

DARE the DARE

30 DAYS TO CHANGE EVERYTHING

Josh Mayo

The Dare

by Josh Mayo

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THE DARE – 30 Days To Change Everything

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Don't Cheat.

Read This Part First!

Dear Gutsy Person Who Picked Up This Book,

I DARE YOU! In this moment I challenge you to become something you have always wanted but only dreamed about. *Many people desire to DO something great for God, but few realize they first have to BECOME something great for God. So I dare you...* I CHALLENGE you to do something that will be incredibly tough at times. It definitely won't be something for the faint of heart. It will require a daily choice – a sacrifice of your time. Sometimes it will even be inconvenient. Am I making you double-think things? I'm trying to.

If you don't really want to grow and deepen your relationship with Christ, this book isn't for you. This is for **the courageous**. This is for **the dangerous**. This is for **potential world changers**. You see, I found out years ago that most people **believe** they were made for a reason, for something BIG. Many even **believe** that GOD wants to use them in huge ways. But, do you want to know how I feel about that? Three words: I DON'T CARE! And let me tell you why.

Everyone believes they were made to change the world, but few are willing to pay the prices to actually DO IT!

Ever heard the Gandhi quote? **“Those who would change the world must first begin by changing themselves.”** With the Lord's help, I believe you really can become great. But it will only happen if you make small, consistent choices to change YOURSELF! The secret of your future really is hidden in your daily routines. So The Dare is your chance to begin down the road of not just talking a big game, but living out that dream.

Potential is pretty worthless unless you put some determined action behind it. God can't use people He can easily get rid of! You have to be a little gutsy and stubborn.

I'm reminded of a guy in the Old Testament named Jacob. Jacob was stubborn to say the least. He literally wrestled with God and would not let go of Him until God changed him. Do you want to be like Jacob? Do you refuse to let go of God until He does something real...something meaningful in your life? When difficulty comes your way, are you just going to throw in the towel and give up? Or do you believe you can be different? It's time to allow God to give you a “Genesis Moment.” Genesis is where God created everything. He made everything perfect, mature, productive, and complete. If God really is the same yesterday, today, and forever, that means He still is a Creator. He wants to create something new in your life. All you have to do is partner up with Him and decide that you're a fighter, not a failure. You're a masterpiece not a mistake.

SO I DARE YOU. EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, I THINK GOD IS DARING YOU! Give Him your all for the next 30 days. When you have completed The Dare, I believe you will be on your way to becoming the person God dreamed of when He made you!

Honored To Make The Journey With You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Mayo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

Josh Mayo

P.S. Always read this book with a pen or highlighter. Mark it up and make it yours! At the end of each day you will see some personal questions. Don't skip them. They will make this daily journey more real and meaningful to you. It will make a huge difference.

P.P.S. It's only normal to occasionally miss a day. If this happens, don't let it defeat you. Just pick up from where you left off and keep going!

Put Up Or Shut Up!

Lordship

It must have been a pretty tense hour between Jesus and His disciples. He was up in their faces, asking them hard questions and then giving them answers that were everything but “sweet and pretty.” Jesus was telling His guys that they had to figure out who HE REALLY WAS — in each of their individual lives. It was one of those “put up or shut up” moments. Jesus was telling His disciples that talk was cheap. He wanted to know WHO HE REALLY WAS TO THEM.

It was a huge deal for the disciples that day. But even more serious, it’s still a huge deal for YOU and ME today. So let’s have our own “Put up or shut up” moment together. Is Jesus “just your Savior”? Or have you radically and purposefully chosen to make Him your LORD? Don’t be quick to give yourself a pass on this one, and try to drop all the cheap, memorized church answers. Think about this one hard and deep. IT MAY SAVE YOU AN ETERNITY IN A HOT PLACE YOU’RE NOT GOING TO WANT TO VISIT!

Listen in to what Jesus was saying to His guys that day:

And it happened that while Jesus was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, “Who do the people say that I am?” They answered and said, “John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again.” And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” And Jesus was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes to Heaven.” Luke 9:18-27 (NASB)

A lot of people have different ideas about who they think Jesus Christ is in their lives. They sure don’t SAY it, but if you watch how they LIVE, it’s really pretty obvious. So as we start The Dare, Jesus has the same question for you that He had for those guys centuries ago. Who is Jesus in your life? For real. Don’t give a quick, cheap answer to yourself. Think about your answer for a minute.

Who is Jesus... really... to you?

Is He the One you pray to when you forget about a test in school and you throw up a “Hail Mary” prayer to keep from flunking? Is He the Guy you casually tell others you “believe in”? (Kind of like, “I believe in world peace, racial equality, and Jesus.”) Is He the Person who demands token time from you each Sunday so you can’t sleep late like you’d like to? Is He maybe your “Santa Claus in the sky” when you need a cosmic bellboy to perform for you?

Or is He really your LORD?

Great question. But don't answer it too quickly or cheaply. Let's think about it for a minute.

What does it mean for Jesus Christ to REALLY be your Lord? I mean, most of us just want Him to be our Savior and forgive our past sins and mess ups. But what is Lordship?

LORDSHIP = AN END OF LIFE ON MY OWN TERMS

It's allowing God to be Number One in your life, the Driver of your whole journey. It's making Jesus "Commander In Chief." Lots of people want to give Jesus a "piece of the pie." But Lordship is saying, "I belong TOTALLY to You, Jesus. You get the WHOLE PIE!" It doesn't mean you have to live a PERFECT, SINLESS life. (Thank God!) But LORDSHIP is a choice and attitude that says, "Jesus Christ, I CHOOSE to make You my BEST FRIEND. I can't promise to be perfect. But I want YOU to matter more to me than any other human being or desire in my life."

Some of you are thinking this is already way more than you bargained for. Go ahead, put down the book. You don't have to read this thing anymore. Go back to the way you were living, because I'm sure it was all you dreamed for, right? Okay, pardon my sarcasm, but if you want God to really do something in your life that's huge, this part of The Dare is crucial. He has to be your LORD...not just your SAVIOR.

Let me give you two more examples where Jesus made this point very clear:

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Luke 6:46 (NKJV)

"Knowing the correct password—saying 'Master, Master,' for instance—isn't going to get you anywhere with Me. What is required is serious obedience—doing what My Father wills. I can see it now—at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to Me and saying, 'Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And do you know what I am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use Me to make yourselves important. You don't impress Me one bit. You're out of here.'"

Matthew 7:21-23 (The Message)

The tragedy of the church world today is that people have been called to belief but not to obedience. Let me explain. We feel that we just need to mentally say we "believe in Jesus" and everything will be great. Belief is important, but simply "believing" in Jesus Christ does NOT make someone an authentic Christian. (Are you mad at me yet?)

You see, if that's all it took, Satan would be ONE HUGE CHRISTIAN! James 2:19 (NASB) says, "The demons also believe, and shudder." Acts 16:31 (NASB) puts it this way, "Believe in the LORD Jesus Christ...and you will be saved." The message of the New Testament is NOT "Jesus is Savior" (24 times ESV). Instead, the message of the New Testament is "Jesus is LORD" (approximatley 500 times¹).

In our opening Scripture, Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me." What does that really mean to you? Are we supposed to carry around a big cross everywhere we go? (That would be pretty tough to fit into your car or drag around school.)

Obviously not. So what IS “the cross” in our daily lives? I think “the cross” is where your will and God’s will sometimes CROSS! Every day all of us have “decision points.” Our human nature wants to go in one direction, but in our gut, we know Jesus wants us to do something different. (Maybe it’s how we talk to another person or how we respond on something.) Whatever it is... Your will and God’s will CROSS! You have to decide if you will “deny yourself” and let Christ be LORD (Boss) of your life, or whether you’re going to keep calling the shots. Sound easy? It’s not.

DAILY DARE...

- 1. What area(s) of your life do you need to “deny yourself” so you can keep making mileage in your relationship with Christ? (After all, most Christians who say “I’ve lived for Jesus 20 years” just kept RE-LIVING the SAME 6-month-growth-pattern OVER AND OVER again! Pretty flat and boring. So what specific area(s) do you want to “deny yourself” in so you can KEEP GROWING in your walk with Christ?)**
- 2. In your own words, what’s the difference between “believing” in Jesus and making Him LORD of your life?**

Some Dangerous Questions

Priorities

Jesus speaking again to us...

“I know you inside and out, and find little to My liking. You’re not cold, you’re not hot – far better to be either cold or hot! You’re stale. You’re stagnant. You make Me want to vomit.” Revelation 3:15-16 (The Message)

Quickly, write down the three most important areas, things, or people in your life. It can be a dream, a dating relationship, a sport — anything. Just write them down below. **AND BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF!** No fair writing “God, Jesus, and the Bible” for your three answers. That sounds great, but be more real than that. As a matter of fact, let’s **LEAVE OUT ALL “SPIRITUAL ANSWERS.”** (Even though I hope your friendship with Christ would be at the top of your list.) What are the three most important areas, things, or people in your life right now — minus Jesus Christ?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thanks for the answers. I hope they were truthful. But before we go on, let me tell you a story about Alexander the Great. For those of you who don’t recognize his name, Alexander was one of the most successful military commanders in history, undefeated in battle. By the time of his death, he had conquered most of the world known to the ancient Greeks.

Alexander once came upon one of his guards sleeping at his post at night. Alexander woke up the man. And like you can imagine, the young soldier was petrified. He knew the consequence for sleeping at his post was immediate death. Alexander angrily looked down at the sleeping guy and said, “Soldier, what’s your name?”

The terrified young man stuttered in fear. Finally he said, “Alexander, sir. My name is Alexander. I was named after you.”

The man’s response threw the great commander off his game. Seconds later, Alexander the Great shouted into the darkness as he walked away, “Soldier, either change your **CONDUCT** or change your **NAME!**”²

I think maybe Jesus is saying the same thing today to many of us who call ourselves a “Christ follower.” He’s saying, “Christian, either change your conduct or change your name! Either obey and live the life I’ve asked you to live, or don’t say you belong to Me.”

Let me ask you this blunt question: Does your lifestyle match your label? As I said earlier, we live in a society that is labeled “Christian,” but you have to decide if you’re going to really be Christ-like. There’s a big difference. How many people do you know who call

themselves Christians but their lifestyles don't match their advertising? Just imagine what would happen if a car company advertised that they were giving away vehicles. All you had to do was show up at a certain car dealership at a certain time. There would be thousands of people waiting at the dealership. Now how would you feel if you waited in that line for hours only to find out it was a crazy publicity stunt? No real cars were being given out. You would just be receiving a toy matchbox car! You would be totally ticked off. You'd probably be turned off to the whole idea of car dealerships for a long time.

But we unconsciously do the same thing to people around us who know us to be "Christians." We advertise that we love God. But when others get around us, they see something totally different. Sometimes our daily lifestyle and priorities aren't much different from THEIRS!

You see, Christianity isn't just a matter of doing all the "right things" and being a "good, religious person." Let's read about a guy in the New Testament who did all the "right things" but still came up really short. He "advertised" to others that he wanted to follow Christ, but when he and Jesus faced off together, HIS REALITY became something pretty different. Let's read it. But don't be too tough on the guy. We all can relate to him when we're honest with ourselves:

As he was starting out on a trip, a man came running up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But as for your question, you know the commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not cheat. Honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was a child." Jesus felt genuine love for this man as He looked at him. "You lack only one thing," He told him. "Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." At this, the man's face fell, and he went sadly away because he had many possessions. Matthew 19:16-22 (NLT)

Don't you relate to this guy? The Bible calls him a "rich young ruler." He was following the religious laws and doing everything he was supposed to be doing to live "right." He had gotten rid of all the "big no no's." But Jesus wanted to know one important thing. He wanted to know if the guy was willing to make Him LORD. Jesus put His finger on the one issue that was holding the man back from total commitment — his money.

What's the sad ending to the story? The guy chose to walk away rather than surrender control of his money to Christ. What haunting words: "And he went sadly away because he had many possessions."

What should that verse read in your life?

"And he (she) went sadly away because of his (her) romantic interests."

OR

"And he (she) went sadly away because he (she) wanted to hold onto his(her) rotten attitudes."

OR

“And he (she) went sadly away because he (she) was too lazy to consistently spend time in God’s Word and prayer.

WHAT’S THE AREA THAT YOU REALLY DON’T WANT TO GIVE UP TO GOD? I mean, what’s in the “back closet” of your heart that you hope Jesus never finds? Maybe it’s your friendship with a certain person, or your music, or your pride. We’ve all got stuff hidden in our “back closet.” But what’s your response when Jesus “knocks on the door” and asks you to give that area to Him? You see, we all want to obey God UNTIL it comes to certain “pet areas” of our lives. Just like this rich young man, we want to follow God until it becomes INCONVENIENT to us. So let me ask you again: What’s in the “closet of your heart”? What area(s) do you struggle to sincerely surrender to Christ?

Remember the list of things you wrote at the beginning of this section? I want you to go back and ask yourself: If I had to give up one thing on that list, which one would it be? (Write your answer in the space provided in the DAILY DARE.) Seriously, if you could only have two of those things or people, which two would you hold onto? Okay, got your two?

Now let’s take this up a notch. If you had to get rid of a SECOND one on your list, which one would go next? I know that seems totally impossible, but what if you HAD to — there were NO OPTIONS. What would go? (Remember: Nobody’s going to see your answer. So don’t give the “right” one. Give the REAL one.)

Congratulations! The thing you have left is your “rich young ruler” item (your “And he went away sadly...” answer). What I mean is that if you don’t watch it, the one thing you didn’t give away could eventually come between you and your relationship with Christ. It’s easy to believe we would act different from the Rich Young Ruler if the chips were down. But unless you really watch it, the one item you left on your list can easily become YOUR “GOD.”

I’m not saying that it’s a bad thing. I’m just saying that it has dangerous capacity to come between you and your obedience to Christ. So stop and ask yourself, “What or who is really LORD of my life?” Do I base my decisions, thoughts and priorities more around this “factor”—or more around God’s Word? And remember: None of this “dare stuff” works unless you keep DARING YOURSELF to be honest. So where are you at with this point?

DAILY DARE...

(1) The first thing I would give up on “the list” (Remember—God and spiritual things can’t be on this list):

The second thing I would give up on “the list”:

(2) If I were playing “the Devil” in my own life, how would I use this one remaining area to slow down or mess up my growing relationship with Christ?

(3) It’s been said that “Christianity is not so much an end of all WRONGS, as much as an end of all RIGHTS.” What “right” are you holding onto that could slow down your pursuit of Christ? (i.e. The right to my own time, the right to say what I think, the right to have friends, the “right to be right”...)

The Guilt Trap

Forgiveness

David earned the title “A man after God’s own heart.” Lucky for us he messed up so much! I mean, you’re not exactly Billy Graham if you commit murder, commit adultery, and have more moods than a two year old, even though that’s how the Old Testament biography on David reads. Good thing David learned how to be BIGGER than his failures. Let’s tune into his words in Psalm 51. They’re how I feel lots of days:

Generous-in-love-God, give grace! Huge-in-mercy-God, wipe out my bad record. Scrub away my guilt, soak out my sins in Your laundry. I know how bad I’ve been; my sins are staring me down. You’re the One I’ve violated, and You’ve seen it all, seen the full extent of my evil. You have all the facts before You; whatever You decide about me is fair. I’ve been out of step with You for a long time, in the wrong since before I was born. What You’re after is truth from the inside out. Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life. Soak me in Your laundry and I’ll come out clean, scrub me and I’ll have a snow-white life.

Psalm 51:1-7 (The Message)

A little kid named Brent visited his grandparents during the summer and received his first slingshot. His grandparents had only one instruction: “Only use the slingshot in the back, wooded part of the farm. We don’t want anyone hurt.” So Brent practiced in the woods hour after hour, but he could never hit his target. Discouraged, he finally started to walk back towards the farmhouse. When he reached the backyard, he saw his Grandmother’s treasured pet duck. On an impulse, he took aim and let it fly. Unbelievably, for the first time that day, the stone hit its target. The pet duck fell dead in the middle of the back yard. Brent panicked. Scared and guilty, he hid the dead duck in a woodpile and started to walk away as though nothing had happened. But right as he stood up, he saw that his older sister, Lauren, was watching. She said nothing. But the expression on her face let Brent know that she had seen it all.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, “Lauren, let’s wash the dishes.” But Lauren said, “Grandma, Brent told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn’t you, Brent?” And under her breath so no one could hear but her young brother, she whispered “Remember the duck!” So Brent did the dishes.

Later, Brent and Lauren’s grandfather asked if the kids wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, “I’m sorry, but I need Lauren to stay around the house to help me with dinner. We have company coming.”

Once again, Lauren smiled and said, “That’s all taken care of. Brent loves to help with stuff like that. He just mentioned to me that he wanted to spend more time with Grandma, so I’ll go fishing with you, Grandad, and Brent can stay here.” Again she whispered to him, “Remember the duck!” So Brent stayed behind again to work while Lauren went fishing.

After several days of Brent doing both HIS chores and Lauren's, he couldn't take it any longer.

Crying, he blurted out the truth to his Grandma. He told her that HE had been the one who killed her pet duck, and that he had hidden its lifeless body deep under the woodpile.

His grandmother was very understanding. She bent down and gave him a loving hug. But her next words blew him out of the water. "I knew everything that went on, Brent. I was standing at the window and saw it all. Because I love you, I forgave you right away. I have just been wondering how long you would let your sister make you HER SLAVE."³

What a great picture of how the Enemy tries to work in our lives as Christ followers. We all mess up and sin. We're guilty and feel so ashamed. Then the Enemy uses the mental voices of guilt to make us HIS SLAVE. He tells us that we're big phonies, that we're never going to be consistent, and that God doesn't want to hear from us anymore. But all the time, Jesus is watching from heaven. He gave His life on the cross for just these kinds of moments. He lovingly waits for us to admit our wrong and humbly ask His forgiveness. Then His unbelievable Psalm 51 kind of forgiveness goes into action. But all too often, we become the Enemy's "SLAVE" by entertaining the haunting voices of guilt that keep re-playing over in our minds.

Guilt obviously comes when we do something wrong. When we sin, we feel guilty. But here's what I've discovered about guilt: guilt usually makes us do more wrong stuff. Since I messed up once in this area, I'll just mess up again. I already feel guilty...so why stop now?

Ever feel that way? We think thoughts like:

1. I've messed up so many times in this one area, so why even try again?
2. Why try to live a pure life when I've already messed up mentally and sexually?
3. I've lied and distorted the truth so much, why tell the truth now?
4. I've already gained 3 pounds this month, so why not have a Cinnabon while I walk around the mall? (Cinnabons are these unbelievable cinnamon rolls. I laughingly call them "Sin-in-a-bun"!)

Satan then uses guilty, hopeless thoughts like these to make us feel condemned. Condemnation is basically a big word for the devil making us feel like we can't change. Eventually, the guilt and hopelessness is so overwhelming that we just give up. We just sin more because we feel like there is no use to keep fighting and trying. It's like we are carrying around a backpack, and every new sin throws a new weight of guilt into that backpack. Over time, life feels incredibly heavy. Ever felt that way?

Satan is really like Lauren, whispering in your head, "You've messed up... you'll never be good enough... remember the duck...remember your sin." And the Enemy places weight after weight into the backpack that you're forced to carry around. That's condemnation. But what's important for us to realize is that God doesn't work like that. Instead of condemnation, He gives us CONVICTION.

What's the difference between the two? Let me show you:

CONDEMNATION is the tool of the Enemy. The Bible says he is the “accuser of the children of light.” Condemnation may start with something you legitimately did wrong. But even after you ask forgiveness for it, you will still feel HEAVY. There’s no motivation or energy to pick yourself up and keep going. The Enemy just keeps reminding you (and re-reminding you) what a LOSER YOU ARE!

CONVICTION, though, is the tool of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word tells us that when we ask forgiveness, that our sins are “wiped away as far as the East is from the West, never to be remembered against us again.” Conviction is the Lord’s priceless way to say, “Red alert! You’re violating My Word. Stop before you get yourself into more trouble.” When we ask for Christ’s forgiveness, we don’t wait for a “certain FEELING.” We know that forgiveness DOESN’T COME with a certain FEELING most of the time. It comes only because God is faithful to His Word! And after asking for forgiveness, the Lord gives us hope and motivation for the future.

God’s Plan For When We Mess Up Is Pretty Simple: CONFESS!

This may seem really straightforward, but we have to talk to God about our sin, and mess ups. We have to confess. 1 John 1:9 says, “But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.” But why confess to God since He already knows? Yeah, God knows, but He wants to make sure that YOU know. When we confess our wrongs to God, it’s like we’re finally coming out of hiding. We’re not covering things up anymore like Adam and Eve did. We’re admitting how heavy and real our sin is and then giving that weight to God. The “emotional backpack” breaks loose. The burden is gone. That’s why Jesus says, “If the Son sets you FREE, you are FREE INDEED.”

DAILY DARE...

- (1) In what areas do you let the Enemy bring CONDEMNATION (when the Lord wants to bring you CONVICTION)?**
- (2) What do you need to confess to God today?**
- (3) What will you do the next time Satan whispers guilt-trips in your ear? (Something like, “Remember the duck!”)**

Forgiveness—the Real “F” Word

Forgiveness

There is probably nothing that will strangle out spiritual growth faster than resentment and unforgiveness towards other people. But this forgiveness jazz isn't for weaklings. It's a tough, uphill climb to forgive someone when they've deeply hurt you. But like the old quote reminds us, “Unforgiveness is like drinking poison MYSELF and expecting SOMEONE ELSE to die from it.” Jesus gave a lot of attention to this important topic. Good old Peter was our “Exhibit A” on this one. Let's listen in:

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” Matthew 18:21-35 (NASB)

I have to be honest. This part of The Dare seems to be one of the toughest areas for us to swallow. Forgiveness is the real “F” word. Our society doesn't really seem to believe in it. We believe in “justice.” We believe in everything being “fair.” And if it's not “just” or if we weren't treated “fairly,” then we have the right to “even the score.” It's our right! Right?

Peter was feeling pretty bold one day and came to Jesus with a question. “Hey, God,” he said. “When someone messes me over, how many times do I have to forgive them? How about seven times? That should really cover it, right?” Jesus responded with the 70x7 answer. I don't think Christ was literally saying we should forgive the person 490 times, but I do believe He was trying to make a point. Our forgiveness should be as limitless as His forgiveness is toward us. That's a pretty tall order!

Like the servant who has been forgiven a HUGE debt in Matthew 18, we each have a debt of sin that is so huge we can't ever make it OK on our own. And in the same way, we have others who OWE US big time as well. Maybe they really hurt us. Maybe they said something that we just can't get out of our minds. They did something that really tore us apart on the inside. You probably have secretly tried to hide tears over some of the junk people have put you through. It's pretty gutsy of God to tell you "FORGIVE THEM!" It's gutsy, that is, until we listen to the rest of His sentence. He's pretty blunt with us: "Forgive their debt to YOU because YOUR debt to ME is so much BIGGER!" Thanks for not beating around the bush, God. I get the idea, You feel pretty serious about this deal of forgiveness.

But we want to hold onto our unforgiveness. We feel like we have the right to hold onto it. Yet when we hold onto it, we're only hurting ourselves. My best friend, Craig, once talked about how unforgiveness is like chaining that past issue or that past person to your present life. It's like you can never get away from them. It becomes extra baggage that just weighs you down. He talked about this subject for over thirty minutes, and while he did it he dragged around a dressed-up dummy chained to his leg. It was a great visual picture that really made me think.

When you hold back forgiveness, you're really just chaining yourself to your past. Said another way Unforgiveness is like letting someone who has hurt you live RENT FREE in your mind. You see, forgiveness is more for YOUR sake than for the person who hurt you. It's about letting go of your past so God can give you a new future. It really doesn't have anything to do with how you FEEL. Since God COMMANDS us to forgive, we know it has to be a CHOICE, not an EMOTION. And it's a really important, eternal choice at that.

But what do you do when you try to forgive someone but the painful memories keep coming back? Corrie ten Boom was a Christian Holocaust survivor who helped lots of Jews escape from the Nazis during World War II. She struggled with forgiveness herself, having been tortured by the Nazis and then having watched her beloved family suffer unspeakable anguish. One cruel Nazi guard continued to haunt her memories long after the Holocaust was over. She had forgiven the man the very best she could. But night after night, her mind was bombarded with thoughts about what he did. She tried to fight the thoughts away, but they kept coming back. Sleep was nowhere to be found.

Finally, Corrie was so guilty about her feelings that she went to an old Lutheran pastor for help. "I've tried to forgive the man," she said through tears. "But I keep having those memories race through my mind each night." The wise old pastor pointed out his office window to the church tower. This is what he said:

"Corrie, high up in that church tower is a big bell. We make it ring each day by pulling on the rope that is attached to it. But let me show you something very important. After the church caretaker lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging for awhile. First ding, then dong. Gradually, it goes slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops.

"I think the same thing is true of forgiveness, Corrie. When we forgive someone, it's like taking our hands off the rope. But if we've been 'tugging' at our hurts and wounds for a long time, we shouldn't be surprised if it takes awhile for the 'clanging thoughts' to stop. They're just the 'ding-dongs' of the old bell slowing down. You've already made a

CHOICE to forgive the person who has so deeply hurt you. So when the thoughts come to your mind, PUSH THEM OUT by thinking on something totally different. Little by little, the ‘dings’ will get quieter and less forceful. Trust me, Corrie. I promise that your emotions will soon follow your Biblical choices. And it will be YOU who will be freed most through your forgiveness, not that cruel guard from your past.”⁴

Beautifully enough, that’s exactly what happened in Corrie ten Boom’s life. There were a few more midnight reverberations, and a couple of “dings” when the subject came up in conversation. But the force of the pain gradually went away as she kept controlling her mind. Why? Because of two big choices: (1) her choice to forgive in prayer and (2) her choice to “give God time” for her emotions to come into line with her obedience.

Why not try it for yourself? I promise; it works. I’ve had a lot of practice on this one.

DAILY DARE...

(1) We mentioned that “Unforgiveness is like letting someone who has hurt you live RENT FREE in your mind.” So reach deep inside of yourself. Who do you need to CHOOSE to forgive at this point in your life?

(2) Forgiveness really is like setting a prisoner free...and then learning that the prisoner you MOST set free was YOURSELF. But forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. What are some CHOICES you need to make in order to help your mind and heart heal? (i.e. Stop talking about what happened, stop hanging our with certain people, get rid of some mementos or music, etc.)

Soul-Knitting Friendships

Friends

It's probably one of the quotes that most defines your success in The Dare: "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." I've been in full-time youth ministry for several years now. And without any hesitancy, I can say that the #1 thing that takes today's youth culture down spiritually is wrong or neutralizing friendship choices. Let's take another look at David's life. In this arena, he nailed it.

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 1 Samuel 18:1-3 (NASB)

Today The Dare deals with the thing that probably means the most to you – your friends. Oh yeah, we're going to talk about what you cherish most. The relationships in your life affect your relationship with God more than anything else. I often say that friends are like buttons on an elevator. They will either take you up or they will take you down.

I want you to look closely at your friendships. As a matter of fact, write down your three closest friends' names here. We will come back to this list a little later.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Jonathan and David really knew how to do the friend thing. They created a "soul-knitting relationship" ("...the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself").

Cool, but WHAT ARE THESE VERSES TALKING ABOUT? What's a "soul-knitting relationship"?

It's not something that "just happens" or that comes quickly. All of us WANT the awesome kind of bonding that David and Jonathan had, but most of us expect that relationship to magically fall into our lives. That's not how it happens. You WORK AT creating a friendship that goes beyond the shallow ones we all experience daily. It's easy to self-centeredly complain, "I just don't have any good Christian friends." But amazing friendships happen when YOU FIRST pay friendship prices with other people, rather than waiting for them to pay friendship prices with you. David and Jonathan paid those kinds of prices. Let's look at what creates a "covenant friendship" a little closer.

Quality Christian friendships begin by your consistently making the correct day-to-day choices. You see, God has a significant friend for you, a David-Jonathan friend. And He wants to put that person in your life. But you have to first make the day-to-day choices that attract this kind of friend.

Let me break it down this way: if you hang around the dumpster, you're going to attract a lot of flies. Translation: if your surroundings and daily patterns STINK, you're not going to attract a lot of great-smelling friends! I want you to glance back at your list of friends. Are they friends that really help you grow in Christ, or are they friends that became important for some of the wrong reasons? There's a huge difference between "Christian friends" and "friends who are really Christian." I really don't think any relationships in our life are NEUTRAL. So which direction are your current friends taking you spiritually?

Let me say it differently: you're not going to attract the friends you really want if you continue to settle for the friends who don't make you better. Now let me say something unpopular, something difficult to accept. Sometimes finding the right kind of friend will mean you have to face times of loneliness. Now I didn't say you're alone. God tells us that He wants to stick closer to us than a brother. It is incredibly important that you never confuse feelings of loneliness with actually being alone. When Christ really is your Best Friend, He is as close as your next conversation. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've ever known a great man or woman of God who didn't OFTEN experience loneliness. In fact loneliness helped deepen their authentic friendship with Jesus.

Sometimes you have to take a step of faith in this friendship category. You might have some weekends where you don't know exactly what you're going to do because you're still trying to make the right kind of friends. Hey, this book is called *The Dare* for a reason. The best way to attract a "soul-knitting friend" to yourself is by cultivating a soul-knitting relationship with the Lord first. He's pretty tough to beat. What other friend can always finish your sentences and promises you "abundant life"? Besides that, He's probably the only Friend who took nails in His hands and feet for you. Just remember: Sometimes loneliness is God's cry for friendship time with you.

DAILY DARE...

- (1) How is loneliness different from being alone?**
- (2) Being totally honest with yourself, how have negative (or neutral) friendships COST YOU in your relationship with Christ?**
- (3) What can you prioritize or do to begin CULTIVATING deeper "soul-knitting friendships" with a couple of Christian friends?**

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