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Jesus Gave Me Grace and Forgiveness



QUESTION 1:

What are some of your favorite stories of forgiveness?

THE POINT

Jesus took my guilt
and set me free.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Several years ago, I was preaching on forgiveness. I spoke of how God had forgiven us and, therefore, we needed to forgive others. The very next day, a man was waiting in my office to speak to me about my sermon. To know someone wants to “discuss the sermon” fills every pastor with a note of uncertainty. Will this be praise or a heavy critique? Was he going to point out some ill-advised illustration I had used? Was he going to critique my interpretation of the text?

What I found was a man in tears. He told me that he had done some horrible things in his life, and he wasn’t sure he could ever be forgiven. Many people live under this heavy burden. They know the pain they have caused, and they live daily in shame and guilt. The good news I shared with this man is the same good news that is available to all. Jesus came to forgive and to give grace to all who will trust in Him.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

JOHN 8:2-6A

² At dawn he went to the temple again, and all the people were coming to him. He sat down and began to teach them. ³ Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. ⁴ “Teacher,” they said to him, “this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. ⁵ In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” ^{6a} They asked this to trap him, in order that they might have evidence to accuse him.

There are few encounters recorded in the Scripture that are more thought-provoking than the woman caught in adultery. I suppose this is because it's easy to see ourselves in the text. Sometimes we can see ourselves as the sinful woman. We have messed up big time, everyone knows it, and we are looking for any grace we can get. Other times we can identify with the self-righteous religious leaders who wanted to stone others. We look at someone's sin and, in our zeal for truth and righteousness, we forget what it was like to be the one in need of grace. We are more interested in revenge or exacting justice.

QUESTION 2:

Why is our first reaction often to judge others?

The religious leaders brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. Let's not pass by this too quickly. They didn't bring her to Jesus to determine if she was innocent or guilty. She was guilty. She had “done the crime” and she was about to have to “do the time.” One interesting thing about this situation is that the guilty man is nowhere to be found. The law of Moses (Deut. 22:22) called for both guilty parties to be killed, but in this instance, they only brought the woman. This is our first indication that they were more interested in testing or accusing Jesus than they were in keeping the law. They were clearly more concerned with wiping out the Messiah than they were with wiping out the sin.

The test was set up this way. If Jesus said they should stone the guilty woman, then He would be viewed as cruel and a man without

mercy. This would surely turn the people against Jesus. If Jesus ignored the woman's blatant sin, then the leaders had cause to say Jesus had no regard for the law and the Scriptures. It seemed like the perfect trap.

The easiest response would have been for Jesus to refuse to get involved. He could have just affirmed the truth of Scripture and moved on, leaving the woman to face the consequences for her sin. However, Jesus,

being full of compassion and grace, loved this woman and knew what was really happening. He knew she was guilty, but He refused to leave her at her worst moment. We are like this woman; we're all guilty of breaking the law of God. None of us are righteous (Rom. 3:10). We are sinners to the core, and yet Jesus, seeing us at our worst, chose to die for us, the righteous for the unrighteous.

JOHN 8:6B-9

^{6b} Jesus stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they persisted in questioning him, he stood up and said to them, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Then he stooped down again and continued writing on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this, they left one by one, starting with the older men. Only he was left, with the woman in the center.

We'd love to know what Jesus wrote on the ground, and many have speculated. I've often heard that Jesus was writing the sins of all those standing around. If this were the case, it would be easy to see why the men dropped their rocks and walked away. We really don't know what Jesus wrote, but the text seems to indicate that the power wasn't in what He wrote, but in what He said.

The religious leaders were persistent. They didn't ask just once, but they continued to press. When Jesus gave them a response, it wasn't



the response they were expecting. They were expecting a “gotcha moment,” but they were the ones who were “got.”

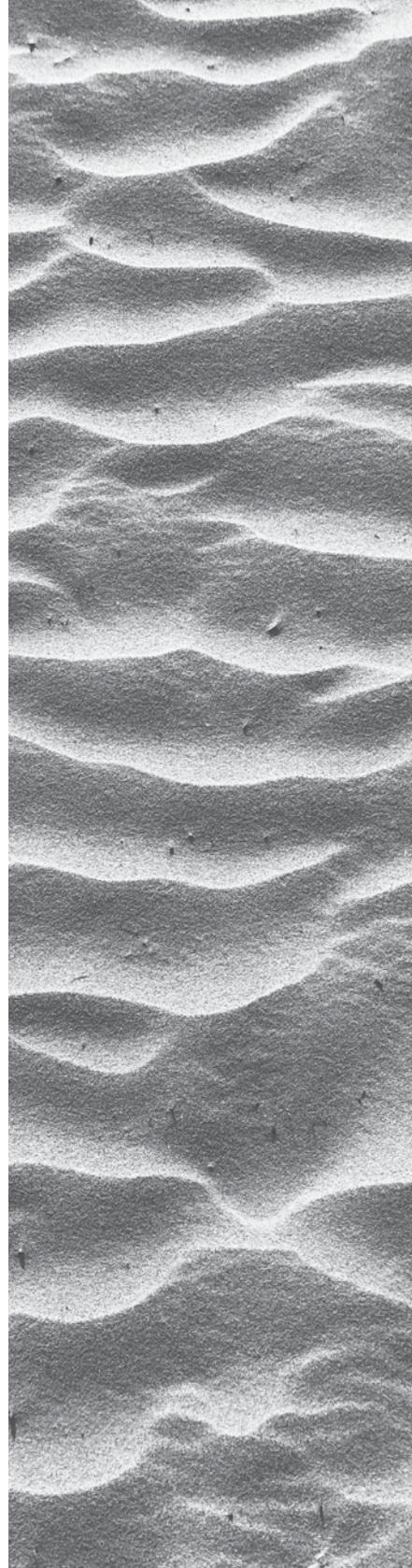
Several years ago, I was pushing for some changes in our church that I felt were going to be beneficial to our future. I had painstakingly taught through the Scripture on these issues and felt like these changes were going to better align us with the biblical mission and structure of what is called for in Scripture. After talking with our leadership and putting together a plan, we began to present it to the church body in a series of what we called “asking and listening sessions.” We conducted several of these meetings where people could hear me explain the changes in a smaller setting and then ask any question or make a comment.

At one of these sessions there was a man who wasn’t a big fan—OK, he hated the plan—of what we were proposing. When his turn came to speak, he made the mistake of using the history of the church as a reason for not doing something the Bible was clear about. When I graciously responded that the Scripture was more important than what the church had done historically, he blurted out “I don’t care what the Scripture says; we have never done it like this.” In that moment everyone in the room embraced the plan and we never looked back. In that poorly-phrase and ill-timed comment, the church took an even deeper look into Scripture and decided to move forward with the plan. What this man thought would drive home his viewpoint actually drove people away from his viewpoint and toward the truth. In a similar way, the religious leaders’ plan backfired.

The first to recognize the impact of Jesus’s words were the older men. We aren’t told why, but perhaps they were the first to leave because of their life experiences or the depth of their own sin. Whatever the reason, they dropped their stones and walked away while Jesus bent back down to write in the dirt again. The reality is that all of us are sinners and we share a common outcome: death.

QUESTION 3:

When are you most tempted to “throw stones”?



JOHN 8:10-11

¹⁰ When Jesus stood up, he said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ “No one, Lord,” she answered. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.”

The right question can be powerful. It can engage us, draw us in, and force us to reflect and respond. The Bible is full of more important questions. “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). To this woman brought before Him, Jesus asked two questions that had life-changing answers. Jesus asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” This woman was facing death at the hands of the Pharisees, but then the Messiah spoke. Jesus didn’t say much, but His words were poignant and powerful. Jesus’s questions pointed to a great truth for this woman: her accusers were gone!

This same Messiah who refused to condemn this woman caught in the act of adultery is the same Messiah who came to save you and me. We are just as guilty of sin. Just like her, we deserve to die, but instead we are given life through faith in Christ. Jesus offers us the same grace-filled truth He gave to this woman: “Neither do I condemn you.”

QUESTION 4:

How can we communicate to others they are sinners without condemning them?

Note the last words of Jesus to this woman as she soaked in His grace. “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.” This is the heart of repentance. It means that we receive the gift, turning toward the Savior and away from sin. It means we walk away different than we came. We draw close to Him and away from the world. Repentance coincides with grace. We don’t repent in order to receive grace. Notice that Jesus told the woman she was not condemned before He told her to stop sinning. We repent as we see the gracious gift of Christ applied to our lives. Through grace we are set free from the law of sin in our lives. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2). Do you stand boldly in the grace of Jesus, no longer condemned, or are you still struggling with the accuser trying to live under the law of sin? Embrace the freedom Jesus provides.

QUESTION 5:

In what ways does this encounter clearly demonstrate the gospel?

FREE FROM SIN

Use the space below to draw a picture that represents the concept of “sin” for you. This could be a specific memory from your childhood, an abstract representation of sin, an illustration, or whatever else comes to mind. You could also write a lyric from a song.



*“The way to no longer feel guilty is not to deny guilt,
but to face it and ask for God’s forgiveness.”*

RANDY ALCORN

LIVE IT OUT

Jesus took my guilt and set me free. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Confess sin.** What are some ways sin has reared its ugly head in your life? Take a moment and think about the consequences of that sin. Confess those sins to Christ. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
- ▶ **Write a prayer.** Most of us speak our prayers, but writing prayers can be a powerful exercise. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for saving you from your sin. Mention His mercy and grace. Ask Him to help you show grace to others even as He has shown grace to you.
- ▶ **Extend grace.** Rarely a week goes by when there is not some situation that has me flustered. Someone has cut me off in traffic or one of my kids has pushed my last button. Prepare yourself now to extend grace. Extend grace to others. When you do, you reflect Christ to others.

It's a powerful thing indeed when someone recognizes their need for forgiveness and repents. As those who have experienced that forgiveness, let's be quick to offer that hope to others.