

Additional Resources to Understand the Process of Asking Forgiveness--

Who do I ask forgiveness from?

The circle of confession is as wide as the circle of offense. If you lie to one person, confess to God and ask that person for forgiveness. If you lie on national TV, confess and ask forgiveness on national TV.

How do I ask for forgiveness? Scripture shows the way.

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:11-24

Note the example of the returning prodigal:

- He prepared what he would say
- He went in person--a letter or e-mail is not normally a good way to ask forgiveness
- He took full responsibility--he did not blame others
- He acknowledged both the vertical and horizontal levels--"...against heaven and before you..."
- He acknowledged that there would be consequences of his sin--"Treat me as one of your hired servants..."

What if my offense involves money or things of value?

Tell the one whom you wronged that you want to make it right. And be willing to do so! See Numbers 5:6-7 and Luke 19:1-10

What if it was a long time ago?

The fact that God is bringing it to your conscious thoughts right now is an indication that time has not made this go away. It still needs attention.

What if I can't find the person or they are now dead?

There may be the need to confess to a mature, trustworthy Christian to clear our conscience.

What if the person I sinned against is unaware of my sin? (Such as a spouse that is unaware of an act of unfaithfulness.)

Start by dealing thoroughly with your offense with a pastoral counselor. God will show what further steps need to be taken from that point.

What if the person I confess to refuses to forgive me?

You cannot make them forgive you; your responsibility is to ask. *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* Romans 12:18

If the person minimizes the offense ("You didn't do anything wrong." or "Don't worry about it."), it is right to proceed anyway. "Thank you for being gracious, but God has convicted me that what I did was wrong. Will you forgive me for what I did?"

What if my sin does not involve another person directly? (Such as lust, envy, covetousness, pornography.)

What is inside will come outside, so others are being affected or will be affected by your participation in these areas. If you were able, in your own strength, to overcome these sins, there would be no further need. But since you have been unable to, it is necessary to confess your participation in them to a trusted brother or sister in the Lord (of your same gender) or to a pastor.

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Proverbs 28:13

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16

If this does not provide the additional guidance you need, your pastors will help you move forward in the will of God. Please call or e-mail.