

# Gaining and Maintaining a Clear Conscience

by Tom Palmer

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*Tom Palmer emphasizes the importance of gaining and maintaining a clear conscience through forgiveness and personal accountability.*

**Duration:** 56:21

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Luke 19:2, Luke 19:8, Acts 24:16, 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 Timothy 1:16, James 5:16

**Topics:** "Clear Conscience"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a clear conscience and being right with God and others. He encourages the audience to take a moment to reflect on those with whom their conscience is not clear and make a list of names. The speaker emphasizes the need to confess sins to God and seek forgiveness, demonstrating humility and repentance. He also encourages seeking the right opportunity to make things right with others, emphasizing the importance of person-to-person reconciliation. The sermon references 1 John 1:9, which states that if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse us from unrighteousness.

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## Transcript

I almost got up and said they're all reruns, but that wouldn't be a very good thing to say. Well, it's good to see all of you here tonight. And as I told you, those of you who were here in the session this afternoon, I enjoy young people.

I love teenagers. Really had to this year. From about March 19th to May 31st, I had three of them in my home.

And then the oldest one turned 20. But we enjoy young people in our house. And to me, one of the greatest things is watching God work in the lives of our young people.

I remember three years ago, we came for the first time to a youth prayer advance. And Ben was with us that night. And I remember us, my two older children.

And I remember that time of prayer on a Thursday night at the picnic table out by the lake up there in the mountains. And how it just seemed like God just came and sat down at the table with us. And I remember we had quite a time, a real meeting with God that night.

And that's what's exciting to me. I am so glad that you don't have to wait until you're old enough to get to know God. And what a blessing it is to see young people getting excited about God in their lives.

Let's take our Bibles tonight. Will you open them with me please to the book of Luke chapter 19. I intend to actually use three different passages of Scripture tonight to present the text for the message.

But I want us to begin here in the book of Luke chapter 19. And we're going to read one verse of Scripture. I'll make a comment or two.

We'll look at another and then another passage before we pray tonight. Luke chapter 19 verse number 8. And Zacchaeus stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

Verse 2, we're introduced to the occupation of Zacchaeus. He was a publican. He was the chief of the publicans.

We get a little explanation of his offense. He was rich. It wasn't because he was good at investments.

He was a rip-off artist. In verse number 3, we see his opportunity. He got to meet Jesus.

And then we drop down to the verse we've read and we see his obligation in his desire to be right with the Lord. He saw his need to be right with others. That's an example of what I want to preach about tonight.

And then over to the book of Acts chapter 24, a word of testimony about what I want to preach about tonight. The Apostle Paul is on the witness stand in defense of his own life. He's giving testimony regarding the life he had lived.

And in verse 16, he said, And then we go over to the book of 1 Timothy chapter 1. We have an example in Zacchaeus. We have a testimony in the Apostle Paul. Finally, we notice a word of instruction.

1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 5, I want to speak to you tonight about gaining and maintaining a clear conscience. Ladies and gentlemen, I believe what I am going to preach to you tonight from the Bible was and is to this very day the most valuable Bible truth that I ever learned as a teenager. I know of no other Bible truth that I learned while a teenager that has had the impact upon my life as what I'm going to preach to you tonight.

Let's pray and ask the Lord to speak to us. Father, I thank you tonight for the Bible. Lord, I am so grateful I am not left to my own opinions, philosophies, or ideas to try and help people here tonight.

Thank you rather for the Bible and the Holy Spirit who is here as our teacher. Holy Spirit, I just would invite you right now to have total freedom in this service. Please confront us with our need.

Please convict us of our sin. But then will you please bring about that supernatural change in our lives. Lord, it was already mentioned tonight that this service would be a night of liberating and freeing us.

Lord, I pray that that's exactly what will take place. And even when an invitation is given a little bit later on tonight, may we see a tremendous work of God in our midst. We'll thank you for what you will do in Jesus' name.

Amen. Yesterday I was sitting at my desk at home and I happened to pull the middle drawer out in the top of my desk and when I did, I found this little stone. It was kind of interesting because immediately it brought back to my mind an experience that illustrates in my life the impact of what I want to speak to you about tonight.

My father was a pastor and one night was out on visitation and visited a man who was a jeweler and I remember my father the next day giving me this little stone that the jeweler had given to him. In fact, he gave me several of these fine polished stones. Well, it just so happened that at that stage of my life, I was in junior high.

What a wonderful experience. I know we have some junior hires here this weekend. I saw several of your tricycles parked out here in the sidewalks.

I knew there are some of you here so you'll relate to this. But the very next day I went to school with this little stone in my pocket. I'm sitting in an English class.

We had a substitute teacher who was actually a missionary home from the field of Peru on a year of furlough. Some of you may remember several years ago when missionary Kevin Donaldson was shot down in his mission plane over the Amazon in Peru. It was Kevin's mother who was the teacher.

That day, sitting in class, for whatever absolutely stupid reason, I took this stone out of my pocket like this. I leaned my arm on the desk and I sat there like this. Remember, I was in junior high.

I just want to make sure you don't forget what time frame of my life this occurred. There I sit with this in my hand pretending to be chewing. Mrs. Donaldson saw it.

And she called my name out and she said, Tom Palmer, we do not eat cookies in English class. To which I quickly replied as I held it up, it's not a cookie, it's a stone. And the whole class cracked up laughing.

I put the stone back in my pocket. It was then a number of years later as an assistant pastor in my father's church that an older couple came and began to attend our church. It just so happened that they were the parents of Mrs. Donaldson.

And as we found that out and as I remembered her, interestingly enough, the little incident with the stone came back to mind. Young people, at this stage of my life, I've now been in the ministry for a number of years. I'm a full-time youth pastor.

The Spirit of God prompted me that I'd been wrong. Initially, my response was, oh, it was just a moment of junior high idiocracy. But it was as if the Spirit of God just kind of kept bringing it to my mind.

And of course, then as so easily we do, it was one of those situations where I rationalized and said, yes, but how do you just run over to the Amazon jungle and tell her you were sorry? This went on for a period of time and the conviction continued to grow and this incident kept coming back. And finally, just almost out of a sort of a desperation, I just prayed a little prayer and I said, Dear Lord, if you will make it possible for me to make contact with Mrs. Donaldson, I'll make this right. Can you imagine my shock, less than a week later, standing in our church office with a pile of mail paging through a mission directory that had just come in the... And there were the Donaldsons.

And there was their address on the mission field in South America. I sat down and I wrote a letter and I explained that as a junior high student, I had on a certain occasion been disrespectful to her as a teacher and God, years later, had brought this to mind and it was my desire to seek forgiveness and to make it right. And I asked her, will you forgive me for the way I responded to you in that class? Mailed the letter off.

It was probably a month, maybe even longer, a letter came back from the South American continent. And Mrs. Donaldson said this, Thank you for your letter. She said, I certainly forgive you.

And then she went on to say, We have laughed several times as my parents and I talked about the day you took the stone out of your pocket and pretended it was a cookie in my class. She knew exactly what I was talking about. And you know, even though it was such a simple, such an insignificant event, we might say, in my life as a goofball junior higher, yet that little experience then and even yesterday when I took the stone out of my pocket was a reminder again, sort of a refreshing in my mind of a great lesson God taught me as a teenager.

If you don't mind, let me tell you how God taught me that lesson. Folks, I believe in Bible preaching and I'll do Bible preaching tonight, but I'm starting with a testimony. I was a senior in high school.

The church that my father pastored in Pennsylvania was involved in a revival crusade that lasted an entire month, 31 days, 5 Sundays, 4 weeks. It was one evening, sitting there in a youth session, apart from the main service that would go on in the auditorium that a speaker got up and he spoke to a group of probably 40 teenagers about a clear conscience. Now gang, you've got to understand, I was raised in a Christian home.

We knew how to say, I'm sorry. As we stood with our nose in the corner, kind of a situation. And we had been made to apologize, and I guess I understood the basic concept.

This fellow stood there that night and said, a clear conscience is the ability to say there is no living person that I've ever wronged, hurt, or offended that I've not gone back and made it right. Somehow that took it all to a different level. He then took the Bible and just in a rather hurry up fashion showed us a list of areas of the life, even as a Christian, that will be drastically affected if our conscience is not clear.

If we're not right with God and others. He wrapped up this little session by saying, take out a piece of paper quickly. He said, I'm going to give you about one or one and a half minutes.

He said, ask God to show you those with whom your conscience is not clear. He just stood there quietly. I did what I was supposed to.

Took a pen, took a piece of paper. And before he closed in prayer, had written down 20 names. He said, let's bow our heads for prayer.

He said, before I pray, he said, how many of you young people would commit yourself to begin immediately to do whatever it takes to have a clear conscience? You know, I mean, that's what we were supposed to do. Raise your hand. That's what he's asking.

And he said, now, just tell God you'll do that. So in a simple prayer with this list in front of me, I said, I'll do that. He said, all right, you're dismissed.

Get to the auditorium. The service will start momentarily. Up the stairs, down the hallway, turn the corner into the foyer.

As I'm doing it, the door opens. In steps a family who had not been in our church for several years. But amazingly, their son, who was one year younger than me in high school, was the first name on my list.

You know, even at that moment again, there was that shock. Oh, come on. I mean, just 60 seconds ago, I'd said, dear God, I will begin immediately.

And I walked across the foyer to him. I had not talked to him for a couple of years. At one time, he had gone to our Christian school and had been affectionately nicknamed Snorts.

Does that give you any explanation as to how his name got on my list? And I said, listen, God spoke to me. And I said, when you went to our school, I didn't treat you well and didn't say nice things. And I said, I want God to forgive me.

I want you to forgive me. Will you do that? And now he was kind of shocked. I mean, this isn't typical stuff.

He said, yes. I said, thank you. I walked into the auditorium, sat down, took out my list, and checked off the first name.

Now, young people, this may be hard to describe if you've never experienced it. But gang, something happened in my heart in that moment that was absolutely incredible. You say, you started 19 names on the list.

I know. But I had just taken my first step of obedience toward gaining and maintaining a clear conscience. I went home that night.

My mother had been physically ill and unable to come to the service. Her name was on the list because of a little mother-son dispute that had occurred that very afternoon. And I had to go to her, actually in bed, not well, and say, Mother, God spoke to me.

I want to make this right. Will you forgive me? I had a younger sister, two younger brothers. This is going to blow your mind.

Their names were on the list. And so it was necessary to go to their bedrooms before we went to bed and just follow through on the same thing. You know what? That first night, I went to bed with five check marks already on my list.

You know what else it meant? About 10 miles away was a Christian school that I had attended in junior high. You know, if I could just erase junior high from my life, things would be so much better when they write my biography. But I called the principal of that Christian high school.

I said, Could I come and speak to your seniors in homeroom tomorrow? He said, That would be fine. I walked into the senior homeroom the next day, stood in front of the students that I had been in class with in those dreadful junior high years. And I said, I've got to tell you what God's doing in my life.

I said, God is working drastically right now. And I said, God has shown me that in this Christian school I was a pitiful example of a Christian by what I said and did. And I said, I have come to share that with you and to make that right and to seek forgiveness.

I can remember going to a pay phone. God just prompted me to make the effort. Went to a pay phone, called a teacher I'd had during sixth grade.

You know what? It was sixth grade that messed me up for junior high now that I think about it. Going to a pay phone, looking a teacher's name up in the phone book and calling and saying, I remember the day I stood in front of your desk and lipped off. Will you please forgive me? It meant driving a couple miles to a sewing factory.

For two years I'd been the clean up guy at the end of the day, would come in, walking into the office, going to the desk of the owner. As far as I know, an unsaved man and saying, Sir, during the two years that I worked here, there were times that I was not working but the time card was punched. And God showed me that basically I was taking time and eventually wages in that way.

Folks, I'm here to tell you that that continued on to be one of the greatest learning experiences of my life. A learning experience that would prompt me on occasion, for example, to stand in a restaurant. I remember one night standing in an Italian sandwich shop and the girl rang up my bill and in my mind I'm doing a little calculating and thinking, No, she's not right.

I mean the bill, she was fine. And she came and she said, It's this much. And I said, You know what, I don't think so.

I said, You better check that again. It came out to be several dollars more. She looked up, she said, Man, you're honest.

I said, I know, but it's a lot easier than coming back to pay you the money later. She said, Well, that's one less thing to confess to the priest on Saturday night too. I can remember going up on the front steps of my family doctor and knocking on his door one morning and he came to the door, his wife got him and I said, I've got to tell you something.

I said, When we first moved to this town, I called in and scheduled an appointment with you and then canceled it. Several years later when I needed a doctor's appointment, I remember calling and your wife was the receptionist. And she said, Have you ever had an appointment with us? We're not taking new patients.

Have you ever had an appointment? I said, Oh, yes. And that's what got me in. He'd been my family doctor, but I said, You know, God just showed me that was a flat out lie.

I'd never been to see you. You didn't know me. I didn't know you.

I said, I'm here to ask your forgiveness. Remember a couple of years ago, we were in Indianapolis. I was going to preach on a weeknight in a revival subject on a clear conscience.

God prompted me that I'd gotten two of the same washer parts from Sears for my washer, put one in and just logically concluded, now I'm ready for the next breakdown and kept the second part. A couple hours before I'm to preach that night, God reminded me, took that part back to Sears and said, Hey, you sent me double. I'm not to have this and returned \$120 washer part.

I guess what I'm saying to you tonight is this, whether it's the little stone incident or whether it's any of the other things that I've told you about tonight, looking back in my life to my teenage years, I do not know of

anything that ever impacted my life as the blessing of a clear conscience. Now, I know what some of you are starting to think. You've been sitting there now for about 15 minutes, listening to me publicly confess all the bad things I did when I was in junior high.

And you know what? There's a very good possibility. Some of you are already recalling the day you cheated on the Algebra 7 quiz. Kind of a thing.

Or you're remembering something you stole at work. You're remembering a lie you told to mom and dad. You're remembering a time when you got angry with a teacher and maybe already God's beginning through the blessed ministry of His Holy Spirit to bring conviction.

And already you're sitting there saying, Wait a minute, I was bad in junior high too. But oh, come on. Is it really that big of a deal? I mean, come on.

Aren't you maybe making a little more out of this just because it's good preaching material? Folks, I want you to take your Bible and let me see if I can give you some of that same list that was given to me that night sitting there in that meeting when I was a senior in high school. I mean, what areas of life really will be affected if my conscience isn't clear? Let me just give you some. In fact, we're not going to necessarily turn to all these.

I see a lot of people getting ready to take notes. I'd rather you write it down. So just do that.

Number one, your prayer life. You know, I'm always amazed how quickly we quote Scripture in part. Did you ever notice that? We use the part we want.

Here's the example. James 5.16, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. You say, I know that verse.

That's a good prayer advance verse. Right. Only if you've used the first part of James 5.16, which says, Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that ye may be healed.

Then it says, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Young people, are you aware of the fact that just simply coming to a prayer advance does not mean you will get answers from God? Not if your conscience is not right with God and man. Not if at this moment you are recalling the lie or the item you stole or the anger or... No.

You see, those offenses that were committed against mom and dad or a teacher or the law were also sin against God. The Bible says, If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. One of the main reasons why we do not live with a clear conscience is because we do regard iniquity in our hearts.

We leave it there. Don't touch it. Just forget about it.

Let the sleeping dog lie, we say. And yet the simple truth is, if our conscience is not clear, my dear friends, we are not right with God. And if we are not right with God, just ask Joshua, there is a wrong time to pray.

And that's when there's sin in the camp. Your prayer life, number one, is absolutely shut down. Number two, the area of spiritual maturity.

Hebrews chapter 5 verse 14 says this, But strong meat belongeth unto them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Young people, one

of the signs of spiritual maturity is a sensitive conscience. Has it ever dawned on you? Have you ever noticed that little kids have no conscience? Well, I shouldn't say no conscience, but they have a very insensitive conscience.

That's why when mom turns around, little junior in the high chair can take his peanut butter and jelly sandwich and hand it to the dog, and the dog takes it in the living room and eats it, and mom says, Junior, where did your sandwich go? And he says, I ate it. Because little junior does not have the maturity to have a sensitive conscience. But you know something? The older you get spiritually, the more grown up you become spiritually, the more sensitive your conscience becomes.

Do you know what shocked me about that list of 20? It was just about the time I began to jump for joy and high-five myself, because number 20 had been checked off. The Holy Spirit of God says, Good, now take... Oh man. Alright, so we take care of that.

The Holy Spirit says, Here, here. You know what you begin to find? The more we get closer to the light, the more God's Spirit can show us. And the more God's Spirit can show us, the more we can obey, and the more we obey, the greater the blessing.

And you know what? The older you get spiritually growing up, the more sensitive that conscience becomes. Number three, the area of your rejoicing. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 12, Paul says this, Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.

Hey young people, I'll just put it to you this simply. The happiest people in the world are people who are right with God and right with each other. It's that plain and simple.

And some of the most miserable people in the world are the people who refuse to get right with God and each other. Quickly, number four, our spiritual warfare. 1 Timothy 1, 18 and 19, notice what Paul is writing to Timothy, the young servant of God, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare, listen to this, holding faith and a good conscience.

Hey gang, do you realize that the devil is the accuser of the brethren? One of the things the devil loves to do is to take your faults and failures and my faults and failures and flag them in front of God. Do you realize when you clear your conscience, you've just de-flagged his flagpole? When you clear your conscience, you have just unloaded his gun, you have disarmed him. Because he doesn't have that ammunition to keep launching.

You can fight a good fight of faith when your conscience is clear. I love it there in Acts 23, we didn't read it, but then again in Acts 24. You know what hit me one day? The most powerful defense on the witness stand is a clear conscience.

The enemies of the apostle Paul were doing everything they could to drag him down, but his victory rested in the fact that I have exercised myself to have a clear conscience. Number five, the area of your testimony. By the way, here comes another one of these quotes in part.

Have you ever quoted 1 Peter 3 verse 15, Be ready always to give an answer to everyone that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. Hey, that's good soul winning, that's good witness and testimony scripture, isn't it? Do you know what verse 16 says? Having a good conscience. Christian teenager, listen to me.

There are some people tonight that you could not witness to. You want to know why? Has nothing to do with the fact that the word whosoever has been taken out of John 3, 16 or Romans 10, 13. It has everything to do with the fact that your life has weakened the testimony of your lips.

Your walk and your talk are not balanced. And so people would look at you if you came and tried to tell them what a great thing it is to be a Christian and say, who, you? Man, I've heard what you said to the boss. I know what you laughed at.

I know what you did and how you reacted. I remember a young man, this was in New York City a number of years ago, I preached basically this same material. Came to the service the next night, stood and shared a testimony.

He said, last night God dealt with me about my attitude toward the boss or the supervisor, I guess it was, in the warehouse where he worked. He said, this morning I walked into the warehouse, found my boss and said, I'm here to ask your forgiveness for the way I've responded to you. The boss was like, yeah, I'll forgive you.

And then, you know what the boss said? This young man said this to the whole church. He said, you know what? When you would blow up, we'd just stand back and laugh because we knew you were a Christian. See, young people, a clear conscience strengthens your testimony.

Number six, clear conscience affects the area of your physical health. We'll step out of the realm of the spiritual for a moment and look at the physical. You know, Psalm 32 is an interesting passage.

David had done something that displeased the Lord at the end of 2 Samuel chapter 11. You know what had happened. Wrong place, wrong time, wrong person, wrong reason, the whole business with Bathsheba.

You know what's interesting about it? Though David had pulled a classic cover-up, he hadn't faked God out. So he begins in chapter 32 of the book of Psalms to just describe a little bit of what he went through at that time. Do you notice or do you remember some of the things he said? When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

Premature aging. He said, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. His body began to dehydrate.

I think we could even expand upon the thought that probably he lost energy, vitality. Why? Because it was as if his body was drying up. You know, this is very interesting.

Scientists have proven that, well, come to think of it, we don't need scientists to prove this. Have you ever got called into the principal's office? Or have you ever had dad say, go to your room, I'll see you in five minutes? And the principal comes in or dad comes in and walks over and sits down or stands in front of you and confronts you over the need and they say, what do you have to say for yourself? And you go to speak. And what do you suddenly realize? Your mouth is so what? Dry.

You feel like you could spit cotton balls. And all the junior hires said amen. Why? Because guilt even has the unique ability to affect the way certain glands function in our bodies.

Do you know what I've heard that used to be done in the old Indian tribes? When they couldn't find the guilty culprit, let's say when something got stolen, they would do this little procedure, they'd line up all the Indians and they'd take a knife, heat it red hot in the fire, they'd walk down the row and every Indian would stick his tongue out. They'd take that knife and just lightly touch the tip of the tongue. When they hit a wet tongue that sizzled, they kept going.

But when they hit the dry tongue that didn't sizzle, then knew them had bad Indian. You see, young people, amazingly, what goes on emotionally and spiritually in our body affects the function of our body. Do you know several years ago, I read the report of a group of Christian medical doctors who did extensive research, gang, listen to this, determined we could empty two-thirds of the hospital beds in America if we could get people right with God and right with each other.

You say, no. Wait a minute. You start looking at the multitude of conditions medically that people are being treated for these days.

So many of the stress disorders and eating disorders and sleep disorders and weight disorders, and you know what you begin to find? So much of that is the byproduct of what's going on in their minds and their emotions. Hate, gang, guilt can ultimately drive people to swerve into a bridge at a high speed or put a gun to your head. Duke University Medical Center reported results that said angry people are five times more likely to have a heart attack.

Shocking, isn't it? Dentists have told of people who came in complaining of toothache to discover they had perfect health with their teeth, but they were angry. You say, oh, come on. What do you do when you get angry? Sure you do.

Get those teeth and get detention. You see, young people, whether you realize it or not, your physical body even, biblically, scientifically, medically, even Indianifically, if we want to use that example, it is affected by your conscience. We quickly go on.

Number seven, the area of service for God. 2 Timothy 1, verse 3, I thank God whom I serve for my fathers with pure conscience. Well, I tell you, I remember a Sunday.

This goes back a number of years ago now. I was just basically pulpit supplying in a church. And it was a church that didn't have a pastor, and the service had ended.

And I was standing in the back of the auditorium, and down front there's this little kid, probably five, six years old, and his teenage brother is just antagonizing the fire out of him. I know, you can't imagine it, but in Pennsylvania there are a lot of weird people, so that's what was happening. Well, this little kid is just getting fired up, you know, and finally he just launches into, I will kill big brother in the front of the church type situation.

Just as dad comes in, dad spots it, goes over, and just wails this little guy. Big brother, you know, does the big brother strut. You know, like, as the screams are echoing, you know, it's like, out he goes.

And he came walking past me, and he walked past me, and without thinking I said, you're the one that should have been whipped. Well, that didn't faze him. He just kept on going.

You know what? It was about three months later, I get a phone call from the church, can you come fill the pulpit again? Folks, before I could even say yes, you know who I thought of? That teenage boy. And I

thought, you know what? There's no way I can stand up to preach if that boy is sitting in that auditorium. I said yes, we went to the service.

I had prayed, dear God, will you please let me find this kid before the service, I'll make this right. I'm standing in the hallway, waiting for my wife, and at that time, my very little girl. Guess who was the first person to walk? That teenage boy was like, hey, come here a minute, I need to talk to you.

You know what? God answered my prayer, and I was able to make it right. What I had said was totally unnecessary. God had cleared up.

You know what? My vessel was clean. My instrument was pure. I was ready to go preach and serve God that day.

Hey gang, I got news for you. God doesn't use dirty instruments. That's why a clear conscience is so important.

Let me give you one last area where this plays into your spiritual experience. Number eight, the area of giving and worship. Matthew chapter 5, verses 23 and 24.

Jesus is teaching. Here's what He says. If you go to the altar, and I'm just kind of telling you what He says, but He says, if you go to the altar to offer your gift, we would think of the offering plate kind of a situation, and there remember that your brother has ought against you.

Young people, this is almost shocking. You say, but Jesus would love a hundred dollar bill and the offering plate wouldn't. No, not if your conscience isn't clear and your brother has something against you.

Jesus said, leave your gift at the altar, go be reconciled to your brother, then come offer your gift. Could we safely conclude that there's greater blessing in a clear conscience than putting a hundred or a thousand dollar bill in the offering plate? Could we safely conclude that even if you do put a thousand dollar bill in the offering plate with a conscience that's not clear, God will not be able to bless your life the same? Now folks, you've got the same list that I do at this point. Would you not agree with me then that a conscience that is not clear, right with God, right with others, basically short circuits every significant area of your Christian life? What's left if you can't pray and give and serve and witness and do spiritual battle? You see, young people, the simple truth is that if you're not right with others, you're not right with God either.

That's why Zacchaeus stood there before the Lord that day. There's no doubt in my mind that he was already right with Jesus because Jesus makes it clear, this day salvation has come to your house. But isn't it interesting that that very moment in his intense desire to be right, Zacchaeus said, Alright, if I have taken anything from any man... Hey, those are two key phrases right there.

You can't get much more broad than anything from any man. It's pretty tough to dodge anything from any man. I'll restore him fourfold.

That's why the Apostle Paul was so committed to saying, I exercise myself of a pure conscience, a conscience void of offense, nothing between my God and fellow man. That's why the challenge was so clearly given to Timothy. Sure, the end of the commandment is charity.

Oh, how I love Jesus. Yeah, that's right. With what? Out of a pure heart and a good conscience.

Now here's what's happening right about now. Alright, Brother Tom, you've told us all the little stories and yeah, you're right, we've done some of those things too and now you've got the list of verses and okay. But Brother Tom, and now we start making excuses.

Oh man, it happened so long ago. You know, it always comes to my mind with that question that how come you can't forget it? Or, but it was so small. How come the other person can't forget it? Or maybe we say this, oh, but how could I ever find them? Let me tell you one more of my junior high catastrophes.

Kid in my sixth grade class in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania with the last name of Stalsfus. That means nothing to you if you're from Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Iowa, Illinois. But if you live in Lancaster County and open the phone book, let me tell you something.

There are pages and pages and pages of Stalsfuses. You know what? It's much later in my life, kind of about the cookie situation time of my life. God brought to my mind a boy who had been in my class, who had sat in front of me, who again, I had been wrong to.

Last name, Stalsfus. Man, how in the world do you find a Stalsfus in Lancaster County? Everybody's a Stalsfus. Young people, listen to me.

I prayed about that and said, dear God, if you'll help me find them, I'll make it right. Went and got an old phone book. I guess my mother still had it from when we lived there.

I am not kidding you. I did some checking. Within less than three calls, I had him on the phone.

And I'm asking questions like, did you go to this school? Yeah. Were you in this class? Yeah. Were you in this grade this year? Yeah.

Do you remember me? Yeah. You know what that proved to me? God was more interested in me getting things right even than maybe I had been for a long time. Talk about commit thy way unto the Lord, and trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

You say, well, I'll never find them. You might be shocked whose picture you'll find in the church, or I'm sorry, in the mission board directory or whose name you'll find in the phone book. I've heard other stories that have made... I know of people who have found a name in an obituary column as a relative to someone who died and said, oh my word, that's the person I've been waiting to try and find.

And they were able to clear their conscience. Of course, one of the favorite lines at a point like this is, time will heal all wounds. Young people, does time heal wounds? Remember the last time you slid into second base and got up with that big strawberry on your knee, ground all that gravel and sand into your flesh? Did time heal your wound? No.

24 hours later, your knee was so stiff and the infection was burning so bad you couldn't walk. Time doesn't heal. There's only one thing that heals, cleansing and clearing.

People say, well, they were wrong too. So, there's only one person you're responsible for and that's you. People say, well, I just won't do it again.

Good, don't. But you know what? That changes nothing of what already happened. See, what we're talking about here tonight, young people, is coming to the point where number one, we get honest.

Hebrews chapter 13, verse 18, we trust we have a good conscience in all things, willing to live honestly. We're talking about humility. Is it humbling to walk in to a school teacher's room and stand there and say, I cheated.

Yeah, it sure is. But you know, that's exciting because God's grace kicks in anyhow if we're humbled and then we have the ability and the power to do what's right and we get it done. We're talking about a desire to obey.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy. Hey, let me wrap this thing up tonight quickly by giving you just some quick steps. You know, hopefully by about this point in the message, you're sitting there saying, all right, God's got my number, my phone's ringing, I'm going to have to answer it.

What do I do? Let me give you these things real quick. We're almost done. Number one, commit yourself to a clear conscience.

You know what? In just a couple of minutes during an invitation, I'm going to ask you tonight to go to your God and say, dear God, I want to have a clear conscience. I'm willing to do whatever it takes. I had a man come up to me two years ago after a message on a clear conscience and began to relate to me a story that involved over \$10,000 with the IRS.

We're not talking about a ripped off snicker bar. We're talking about a man who could end up with tremendous fines. We're talking about a man who could end up in jail.

He said, what do I do? I said, the first thing I know to do is go to God and say you'll do whatever it takes to be right. He said, I just got up off my knees. Number one, commit yourself to do everything.

Number two, make a list. You know, I am so thankful that night that that fellow in that youth meeting just didn't say, hey gang, we got to go. A service is starting in two minutes.

Let's get upstairs. No, he made us take out the pencil and the paper. You know, we are so good at hearing but not doing.

Make your list. By the way, ask God to bring names or situations to remembrance. You may have forgotten, but God hasn't and He'll remind you.

Thirdly, ask God's forgiveness. That's where 1 John 1, 9 kicks in. And if we confess our sin, He's faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Get it right with God first. Some of you tonight could come to this altar and say, God, forgive me for lying, for stealing, for cheating, for anger, for disobeying, disrespecting. And you could at least get that much right with God tonight.

Number four, let God prepare the way. By the way, here's where it gets so exciting. That's that commit thy way unto the Lord.

Commit thy works unto the Lord. God, I do not know how, but you do. I'm going to watch you work.

Number five, choose the correct wording. You know, this is interesting. Human nature is so lousy because even at a moment like this, isn't it amazing how we'll often say things? Well, I was wrong in what I said

after you made me angry.

You know what that is? That is a classic dodgeball stunt. That's a duck and roll when the conviction of God is zeroed right in on us. Excuse me, that's blaming the other person to avoid my responsibility.

No, young people, when you go to someone, you take responsibility, demonstrate humility and repentance. I was wrong. Don't make excuses.

Don't defend injustice. I was wrong. Here's what I did.

Next, seek the right opportunity. Number six, seek the right opportunity. Folks, I believe person to person will always be best.

I encourage people in our meetings when I preach on this subject, when you get up from the altar, if that person is sitting in the auditorium who you just put on your list, go to them and make it right right now. I remember a man several years ago in Mississippi got up, walked back the aisle, went to the back row and went to every person. By the way, it was all his family in the row.

You know what? I just stood there with everybody else's heads bowed and eyes closed, and I got the blessing of watching a man obey God. Deal with it right now. Do whatever it takes.

A phone call would be plan B. A letter would be plan Z. Letters are fine if there is not one other option, but letters can be lost, letters can be misunderstood, and so on. The personal contact is the best. By the way, here's a little key that I have learned to be very, very helpful.

Personal wrongs should be dealt on a personal level between me and God. Private wrongs should be dealt with between me and the person. Public offenses should be dealt with on a public basis.

There's someone in this room who I have thought vengefully about. I deal with that with God. If I've let them know I'm going to even the score, I better deal with it with them.

If I did it with all of you watching and listening, then I better deal with it with all of you. The scope of the offense equals the scope of the confession. Do you understand? That's a key thought, and I've had people at times ask about that.

Number seven, make restitution. You know what? That may mean having the teacher change the grade book in your report card. That may mean paying back.

My father, as an adult senior pastor, returned a high school diploma and two college diplomas to institutions to make right dishonesty as a student at all three places. I read of a man who walked into his supervisor with a check for \$200 because he hadn't been putting change in the coffee cup in the break room and God had convicted him and he figured out how much coffee he had been drinking while he worked there. You know what happened? God used it to convict the supervisor who had never paid over \$800 worth of coffee.

You say, \$800 for... You know what? \$800 is nothing compared to the blessing of God. And if that's what it takes... I have known of men, I've read of men who went to prison to clear their conscience and said, I was more free in prison with a clear conscience than I ever had been with an unclear conscience outside a prison. Folks, I believe tonight that a clear conscience is one of the greatest blessings you will ever know.

And I stand here tonight as a former teenager, if you know what I'm saying. Worse yet, a former junior hire to say to you that as a young person, if you will learn how to gain and maintain a clear conscience, young people, for the rest of your life as a Christian, you will find it to be one of the greatest blessings you have ever known. Now, I know what you're saying.

Brother Tom, why don't you just have a closing word of prayer and let's dismiss. Oh, no you don't. Gang, I'm not about to wrap up without at least taking two more minutes to say, now get out your piece of paper and let's make our list.

You see, it may well be that sitting here in this service tonight, God has already been prompting, now you just need an assignment pad. And so I'm going to ask you to take the next minute, say, dear God, who or what do I need to deal with in order to have a conscience that's clear, pure, good, void of offense? I'm going to stand here quietly for 60 seconds while you begin to write. Put down what God has already shown you and then we'll pray.

Mom and dad, brothers, sisters, school teachers, boss, police officer, youth pastor, neighbor, coach, what's God showing you tonight? Let's bow our heads please for prayer.

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