe what you learn about the essence of forgiveness will demonstrate how erroneous that proposition is. The error the LDS prophets make is in selling short the dramatic changes forgiveness produces in a person, changes which only can only occur **if all sin is removed!** This in turn results in the faulty premise that forgiveness is a ‘one-sin-at-a-time’ proposition.” She was right. In the next section we learned what forgiveness results in; how it changes a person in God’s eyes. Forgiveness results in being reconciled to God – being made fit to come into God’s presence, being considered holy, unblamable, unproveable – in a word, perfect. The image of being washed radiantly clean by the blood of the Christ returned to my mind. As a Mormon I had been taught to think of forgiveness as being washed clean. I was also taught we are forgiven sin-by-sin. Now I wondered how I never saw the obvious contradiction between those two concepts. How could we be washed clean when in effect only a little mud is removed by each forgiven sin and the vast majority of the mud remains!

As I considered each of the all-inclusive results dramatically pictured by Heavenly Father’s illustrations of forgiveness; I could see what Connie was getting at. Whenever forgiveness was discussed in LDS surroundings it was focused on individual sins. The Process of Repentance was intended to gain forgiveness one sin at a time. No one I ever knew or heard of had ever claimed that **all** of his/her sins were forgiven. We had been given the picture of a ladder; forever climbing rung by rung as we gained forgiveness for each of our sins and fulfilled each requirement until the Last Judgment when Heavenly Father would decide if each person had done all that he or she could have done. Yet to be washed clean, to be reconciled to God, to be blameless – to be able to come into Heavenly Father’s presence meant **all** sin had to be forgiven. This was a very new proposition for me so I tested it with the group by sharing the LDS illustration of a ladder of progression.

One of the women responded by saying “All a person needs to do is look at the verb tenses in the passages we’ve just studied. They are all past tense: ‘Washed us from our sins’, ‘hath reconciled’, ‘having forgiven you all trespasses’, etc. There is nothing partway about forgiveness. There is no ladder. There is no process. There is no progression. Forgiveness is not given for one sin and at the same time withheld for others. Forgiveness is all or nothing!”

The import of these words resounded in my heart as well as my mind! “*Forgiveness is all or nothing!*” I realized then that as a Mormon I had stood on the “*Nothing*” side of the fence! I had never been cleansed, I had never been reconciled to Heavenly Father, I had not been guiltless, unblameable! What good was a pardon for a single offence when you remained imprisoned for a myriad of other unpardoned offences? As a Mormon most of my sins were still counted against me and so I was **not** forgiven!

Patricia took this as her cue to bring our attention to the last section of the day’s Bible study – which was titled: “**Forgiveness is ‘all or nothing’**”. And there I saw the beautiful symmetry of it all. Forgiveness was **all** sins forgiven at **one** time because the payment for sin was made through **one** act that covered **all** sins. There was the key to understanding forgiveness – the Christ’s one act of redemption, His act of atonement.

I was just beginning to grasp that forgiveness was so much more than I had ever imagined; that it transformed a person much more profoundly than I could ever have guessed. I was eager to continue our study but it had gotten quite late. Over the next week I looked up the passages we had studied and read them in context. It was exciting to think of myself as having been reconciled to Heavenly Father; of being washed clean so that I could come into His presence – no longer questioning my own worth, whether I had really “*done all I could do*”. I found my prayers had changed from asking

Heavenly Father for forgiveness to thanking Him for forgiving me. Consequently my focus in life changed from what I had to do to gain forgiveness to what could I do to show Jesus how grateful I was for being forgiven.

### **A Phone Call from Connie**

The morning before the next Bible Study class I got a phone call from Connie. She said “Rachel, I wanted to talk to you about the meeting tonight. You know when Patricia learned you were going to be coming to this Forgiveness Bible Study she asked me to come. She said I would likely make you more comfortable having also been LDS. She also said I could serve as a bridge for you. She felt that since I had taken this class a couple of times in the past and had also been LDS I could recognize when the traditional Christian definitions of words might be conflicting with the LDS definitions and might cause confusion. She also thought I could help by giving her a ‘heads-up’ when a topic was to be presented that could be particularly hard for you to grasp because of LDS teachings.”

I wasn’t sure what to think. Was this collusion? No, I knew better than that. Connie had already helped several times in just the ways she mentioned. To think that Patricia would have taken such preparation to ensure I would be comfortable and to take my needs into account... And Connie was making a big commitment of her time to attend classes she would not otherwise have attended. I told Connie “Thank you for taking your time and using it to help me. You have been a great help. But I don’t know that you should have to give up so much time just for me.”

She replied; “Oh don’t get me wrong. There isn’t anywhere else I’d rather be! Along with my faith Heavenly Father gave me a special desire to reach out to “my people”; the LDS. In fact the reason I called is to prepare you for tonight’s Bible Study. I don’t want you to become overwhelmed by what we will be covering.”

I was surprised by this and asked why she thought I might be uncomfortable. She replied “This lesson will force you to confront how wide the great divide is between the Bible’s teachings concerning forgiveness and what the LDS church teaches. You may end up feeling like you are at a crossroads being forced to forever abandon LDS teaching. My prayer is that you are ready for it. And I want to assure you that no one is deliberately trying to make you feel exposed. It is just that Christian and LDS beliefs are so different.”

I must admit Connie made me feel some trepidation concerning the evening’s class; but at the same time she heightened my curiosity. I said “But I’ve always been told that Mormons and Christians believe basically the same. Mormons just add their works to their faith.”

“That is what I had always been taught too. But you will see tonight that Christianity and Mormonism are fundamentally opposed. The one denies the possibility of the other. Now I don’t want to steal any of Patricia’s thunder so I will let you go. I just wanted to ensure you are forewarned that tonight may be a difficult class.” Then she was gone. I wasn’t sure what to think! But as I thought about my forgiveness, being reconciled to Heavenly Father and having been washed perfectly clean I think I saw what Connie was concerned about. I had come to place my faith in these things but I had not yet dealt with the question of why I had to go outside of the LDS church to find them. I did not want to think about that question. I don’t think I really wanted to be confronted with the answers! But I wasn’t going to let my uneasiness stop me from finding out more about how I can be forgiven when I do not deserve it.

## Lesson Three: How Are We Forgiven?

### --- Forgiveness does not depend on you (Day One)

I arrived at the meeting quite reserved. Connie's phone call had worked. I was at least partially prepared to confront my crossroads.

The first section of the lesson was titled "Forgiveness cannot be earned". This heading gave me some clue as to why Connie had forewarned me. The words of Spencer Kimball resounded in my head "*difficult extended effort*" "*The plaster must be as wide as the sore.*" "*Restitution insofar as it is possible.*" "*He must restore that which he damaged.*" "*It depends upon you whether or not you are forgiven, and when.*"

Patricia opened by asking: "Have any of you had a debt forgiven?" One woman, Gloria, replied by telling the story of how her grandparents had helped her through college by lending her the money she needed for tuition. After she had graduated, they had setup a repayment schedule. But before she had made even one payment they had called to say they had decided to forgive the entire debt.

Another lady, Naomi, said her husband had a similar experience; but his uncle only forgave the debt after her husband had used his new degree to build a web-based store for his uncle's business. She finished by saying "My husband has always been grateful for his uncle's help in paying for college. He says his work was fair payment for the loan."

Before Patricia could jump back in another woman protested "But Naomi, your husband repaid his uncle's loan by the work he performed. His uncle didn't 'forgive' the debt. If he had 'forgiven' the loan your husband would not have been required to cover the debt by using his work as restitution."

Patricia was delighted that her conclusion was so clearly illustrated. She said "A debt that is paid, for which restitution is made cannot be said to have been 'forgiven'. It is merely repaid. If we paid the price of restitution for our sin we would cancel the debt but it could not be called forgiveness. By definition for something to be 'forgiven' it has to be an outstanding debt. The debtor cannot have already made restitution for it!"

I felt Connie's concerned gaze on me. I knew why she was looking my way. LDS 'forgiveness' **was** based upon restitution. "*The plaster must be as wide as the sore.*"

Patricia had continued with the Bible Study. She was saying "Don't confuse forgiveness with restitution. Suppose a person commits a crime and is sentenced to a just punishment. Upon completion of that sentence whether it consisted of fines, community service or jail time; the person is said to have paid his debt to society. This is the picture of restitution not forgiveness. In order to illustrate forgiveness the person would have to have been pardoned, his sentence of punishment taken away – without him serving that sentence!"

The hairs were standing up on the back of my neck! My ears were burning. I found I couldn't look at any of the women, least of all Connie who understood and had predicted my distress. I found myself questioning my own understanding of Mormonism. I struggled to defend it. I thought "We aren't really taught we must 'earn' forgiveness. It is really more that we must prove that we are worthy of it. After all who could actually make complete restitution of a sin? But as my defense was forming into words Patricia was already unknowingly shooting it down.

She said "No one is worthy of forgiveness" and quoted Jesus' response to the arrogant rich young ruler: "*none is good, save one, that is, God.*" I reflected slowly "*No one is worthy ...*" And there I was at the crossroads! Tears started to fall down my cheeks. Connie noticed and gently moved to my side and put an arm around me.

She whispered in my ear “Don’t be ashamed. You are among friends, friends you will have through eternity in heaven.” Addressing the group she explained my distress: “One word stands out more than any other in Mormonism. That word is ‘worthy’. In Christianity a different word stands out, ‘mercy’, God’s undeserved love. A foundational principle in Mormonism is “All God’s blessings are predicated upon obedience to his laws and ordinances. In a word you must be **worthy** to receive God’s favors.”

Gloria stammered, “But no one is worthy!”

My defense never had a chance. As I thought of what I had already learned about sin I remembered Jesus commanded **“Be Perfect!”** not **“Be Valiant”**. Mormonism had created the mirage of worthiness by reducing God’s requirement from perfection to “*all you can do*” Yet every time we disobey God or fail to do as he has commanded we prove we are unworthy! As I wrestled with these disparities my eyes focused on the next heading on the Bible Study sheet.

As I read the words I spoke them out loud “Keeping God’s commands is only doing what is expected. It can’t make restitution for breaking His commands. It can’t make you worthy to be forgiven.” I looked up slowly and turned towards each woman in turn. My pain had to be obvious on my face because compassion was reflected on each of theirs.

When I looked back at Patricia she smiled warmly at me and said “Well, I think we should break from the lesson for tonight. We can cover the rest next week. Feel free to take the study sheets home with you if you would like to study ahead. But for now I think we should have that rhubarb crisp Gloria made.”

I was grateful for the reprieve. I had a lot to think about. I had been so excited about what Heavenly Father’s Scripture had revealed about forgiveness that I hadn’t been thinking about how these revelations would impact my life as a Mormon. All of a sudden my perfect life wasn’t so perfect anymore. I felt like a cat on a board in a river; floating towards a rapids not knowing which bank to jump towards. It was nice to spend the rest of our Bible Study time just visiting. But as the time came to go home I asked Connie; “You said the word worthy stood out in Mormonism, but in Christianity the word that stood out is mercy. What did you mean by that?”

“Just that: where Mormonism contends that God’s favor is predicated upon you being worthy; the Bible reveals God’s favor is predicated upon His mercy. Most Christian would say ‘grace’ to emphasize the undeserved aspect of mercy. But ‘grace’ is not a word that translates well into Mormonism which has altered its meaning. We will soon cover the topic of God’s undeserved mercy as it addresses the question How Are We Forgiven?”

As I drove home I thought about what Connie had said. I had to admit when I heard the word grace it didn’t really seem to emphasize God’s undeserved mercy. It seemed to have more to do with God helping us strive to be worthy so that He could bless us. Alone with my thoughts I admitted to myself that the conflicts between what I was learning and my life as a Mormon were just starting. I wasn’t sure what that meant but I resolved to not let it stop me from finding out more about God’s undeserved mercy.

## Lesson Three: How Are We Forgiven?

### --- Forgiveness does not depend on you (Day Two)

As we settled in the next week to complete the third installment I was much more objective about my circumstances. I had spent the last week thinking about what it meant to be “Mormon”. I realized that being Mormon had a much wider impact on my life than just beliefs. It also included my relationships with my husband, family members and LDS friends; and with inclusion into a uniquely identifiable social group. It was who I was! Being Mormon was intimately engrained in my image of myself. I also realized that I had a strong emotional attachment to the “Church” and Joseph Smith that transcended what I believed about God. I felt conflicted internally because on the one hand I had placed my faith in teachings that were not LDS and yet I did not want to stop **being** LDS. I did not know how I would ultimately address this conflict. What I did know was that I was not going to let it stop me from seeking personal revelation from Heavenly Father through his Scripture.

Patricia got our evening going by asking a series of questions intended to create a discussion among the women. First she asked “What can you do to make restitution to God for your sins?”

People came up with a number of tangible responses; like a kid that had stolen a candy bar could return to the store, apologize to the manager and pay for it. A person who had cheated on their taxes could confess to the IRS and pay the required amount plus penalties. But for the most part it seemed it would be impossible, or at the very least difficult; to make any kind of substantial restitution for most sins. How do you make restitution to someone whom you slandered? How do you make restitution for lying to someone? How do you make restitution to the needy of the world because you aren’t as charitable as God commands you?

Then someone pointed out that we weren’t really answering the question. We had been focused on making restitution to other people; but the question centered on God. “What can you do to make restitution **to God!**” We quickly realize that answer was: “You can’t”. As we had seen last week keeping his commandments is only doing what he expects. That can’t make up for past sins. There is no “extra credit” that can cover the betrayal of God, the self-centeredness, that is at the core of every sin we commit. And we commit more sins every day!

The next question addressed repairing the **real** damage caused by our sin. The real damage, we realized, was our broken relationship with God. Every sin made us unfit to come into His presence. If it was left up to us that relationship would remain broken as long as we remained in our sins. Even if we could some day stop committing more sins, that would not remove our past sins. Just because a broken pitcher isn’t broken more doesn’t make it able to hold water. Naomi pointed out, nothing **we** can do short of eternal death can remove our sins.

Likewise nothing **we** can do can remove our guilt. Even a convict who completes his sentence with the best of behavior still carries his guilty verdict for the rest of his life.

But the Bible Lesson’s final question was the most damning. “What can you do to pay the penalty – serve the sentence – ‘do the time’ you have earned for each one of your sins?” That was a price no one wanted to ever have to pay personally!

Our conclusion was: “If forgiveness depends upon what we do to qualify for it we are in serious trouble. Because there is nothing of any substance we can do to remove or pay for our sins.”

The next part of the lesson looked at the Old Testament Temple Ordinances. I seemed to be less familiar with the details of these than the other women. I was puzzled by how little they had in common with the LDS Temple ordinances.

We read from Leviticus the details behind the sacrifices made on the temple's altar that were said to remove the sins of the priest and people. I was surprised to see the lack of restitution required on the part of the people to qualify for the blessing of forgiveness bestowed by the sacrifice. These sacrifices also emphasized the importance of blood in these forgiveness ordinances. Blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar, the mercy seat (the ark of the covenant's atonement cover) and on the floor in front of the mercy seat. Two words that could not be separated in these ordinances were blood and atonement.

It was the life blood of the sacrificed animal that symbolized the atoning payment for sin. For me these ordinances dramatized the illustration of being washed clean of my sin by the blood of the Christ.

Two other concepts were exemplified by these ordinances. First the animal always had to be perfect, without blemish. Second the animal being sacrificed was a substitute for the person or persons being forgiven. The act of atonement that financed forgiveness did not come from the people being forgiven; but from a perfect substitute!

Another ordinance we examined was that of the scapegoat. All the sins of the people were ceremonially laid on the head of the scapegoat which was led deep into the desert wilderness symbolizing God separating the people from the sin he had removed from them.

After we had finished looking at these pictures of forgiveness from the Old Testament, Patricia said: "Next week you will see how these Old Testament ordinances typified the role and mission of the Messiah who was to come later. He performed the real atoning work that pays for our forgiveness. But today we are going to conclude our lesson by looking at an example of God forgiving someone. As we look at this example ask yourself the question 'Did this person do anything to earn God's forgiveness?'"

The example was King David. Using him as an example initially caused me some concern. I had always been told he was not forgiven because he had committed murder. But after what I had learned about forgiveness thus far I was willing to look at and study the Bible references with an open mind. We looked at both **2 Samuel Chapter 12** where Joseph Smith changed Nathan's statement of God's verdict from "I have forgiven you" to "I have not forgiven you". We also looked up **Psalms 32** which also says God had forgiven David. This reference had not been changed by Joseph Smith. Again I was being confronted by the stark differences between Christian beliefs and Mormon teachings. Was David forgiven or not? Was **I** forgiven or not?

I was caught up in my own thoughts as the rest of the group discussed whether King David deserved to be forgiven. They had no issue in accepting Heavenly Father's pronouncement of King David's forgiveness. But what hit me was that King David and I had both had our forgiveness denied by LDS teachings. I knew that by LDS standards I was still unclean, unforgiven of most of my sins. Yet that is not what I now believed. The Bible declares King David forgiven in multiple places; one of those places Joseph Smith changed to deny that forgiveness. I didn't like the path this train of thought was leading me down. I had never questioned Joseph Smith before. Strangely ashamed, I fled this train of thought by getting back into the group's conversation.

They had concluded that King David had declared his guilt but had not done anything to atone for his sins, nor made any restitution. Therefore he had not deserved to be forgiven. He was not worthy to be forgiven. In fact, by Jewish Law he deserved to be sentenced to death. Yet God had also rescinded that sentence when He declared David forgiven.

As we finished up Patricia provided a tantalizing glimpse of Installment Four. She said that “It will establish **the foundation of forgiveness**. If there is a ‘miraculous formula’ to forgiveness; you will see it next week!” Now that sounded intriguing!

## **Lesson Four: How Are We Forgiven?** -- Justice Paid Mercy Reigns

The words kept running through my head all week: “the foundation of forgiveness; a miraculous formula for forgiveness.” My anticipation and excitement engaged me so completely that I found it easy, for the most part, to continue avoiding the new contradiction in my life.

Except when I was alone with my husband, Matthew. Matthew knew something had fundamentally changed in my life. I could tell he was nervous but I wasn’t ready to talk to him yet.

If he only knew how foundational a change it was! But one thing I learned as a Mormon was to hide my true feelings, to put the best image forward. But it was getting harder. It was like my secret had a life and a power all its own. It didn’t like to be kept in hiding. Secretly I laughed at the irony: last month I was hiding my despair because of my unworthiness; now I was hiding my joy because of my deliverance!

Mercifully the week flew by with minimal moments of compromise.

The lesson started by returning to the pictures of the Old Testament temple ordinances. The point was that these ordinances were commanded by God. They were practiced for hundreds of years. Acts of atonement were performed over and over and over again. Why? Because God demands that sin be atoned for! As the Bible study put it: “God demands justice”.

Patricia called this the first element of the “miraculous formula” – God demands justice. I was not unfamiliar with this facet of God. The concept was reinforced in the lesson by the biblical picture of God’s throne standing on justice.

The lesson used the book of Hebrews to highlight the form justice takes when it comes to sin; namely, the shedding of blood. Again, the Old Testament temple ordinances dramatized this principle so clearly. You cannot separate blood from paying justice when it comes to sin.

The class was becoming somber. Patricia noticed and said “If that was the whole story this somber mood would never lift! But God’s demand for justice is only the first element in the equation. Heavenly Father is also a God of mercy!” She presented a series of Bible references that highlighted her assertion. I implore you to download this week’s lesson – even if you haven’t downloaded the others; and read these amazing and uplifting accounts. They may well change your life for all eternity!

In Daniel and Nehemiah were pictures of a God “*ready to pardon, gracious and merciful*” even though his chosen people had “*refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage*” They were worthy of abandonment, yet they received mercy!

John, the beloved disciple, recorded that “**God is love!**” Ephesians provides the proof: “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*” And various references, including the most famous **John 3:16**: “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*”, declare that the role and mission of the Christ, the atonement, was an act of love.

I read the words. I heard the discussion. I tasted the excitement. But I felt foreboding. Too often I had heard the words **“Heavenly Father would never let mercy cheat justice!”** I didn’t want to break the good mode but I had to speak up or I would never truly be at ease.

Patricia took my apparent “bad news” in stride. Actually now that I think of it, she may have been forewarned by Connie of this prominent LDS credo. She was absolutely beaming when she said “That is absolutely correct, Rachel!” In my mind her expression and her words were absolutely opposed! How could she be smiling?

So I asked “Then why are you smiling?”

To which she replied “Because justice has **not** been cheated!” God’s demand for justice is one element. The second element is God is a being of merciful love. And one principle is that mercy cannot cheat justice. This may seem to create a bad news formula; and it does if you rely on your own worth to qualify for forgiveness. Because we fall short of perfection the only way our imperfect worth can qualify for forgiveness is to cheat justice! But there is another element missing!”

“And what element is that?”

“You know Rachel; even if you can’t quite put it in words. Think Rachel. Don’t just listen. Think! And I’ll give you a hint: What is the lesson behind the Old Testament temple ordinances?”

I tried to think. It was strangely liberating. God demands justice... God is merciful love... Justice cannot be cheated... And the Old Testament ordinances pictured forgiveness as ----- as being paid by **the life blood of a perfect substitute!** Something clicked into place in my heart. I couldn’t stop the tears as I looked at Patricia and blurted: “Justice **has** been paid – by the life blood of the perfect Jesus, my substitute!”

Connie was actually applauding. She also had tears in her eyes. She said, “That is why I now wear this every day.” She held out a necklace with a simple silver cross ornament. “The cross is the altar upon which the lifeblood of the Perfect Lamb, my substitute, was shed to atone for my sins.”

Indeed, as we studied the next several Bible references we saw one declaration after another that Jesus Christ paid the price demanded by justice – paid the price I could never come close to paying. I found myself asking – why had I never seen it before? It wasn’t **The Atonement**; it was the **Act of Atoning!** And on the cross Jesus had declared **“It is finished!”**

Patricia explained that those words from the cross were actually one word in the Greek, ‘Tetelestai’ which was routinely used to stamp across a debt that had been ‘Paid in Full’. Then she said “So let us put it all together: Christ’s blood is the payment to Justice that allows God to freely forgive. With justice paid in full mercy can reign. There is nothing we can or are commanded to add to the Messiah’s per-fect work of atonement.” Passages from the books of Romans and Hebrews reinforced her statements.

She continued; “That brings us to the title of this Bible study **‘Faithful and Just to Forgive’**; which is taken from **1 John 1:9**. Consider: Forgiveness just for the asking. With justice paid by a substitute a faithful God forgives the unworthy, a true act of mercy. If a god withholds forgiveness after it had been paid for; demanding yet additional payment – that god is not faithful. He would be like a corrupt banker who after receiving full payment on a client’s debt from another source still tried to extort payment from that client. I promised you a miraculous formula. Here it is: **Justice Demanded + Justice Paid by an Atoning Substitute = Mercy** in the form of Forgiveness for those who are Not Worthy of it!”

A reserved woman whom I had only rarely heard speak said in a very quiet voice: “But how can we know it for certain. Might there not be other interpretations for the passages we covered?”

Patricia’s response was; “we can be certain because God has declared that our forgiveness is an accomplished fact. Look at these final passages in today’s lesson. The passages say we **have** forgiveness not **might have** or **will have**. And they say that forgiveness comes through Christ’s blood. If the job wasn’t finished God couldn’t use the past tense!”

Patricia had said this lesson would lay the foundation of forgiveness. It had. Now I not only knew in my heart that I was forgiven, but I understood in my head how I could be forgiven even though I did not deserve it. But a slimy little thought was slinking around in my head as well. I didn’t want to take it home so I gave it to Patricia: “I was just thinking. If forgiveness is bestowed freely on the unworthy, then what is to stop someone from willingly sinning as much as they want?”

“Ah” was the reply, “that is a very important question and it has what some would call a mysterious answer. That answer is the subject of our last two lessons. I guarantee that you don’t want to miss them!” She winked and that is all she had to say about it.

## A Crisis of Faith

During the next week I got the courage to talk about some of the things I had learned about forgiveness with an LDS friend. I wasn’t ready to expose myself as believing non-LDS teachings so I framed the discussion as if I had been witnessed to by a Christian. I didn’t get very far when my friend rejected my words outright by saying vehemently: “Those evangelicals! They just want an easy way out. If you don’t have to be obedient; then you won’t be. You’ll commit whatever sins you want! And you can’t trust the Bible.” I heard the echo of Bishop Smith’s accusation in her words “*You just want a shortcut to get the stain removed without doing the work!*” I also heard an echo of my own question at the end of the last Bible lesson, “*If forgiveness is bestowed freely on the unworthy, then what is to stop someone from willingly sinning as much as they want?*”

The conversation left me shook. I felt confused. My stomach felt like it was tied up in knots. I had a sense of desperation, like a cornered animal. But I know what I had read and studied in the Bible lessons. And the illustrations of the Old Testament sacrifices were so clear. But on the other hand my friend’s words also made sense. I didn’t know it then, but I was having a crisis of faith.

I didn’t know who to believe. I couldn’t turn to anyone for advice because I no longer knew if I could trust what I was told. I wanted to trust God’s Scripture and the truths it had so recently revealed to me personally; but that solace had been stolen from me. My LDS friend had said you can’t trust the Bible. That wasn’t the first time I had heard that! But I had been doing just that – trusting the Bible. I wanted to trust the Bible. I felt a great force pulling me to trust the Bible! Reading the Bible seemed like I was listening to my Master’s voice. Or was that just the voice of my own selfishness?

It was like being on a carousel. My heart started racing. My bishop, my Relief Society teacher, my LDS friend, Patricia, the Bible study group and, strangely, the Bible all passed by in front of me. It didn’t know who or what to trust.

That thought took control. “Who can I trust?” Slowly my heartbeat lowered as I recognized I knew the answer to that question! I knew I could trust Heavenly Father so I went to him in prayer.

“Heavenly Father, I am in distress. I do not know where to turn, who to trust. Are you speaking to me through the Bible when it says your Son paid the full price of my sin freeing you to offer me full forgiveness even though I don’t deserve it? Or are you speaking to me through my friend when she says if forgiveness is free; people will just freely sin? Please help me know the truth!”

I don't know if I ever heard God talk directly to me before. In my dream Jesus talked to me; but this was different. I wasn't asleep and this was Heavenly Father. I don't know if it was actually His voice but I did 'hear' a thought in the form of a still, quiet voice. It said: "Rachel, do **you** want to freely sin?"

"I looked in my heart for the answer but I already knew what it was. It was an uncompromising and impassioned "No!" What my friend had said make perfect logical sense; but it somehow did not apply to me! I believed I was freely forgiven but I did not want to go out and sin freely. My faith in God's free forgiveness reasserted itself stronger than ever! The carousel ride came to a grinding halt. I said a silent thank you to Heavenly Father for answering my prayer and went about my week anticipating the next two Bible lessons. I even smiled inwardly a tiny bit as I thought I had discovered something of the 'mysterious answer' Patricia had in store for us.

## **Lesson Five: What Happens When We Believe We Are Fully Forgiven?**

### **--- Believe it and Receive it**

Believe it and Receive it. That was the first heading under the evening's segment of the Bible Study. The words were so simple and yet so powerful. We studied one passage after another each boldly proclaiming forgiveness based on simple faith. The only condition placed on receiving forgiveness was recorded as: "*whosoever believeth in him*", "*if we believe on him*", "*believeth on him*", "*by the faith of Jesus Christ*".

I believed it. I received it. But didn't Jesus pay "*for the sins of the world*"? I asked "So what about those who don't believe it? Didn't Jesus pay for their sins too?"

"Yes he did" Patricia replied. "But people can reject his gift of forgiveness. And when they reject His gift it does not benefit them. The story is told of a young teenager who committed a particularly grievous sin. At first she tried to hide from what she had done. But she knew that her parents would eventually find out and when they did it would crush them. So she emptied her college fund and left home. As time passed she exhausted her funds and ended up on the streets. It was not a pleasant place to be but the girl could not go home until she had made some kind of restitution.

"One day she happened to picked up a copy of the newspaper and as she scanned the personals there was a letter to her from her parents. It read simply "Alicia please come home. All is forgiven. We love you unconditionally! Mom and Dad.

"You see, when her parents found out the truth they were terribly hurt. But they also loved their daughter. Almost immediately they forgave their daughter but she had not stuck around long enough to find out. But now she knew. It was proclaimed to her in bold print! She was forgiven. She could go home. But..." And Patricia stopped talking.

One of the women blurted into the now still room "But... what?"

"But...," continued Patricia, "the girl could not bring herself to believe her parents would freely forgive her. And it somehow didn't feel right that they should. After hesitating a moment she crumpled the paper and threw it in the trash. She chose to reject her parent's forgiveness. She did not go home. By not believing in her parent's forgiveness she failed to receive it!"

As I thought about the young girl I recognized my story was not much different. Up until recently I had rejected the idea of freely offered and undeserved forgiveness. My disbelief resulted in my not benefiting from the forgiveness Jesus had earned for me so very long ago.

The group spontaneously joined together to say an informal prayer of thanksgiving for the faith which kept them from rejecting God's gift.

Patricia used our spontaneous prayer as an introduction to the next section. She said: “We are thankful because we recognize the true value of our forgiveness.”

It was true. As we worked through the section we reacquainted ourselves with our abject need for forgiveness due to the magnitude, seriousness and frequency of our sins. We reviewed the high cost paid as atonement by our substitute. At the heart was an innate knowledge that we are not and could never be deserving of full forgiveness. Yet unlike the girl in the story this knowledge did not cause us to reject God’s gift. Instead we recognized that we don’t have to hide or deny our sins.

At this point Patricia announced, “And that brings us to the ‘mystery’ to which I alluded last week.”

I was so engulfed in the Bible study that I had almost forgotten my crisis of faith. Now with Patricia’s reference to the ‘mystery’; it came flooding back to me. I blurted out without thinking “I don’t want to freely sin!” Then I turned a deep shade of red as the other women tried to suppress their giggles.

“Oh I couldn’t have planned that any better, Rachel! Thank you for your exuberant testimony. But what brings you to make your declaration so emphatically?”

And so I told the class of my crisis of faith and of the comfort I gained from my knowledge that I did not want to live a sinful life even though I believed I did not have to earn forgiveness. When I had finished Patricia asked; “Would your friend label your belief in free forgiveness ‘foolishness?’”

I replied, “Certainly. She considers it foolishness because she thinks that if people believe forgiveness is free they will freely sin.”

Then Patricia addressed the group “How do people who believe they have been forgiven because they have earned it appraise themselves?”

My flush started to return as I thought of how I use to feel proud of myself when I believed I had done enough to gain forgiveness for some sin. Now I knew my efforts came pitifully short of the price I owed justice and belittled the immeasurable sacrifice made by Jesus. But before I could voice my recollection Connie had started to speak.

“When I was Mormon I used to put a lot of stock in myself. I was born into a prominent LDS family which meant, I was told, that I had been particularly valiant in the pre-existence. And as I lived the life of a young LDS woman I believed I was doing well in my progression. Whenever I caught myself sinning I would do all I could to earn forgiveness. If I couldn’t make direct restitution I would do extra volunteer work at the church, or help church members. When I had done what I had thought was enough and had not repeated the sin I declared myself ‘forgiven’. All in all I ended up thinking pretty highly of myself. Of course I gave Heavenly Father and Jesus their due credit. After all if Jesus hadn’t fulfilled His mission and gained me the resurrection my efforts were meaningless. But in the end it was I who met the conditions of my forgiveness. I felt justified in sharing in the credit.”

I could easily see the incredulous look on many of the women’s faces. How different this must seem to them. But I could certainly relate to Connie. I may have never developed that high of an opinion of myself; but I knew the self-gratifying feeling that came when I believed I had earned God’s forgiveness for a sin. And I knew the sinking feeling that I could never do enough to earn it for a different sin.

Patricia had us read the next Bible reference in the lesson, **1 Corinthians 2:25-29**. This section explained the wisdom behind God’s “foolishness”. God chose the weak, base, despised things of the world to confound the wise, mighty and noble. He did this “*That no flesh should glory in his presence.*”

Patricia explained: “In the case of forgiveness His ‘foolishness’ is that we are freely forgiven when we do not deserve it. As Rachel’s friend said ‘wise’ men consider this foolish because there would be

nothing to prevent people from freely sinning. But this ‘foolishness’ is actually ‘wisdom’ because it results in us not giving ourselves the credit, the glory, for what His Son has done. Instead we give God all the glory and we are truly thankful for what we could never qualify for ourselves. This results in us placing our hope for eternal life solely in the accomplished act of atonement instead of in whether we can be worthy enough to receive it.” Patricia paused to let what she had said sink in and take root.

I wondered why I never saw the wisdom Patricia described before. That is, before I believed I was fully forgiven even though I was undeserving. But as I thought about it I realized that in order to see God’s wisdom a person needed to first experience it. If a person didn’t believe she was freely forgiven when she didn’t deserve it the premise would just be so much ‘foolishness’.

Then Patricia concluded: “And in the end our knowledge that our forgiveness is undeserved unlocks our hearts! This is the mystery, that our faith in God’s underserved forgiveness unlocks our hearts and turns us towards him. Exploring how we are changed when our hearts are unlocked is the focus of next week’s final lesson; **‘Faith in Our Full Forgiveness Unlocks Our Hearts’.**”

I had to admit; that did sound like a mystery. After a lifetime of teachings like “*all blessings are predicated upon obedience*” and “*if it weren’t for the hope of forgiveness no one would make the effort*” and “*if forgiveness were free people would just freely sin*” it was indeed mysterious ‘wisdom’. But I had already recognized that mystery working inside me!

## **Lesson Six: What Happens When We Believe We Are Fully Forgiven?**

### **--- Faith in our full forgiveness unlocks our hearts**

My life **had** become a mystery. My attitude towards life had changed. My attitude towards myself had changed. But more than anything my attitude towards Heavenly Father and Jesus had changed. And people had started to notice.

No one at church actually said anything to me directly but there was a difference in the way they treated me. It seemed like they put more distance between us. Matthew was still waiting for me to approach him. I resolved “As soon as the Bible Study is over”. That thought filled me with both dread and excitement.

My teenage daughter, usually too caught up in her own life to notice any change in the family, said “Mom, you sure have been in a good mood lately!” Even the young man behind the deli counter at Albertson’s said “You know, you’ve become one of my happiest customers!”

I did feel happy. But more than that; I felt secure. For the first time in my life I wasn’t riding turbulent waves of my own making — waves created by my dependency on Heavenly Father’s blessings through my questionable worth — waves that rose and fell in harmony with my confidence in my ability to meet the demands of my faith. Instead I stood on solid ground. I stood on the knowledge that what had to be done to pay justice had already **been** done.

I was excited to hear what God had to say about my transformation. I was eager to study His Scripture with the rest of the women. I decided I would ask Patricia to help me acquire the study tools she used so that I could start my own personal studies.

Finally the evening of our class came. I could not believe this would be the last class. But of course I knew the Bible study group was still going to be meeting. I had already been invited. I think they said the next series was going to be on trusting God in times of turmoil. But I had been so focused, so consumed by the topic of forgiveness I hadn’t looked past this series of lessons. And I realized I hadn’t looked further down the road because I had some difficult choices to make.

But my thoughts did not diminish my excitement concerning tonight's topic: the mystery of an unlocked heart!

Patricia began the lesson by announcing: "If a person loves God he will act on it, in fact, God guarantees it! Saving faith has an irresistible bond first to love, then to obedience."

We studied the story of the sinful woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears of joy in the home of the Pharisee Simon. Jesus used the event to try to teach the self righteous Simon a profound principle: If a person is forgiven much; that person will respond by loving much. But, if a person does not think he has been forgiven much (or in the case of this Pharisee didn't think he **needed** to be forgiven much) he will not love much. Jesus declared that simply through her faith the woman was forgiven of her many sins. He pointed to the loving and thankful actions of the woman that resulted as a living testament to the 'loveth much' part of His message. He pointed to Simon's lack of hospitality as a living testament to the 'loveth little' part of His message.

Gloria added "Isn't that the point James was making in his second chapter when he said faith without works is dead?"

"Exactly" Patricia replied. "Jesus is saying that if anyone believes that they have been forgiven of all their sins then they can't help but be grateful. Imagine if a mother had a child stuck in a mine shaft. No one can get to the child without causing the hole to collapse and burying the child. But one man risks his own life by finding another way into the mine, rescues the child and brings her back to her mother. That mother could not help but be grateful. Now suppose the man rescued the child but it also cost him his own life. How much love would the mother hold for the child's rescuer?"

Naomi added her own story: "My husband, Jim, was trying to explain it to a Mormon friend and co-worker. His friend had had the same response to Jim's message of free forgiveness as Rachel's friend; 'If forgiveness is free then people will just freely sin.' Jim knew his friend was married to the girl of his dreams so he said: 'Next week you're going to that conference in Miami, right?' His friend said 'Yes'. And Jim said 'I hear there are a lot of gorgeous call girls in Miami, you could have a wild time and your wife would never know.' His friend wasn't too happy and snapped 'I could never do that! I love my wife.' To which Jim replied; 'That is exactly my point. I love my Lord for His gift of full forgiveness. I could never just sin freely.'"

As I listened to her story I was amazed how bold Naomi's husband had been. The other man must have been a good friend. But then I realized his friend had been just as bold to imply someone who truly loved God would just freely sin! It kind of made me mad at my own friend who had said the same thing to me!

Then the reserved lady spoke up. "Patricia, you said God **guarantees** it."

To which Patricia replied "Yes I did. Look at our next Bible passage." And there were the words; spoken by Jesus and recorded by John the Beloved: "*If a man love me, he will keep my words.*" The passage was not unfamiliar to me. But it had always been drilled into me as a command. If I loved God I had to prove it by being obedient. Now I could see that isn't what it meant at all. I could see it because **I** was a living example of it – like the woman in the Pharisee's house. I did not want to sin freely. I wanted to show Heavenly Father and Jesus how much I loved them!

Patricia concluded this section by saying "Saving Faith is believing that Jesus, the Son of God, atoned for all your sins leaving you with no sin debt. This 'saves' you because it makes you right with God; you are able to come into His presence because you have been washed clean of all of your sins. Love for God is the **unavoidable** consequence of embracing God's act of love. Your own acts of love

naturally follow. Only someone who claims to have saving faith but is in reality a hypocrite could ever lead a life of freely sinning.”

As we continued with the evening’s lesson we studied passages that provided details on the profound changes and the acts of love that naturally flow from saving faith. I encourage you to read the passages from the Bible Study download as I summarize.

We learned we no longer live for ourselves; that is, doing things to get something for ourselves. This was of particular impact to me for I was beginning to recognize that the works I did before I had saving faith, the works I **had** to do to qualify for God’s blessings were really self-centered. That was actually living for myself, not giving to God.

Our acts of love include being zealous of good works – works that were truly voluntary, truly acts of love, because they could not gain us anything more than what we had already received.

Naomi shared another story about someone (named Bob) she had worked with for many years. “Bob had fallen in love with a girl named Alice in another office in the building where we work. They dated and ended up getting married. Before they were married and for the next several years Bob had two dozen red roses delivered to Alice’s desk on Valentines Day. You could actually feel the joy it gave Bob to buy those roses.

“But then one year Bob didn’t order the roses. Instead he got her something else. When Bob came in the next day he was really down. Alice was very upset with him for not getting her flowers that year. She said it embarrassed her at work because all the other people in her office noticed. She made it clear that she expected flowers every Valentines Day from that point forward. Bob dutifully bought Alice those flowers every year. But you could tell it no longer gave Bob any joy. Once I asked him about it. He laughed and said that once Alice said ‘I have to’ there really isn’t any joy in it anymore.”

As the lesson continued we learned that our saving faith transforms us into a new creature. One that God works in to accomplish what he needs done. In fact we become a habitation of God, his own holy temple built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

We also learned that recognizing the immense amount of mercy God grants us compels us. It compels us to share our good news, to forgive others freely because God has freely forgiven us, to show mercy to those who do not deserve it, to be obedient to God’s will and to give Him all the honor, glory and praise. If He hadn’t first loved us and heaped His mercy on us we would not be able to return that love.

The last part of the study presented some examples from the Bible. We saw how David responded to his undeserved forgiveness by trusting in God throughout the rest of his life even though that included many hard times.

We heard the Apostle Paul’s personal testimony that he drew strength from the knowledge that he did not deserve the mercies God granted him. And that strength empowered him to labor to be God’s faithful servant

But the example that was the most dramatic was the comparison between Judas and Peter. Both had betrayed Jesus. Judas with a kiss and Peter by denying Jesus as his Lord. Both men regretted their actions. Judas threw his blood money back at the Jewish leaders and Peter wept bitterly.

But there the similarity ended. Judas did not believe God would ever forgive him and he knew he could never make restitution. So in his despair he killed himself. But Peter did not kill himself. While he was equally deeply sorry for his sin; he did not despair. He would later preach about Jesus: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by*

*his wounds you have been healed.”* Later the same day the man Peter disowned three times died on a cross. In spite of his denial of Jesus, His death benefitted Peter. Peter benefitted because he believed his Master’s death paid the price of his undeserved forgiveness. That saving faith gave him the strength to voluntarily give back a life of service to his God out of thanksgiving and motivated by love. He even boldly testified of what Jesus had accomplished on the cross to the same Jewish Sanhedrin from which he had earlier cowered.

I saw irony in the Bible Study concluding with Peter testifying before members of the Jewish church. The irony was that I found myself in a very similar position.

Peter was a Jew. Because of his unwavering testimony to his Lord’s message Peter was disowned by these members of the Jewish church. But Peter knew these leaders no longer had the truth. So Peter boldly proclaimed what they had lost. He had disowned Jesus before; he would never do it again! And it was the love of his Lord that flowed from his faith which gave him the strength.

I was a Mormon. And now I had the same choice Peter had: risk being disowned by my Mormon family or disown Jesus. My husband, children, family and friends did not have the truth. They were in need of my testimony. But by bearing it I might be disowned by any or all of them. But the choice was easy! How could I give up what God had already given me? How could I deny what he had already done for me? The love for God that flowed from my faith was too strong. And I would not be alone. Peter was accompanied into the presence of the Sanhedrin by more than John! The choice was easy but approaching my family and friends would not be. Yet an opening line was already forming in my mind: *“You don’t have to be afraid of your sins. They can’t prevent you from getting into heaven. But thinking you are worthy will!”*

### **Suggested Reading:**

To contrast this Bible-based study of the topic of forgiveness with what is taught by LDS authorities [Click Here](#). This link will take you to an article on the Latter Day Saint Woman blog titled **This Is My Gospel?** (<http://latterdaysaintwoman.wordpress.com/2008/11/16>)

To contrast the message of full and free forgiveness bought by the blood of Christ with the LDS Process of Repentance [Click Here](#). This link will take you to an article on the Latter Day Saint Woman blog titled **What Does “Repentance” Mean?** (<http://latterdaysaintwoman.wordpress.com/2009/01/12>)