



## TIME OF GRACE®

# Forgiveness Is Offensive: I Can't Forgive Myself

## Study Notes

### Summary

What if you struggle to forgive yourself? When you come face-to-face with the earthly consequences of the sins you have committed, it can crush your spirit, making it feel impossible to move on and enjoy the grace of God. This message takes a surprising approach to this common struggle and brings us back to the authoritative declaration that Jesus made at the cross.

- Forgiving yourself is harder when . . .
  - ... you are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ... you are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ... there are \_\_\_\_\_.
- Offensive Truth #1: Not forgiving yourself is pure \_\_\_\_\_.
- Psalm 51:1,5: <sup>1</sup>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. . . .  
<sup>5</sup>Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- Offensive Truth #2: Forgiveness is his \_\_\_\_\_, not your \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1 John 1:7: The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- Romans 8:1: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- Lamentations 3:19-23: <sup>19</sup>I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. <sup>20</sup>I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. <sup>21</sup>Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: <sup>22</sup>Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup>They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

### Points to Ponder

1. For which sins from your past do you find the hardest to forgive yourself? How did this message change your way of thinking?

2. Meditate upon every word of Romans 8:1. Then rank the top two words that bring you the most comfort.
  
3. **Evaluate:** If God could forgive King David (an adulterer), the apostle Peter (a Jesus denier), and the apostle Paul (a former killer), he must be able to forgive me.

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Revelation 22:13; Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 15:54,55; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14.

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Forgiveness Is Offensive: I Can't Forgive Myself**  
Psalm 51, 1 John 1:7, Romans 8:1, Lamentations 3:19-23  
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*Pastor Mike Novotny*

The truth is, and you might not know this about our church, but many people here, and actually, many people who email us who watch on TV from Time of Grace, many of you, in fact, think that I don't know much about God.

Here's what happens. You text me or email me really late at night, "Pastor, can we talk?" And I've done this a thousand times so I know exactly that something happened and it's really bad so we find a time to meet. I meet you at the backdoor, I try to start the interaction with a smile but you're not smiling. In fact, you can barely look me in the eye. And we sit down in my office and I say, "What's going on?" And you tell me about this. "Pastor, I sinned. I messed up, like bad; bad messed up. I cheated. I drank. I relapsed. I used. I clicked. I did the thing that I swore I wouldn't do and it's a mess, but Pastor, I don't even know what to do."

And that's when I say the thing that I always say. I say, "Thank you." Like, thank you for telling me about this. It's so easy to hide. Thank you for talking and there's so many things we need to figure out because of this but there's one thing I need to tell you right upfront; I want to tell you right upfront because it's the most important thing I'm going to tell you today so listen closely: God forgives you. And I grab my Bible and I open up to one of a thousand pages and I find one of my favorite passages and I read it to you and I say, "Isn't that amazing? That even now - that even for this - God forgives you!" And do you know what most of you do? You react like I don't know that much about God. Either you dismiss the passage I just quoted as if it's unimportant, you pushback, "But there's so many consequences, Pastor." Or you flat out call me a theological liar: "But that can't be true. I will never be able to forgive myself."

It happens a ton in the church, especially with people who thought that coming to church would put all the worst choices in their past. When we just hold on and we can't let go. It's not that we don't take it seriously; it's just that we can't believe that God would be with us and that he would like us and that he would be for us. That's when these words come out of our mouth: "I can't forgive myself."

Now that reaction and feeling can happen to any one of us and it can really happen with any sin but there are three specific situations where you might be most tempted to think that. So I want you to grab a pen and write these down in your program. It is so hard to forgive yourself when, first of all, you are close.

Second, it can be really hard to forgive yourself when you are compassionate. The word compassion by its very definition means someone that suffers with another person. But I think the third one is actually the worst of all. Not just when you're close or when you're compassionate but when you know that there are consequences. When you fight in a war and in

the craziness of combat you do things that you can't take back and you stay up at night and you talk to the men and women who fought but you still realize that what you did, even if you had to, it had consequences. You know, sometimes we hook up and there's an abortion, sometimes we encourage someone to get an abortion, sometimes we flirt with someone we shouldn't, we sleep with someone we shouldn't, we talk to someone and kiss someone that we shouldn't, and the damage is so profound - it is not a small stone - and when we see it day after day after day, how could we just move on? How could we forgive ourselves when someone is hurting that badly?

And so for all three of these and so many other reasons, it's no joke; I get why it's so hard to believe what the pastor says is so simple. You are forgiven. Period. Our conscience wants to put a question mark on this sentence. Really? But that's why I'm glad you're here today. Today, God is going to confront that feeling that we just can't forgive ourselves and I want to make you two promises one last time. I'm going to promise you that by the end what God has to say is amazing. Best thing you're going to hear all week. And I want to warn you that before I get there, it will be amazingly offensive so are you okay if I preach the sermon on that paper? Alright, you didn't get up to leave! Alright, grab your pen because today, I need to teach you two offensive truths about not forgiving yourself.

Here's the first one. The first offensive truth is that not forgiving yourself is pure arrogance. Here's why: If you can't forgive yourself for what happened, let's say, a year ago, you know, if the divorce, the addiction, the words that you spoke, the choice that you made five years ago, you just can't get past it, God couldn't love me after I did that, here's my simple question: What did you think you were like before you did that? I mean, if it's such a stumbling block that God can't get past it, what did you honestly think of your own behavior before that sin? Some of you grew up in churches like I did where we confessed Sunday after Sunday after Sunday: "I've sinned. I don't deserve you, God." But did you believe that or did you only become undeserving after that one big thing? Here's the offensive thing that I need to say to you today: If you are not going to forgive yourself for that thing, then at least be biblical about it. Then at least not forgive yourself for all of it. If you don't want to forgive yourself for an abortion, then don't forgive yourself for the attitude you had towards your dad when you were 15 because God hated that, too. And if you relapse into heroin or drug use, it's just a thing that you can't let go and believe that God likes you? Then don't believe he likes you after speeding on the interstate because that was sin, too. And if you think the mess that you made of your marriage is the one thing that God can't get past, then add to that the worry you had about your grandma's cancer, finding your self-worth in the mirror, looking a second time in the mirror at the gym at that girl, if you don't want to be forgiven, that's fine; the Bible is serious about sin. But it's not serious about just some sins; it's serious about all of it. So don't make up some new theological category. Either you're unforgivable because of sin or you're forgiven because God forgives sins but there's nothing in between.

In other words, what you should do is what King David did. Do you know the story of King David's major sin in the Bible? I'll show you a picture of it. I took this picture in Jerusalem a few years ago up where King David's palace used to be and you can see that in the ancient world, his palace was on the high ground. And about 3,000 years ago, one day King David got up and he looked out and he saw a woman bathing; a naked woman, a married woman, and he was a married man. He looked again, then he lusted, then he leveraged his royal power, and then he

made love to her. He cheated on his wife and he led her into cheating on her husband. Except, if that wasn't bad enough, then she got pregnant and David tried to cover it up but he couldn't. And so one of the most shocking sins of the Old Testament turned into an episode of BCTMZ. Do you know what David did? He had the woman's husband murdered and he tried to cover it all up. But God wouldn't let it happen. God, who knew about all of it, dragged that stone into the light; he confronted David. David confessed: "I messed up. I sinned." And God did the most offensive thing. He just forgave him - just like that. Yes, there were consequences but God just forgave him. And afterwards, David actually wrote a song called Psalm 51 to detail the experience. And inside of that psalm is something many of you grew up reciting but I wonder if you ever realized what David was saying?

Look at Psalm 51. He said, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. Surely I was sinful at birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Is that crazy? God, I need you to have mercy on me. You can't treat me like I deserve to be treated. I failed and so I need your unfailing love. Why? Because I was sinful since birth. David says, my problem with you, God, didn't start when I had sex with that woman; it started when my mom had sex with my dad. From birth, I've been bad. Not when I slept with Bathsheba bad; I need you to be merciful because of all of it - not just that one thing. And so I want to encourage you today to be like David. Taking sin seriously is a good thing because sin is a bad thing in the eyes of God. But not just that one thing that you did; all the things. Please, don't be so arrogant to think that that one sin is the only thing that God can't forgive.

And, there's something else you should know. Sorry, I'm not done offending you yet. Not forgiving yourself is pure arrogance because you're implying that God is an idiot. Imagine if you confessed these stones not to some pastor in an office but at a coffee table with God the Father and Jesus the Son. Let's imagine you confess all of it: "God, I can't believe I did that. I can't believe I said that. I hurt so many people and I wish I could take it back. I'm such an idiot. You don't even know, God." And what does God say? "Actually, I do. Yeah, I know. I know all; I know better than you do. But here's the thing: I forgive you." "But you don't understand, God. I mean, the look on her face. I have hurt her," - "Whoa, whoa, whoa," God says. "I actually do know the look on her face. I see it more than you do and that's serious to me but I need you to hear this. I forgive you." And you say, "But God, I can just never forgive myself." And that's when the Father looks at the Son like, what do we do with this one? Right? They tag team it so the Father taps in the Son. Jesus comes in and he puts out his hands and he says, "Hey, do you know what these scars are?" "Yeah, Jesus, that's when you died." "Yeah, you're right. And do you remember why I died?" "Well, you died for sins." "Yeah. Do you remember what I said to the Father when I was on the cross? I said, 'Father,'" - "Father, forgive them,' you said." "Exactly. Why?" "Beause they don't know what they're doing." "Exactly. And do you remember what I said next? It is finished!" And you grab Jesus by the scarred hands and you say, "But is it?"

Do you see? We think we're being so humble when we hold onto sin but it's crazy. It's telling God he's a novice at his job of forgiveness; that the Judge of all the universe couldn't possibly judge this correctly. So it might be offensive to say and I know some of you have stones in your hands; don't throw them at me because you need to know the truth. You're not being humble.

The devil duped you with pride when you committed the sin; don't let him beat you twice by holding onto it.

Which brings us to offensive truth number two; this is my favorite one and I think you'll like it a little bit better. Here's the last thing I need to tell you today; that forgiveness is God's fact and not your feeling. What I love so, so much about church, about the Bible, about Jesus, is that forgiveness is just a fact and it's not waiting for you to feel it. I grew up in the church and I grew up in one of those churches where no one had any emotions. You ever been to a church like that before? Like this was the face we made for everything. Rejoice in the Lord, always! I am; that's what we'd do. And you know, there's some bad parts about being in a church like that; like it's easy to go through the motions and just come to church and check the box. But let me tell you the really good thing about going to a church like that is that I learned it doesn't matter how I feel. I don't have to wait until I really feel like God loves me. In fact, a college professor used to mock that all the time, "But I really feel," he would say. Who cares how you feel! Here's what God says. My wife and I watch *The Office* a lot at night. Any *Office* fans here? And I was thinking of this like Dwight Schrute - you know Dwight Schrute from *The Office*? What would Dwight Schrute say to your heart? "False." And he'd open his Bible and what would he say? "Fact." You are forgiven. God's patience isn't waiting for your permission. His compassion for you doesn't need your consent. And his salvation of you doesn't need your stamp of approval; it just is. So tell your feelings to put that in its pipe and smoke it because that's the truth. You are forgiven, you're loved, and your feelings might have to catch up later after I say amen but it is simple truth and I'll prove it to you with three passages.

Here's the first one: 1 John 1 says, "The blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin." You tell me the sin, I don't know what it is, but I know what the word "all" means. It means it doesn't matter the size of the stone, or how many times you threw it. All sin means all sin. And so you are purified. In Jesus you're washed. You're clean. You're holy. You're righteous. I'm looking at this camera back here. I'm thinking about all the guys in jail who have written me that you watch, you stay up late and this word applies to you. There might be crazy consequences you face because of your choices but because of Jesus, there's absolute cleansing. And it's true for all of you, too. All sin purified. No exceptions. In our church we have a big cross. There's no asterisk after it.

And then Paul jumps on the forgiveness bandwagon. Romans 8 he says this: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." In fact, in the Greek language, if Paul wants to emphasize something, he says it first. Do you know what the first word of this verse is in Greek? "No." Like no condemnation! Not a bit of it. You're not even close to being condemned. If you think that God is far from you, that's how you feel, but here's the fact: There is no condemnation for those who cling to the cross of Jesus Christ.

And then my favorite from the Old Testament. The prophet Jeremiah said this: "I remember my affliction and my wandering; the bitterness and the gall," right? He can't forgive and forget. "I well remember them and my soul is downcast within me. Yet, this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning and great is your faithfulness." His compassion. His great love. It already beat you. It didn't hit the snooze button and because of that there is grace on top of grace

on top of grace. In fact, God will even use your sin to drive you to him and to make you love his great love. When you expect to be consumed by his anger, instead you are met with his compassion.

And friends, it's just that simple. That's what my kindergartener taught me. These days, I'm this close to having a pre-teen daughter but six years ago, Brooklyn was just a little kid with a bob haircut in a car seat of the van. And I've told some of you this story when she and I had this really in-depth discussion about forgiveness. Here's what happened. I said, "Brooky, do you think your daddy is a good or a bad guy?" And she immediately said, "Bad guy." Well, guess who's not going to McDonald's today? "Why do you think daddy's a bad guy?" "Because daddy does sins." That's terrible grammar but, okay, I'll give you that point; you're right. So I gave her the spiritual test. I said, "Brooklyn, you're saying God doesn't love daddy?" "No, God loves you daddy. God forgives you." "But Brooklyn, what if daddy's done bad stuff - like really, really, really bad stuff?" "He would still forgive you, dad." And she smiled and looked out the window.

Grownups, don't complicate this. It's so simple a kid can get it. If God loves the world, he loves you. If the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin, it includes yours. If there is great love and compassion, then it's true for you today, too. So I don't know what happened, I don't know what stone, but today God is encouraging you to imitate what he's doing this very moment and let that stone alone. So let me leave you with two things before I say amen. Number one, and this next picture, this is why we really, really, really, really want you to have roots. Do you know the problem when you're not connected to a church community? All you often have are your feelings. And so often, our feelings are just lies in disguise. But when you have roots, when you come to church like many of you are today, you get to hear the word preached. Not a suggestion, not a feeling from some other human being, but the actual things that Jesus said. And your feelings are confronted with the facts of forgiveness. When you're doing life with a group of other Christians and you open up at the coffee shop and say this is what I did and this is how I feel; I can't forgive myself. They can say I get what you're feeling but in fact - you are forgiven. When you turn on Christian radio, when you turn on Time of Grace on your TV, when you open up your Bible app or sing Christian songs at home, like the actual truth gets into your heart and that's why roots produce fruit. That's why there's joy and peace when you're connected to something bigger than yourselves. It's why we want you to take the next step today and get connected. Not for the sake of our church but so that your heart would actually believe the most important thing in the world: That you're loved by God.

And here's the last thing I want you to do. When you came into church today, many of you got a stone. Would you grab it in your left hand for a second? More than one of you said, "Pastor, is this for us to throw just in case we don't like your sermon?" The fact that many of you said that is concerning to me. I want you to grab that stone, I want you to grab a pen, and I want you on your stone to make a cross. And I want you to take this home and I want this to remind you of what's true. There's some things that we do in life that are just hard to forget and they're hard to let go and they're so big we stumble over them and think we can't be forgiven. But let this stone be a reminder that you are. Maybe you can't forget but you can forgive yourself because Jesus did it first.



Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for not respecting our feelings. If something wasn't true until we felt it, so many of us would be condemned but we're not. Right now, there's no condemnation for all of us who look to Jesus and call him our Savior and we're so grateful for that.

Holy Spirit, I ask that you would help the hearts of everyone here today. Let those hearts catch up to what is actually true; that we are loved; that because of your great love, we are not consumed. That instead today, we have your compassion and in fact, we have the greatest thing in the world: Your face, which is looking towards us. Not in anger, but it's shining upon us in acceptance. Help us to be the community of faith that you call us to be.

Heavenly Father, I ask that we could encourage each other. Accountability is great but gospel accountability's better. Help us preach the gospel to each other; to remind one another not just of your standards of behavior but of the cross of your son, Jesus. Thank you over the past few weeks, Father, for teaching us about forgiveness. It's been hard but it's been good for our soul. And I pray that we would work our hardest to reconcile and remedy the brokenness of the past. And at the end of every day to know what's true and what can't be changed; that you're with us, you're for us, and your spirit is within us.

We pray all these things with confidence as your loved, forgiven, purified children because we pray today in Jesus' name, amen.