

RUNNING TO WIN

INTRODUCTION

Becoming more like Jesus requires...

LIFE

Corn plants grow but pictures of corn don't. You received spiritual life from God when you repented of your sins and received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

THE BIBLE

The Bible supplies spiritual food. "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2).

TIME

A zucchini plant matures and bears fruit in 45 days. You can influence others for Christ right now, but Christian maturity requires at least two years. One mark of spiritual maturity is the ability to apply God's Word wisely to life's daily decisions. Spiritual growth is a life-long pursuit.

EFFORT

Without discipline, you won't grow. The Apostle Paul said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

SACRIFICE

You can't afford to dedicate yourself to achieving some earthly goal. Mowing your disabled neighbor's grass impresses God more than making newspaper headlines, multi-millions, or winning medals and trophies. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

GOD

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6). God is at work in your life to make you grow and bear spiritual fruit.

PEOPLE

God will use more mature believers to teach you so you can then teach others. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

If you open the door of your life to Jesus (Revelation 3:20), he promises to come into your life. He doesn't say he might or he'll think about it. He says he will. You can trust his promise because he is the truth (John 14:6) and truth comes through him (John 1:17). If Jesus is in your life, you have eternal life (1 John 5:11-12) right now (John 5:24). Eternal life is more than living forever. It's Jesus' life transplanted into you, a different kind of life altogether. When Jesus loves, he's just being himself. His life in you gives you the ability to be like him.

Put your trust in the facts (God's character and promises) and not in whether you feel like Christ is in your life. Imagine that your car's engine represents the facts, the gasoline is your faith, and the trunk, your feelings. Putting faith in your feelings is like putting gasoline in the trunk. It won't take you anywhere. Your feelings change, but God's character and promises don't. Faith believes God's promises and ACTS on them.

Faith is the foundation for knowing that Jesus is living within you because without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Your faith is in God's character and promises and not in faith itself. God's dependability in fulfilling his promises makes all the difference. Great faith that river skim ice will hold your weight doesn't prevent you from breaking through it. God's promises are like thirty-inch-thick ice that supports even those with weak faith who are bold enough to step out on it.

God wants you to KNOW you have eternal life (1 John 5:13). That KNOWING begins by simply taking God at his word. With time you'll increasingly detect in yourself these vital signs of new birth from God:

- 1) The Holy Spirit's presence (1 John 4:13).
- 2) Unwavering belief that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1) evidenced by trusting his death, burial, and resurrection instead of your own goodness to make you 100% acceptable to God.
- 3) Obedience to God's commands (1 John 2:3).
- 4) Love for other believers (1 John 3:14).
- 5) Doing what's right (1 John 3:10).

As you grow spiritually, expect to see “fingerprints” of God’s nature in your life. You’ll be more interested in the Bible, forgive others easier, pray more, be unburdened from the weight of guilt, enjoy being with other believers, have a greater desire to help others, want others to know Jesus too, love others more, talk “cleaner,” and have a new ability to resist sin.

If you aren’t sure that Jesus is in your life, but would like to be, you must **repent** (Be willing to turn from self-centered living to God) and **believe** that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, died on Calvary’s cross in your place, was buried, and rose again the third day.

Believing in Jesus means receiving him. Ask him to forgive your sins and come into your life to be your Savior and Lord. The following is a prayer you could use:

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross in my place and taking my sin, death, and judgment upon yourself. I open the door of my life to you. I want you to come into my life and take control. Thank you for forgiving my sins, and making me a child of God. Make me like you. Amen.

DAILY TIME WITH GOD

David prayed every morning (Psalm 5:3) and sought God’s face (Psalm 27:8). What does it mean to seek God’s face? Psalm 27:9 describes its opposite as hiding your face or turning away in anger from, rejecting or forsaking God.

Seek God as earnestly as you would cold water in 115-degree desert heat (Psalm 63:1). Seek him with all your heart and soul, and you’ll find him (Deuteronomy 4:29) and he’ll bless you (Psalm 119:2).

Daily time with God prepares you to bear spiritual fruit. To bear fruit a grape branch must remain attached to the vine. To be spiritually fruitful, you must maintain vital contact with Jesus (John 15:5). Set aside time daily for prayer and Bible reading when you are most alert in a place where you can meet with God without interruption (Mark 1:35).

WHAT TO DO

1. Read your daily Scripture portion starting with the New Testament. A study Bible such as *The Life Application Bible* will help you understand the background of the passage, its meaning, and how to apply it.
2. Write the date, what Scripture you read and a one or two sentence personal application.
3. Pray about all that concerns you (Philippians 4:6-7).

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

David rejoiced that he could go to the Lord's house (Psalm 122:1). Not everyone does. Many excuse their absence from church because of all the hypocrites who go. Hypocrites are people who only pretend they're following God. Jesus attended synagogue regularly despite the hypocrites there (Matthew 23:2-3, 13; Luke 4:16).

One of the purposes of church attendance is fellowship with other believers. Fellowship means sharing together. The first 3,000 Christians baptized into the church dedicated themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper), and prayer (Acts 2:42). Now that you're a believer, you share life and ministry with other believers, the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

The church is a living organism created by God—the body of which Christ is head. According to 1 Corinthians 12:17-21, you need the other members of the church and they need you. Having a ministry in the church isn't optional. An index finger can't function properly apart from its place in the hand. The hand can't function properly without the index finger. The church is your home where you can use your spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-5) to serve others (John 13:14-16).

God's will is for you to assemble regularly with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). When you remove a log from the fire, its flame quickly goes out. The same thing happens to you if you isolate yourself from other believers. You meet together with other believers to spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).

The world will know you are Jesus' disciple by the love you show his other followers (John 13:34-35). You can't love other believers if you isolate yourself from them.

Attending church is one way to show your allegiance to Jesus to others who don't yet believe in Him (Matthew 10:32). When a deaf man was asked why he attended church, he said, "I want people to know whose side I'm on!"

In worship and Sunday school, pastors and teachers will explain and help you apply God's Word to your life to build your spiritual muscles (1 Peter 2:2). This will prepare you to serve God (Ephesians 4:12).

Worshipping Jesus will bring you joy. In God's presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). You will encounter Jesus' special presence when you worship together with other believers (Matthew 18:20).

Football is a team sport. You can't play it alone. Neither can you be an obedient Christian without being a contributing church member.

Christianity is a team faith!

JESUS CHRIST IS YOUR NEW LEADER

At His birth, Jesus is described as Savior, Christ and Lord (Luke 2:11). He is the Word, and the Word is God (John 1:1). The Word became flesh (John 1:14). Since Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, he is both God and man.

When Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, saw the crucifixion-wounds, he called Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Let's consider qualities that Jesus shares with God. He claimed he could forgive sins, which no one but God can do (Mark 2:7-11). In Psalm 23:1, the Lord is the shepherd. In John 10:11, Jesus is the shepherd. The clear conclusion is that Jesus is the Lord. The Jews understood that Jesus made himself equal with God and they tried to kill him for it (John 5:18). Likewise, at another time, they tried to stone him to death because they understood that he claimed to be God (John 10:30, 33).

Do you know anyone who never did anything wrong? Neither do I! Contrary to our experience, John and Peter followed Jesus for three years, yet couldn't point out a single moral failure or sin in his life (1 John 3:5, 1 Peter 2:22).

Jesus came to show us God the Father. He's God's "Show and Tell." Knowing Him means knowing the Father (John 8:19). Believing in Him means believing in the Father (John 12:44). Honoring Him means honoring the Father (John 5:23). Hating Him means hating the Father (John 15:23). Seeing Him means seeing the Father (John 14:9). Welcoming Him means welcoming the Father (Mark 9:37).

Colossians 1:15-18 describes Jesus as the image of God. He's God's reflection in the mirror of humanity. He perfectly reveals what God is like. He is the firstborn (first in rank) over all creation because he made it to do his will and give him glory. He is the head of the church (the collection of all believers past, present, and future). He is its Leader and source of its life. He has first place in everything (Colossians 1:18).

Someday every knee will bow before Jesus in worship and confess that he is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Calling Jesus Lord now implies that you will do what he says (Luke 6:46).

Jesus Christ is more than a great teacher. He's fully God and fully man. You owe him complete obedience. He is your ultimate boss with authority over every area of your life.

OBEDIENCE

God made salmon to swim freely in sparkling rivers and vast oceans. In the mouth of a grizzly bear, however, they're absolutely helpless. You're like a salmon, God's kingdom like water, and sin like the bear. God designed you for the sea of his kingdom, not the jaws of sin. The choice is yours. Without obedience, there's no joy, freedom or peace in life! God has chosen you for obedience to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2). The righteous are described as obedient children (1 Peter 1:14). That means you can't live however you want. You serve either sin or obedience (Romans 6:16).

KEEP IT SIMPLE

A relationship with God isn't complicated. You don't have to dig a hole 1000-feet deep with a teaspoon or climb a ladder 49 miles into the sky to stay on his good side. You need to know what he has said, believe it, and do it. Don't bother exploring other options.

RULE #1

Rule #1 is *God's will takes priority over your own and everyone else's*. Don't rationalize or make excuses. Your situation isn't special. When tempted to make excuses, refer back to rule #1!

PRIORITY #1

Obedience to God is more important than any other claim on your life. An elderly woman attends Penn State's football game with Michigan. Every seat in Beaver Stadium is filled except the one beside her. Someone asks her whose seat it is. She says that she and her late husband have been season ticket holders for 35 years, and the seat belonged to him. She is asked why she didn't ask a friend or relative to come with her. She says, "Are you kidding! They're all at the funeral." You need that kind of commitment to God. The result of such obedience is eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

OBEDIENCE DEMONSTRATES FAITH

Obeying Jesus' commands demonstrates that you love him (John 14:21, 15:14) and know him (1 John 2:3).

OBEDIENCE PAYS DIVIDENDS

When you do what Jesus commands, you remain in his love and experience his joy (John 15:10-11). God rewards your obedience by giving you what you ask for (1 John 3:22), prolonging your

life and making you prosperous (Proverbs 3:1-2), granting peace and righteousness (Isaiah 48:18), blessing you (Luke 11:28), and giving his love and presence (John 14:23), eternal life (1 John 2:17), a spiritual crop (Luke 8:15), and stability and safety (Matthew 7:24-27).

PUT YOUR HEART INTO IT

Outward conformity to God's commands isn't enough (Matthew 22:37). The obedience that makes God smile is wholehearted (Ephesians 6:7) and motivated by love for and gratitude to him (2 Corinthians 5:15).

READING THE BIBLE

IGNORANCE ISNT BLISS

Knowing the truth sets you free (John 8:32). Sin is a prison cell. You're a slave to the things that control you. Many think God's ways are too restricting and prefer their "freedom." They aren't willing to exchange their cigarettes, alcohol, sexually immoral lifestyles, etc. for God's ways. Studying and applying the Bible to your life cuts away the bars of sin. It will take years to realize how much they've limited you. Jesus came that you might experience life to the full (John 10:10).

READ OR BLEED

Ignore God's Word and you're a possum in Satan's headlights. Bump-bump. Road-kill for sure! Make no mistake about it— he wants you to be the most ineffective Christian in North America. He's like a roaring lion (powerful), on one hand (1 Peter 5:8), and an angel of light (subtle) on the other (2 Corinthians 11:14). To defeat him you must spend time reading, studying and applying God's Word. Begin with at least ten minutes each day and gradually increase. Set a goal of reading through the New Testament within the next twelve months. Then spend the following twelve months completing the Old Testament.

A GUIDE DOG FOR THE BLIND

A blind man trusts his guide dog's eyes and judgment. Living the Christian life is similar. You must learn to see life through God's eyes and trust his judgment. Proverbs 3:5 commands you not to trust your own understanding but in all your ways to acknowledge God who will then direct you. Consistently reading and applying God's Word trains you to see life from his point of view.

Lies are the devil's weapons of mass destruction. He has no truth in him and is the father of lies (John 8:44). He camouflages untruths as half-truths and even 90% truths to inject more poison than a pure lie could. Daily you swallow them like pills ground up and mixed with

applesauce. They go down so easily. Few of them are obvious. Understanding and acting on God's Word frustrates Satan's destructive plans.

LIQUID TRUTH

Truth used to correspond to reality. Now we're told it's relative. Supposedly, it no longer applies to all people at all times and places. Like milk, it takes the shape of its container. Some think everyone's truth is as unique as his/her fingerprints.

THE GOD-STANDARD

Abe Lincoln once asked someone how many legs a dog has if one calls its tail a leg. After the man answered incorrectly, Abe told him it has four legs. He said, "Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it one." Many have departed from the reality-standard, but God hasn't and he's the Judge! For now they can play word games and twist "truth" into whatever shape is convenient. They can ignore or redefine reality as they like, but they can't escape it or the consequences of their actions. Calling black, white, and wrong, right, doesn't make it so. On judgment day all will have to explain every careless word (Matthew 12:36). Everything hidden will be uncovered before God's eyes to whom all must give account (Hebrews 4:13). No one will tell *him* that truth is relative!

PROGRAMMING 101

Your brain is like a computer with defective software. Even right out of the box, it didn't work as it was designed to. No one naturally imitates Jesus very well. His life alone was unaffected by the "sin bug" (1 Peter 2:22). When you repented and received Jesus into your life, God inserted a spiritual drive into your "computer." That's the new birth. Your spiritual drive enables you to "read" God's truth. Your mind needs to be renewed so you can see the world as God does (Romans 12:2). How does that happen? According to 1 Peter 2:2, you are to crave pure spiritual milk (God's Word). Let a hunger for God's word be your defining passion.

Renewing your mind isn't automatic or easy. It takes time and effort to think, feel, and act more like Jesus. A lot of both! God's part is to work in you to enable you to will and act according to his purposes (Philippians 2:13). Your part is to program your mind with and act upon one transforming God-truth after another after another. Jesus said that those who practice his teachings prove they're his disciples (John 8:31). It's a life-long journey.

Some translations of the Bible are easier to understand than others. *The New International Version* is written at about grade level 8.5. Simpler is better. The Bible isn't a magical book. Reading a chapter a day *won't* keep the devil away! Only Scripture you understand and apply will make you more like Jesus.

A study Bible will help you digest a lot more soul food. *The Life Application Bible*, for example, will both help you understand the Bible and apply it to your life.

A Bible dictionary and concordance deepen your study. You can purchase them in a Christian bookstore. If you have a computer, you'd be wise to buy them on CD ROM. This will help you to search more quickly and effectively. A Bible dictionary explains Bible people, places, things, books, and customs. A concordance is an index of important words found in the Bible. For example, a complete concordance lists all 250 places the term "peace" occurs (book, chapter, and verse). Your concordance should correspond to the version of the Bible you're using.

NINE PRINCIPLES TO INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

1. Let the Bible explain itself. Matthew 7:7-8 doesn't guarantee getting everything you ask from God. Other passages, such as James 4:3, describe conditions for answered prayer.
2. Consider literary forms. Jesus is the door (John 10:9), but don't expect a knob and hinges.
3. Look for only one meaning (the original intention of the author), but many applications.
4. Understanding grammar and historical background are two keys to accurate interpretation.
5. Interpret unclear passages in the light of clear ones. Ephesians 2:8-10 describe how good deeds relate to salvation better than James 2:24 does.
6. Research what words meant to the biblical authors. Two resources to help: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* by Merrill F. Unger and Williams White, Jr. and *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine.
7. Proverbs express general principles, not moral absolutes. Proverbs 3:16 promises long life to the wise, but some wise persons die young.
8. Parables teach one main point. Luke 15: 3-7 teaches that God cares about lost people.
9. Pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you.

PRAYER POINTERS

YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

During Operation Desert Storm, Iraq was overwhelmed by the Coalition Forces' ability to strike targets with surprising accuracy. Special Operations Forces had moved undetected deep behind Iraqi lines. They provided bombing coordinates with hand-held lasers pointed at targets that missiles then homed in on and destroyed. Through folded-hand, laser prayers, you can direct God's missiles against the enemy. But first you have to know the enemy.

Your struggle is against the forces of Satan (Ephesians 6:12), your sinful nature (Galatians 5:17) and the world (1 John 5:4). Your sinful nature is that part of you that loves to have its own way in everything. The world is the system of values organized against and hostile to God's values.

Satan laughs when you fight against him trusting in your own resources instead of God's. Apart from a trusting connection with Jesus Christ you can do nothing (John 15:5), but through it you can do everything he asks you to do (Philippians 4:13). You win spiritual battles through prayer.

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Prayer is talking *with* God about everything. He's your best friend. Give him a chance to speak. Many days he'll let the Bible do all his talking. Sometimes, though, he speaks directly. Often this takes the form of a persistent impression. Hearing God's voice shouldn't seem strange. You follow Jesus because you know his voice (John 10:4). Allow some quiet moments during prayer for God to speak to you in a still, small voice.

VENDING MACHINE IN THE SKY

Many people think prayer is asking God for things. Period. You put your money into the prayer machine (time spent praying), push the button (make your request) and get what you want (kerplunk!). That kind of one-dimensional prayer life doesn't develop your relationship with God! The basic ingredients of a growing, healthy relationship with another person are found in a growing relationship with God.

PRAYER TIME

Prayer's primary motivation is to become more like Jesus. The acrostic PRAYER will help you develop a balanced prayer life. PRAYER represents: **P**raise, **R**ely, **A**dmit, **Y**ield, **E**xpress thanks, and **R**equest.

PRAISE

DEFINITION

Praise is words or deeds that honor and exalt God for who he is and what he's done. Knowledge of both comes from the Bible.

BIBLICAL BASIS

You can exalt God for his glorious grace (Ephesians 1:6). Jesus is God's all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Praise is an appropriate sacrifice for those he has rescued (Hebrews 13:15). God's servants in heaven shout "Hallelujah" (Revelation 19:6) to praise him (This word means "Praise ye Jehovah" or "Praise the Lord").

EXAMPLE OF A PRAISE PRAYER

Father, I praise you for your glorious grace that rescued a sinner like me. I deserve hell, but you gave me heaven. Without grace I wouldn't know or serve you. I couldn't do your will with the right attitude for even one minute. You made a way for me to know you even when I didn't care. I praise you for your grace.

I praise you for your love for me that's new every day. I can always depend on it. I love you only because you first loved me. Your love doesn't contain even an ounce of selfishness. Lord, I praise you for your love.

RELY

DEFINITION

The Greek word translated "faith" means trust or reliance. It includes dependence upon Jesus, his teachings, and his finished work on the cross. It describes a commitment to believe God no matter what.

BIBLICAL BASIS

Prayer without faith doesn't please God (Hebrews 11:6). In Matthew 8:13 Jesus told a centurion that it would be done to him as he believed it would. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22). Of course, this verse isn't a blank check to use prayer to get things that aren't good for you. It's qualified by other verses on prayer.

EXAMPLE OF A RELY PRAYER

Father, I need a job. I trust you to supply it. You have promised that if I seek you first, the things I need will be provided. You know how my faith wavers. I've been without a job for two months. I've filled out 23 job applications, but still haven't heard any encouraging news. Lord, I believe you'll provide a job where you want me to have a ministry. Help me to persevere despite the heckling unbelief within that tells me I'm a fool to rely on you.

ADMIT

DEFINITION

You must acknowledge the sins of which you're guilty.

BIBLICAL BASIS

When you're guilty of offending God, you must confess it (Leviticus 5:5). When you wrong another person, you must confess the sin and make up for it (Numbers 5:6-7, Luke 19:8). When you confess your sins, God will forgive your sin and purify you from unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

EXAMPLE OF AN ADMIT PRAYER

Dear Lord, I'm sorry I watched that television show last night. It didn't help me become more like you. It appealed to my lust and filled my mind with pictures that I can't erase. I watched the

show even though I knew better. Please forgive me. Help me to develop a plan to keep this kind of thing from happening again.

YIELD

DEFINITION

Prayer demonstrates your dependence on God. He's God. You aren't. You surrender to him and his purposes for your life.

BIBLICAL BASIS

Effective prayer requires surrendering to God your will (Matthew 26:39), mind (Colossians 3:2), kingdom (Matthew 6:33), body (Romans 12:1), understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6), ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9), and the control of your life (Ephesians 5:18).

EXAMPLE OF A YIELD PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, I want to present all of myself to you this morning. There are parts of my life that I want to reserve for myself alone. Help me to hold these with an open hand. I ask you to think with my mind, speak with my mouth, love with my heart, walk with my feet, and bless others with my hands today. I give you the control center of my life. Thank you for controlling me with your Holy Spirit.

EXPRESS THANKS

DEFINITION

Thanksgiving means expressing gratitude to God for what he has done.

BIBLICAL BASIS

Enter God's presence with thanksgiving (Psalms 100:4). Give thanks to the Lord for his goodness (Psalms 106:1). Always thank God the Father for everything (Ephesians 5:20). Give thanks whether circumstances are favorable or not (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

EXAMPLE OF AN EXPRESS THANKS PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross in my place. Thank you for giving me this healthy body. Thank you for my house, a warm and dry refuge, as the snow is piling up outside. Thank you for the food you have provided for me and my family. Thanks for Bill who has taught me so much about you since I met him. Thanks for Pastor Paul who led me to faith in you. Thanks that you will give me everything I need to serve you today.

REQUEST

DEFINITION

Ask God to supply what you need (petition) and what others need (intercession).

BIBLICAL BASIS

In Romans 1:10, Paul asked that the way would be open for him to visit the Christians in Rome. Paul asked three times for a thorn in his flesh to be removed (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). In 1 Timothy 2:1 Paul urged Timothy that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. Christians are to keep on praying for other believers (Ephesians 6:18).

EXAMPLE OF A REQUEST PRAYER

Dear Father, give me wisdom as I shop for cars today to pick one that will provide the best value. Give me safety on the highway as I travel to and from the car dealership in Harrisburg.

Lord, I pray that you would encourage Pastor Paul, protect him from Satan's fiery darts, and fill him with wisdom and knowledge as he prepares his sermon this week.

I pray for Betty. Help her to adjust quickly to her new job and may her Christian light shine brightly there.

KEY REQUESTS

Along with your other concerns please pray regularly for:

1. The salvation of at least three acquaintances who don't know Jesus personally.
2. The purity, protection, and effectiveness of your pastor and the spiritual leaders of your church.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness means God lets go of hard feelings and any attempt to get even with you, even though you've offended him. How can a holy God who hates sin justly forgive you? The law of Moses required the shedding of blood and death of an animal substitute for forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). However, blood from the death of these animal substitutes can't permanently solve your sin problem (Hebrews 10:4).

Jesus' mission was to save you from your sins (Matthew 1:21). His death on the cross is the basis of your forgiveness and eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12, Ephesians 1:7). He took your place and paid the death penalty that your sins deserved (Romans 6:23). Redemption

means God has bought you back and made you his own. As a result of Jesus' death in your place, you've been set apart for God's purposes (Hebrews 10:10).

Your forgiveness depends on God's undeserved favor received by faith (Ephesians 2:8). This forgiveness is conditional on repentance (Luke 3:3), belief (Acts 13:38-39), and confession (1 John 1:9). Confession means calling your behavior what God does (sin) and changing it. Being a believer in Jesus doesn't mean you won't sin anymore. You will. Your sin doesn't cause you to lose your relationship with God but it does break your fellowship with him until you confess and forsake it.

Because God has forgiven you, you're under obligation to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). God won't forgive you if you don't forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Since you want God to forgive you as often as you sin, you (Matthew 18:21-22).

Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20 and God's promise in Romans 8:28 demonstrate that God uses even offenses against you to work for your good.

The parable in Matthew 18:23-35 concerns forgiveness. Your sins are represented by the man who owed 10,000 talents (30 million days' pay) to the king. The sins of those who offend you are illustrated by the man who owed 100 days' pay to a fellow servant. The sins of others against you are nothing compared to your sins against God.

When God forgave you, he made you spiritually alive with Christ (Colossians 2:13). The forgiven person is blessed (Psalm 32:1-2). This means "fully satisfied." When Jesus has forgiven you much, your natural response is to love him much (Luke 7:47).

Rasputin, the Russian monk, lived very immorally because he thought the more he sinned, the more forgiveness he'd experience. That's "stinkin thinkin"! Jesus died for you that you might live a new life for him and no longer be under sin's control (Romans 6:1-4).