

SWEET REVENGE!?
Turning Hate into Healing

The Righteous Lust for Vengeance: Satisfaction at Last!

Someone has left you suffering severe emotional pain, or financial ruin, or physical disfigurement, or insomnia, or post-traumatic stress syndrome, or the loss of a loved one, or false guilt, or some other devastation. You have suffered far too much. You desperately need closure.

But that cannot happen until full justice is executed on your behalf.

Here's how to see it happen:

The Dream

A public lynching would be far too kind for the despicable creature who hurt you. Let's for a moment let our minds run wild to determine exactly what punishment would be fitting.

Start by dragging him before court. Let him face the music. Let his accusers point the finger. Let their hate erupt like vomit over his head. Make him sweat as they scream their chilling accusations. In fact, just for fun, make it three courts—one trial after another after another. That should raise his blood pressure. But it in no way settles the score.

Hire professional thugs. With the vilest language they spit on him; demeaning their human plaything, while hammering him with their fists. Here's an idea: have him blindfolded so that he waits in terror, never knowing when or from where the next sickening clout will come from. Blow upon blow smashes his face and body. Keep it up! Make him reel! More! More! Finally, he's utterly broken. He's sobbing uncontrollably, tears flooding down his bloodied face, longing for mercy. This is fun! "You're not so tough now!" you laugh. "What's the matter, big boy? Can't take a little pain? Go on—grovel at my feet! Writhe like the worm you are!" You are grinning from ear to ear.

But we need some instrument that inflicts more pain than fists. A whip? The thugs rip off his clothes and lash his naked back. Whack! He screams as the whip mercilessly tears through his skin. Blood spurts. Excellent! Whack! The whip cruelly digs in, ripping out more flesh. Now you've got him where you want him. He's cringing in pain; a sobbing, bloodied wreck. You're laughing hysterically. Whack! Scream. Whack! Scream. Flay his flesh! Whack! Whack! Whack! Don't weaken—what mercy did he have when he ruined your life? Pulverize his back! Whack! Whack! Whack! Fire up your rage. Remember the grubby way he treated you. Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! . . .

Oh, no! He's lost consciousness. Drench him with water. Shake him. Slap him around. Great! He's conscious again! Whack! Whimper. Whack! Whimper. Whack! Whack! You've run out of skin on his back. Turn him over. Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! . . . Keep it up! More! More!

Rats! You can't keep him conscious any longer. You'll have to wait a couple hours until he comes around again. That will give you more time to dream up new horrors.

At last! He's conscious again! You sneer at him in disgust. "It's pay back time, vermin!" Jerk him to his feet. "Your day of reckoning has come!" Parade him through the busy streets, with everyone knowing he's a condemned criminal. Incite the mobs to expel their venom on him, hissing and cursing and despising him like the nauseating slime that he is. He drops to the ground. Belt him until he staggers up again and stumbles on. A few more steps and he's down again. Another wonderful opportunity to swat this lowlife! Finally the thugs have to drag him.

What's something new we can try? I know! Strip him naked. Shamefully naked. Fully exposed; humiliated in front of the gawking, piercing, critical eyes of crowds of laughing, jeering women and men and children. Now we need some new instrument of torture; something that will make every second sheer hell but will keep him alive minute after never-ending minute; hour after endless hour. Make the tiniest movement—every breath—a source of torment, while he remains fully exposed, with every shred of decency stripped from him, for the sneering crowds to continue to gloat. Pin him out like a captured bug on public display, with no where to hide his shame, no rock to slither under, as the world stares wide-eyed. The crowds are teasing and slandering him, yet something is still missing. I know: the sickening stench of this vermin's offense has reached high heaven. Almighty God must be furious at what this degenerate did to you. Has injustice ever fired uncontrollable rage within you? That is but a breath relative to the terrifying tornado of divine wrath at that injustice. If a mouse is angry, you can snigger; if a grizzly bear is angry, you can fear; but if the Almighty is angry, there is no human emotion to express the chilling terror that rips through its victim. Every conceivable scale of sheer dread is exploded by this horror. Dying the most violent death a thousand times over is more preferable. The Judge of all humanity—the God who flung the flaming stars in space—storms down torrent upon torrent of his fearsome fury on this pathetic excuse for a man.

In a sense, it would be exquisite to keep this torture up forever, but earth should be rid of this contemptible beast. More significant still, you need closure so that at last you can get on with life. Otherwise, like a deadly cancer, lust for revenge would eat your insides, slowly destroying you.

So, finally, his body slumps in death.

Now grab a long, dirty blade and have your last fling. Vent your wrath on that stinking body. Gleefully tear into the corpse, ripping it open in rage. Plunge in from below the rib cage. Burrow right through to his heart. Now mutilate that lifeless organ. Yes! There's nothing left of this animal but meat and offal. He's dead! Savor that word:
D-E-A-D.

Perfect?

Sweet revenge! But wait. Although you need him dead, your ordeal has been more prolonged than his. How can this discrepancy be righted? We will soon use our dreams in a very practical way, but while fantasizing to determine the ideal, let's not limit ourselves to what seems possible. What would be perfect is if somehow he could have known since he was a little child that this horror awaited him. Let him dread it, nightmare after nightmare, day after day, year after year, all his life.

Perfect! Almost. There's just one missing element. Brutal, de-humanizing treatment is merely what this slithering snake *deserves*. This is in stark contrast to what he did to you. In no way did you deserve the shameful way he treated you. Wouldn't it be exquisite revenge if he could somehow be totally innocent—as pure as the driven snow; kinder and gentler than anyone—and yet still have forced upon him all the torment we have detailed! Now *that*, if only it were possible, would truly be justice.

The Exciting Reality

This, as gruesome and distasteful as it reads, is exactly the punishment that fits the crime against you. It is no exaggeration. God himself affirms that the offense you suffered was so gross that it deserves every bit of this torture, finally ending in agonizing death. In fact, the Judge of all humanity agrees so whole-heartedly with this assessment that it is exactly the nerve-jangling torment he took upon himself to ensure the penalty for the crime against you was paid, right down to the last drop of blood.

I've been detailing Christ's treatment at the hands of the people he loved. It is staggering how many elements of Jesus' ghastly ordeal fit perfectly what you have suffered. For instance, you have probably felt betrayed. Jesus was betrayed. Maybe people suspected you were being ill-treated and did nothing to intervene. It was the same with Jesus. Maybe you felt abandoned by God. So did Jesus.

"You make it sound so personal," says someone, with pain in her voice, "Surely Jesus died for everyone, not just to comfort me."

Your healing hinges on grasping this one point: Jesus agonized specifically for you. Were God like everyone else we have ever known, he would have limitations preventing him from focusing on you as if you and your offender were the only people in the universe. But the infinite, all-knowing Lord is altogether different. For the vaguest conception of the immensity of God's attention and devotion to you, imagine someone who has no distractions in life. He is head-over-heels in love with you, his whole world revolving around you. His only reason for living is to make you happy. God's uniqueness and the inconceivable intensity of his selfless devotion to you means that any analogy is riddled with holes. One of the many holes in the one just given is that it doesn't allow for the mind-boggling vastness of the Infinite Lord's intimate knowledge of you. He knows you not only better than anyone else does, but unfathomably deeper than you could ever know yourself. God's attention to everything about you, right down to your every molecule, is so incomprehensibly vast that it would blow the circuits of any human brain to hold

such detailed, compassionate understanding of you and of everything that touches you. You are the focus of divine love.

It is not hard to recognize that with his infinite intellect and astounding supernatural abilities, God has the ability to treat us this way. Far more difficult, is believing that we are important to God. For all our lives, the treatment we have received from other people keeps telling us that we are rather insignificant and not too lovable. We keep falling for the delusion that God must be like all the puny, self-seeking people we have ever met. “No one could love *me* like that,” are the sad words of people whose experience has been limited to human love. For you, that limitation might be about to end. You could be poised to make life’s most exciting discovery.

Jesus’ actions were targeted specifically at you. From his perspective, it couldn’t have been more personal. How personal it seems to you depends on how close you get to Jesus to understand his heart. Forget the millions: your pain sears his heart. Christ’s yearning to see you released from distress is so overwhelming that no terror, nor the most extreme pain, could deflect him from his determination to restore your honor and avenge the injustice you suffered.

“Not good enough!” complains someone.

Jesus isn’t good enough?

“Well . . . he’s too good. The person who did wrong should suffer. Jesus was innocent. He doesn’t deserve to suffer for what I suffered.”

I understand your concern. The uniqueness of both Jesus’ person and his love for you empowered him to do something that leaves us flabbergasted. In the next few paragraphs I’d like to walk you through the perplexing issues it raises.

Before doing this, however, we need to see this matter in perspective. Let us agree together that your torment has been so horrific that a whole range of seemingly impossible things would need to occur for all the wrong you have suffered to be put right. Christ’s sacrificial love for you is so staggering, and so sacred, that I can hardly bare the thought of implying it is not enough. Nevertheless, I will agree with you that if Christ did nothing but die an agonizing death for you, then as far as being adequately compensated for what you suffered, there is a sense in which you could legitimately claim to be short-changed.

To right the wrong you have suffered, the following things would have to happen:

- You would need total healing of every emotional and physical hurt the offender inflicted.
- More than an end to your current distress, you would have to be fully compensated for every speck of past distress and for all the years of unique pleasures you have lost. You would need to be so abundantly compensated that you have not the slightest regret that it ever happened. It is beyond the edge of human imagination to conceive of anything so wonderful that it could do this. But what if there really is a God who gives eternal life and is capable of infinitely more than we could dream? What if the Almighty cares for you so deeply that he

has reserved for you rewards so astounding that they make the best things in earthly life seem pathetic?

- You would need for everyone who matters to you, to fully understand how much you have suffered, and to empathize with you.
- You would need your honor to be completely restored.
- You would need for everyone to know that you did not deserve the treatment you received. You, yourself, would need assurance that what you suffered was not God's punishment, and you would need to be set free from every trace of guilt—a big issue with victims of child abuse, for example.
- You would need to know you are loved so tenderly and passionately that even when you had thought you were suffering alone, that special person who cares for you so deeply was with you in spirit, moment by moment sharing your pain.
- You would need to see justice fully executed, so that the gravity of the offense against you is fully recognized and soberly dealt with.
- Your offender would have to realize how wrong he was when he hurt you. He would have to reel in remorse over what he did and he would now have to want your well-being as fervently as he had previously wanted to harm you.
- You would need to know that what you suffered was not a meaningless act, but that as evil and as senseless as it was, it has now been fitted into a meaningful plan for your life so that much good will come out of it.

We can only examine these serious matters one at a time. I realize that while I am dealing with an aspect of one matter, you will have still other needs screaming for attention. So I beg your patience. Please try to focus on the issue at hand and know that we will get to the other matters soon. Until then, let me assure you that the Almighty's love for you is so mind-boggling that he will repeatedly do for you things that are humanly impossible. Although on earth you will take giant steps towards receiving full compensation, your time on earth is but an infinitesimal fraction of eternity; and eternity is the realm in which you will experience the ultimate compensation and restoration. For example, one feature of heaven is that we will no longer be subject to the limitations that on earth keep people from understanding your heart and what you have suffered.

We should touch on one final matter to help our perspective. It is because of his astounding love that God longs to restore you. It is not as if the things you suffered were in any way God's doing. The person hurting you was breaking God's laws and God's heart; defiantly doing the exact opposite of what God wanted. The divine dilemma is that you—the darling of God's heart—have chosen to break God's laws, like the rest of us, . We live in a world in which people hurt each other as a manifestation of their rebellion against God and his ways. But we ourselves are part of that rebellion. For God to wipe out everyone the moment they are about to rebel against him and his loving ways, he would have had to wipe out the entire human race before we were even born. To say God should tolerate some rebellion against God's loving ways (that which you are I have committed and try our hardest to excuse), but not other rebellion, would be the height of hypocrisy. We'd love to call down fire on the those who have hurt us, but we want the divine Judge to overlook the times we—by lies, cheating, stealing, or whatever—have hurt others. The Lord, no matter how much he loves us, cannot be partner to such double standards. The Holy Judge must be utterly impartial. The time is hurtling towards us when all evil will be annihilated.

Everyone who has not received Christ's holiness into their lives will be destroyed. Every second the Almighty restrains his explosive urge to destroy all evil is yet another second in which billions of the people he loves have yet another chance to come to Christ before it's too late.

So now that we have had a little overview, let's return to the matter at hand: feeling uncomfortable with the notion of Jesus being tortured in the place of the one who hurt us.

It is indeed heart-wrenching to see such cruelty poured out on the kindest person earth has seen; for humanity's most innocent to be treated like the most contemptible of criminals. And yet to lust after further vengeance is to spurn his sacrifice and pour contempt on the greatest act of love you will ever receive. Of course, Jesus deserved none of what he suffered, but for you he chose it. At any moment he could have opted out, but he endured every last dreg of the devastation and searing pain because you are so special to him. Driven by his passion for you, yearning to defend your name, he forced himself to hang on. So precious are you to him that even more unbearable than his shameful torture, was the thought of the crime against you being swept under the carpet. To him, the outrage you suffered matters enormously.

If someone deeply in love with you fully understood the extent of your pain, it would break his heart. Jesus' incomprehensible love for you means that even without his agony on the cross, he would still have reeled in emotional pain just because you hurt. Jesus' torturous physical pain was just a logical consequence of his inner pain for you, but by physically suffering he was able to do something immensely practical both to comfort you and to restore your honor. He couldn't stand idly by and see you suffer. Love compelled him to intervene. Where was Jesus when you were suffering injustice? He has not just weeping for you; the timeless Son of God, whom you thought was too slow in responding for your cries for help, was two thousand earth years ahead of you, having already suffered for you, so that relief would be waiting for you, the instant you realized what he had done for you. The One you thought did not care about your anguish, cared so passionately that he suffered all your pain. Why didn't God elect to physically prevent people from breaking his laws and his heart by hurting others, yourself included? For the moment, be content to realize that if there were no downsides to merely preventing people from hurting each other, the One who suffered so much for you would have taken that easy way out.

"I don't want an innocent person suffering."

But weren't you innocent when that brute ill-treated you? When working on our wish list, dreaming up the features of the perfect punishment, we decided that for the punishment to fit the crime it should, theoretically, be exacted from someone who is as innocent as you were. A significant feature of what you suffered is that you didn't deserve it. So how could that offense be atoned for by merely giving someone what he deserves? Jesus' intervention suddenly brings to reality what had previously seemed an impossible dream. It makes us recoil in horror, and yet there is no other way to perfectly balance the books. In Jesus' eyes the ghastly offense against you warranted the severest imaginable response. You suffered injustice, so to restore your honor, Christ voluntarily allowed himself to suffer the ultimate injustice. He was innocent, not just relative to the beast who hurt you, but in the absolute sense—innocent to a degree unknown in all humanity. In the dazzling light of his holy perfection, the purest, sweetest virgin is defiled. And this Innocent of innocents suffered the vilest physical and spiritual abuse for the crime against

you, because you are so important to him. This is rather more than a bunch of flowers and a mumbled apology. This the ultimate restoration of your honor.

“That’s astounding. But I still want the person who hurt me to suffer.”

You are right in thinking that, by itself, the torment of an innocent cannot fully ease your pain, but seeing the guilty person hurt won’t do it either. Justice is important and must be executed, but there are two other factors, one or both of which could be moving you to want revenge. The problem is that neither revenge nor justice could ever resolve these other factors. Here are the additional, barely conscious, reasons that could be goading you to want to see the offender suffer:

1. You are still hurting. Either you are still suffering physical or emotional pain, or even if you are completely restored to a normal life, it feels as if nothing could compensate for your past suffering and loss.
2. Hidden deep within you is the need to feel morally superior to your offender. A victim of child molestation, for instance, has usually been cruelly manipulated by the molester to feel responsible for the molester’s crime. Many others who have suffered have the fear that somehow their suffering was divine punishment for previous sins.

People wrestling with either, or both, of the above dilemmas usually discover that maintaining the rage against their offender eases their own pain and or guilt, by shifting their focus off their own internal struggles. This psychological ploy—a mere trick of the mind—might bring temporary relief, but it will do nothing other than delay genuine healing.

So although these two big needs might be subconsciously pushing you to want the offender to suffer, the satisfaction you imagine you would feel in seeing him tortured, is a mirage. It would still leave these needs unmet.

“But I still think the person who did wrong should suffer, not Jesus.”

Let’s explore the consequences of that logic. Certainly, one guilty person can never pay the penalty for the sins of another guilty person. Scripture reveals that death is the penalty for the slightest moral imperfection. It would be presumptuous for me, or any of my kind, to consider dying for someone else’s sins. Once I pay my own death penalty I have nothing left over for anyone else’s sin. Only a morally perfect person could suffer and die, and it not be for his own moral deficiencies. No wonder this concept is so foreign to us—we are not in the habit of meeting sinless people who volunteer to suffer injustice!

If, however, justice demanded that whoever does wrong must pay the penalty himself, it means everyone who has ever had the slightest moral imperfection—every human except Jesus—must end up in hell. It would also mean Jesus is a mistaken fool who suffered his horrific death for nothing. It would mean God is not the righteous, holy Judge; his sense of justice would be defective and we would be holier and smarter than him. Since all this is unthinkable, might I suggest that justice has been fully met?

Let me explain why we desperately need the intervention of someone truly innocent—someone who is not part of the never-ending cycle of wrong-doing that plagues the entire human race. Suppose a sickening case of child abuse is discovered. The abuser—the child’s father—is thoroughly investigated by police, psychologists and the courts. It turns out that the abuser had himself been a victim of such awful child abuse from his own father that it even dwarfed the abuse he had meted out. In fact, his upbringing had left him so psychologically deranged, with such distorted views of what is normal loving behavior, that it is a marvel that he treated his child as well as he did. (Please stay with me: I know victims of crime have the right to vengeance, no matter what the claims of “experts.”) The grandfather is now dead, but the little that can be uncovered about him shows that the grandfather, too, had suffered severe child abuse. What can be done? We are rightly incensed that such a crime has been committed. If the child’s abuser doesn’t deserve the severest penalty, how else could this crime be avenged? And what about the grandfather—the abuser’s abuser—who is now dead and beyond the reach of the courts? And what if the little boy has already mimicked the treatment dished out to him and has horribly abused his little sister?

This mess describes the predicament in which all humanity finds itself. We excuse our own offenses and imagine others have done worse, but our biased tolerance of our own wrong-doing does not lower the gravity of what we have done. The magnitude of the ill-treatment might vary, but the fact clings like a noose around our necks that we have each been hurt, and in turn have hurt others. This is why we each needed the eternal Son of God to enter the human race and be willing to do the unthinkable—to have compassion on those who deserve nothing but the severest punishment and to love us so deeply as to suffer and die for every time we have been sinned against, and for every time we have sinned.

What makes acceptable the extreme violation of this Innocent’s rights is that he suffered it willingly, having planned every detail to match your suffering. Driven by your need to find peace, and his longing to see justice executed on your behalf, your Savior has done everything required to release you from the never-ending, never-satisfying need to try to extort justice from the offender. Like you, Jesus suffered injustice at the hands of sinful men. The difference is that your torment was involuntary; his was voluntary. He chose that agony in order to vindicate you and avenge the crime against you.

Nevertheless, there is a vital matter to be settled between the offender and his Judge. The offender will rot in hell if he dies without having faced up to his crime and admitted to himself and to Christ that what he did to you was so evil that he deserves an eternity in hell for his offense. With God, however, your rights and peace of mind are paramount. He hasn’t left things half finished, so that you are left dangling on tenterhooks worrying about the outcome. Your Avenger has seen to it that irrespective of the offender’s response, you have already been vindicated. You can rest easy: the injustice you suffered has been avenged to the last agonizing breath. Almighty God has settled the score. Moreover, you can now move on, leaving the offender’s destiny to a private matter between the God who restored your name and the offender. The offender’s fate will be determined on the basis of whether he truly has a change of heart and is filled with remorse for what he did to you. The Judge must be fair; the same rules must apply to everyone, or God himself would be corrupt. The same human sacrifice that secured

forgiveness for the sins you committed, did the same for the sins you suffered. The very same rules that give you a chance to get to heaven—whether you repent of your wrongdoing and commit your life into Jesus’ hands—give your offender a chance. If, however, on earth he doesn’t regret what he did to you, and cry out to Jesus for the forgiveness he desperately needs, he will for all of eternity regret what he did to you—an indescribably terrifying prospect.

Enjoying the Benefits

Christ was more than just defiled, slandered, cheated, humiliated and tortured; he absorbed within his own body and spirit all the abuse and cruelty and injustice that humanity is capable of dishing out until it actually killed him. Having suffered the ultimate defeat, being well and truly dead, he burst back to life, triumphantly exploding and disintegrating every trace of shame and pain, returning to honor and sparkling purity. Christ so identified with you so fully that he suffered and won in the hope that you, in turn, would identify with him. He believed in you. All that is needed to complete the miracle is for you to believe in him. Trusting him with every aspect of your life—including justice issues—will release the divine miracle whereby you and Jesus become spiritually one. This oneness is without equal. The closest human parallel is a perfect marriage in which the couple are so devoted to each other that each partner’s joys and sorrows, honor and shame, assets and liabilities merge into one. If one partner is hurting, inner pain stabs the other. If one is honored, the other feels honored. If one has a pay rise, the other is enriched. If one has a speeding fine, both suffer loss. This is a vague shadow of the oneness existing between a sinner and his/her Savior, through the miracle of what Christ accomplished when he treated as his very own, every offense you have suffered and every offense you have committed.

By the abuse meted out to the innocent Son of God, the Almighty Lord, the Judge of all the earth, has proclaimed that the offense against you was so grave, and your honor so precious to him, that nothing less than the horrors Jesus suffered could put it right. Now, at last, you can exalt in the knowledge that the debt owed you has been paid in full. Now there can be closure. When you are one with your Savior you can proclaim with your crucified Lord those triumphant words, “It is finished!” And as he sprang back to life, brimming with honor and glorious in his perfection, you, whose life has been on hold because of what you have suffered, can not only start living again but enter an entirely new level of life.

Once your spiritual union with Christ takes place, heaven sees you in a totally new way. Christ’s purity, for instance, becomes *your* purity. What this means is so mind-blowing that it can take years for just some of the implications to sink in, but it is the most liberating experience anyone can ever have. Furthermore, Christ’s triumph over evil becomes *your* triumph, thereby empowering you to reign in life as victor over the offense that had threatened to crush you, just as he has been victorious over the humiliation he suffered. Like him—and because of him—you will live in eternal honor, totally freed from your past shame and pain.

In the eyes of the Final Judge—in the highest court in the universe—you have been vindicated. Whether you view yourself as vindicated depends on your understanding of what Christ has done for you. And whether others regard you as being vindicated depend on *their* understanding. But God has set a Day when everyone will finally understand, and that Day will never end.

Christ sweat blood to ensure everything needed to heal your broken life has been done. No one has ever done so much for you, nor paid such a price. A box of chocolates and a candlelit dinner are not in the same league! Any yet, sadly, this greatest conceivable proof of love can still have an air of unreality about it. This, of course, is not because of any deficiency in Jesus but simply because you don't know him intimately enough to be thoroughly convinced of his powers and of the depth of his devotion to you.

Imagine a pleasant, rather attractive woman who is convinced she is fat, ugly and in every way despicable. The only time men have ever spoken of love to her has been as a con trick to try to weaken her resistance so that they can use her for their evil purposes. In all her life she has known nothing but deception, rejection and cruelty. Now the most desirable man she has ever met has started using the love word. He's different. His love is genuine. He can fulfill her fondest dreams, but she keeps rejecting him, convinced it is just another sordid trick. What chance has she got of discovering he is genuine if she keeps pushing him away? It's scary, but the only way the tragedy of rejected love can be averted is for her to get as close to him as she can, open up to him as much as she dares, and gradually learn to trust him. It might take her years to be convinced enough to marry him. Even then she might have only the vaguest idea of the depth of his love for her and of how stunningly beautiful she is in his eyes. She might still fear he will leave her, with everything within her screaming that she is unlovable and that at best his love for her must be shallow. The more time she spends with him, listening to him, observing him, believing him, the more it will sink in that she truly is loved, and her harsh assessment of herself will gradually be dispelled. The more she learns to trust and get closer and closer to this man, the more healing she will experience.

This analogy points the way to the greatest of healings. The only way to know a fraction of the incomprehensible vastness of Christ's personal love for you, and the enormous benefits of what he has done for you, is to get closer and closer to Jesus. You will never know, without spending time with him, sharing your heart with him and getting to know him better and better.

Many of us sense that our primary need is not therapy but a life-changing relationship; not some special program but a special person. Although this is thrillingly true, we must leave fairy tales behind, and face reality. Not even the best romance humanity can offer will satisfy your need. In fact, you dare not trust a human—the best and most loving of whom is weak and fallible—until you know intimately the faithful Lord who alone gives the security you need to sustain you through the times when human relationships don't match your dreams. Jesus is like no one else you have ever met. He is genuine and good and strong and dependable. His love is real. He is perfect. He has not merely sympathized with your pain, he has made it his own. Snuggle into him. Let his love splash over you. It will take a lifetime of intimacy to grasp the faintest hint of how precious you are to him and what he has done for you. So the sooner you start, the sooner the amazing benefits will start flowing into your life. Our need is not for a spectacular one-off miracle, nor even a spiritual revolution based on Jesus' sacrifice (as essential as that is). Not even a once a week relationship with God himself will suffice. Our desperate need is for never-ending, ever-growing intimacy with our Savior. That alone will give us the security we need, building our trust in the One who reeled in agony for us. Only such intimacy will continually allow God's

life and healing to flow into our lives. As we physically need oxygen continuously, we spiritually need Jesus.

Maximized Joy

We earlier drew comfort from the realization that the infinite intellect of Almighty God gives him the unique ability to focus on everything (including our every need) simultaneously. This is one of the ways in which we are almost the exact opposite to God. When we focus on something, everything else goes out of focus. No where is this more dangerously evident than when we fixate on someone else's sin. The result is that in our eyes—not in anyone else's—our own sin blurs, so that we begin to lose awareness of our own shortcomings. Hypocrisy soon results, putting us in grave spiritual danger. Our personality becomes increasingly ugly and sin-stained and we don't even realize it. People most likely to fall into this fearful trap are those who feel haunted and repulsed by their sin. They discover that focusing on someone else's sin—usually someone who has wronged them—eases their own distress and so they almost unconsciously use this as a means of survival. The only safe solution to unpleasant feelings about ourselves, however, is to focus, not on someone's sin, but on Christ's sinlessness. Ideally, we should glimpse our own spiritual ugliness only long enough to be driven to Christ for his forgiveness, then we need to fix our gaze on Christ's beauty. This two-pronged action—recognize your sin and keep your eyes on Christ—will remove guilt and transform a person like nothing else in the universe.

We inevitably become increasingly like what we focus on. That's a horrifying prospect if we keep dwelling on the sins of someone who has wronged us. Without realizing it we will become increasingly like the person we resent, even though we are convinced this isn't happening because we will manifest our ugliness in a slightly different way. Nevertheless this life principle become a glorious prospect if we keep our minds on Jesus, who is in every way desirable—we will become increasingly like him.

When driving a car, we will crash unless we discipline ourselves to keep looking in the direction we wish to travel, with at most only the briefest, occasional glance at anything else. Likewise, the only way to successfully steer our lives away from acting like the person who hurt us is to fix our eyes on the moral perfection and wisdom and love of Jesus. In contrast, resentment causes us to keep focusing on a person's shameful behavior. The inevitable result of letting resentment control our minds is that our minds will churn with agitation, ugliness, hate and the other person's low morals until our lives begin to reflect our thought-life. In fact, have you ever considered that a desire to see someone treated as badly as he treated you, brings you to the same moral depths as him? Let resentment control your life and you will fixate so much on that person's sin instead of on purity that you will indeed crash into a version of the very behavior you despise. But if, instead, we habitually look to Jesus, our lives will fill with the beauty, love, peace and freedom that characterize him.

For you, the holy Son of God let himself become the devil's plaything; physically violated, emotionally broken, spiritually raped by evil. Will you for him let the magnitude his sacrifice soothe your anger and give you peace? Bitterness is like barbed wire in your insides. Will you let his love dissolve it? We have uncovered many moving reasons for nestling as close as we can to

Jesus and staying there. And there are a multitude of reasons we have not even touched. So why not begin right now by offering what might be the most honest prayer you have ever uttered.

PRAY.....:

Precious Jesus,

To think I am the focus of such mind-boggling love and that at last there can be closure on the awful time I've had is almost unbelievable. I need you to open my eyes to the perfection of your justice. Explode my understanding of your personal love for me. I'm so used to feeling forced to fend for myself that I keep feeling the need to scheme my own revenge, even though the bitterness is eating me up and ruining my life. As my lust for revenge and issues of justice ceaselessly churn within me I am forced to admit that these matters are too big for any mortal to handle. I need supernatural help. Yes, I desperately need you. Yet I keep wanting to execute my own justice and protect my own interests because it's so hard to trust you to do it properly. How can I trust you to take care of my needs when I doubt that my concerns are as important to you as they are to me? And how can I know the depth of your selfless love and devotion to me when I don't let myself get close to you? You seem so unreal, so distant, and yet I guess I can't expect anything else when, driven by my insecurities, I nervously keep you at arm's length. What a bind! I don't trust you enough to get close to you and I don't get close enough to learn that I can trust you. This vicious circle feels too strong to be broken by my own efforts alone. Yes, I need your help on this one, too. But I now determine to cooperate with you by doing whatever I can to break this bind. I commit myself to keep pressing through my doubts and draw close to you, so I can know you better. I believe this will not only break the negative cycle that has been crippling my life but it will commence an exciting positive one. The closer I get to you, the better I will know you. The better I know you, the more I'll love and trust you. And the more I love and trust you, the closer I'll want to get to you and so the better I'll know you. May this positive cycle keep building in my life forever, giving me an ever-deepening awareness of your love and liberating me from the negative emotions that have darkened my life. Thank you that as I do all that I can do to reach out to you, you will do all that I cannot do, and meet my needs for love, peace, joy, security and so many other things beyond my grasp.

I am beginning to believe that on the cross you gave yourself for me. So, as much as I can, I now return your love and give myself to you; trusting you to care far me better than I could ever care for myself. As you identified with my suffering, I identify with you. As you rose from the dead, triumphant over the horrific abuse of your rights, I cling to you to likewise start a new life, triumphant over what I have suffered. I join myself to you so that your victories are my victories and your concerns are my concerns. As God graciously accepted your sacrifice as sufficient for my sins against God, I now accept your sacrifice as sufficient for my offender's sins against me. As you forgave those who shamefully wronged you, I forgive those who have wronged me. I will stop trying to scheme my own revenge, so that I can demonstrate my faith that you are resolving perfectly every matter that concerns me. Whenever the old resentments come to mind I will push them away, so that I can make you my God, giving you the priority in my thinking that you deserve and so that my heart and your heart can beat as one.

Thank you that no matter what my past, you are eager to cleanse me of any and every sin that I admit to and want removed from my life. Like someone fearing a cancer diagnosis, I have tried to excuse, hide and push from my consciousness my sins. I feared the truth about myself, preferring to live in denial because I've suspected my sin problem is incurable or that treatment would be painful. Indeed it should be both unbearable agony and terminal but you yourself suffered that agony—all the way to death—to make the cure not only possible but swift and painless for me. In your astounding love you suffered the fate you did not deserve to spare me the fate I deserve. The only thing that is now painful and terminal for me is if I choose to live in denial.

I feared I'm not good enough to be the focus of your love and approval. I now believe that you are so good and so loving that you long to forgive me, no matter how bad I have been. You are humanity's only soul surgeon. All you require is for me to, as it were, sign the release form, giving you permission to operate on me and remove my moral blemishes. Sin is terminal, and since you will leave any sin I refuse to admit to, I ask you to shine your spotlight in the dark corners of my life and cause me to see and face up to those things I must ask you to remove.

Thank you that you have good plans for me. I trust your love and wisdom; believing that you have my best interests at heart, even more than I ever have. So I invite you to take control of my life. I rest in you.

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