

The Key To Freedom

✖ When my oldest sister got engaged, I jumped right in to help. I was happy that she was so happy and eager to share in her joy. But what I saw as helping, my future brother-in-law viewed as interference. Our relationship went from bad to worse; my pride had been stepped on and I was hurting. I was treated like the scum of the earth, which only served to fuel my anger at his arrogance.

The more I thought about him, the angrier I became. Soon it was *all* I thought about. I was angry, bitter and stressed. My thoughts turned to revenge—surely there was some way I could hurt him back. I would have been perfectly pleased if he would have just dropped dead.

I'm not happy to admit how far I had gone over the edge, but I am happy to report that I found the freedom that repentance brings.

It wasn't easy. I had to make a deliberate decision to forgive this man for the way he treated me—even though he continued to do it for some time. I discovered forgiveness is not a one-time deal. I have had to repeatedly forgive him, even though he has never asked for forgiveness.

Most importantly, I discovered my own part in the fiasco—and my own need for repentance. It wouldn't have done any good to forgive him and not repent for the part I played. I told him I was sorry, and then I got things right with God. My relationship with Him had suffered greatly during this time and my repentance quickly restored our fellowship.

I discovered that repentance is like a recipe—it has several ingredients that are necessary for the desired result to come about. Leave an ingredient out of a recipe—or repentance—and

the outcome can be hard, bitter, or downright disastrous.

The first ingredient of repentance is *choice*. I had to make a conscious, deliberate decision to repent. In essence, repentance is an act of the will involving change in thinking (not feelings) with a resulting change in conduct.

When God convicted me for the part I played in the situation with my brother-in-law, I made a determined decision to repent, which led to a change in thinking, then reflected in the way I responded to him. Ultimately, *my* change in conduct, brought on by repentance, relieved the growing tension in our relationship.

The second ingredient of repentance is *inward change*. This is where the rubber meets the road. Feigned repentance will not bring inward change and no one will be fooled for long—and God won't be fooled at all!

Humility is what makes inward change possible. "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (James 1:21, NIV).

Once I changed my thinking about my brother-in-law, I was surprised to find myself actually praying for him—not to change but to find Christ. The inward change in *me* enabled me to develop a concern for him that I had never had before.

The third ingredient of repentance is *godly sorrow*. The lives of Judas and Peter clearly illustrate the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Judas felt guilt and remorse, but his suicide was the result of worldly sorrow, not of spiritual brokenness. Unlike Judas, Peter was grieved in his spirit and wept bitterly over his sin. He was a broken man.

The difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow is brokenness.

I knew I had truly repented for my part in the damaged relationship when I cried over *my* behavior. Here was a fellow creation of God and as a self-proclaimed Christian I had treated him as though he wasn't fit to be alive. I had truly sinned against God, and I had finally realized it.

The final ingredient in repentance is *self-sacrifice*. Simply being sorry for the results of sin is not repentance. In confessing openly and admitting our guilt we forcefully have to cast off wrong motives. Sometimes physical restitution is also needed.

True inward repentance is often demonstrated in the sacrificial steps taken to abandon sin. Repentance without meaningful action is like a cloud-filled sky with no rain.

After I repented and got things right with God, I went to my brother-in-law and openly apologized. Our relationship is better than it ever was.

There really is freedom in repentance.