

## STEP 3

### **We make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.**

Many people compare addictions and codependence to bondage. We feel imprisoned by our confusion and chained to our helplessness, bitterness and shame. We've tried to break free a thousand times before, but we've failed every time. The chains are too strong, and we can't find the key to unlock the cell door. Our hopelessness drives us farther into our addiction to escape the pain. God doesn't demand that we get out of prison and get cleaned up before he'll have anything to do with us. Instead, he finds us in the deepest, darkest dungeon, and he meets us there. At our worst moments, he reaches out to us to offer forgiveness and hope.

The Apostle Paul described this moment of liberation in his letter to the Colossians. In that day, people who couldn't pay their debts were thrown into prison, and a list of all they owed was nailed to their cell door. Like them, our debt of sins—when we live in ways contrary to how God intended and when we try to seize control over stuff that we have no business controlling—condemns us and holds us in bondage. But Jesus “has taken [that list of debts] away, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14, p. 275).

We have no way of paying off our debts of selfishness and deceit, so Jesus took our list from our cell door and nailed them to his cell door, the cross. There, he did something we could never do on our own: He paid for every single debt—every one! When we accept his gracious payment, our cell door is flung open, our chains fall off, and we are set free! We are free, but the cost of our freedom came at a steep price.

We are still weak from years of confinement, but we're liberated!  
We still need to understand a lot more about God and about how life is supposed to work, but we're forgiven!

We still need to learn to relate to God and other people with honesty and integrity, but we're not alone any more!

Jesus offers us forgiveness from our debt of sinfulness, and he offers us freedom from bondage. In response to his offer, we can tell him to go away because we like being in prison, we can ignore his gracious offer and hope he goes away, or we can reach out and take the free gift of grace from him. In Step 2, we saw that Jesus Christ is someone we can trust. Now, we decide to take the step to actually trust him. The exact words aren't important. God cares far more about the attitude of our hearts.

If this prayer expresses your heart's desire, express it to God or use your own words.

Lord Jesus, I've been in prison for a long time, and I didn't know how to get out. It's been a terrible place, but somehow, at least it's familiar. But now I'm sick and tired of it. I know you have paid the price for all my debts of selfishness and deceit, and you extend your hand to me to get me out of my cell. Jesus, I'm taking your hand right now. Thank you, thank you, for forgiving me and setting me free. I still need a lot of help now that I'm out of prison. Thank you for always being with me. Amen.

If you expressed that desire to God, some incredible things just happened to you. As Jesus promised, he set you free and forgave all your sins! Here are some

other things God has done in your life:

- You became a child of God (John 1:12, p. 125).
- You passed from death to life, from darkness to light (John 5:24, p. 132).
- You were delivered from the domain of Satan and transferred to the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13–14, p. 273).
- God’s Spirit came to live inside you (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, p. 230).
- Christ will never leave you or desert you (Matthew 28:20, p. 47).
- You are living in the new creation, where things are being made like God intended them to be (2 Corinthians 5:17, p. 247).

The promise that Christ will never leave us is especially meaningful to those of us who feel isolated and alone. Our relationship with God is based on faith, not feelings. Sometimes we feel close to him, but sometimes we struggle with temptation and fear, and he seems a million miles away.

When you are lonely, you can pray, “Jesus, I belong to you, and I know you’re with me whether I feel your presence or not.” When you are afraid, you can pray, “Lord, I belong to you, and I know you understand what’s going on even when I don’t.” When you are happy, you can pray, “Jesus, I belong to you, and I’m grateful for all you’ve done for me.” And when you fantasize about escaping to an easier or more exciting life, you can pray, “Lord, I belong to you, and you’ve chosen for me to walk with you through some difficult times so my faith will grow stronger.”

## MEDITATION

### The Loving Father

Read Luke 15:11–24 (p. 108), the story commonly referred to as “the prodigal son.” Think about the son’s selfish behavior, where his choices took him and his father’s response when he returned home.

The younger son demanded the part of his father’s estate that would have come to him when his father died. In effect, he was saying to his dad, “I wish you were dead!” The father, though, didn’t protest. He respected his son’s decision and gave him the deed to the family property. The son sold the land out from under his dad, and threw the money away “in wild living.”

- In what ways does the son’s selfishness and behavior parallel yours or the attitude and actions of someone you love?

When the son’s life was a total disaster—and not until then—he “came to his senses.” At that point, he practiced Step 1 by admitting that his life was out of control. He realized he had thrown away not only his money, but his relationship with his father, too. He planned to go back and ask his father if he could be one of his hired servants. The father, though, had been longing for his son to return. While the son was still a long way off down the road, the father saw him, ran to embrace him and restored him to his place as a beloved son.

- How do you think the son felt when he saw his father running toward him? . . . when his father embraced him and kissed him? . . . when he was restored as a dearly loved son?
- As a prodigal who has returned to God, how do you feel about your Heavenly Father’s extravagant love and forgiveness?

Father, thank you for welcoming me back. It’s been a long, hard trip, and it’s good to be home where I belong.