

The Day I Found Forgiveness



DEAR DIARY: I had that nightmare again.

I saw myself on hands and knees in the middle of a large room vigorously scrubbing a white marble floor. I had been scrubbing a long time. My arms and knees ached horribly. I was sweating profusely. But I could not remove the huge dark stain I had made. I realized it looked like old blood. Then the scene shifted and shimmered.

Now there were hundreds of people standing around me. I could pick out people I knew from church and old friends I hadn't seen in years. I recognized past teachers, my grandparents, my sisters and brothers and my mother and father. It seemed everyone I had ever known were in the crowd pointing at me in stark disapproval and accusation. Some slowly shook their heads in dismay. They were shouting at me but I couldn't hear what they said. Time had slowed to make their words low pitched moans. I could barely turn my head towards the movement of the crowd parting.

The people on my left were forming a corridor. As they slowly moved aside I could see my children standing with horror-stricken expressions. Jeremy and Alyssa were crying. Richard was hanging his head. Their disapproval seared my conscious. Tears welled in my eyes as I saw little Sarah trying to run to me; but the others held her back. I opened my arms to them, inviting them, but they came no closer.



Movement in the opposite direction caught my attention. Another corridor formed for my husband, Matthew. Unlike the children his face was nearly expressionless. The only emotion visible was cold disdain. His stare pierced my heart. I felt, rather than heard, his bitter words "How could you?" I cried out, tried to offer a defense; but I had none to give. His accusations were well deserved. I could only watch as he slowly turned and walked away.

As he retreated, the scene dissolved; although the image of me kneeling on the ground stayed in focus. New surroundings shifted into view and I saw myself on the hard cold floor of a locked dark prison cell, crying. I awoke with a start. Matthew stirred next to me and murmured "What is it

honey? Are you alright?" For the millionth time I lied. "It's nothing. I'm okay".

DEAR DIARY: Today's Relief Society lesson was on forgiveness.

I approached the lesson with cautious optimism. Maybe I could glean some jewel that would help me in my struggle. We studied Chapter Four of President Kimball's Teachings of Presidents of the Church. The lesson emphasized President Kimball's teaching that *"hope [of forgiveness] is the great incentive to repentance; for without it no one would make the difficult extended effort required"*.

It opened with President Kimball talking to a woman who had committed some great sin. He told her *"You **can** be forgiven for this heinous sin, but it will take much sincere repentance to accomplish it."* He described the exuberance with which the woman responded to his message of hope. This same hope had driven me to make the effort to erase the wrong I committed twenty some years ago. But I know in my heart I am not yet forgiven. And my hope is waning! The rest of the lesson outlined the required *"difficult extended effort"*. It served to reinforce my sense of hopelessness.

"No unclean thing can dwell with God." I am so far from clean.

"There must be a broken heart and contrite spirit." May Heavenly Father strike me down if my heart isn't broken and my spirit isn't contrite! The tears on this page are my testimony! But my despair rises out of the teaching that my broken heart and contrite spirit are not sufficient!

"To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore." How wide is the sore of betrayal, of disobedience, of failing to follow Heavenly Father's commandments? How wide does the plaster need to be to cover a sin that hurt others so deeply, that can't be taken back? Saying "I'm sorry" does not make the scars disappear!



"Confession lifts burdens." My confession to my bishop so many years ago **had** felt like I had taken a significant step in completing the requirements for forgiveness. But to a much larger degree my visit served to drive home the enormity of the remaining requirements. However I had left that meeting resolute.

"Restitution insofar as it is possible." *"He must restore that which he damaged."* How could I restore, replace, or pay for the things I had destroyed, the trust I had betrayed, the hurt I had inflicted? I could no more do that than I could bring Alyssa's dead hamster back to life!

"The Lord will not forgive us unless all our hearts are fully purged of all hate, bitterness and accusation against our fellowman." *"He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven."* I try and I fail. I try again, only to fail again no nearer to my hope of forgiveness. I fear one day I will give up trying. President Kimball's words hammer at my resolve *"It depends upon you whether or not you are forgiven, and when. It could be weeks, it could*

be years, it could be centuries before that happy day when you have the assurance that the Lord has forgiven you.” Today that day seems farther away than ever!

DEAR DIARY: I visited Bishop Smith today.

It seems a lifetime ago when I first confessed to my bishop. I had left that meeting encouraged; feeling I could earn my forgiveness. I knew it would be hard; but it would be worth the effort to erase my transgression and remove my shame. Like the woman in President Kimball’s story I would “*wash my filthy garments in the blood of the Lamb and obtain that forgiveness*”. But after all these years my shame remains. If anything it is even greater because of my failure to gain the assurance that the Lord has forgiven me. I had been in my cell so long I was losing hope. But the Relief Society lesson had steeled my resolve to redouble my efforts. I started by visiting my current bishop, Bishop Smith. I knew Heavenly Father has given bishops the divine power to read a person’s heart. I thought such intuition would help me in my quest.

As I drove to my appointment with Bishop Smith it felt as though the door to my cell opened a smidgen. I started by telling him about my reoccurring nightmare. I broke into tears as I told of my desire to remove my shame. For the second time I confessed my sin to a bishop. I told him how sorry I was, how I wished there was some way I could reverse the damage I had caused. I opened my heart to this man for him to read. Then I was silent.

It seemed an eternity before he spoke. Then he said “You say you are sincerely sorry; that you have ‘*a broken heart and contrite spirit*’. But it is clear to me that the greatest desire of your heart is to have your shame removed, to have your guilt taken away rather than to follow the path of repentance. It seems you just want a shortcut to get the stain removed without doing the work! If you were sincerely contrite; you would not despair. Instead you would be like the woman President Kimball described in your Relief Society lesson. You would be ‘*bright of eye, light of step and full of hope*’. You would be willing, even eager, to take up your well-deserved burden. The reason you are struggling with repentance is that you are not truly repentant!” Bishop Smith’s divinely revealed verdict felt like Heavenly Father had slammed and re-barred my prison door.

DEAR DIARY: Bishop Smith could not spiritually discern my heart.

Last night I went to bed in defeat. But this morning a tiny shaft of light has penetrated my dark cell. Had Bishop Smith really read my heart? Was I truly just looking for a shortcut to remove my shame? Was it true that I was not sincerely sorry for my transgression? I have spent the night searching my heart and I can’t agree with his verdict. But how could Bishop Smith have failed to discern my heart? Implications swirled around me engulfing me in a thick cloud of doubt!

My wastebasket is full of used tissues. I must have shed a gallon of tears. I’ve gone over it again and again. And I have finally reached a conclusion. I would willingly give up my home, my family, even my life if I could reverse my sinful action. I **am** sincerely sorry. My heart **is** truly contrite and my spirit **is** truly broken. Bishop Smith was wrong! He **failed** to read my heart. This realization sent tremors through my prison. Cracks formed in the walls of my cell!

DEAR DIARY: Patricia said I am already forgiven!

Patricia and I took a walk after seeing our school kids off at the bus stop. I had Sarah in my stroller and she had her son in hers. We often take such walks but we've never talked about our different beliefs before. Patricia is not LDS. I guess I was grasping at straws. Or maybe I just wanted to get an outsider's opinion on what Bishop Smith had said. Anyways, I told Patricia about my nightmare and my feeling of being locked in a dark cell. I talked about the Relief Society lesson and about the words of my bishop. To do that I had to admit I was struggling with forgiveness but I didn't tell her what I had done so many years ago. And I hoped she wouldn't ask. I exposed myself by revealing that my heart's desire was to have my sin erased. After opening my heart to Bishop Smith, I now opened it to this casual acquaintance. After Bishop Smith's denial I needed someone to see the sincerity of my sorrow.



She didn't ask what I had done. She did listen thoughtfully as I uncharacteristically poured out my soul. When I had finished she said "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To which I replied "If only that was all there was to gaining forgiveness."

Patricia looked at me sharply and replied "Rachel, I was not offering you a personal opinion. I was proclaiming Heavenly Father's truth as revealed through His Prophets and Apostles! Those were not my words, but God's words spoken by and written through Jesus' beloved disciple John in **1 John 1:9**. Your sin, all of your sins, are **already** forgiven!"

I could only stare at her blankly. Then she asked why I felt like I was locked in a dark prison cell. I said "Guilt for my sin, isolation because my shame separates me from my loved ones and from my God, despair because I've failed to remove my guilt though doing all that is required to gain forgiveness. The isolation puts me in the cell. The guilt makes it dark. The despair locks the door."



Once again Patricia's reply stunned me: "Rachel, I'm sure you remember the story of the time Jesus preached in His hometown and His neighbors tried to kill Him. But I'll bet you don't remember what He preached." I nodded that I didn't and she continued: "He had just revealed himself as The Christ, the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that one would come to '*proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*'. As Isaiah had put it He came to preach the good news that would bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, release the prisoners from the darkness and open the eyes that are blind! Because **The Christ** fulfilled His Mission **we** now live in the year of the LORD's favor. Jesus has thrown open the door to your prison cell throwing away the lock. He has brought you into the light of his mercy and removed your guilt. He stands ready to welcome you into His loving arms and into His eternal family."

I could only utter two words “But how?” But my friend turned my question back on me. She asked “What would unlock your dark prison cell? What would take away your guilt and pain?” I looked at her and spoke my deepest desire: “A pardon. To have my sin erased.”

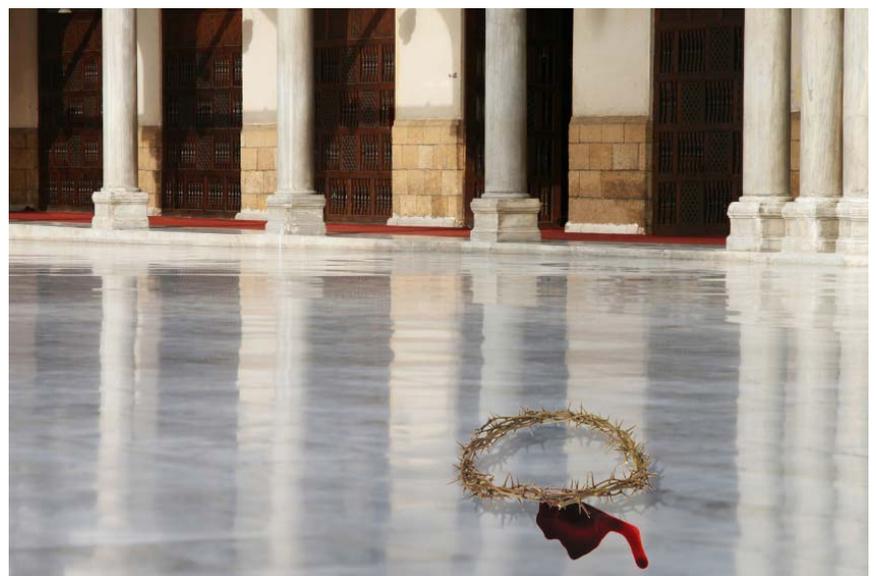
“Exactly” she replied. “The year of the Lord’s favor means that all debts are pardoned – without payment! All lands sold years ago were returned to their original owners – without payment! All Jewish slaves were set free – without payment! All of these symbolize forgiveness of our debts, our **sin** debts. We live in the year of the Lord’s favor and that means **full and free forgiveness** of all of our sins! Heavenly Father puts it this way: *‘To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.’* Believe It and Receive It! Forgiveness **is** a pardon, erasing the sin, forgetting the sin. One prophet said God casts all of our sins into the depth of the sea. Another wrote that God no longer remembers our sins. Another uses the picture that God has put our sins behind Him. And yet another wrote in the Psalms: *‘As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.’* These are not conditional prophesies. All God’s **true** prophets and apostles proclaim the same message as the book of Hebrews: *‘Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.’* Christ paid for the sins of the world.”

Patricia continued: “Even your LDS prophets and apostles declare Christ paid for the sins of the world. But then they hold hostage what Christ has gained for you. They hold it at ransom to compel your obedience because they believe Spenser Kimball’s premise that, *‘hope [of forgiveness] is the great incentive to repentance; for without it no one would make the difficult extended effort required.’* But these are the words of those who do not know of the transformation that occurs in a person when he or she trusts in the promises of Heavenly Father. Such people, like me, are compelled to obey God because of their love for what he has already done for them, already given them – and by the knowledge of the great price Jesus paid to earn it.”

We had made our way around the block, twice! I had a lot to reflect on. Patricia took a pad of paper out of her purse and wrote the reference of several of the passages she had referred to and handed it to me. She also invited me to a women’s Bible study she attended at a friend’s house. She said interestingly enough they were studying the words of the Apostle John she had quoted earlier; in particular that God was *“faithful and just to forgive us our sins”*. I told her I would let her know tomorrow.

DEAR DIARY: I had another dream.

I was on my knees scrubbing the stain on a white marble floor that looked like old, dried blood. But no ... not old, dried blood ... it was fresh, wet blood. As I looked at it fresh drops were adding themselves to the growing puddle. I looked up and I saw the blood was dripping from a man standing before me. He was wearing a crown of thorns and



blood was running down His forehead and dripping onto the floor. He reached out to me and pulled me up off my knees. He said “My dear sweet daughter, don’t you know I have already washed that floor?” As I looked down I saw He was right. His blood had made the floor spotless, radiantly white! I could see my reflection in it. I saw I wore an equally radiant white robe. Amazed I looked back at the man with the crown of thorns. He had His arms opened wide welcoming me. There were old scars in His palms. As I stepped into His embrace He said “Rachel, I have been waiting for you for so long. It pained me to see you struggle to do the work I had already accomplished so long ago. I felt your pain, your shame, your guilt; all so unnecessary.”

Both of us had tears running down our faces. As I looked into His eyes I noticed His crown of thorns had been replaced with a crown of glory. “My Lord and Savior” I cried. Slowly I became aware we were no longer alone. Countless others were there; all dressed in radiantly white robes. All were welcoming me into their family. As I turned around I saw Patricia standing next to a man I instinctively knew was the Apostle John. He was quoting the Prophet Isaiah: “*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*” Then he looked at me and said “Rachel, long ago the Holy Spirit inspired me to write words of Scripture. My sister, Patricia, spoke these words to you. And behold, they have not returned empty! Praise our Lord that they have taken root in your heart. Welcome Rachel; you are a new creature!”

As I looked at Patricia I saw she also had tears running down her cheeks. As we embraced I felt an overwhelming desire to share the Good News she had shared with me. I walked out of my dream in search of my family and slept more deeply than I can ever remember.

DEAR DIARY: What Patricia told me is true!



I’ve read and reread the scriptures referenced by Patricia and I know that I am forgiven! I believe it and I have received it! For the first time in years I can look at myself in the mirror without despair. My whole outlook has changed. I am no longer focused on what ***I must do***; but rather on what ***Jesus Christ has already done***. I am at a loss to describe the change I feel. I am so ... uplifted! I feel energized, eager to serve my Savior! But not obedience compelled by the requirement to gain something for myself. Rather simply for the joy of giving back to my God who had already given me so much more than I deserve or could ever gain for myself. I am eager to serve my Savior out of love and thankfulness! To Him be all glory, honor and praise.

My dream is still fresh in my mind. My first decision is to learn more and to find ways of sharing my Good News with my husband Matthew and my children. I’ve let Patricia know I want to go with her to the women’s Bible study.

I invite you to read more of my amazing journey by reading about my experiences with the women's Bible study. They are contained in the article "**Faithful and Just to Forgive – My Miracle of Forgiveness**". You can read it or download it by [Clicking Here](#) or by putting the following address in your browser: <http://HisHealingNow.com/Articles/MiracleOfForgiveness.html>

Suggested Reading:

To read more about how to gain forgiveness [Click Here](#). This link will take you to an article on the Latter Day Saint Woman blog titled **Forgiveness through Works?** (<http://latterdaysaintwoman.wordpress.com/2008/10/19>)

To read more about what Heavenly Father has to say about forgiveness [Click Here](#). This link will take you to an article on the Latter Day Saint Woman blog titled **God Doesn't Lie–You Have Been Forgiven!!!** (<http://latterdaysaintwoman.wordpress.com/2009/03/12>)

Patricia's List of Bible References:

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Luke 4:18-19: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, ¹⁹To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Isaiah 61:1-2a: The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD

Isaiah 42:7: To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Micah 7:18-19: Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. ¹⁹He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Isaiah 38:17: Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

Jeremiah 31:34: And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Psalms 103:12: As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Acts 10:43: To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Hebrews 10:10-18: By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. ¹¹And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: ¹²But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; ¹³From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. ¹⁴For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. ¹⁵*Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, ¹⁶This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; ¹⁷And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. ¹⁸Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin.

Isaiah 55:11: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.