



*Be encouraged and keep moving forward.*



# Relentless Grace # 1

There's an old saying that says, *"The Gospel is bad news before it's good news. It first confronts you with your sin before it offers you grace."* There's a great example in Scripture of someone who was confronted or singled out for their sin. It's found in Acts chapter 9,

Acts 9:1-9 (NLT) says, *"Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink."*

What makes this example from Scripture powerful is that Saul paints a really good picture of someone who didn't deserve forgiveness, he didn't deserve grace. I think sometimes we slip into this idea that we can earn grace.

- Well they're a really good person, so of course God forgave them.
- Well they help a lot of people so of course God forgave them.
- Well they only messed up once, so of course God forgave them.

But here's a guy in Saul that wasn't a good guy. Here's a guy that wasn't helping anyone but himself. Here's a guy that didn't just mess up once, he was a repeat offender and yet we see God setting up to forgive him. God could have blasted him. God could have struck him dead right there on the road to Damascus. But what God chooses to do instead is to give you and I a really powerful reminder of His relentless grace. Saul is a great reminder that He (God) really does desire to forgive us. I think we develop this image of God like He's in Heaven with this lighting bolt scepter just waiting to blast us, the first moment we screw up. While there are examples all throughout Scripture that talk about and deal with the justice of God, we can't forget that God loves us and desires nothing more to be in right relationship with us. He desires to forgive you and there are some really clear components of forgiveness that I think we sometimes forget.

Here's the first component for forgiveness: The sacrifice of Jesus.

I know to some of you that may sound like an elementary answer or something you heard when you were in 3rd grade Sunday School, but here's the deal, if we really understood this idea, it would revolutionize our lives. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of calvary makes God's forgiveness of your sins and my sins possible. Without the cross there can be no forgiveness.

Acts 4:12 (NLT) says, *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”*

John 14:6 (NLT) says, *“Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

We start with this because this is foundational to everything else. Jesus’s death on the cross and resurrection from the grave is what makes our forgiveness possible. In other words you can’t out-sin the sacrifice of Jesus. When you become convinced that God can’t forgive you, what you’re really saying is that Jesus wasn’t enough. What you’re really saying is that what Jesus did on the Cross of Calvary was great and all but it wasn’t enough to for what I’ve done. It wasn’t enough to forgive my sins. That’s crazy to even think right? So will God forgive you? Yes. Will God forgive you again? Yes. Will God forgive you even when you keep screwing up in the same way? Yes.

Think about how often you and I cheapen the sacrifice of Jesus by assuming we're not or can't be forgiven. Take some time to chew on that and tackle day two tomorrow. Be encouraged and keep moving forward.



# Relentless Grace #2

In part #1, we left off talking about the components of forgiveness. We talked about the magnitude of the sacrifice of Jesus. In other words, you can't out sin His sacrifice. Today, we're on to the next component of forgiveness. If the first component of forgiveness is what Jesus did, then the second component of forgiveness is what we do, or our job in the process.

Now this is where a lot of people get tripped up. We hear this and we think, "Okay, just tell me what I have to do and I'll get started. God you name it, and I'll do it."

- Help three old ladies across the street? Done.
- Give a few bucks to a person in need on the corner? Done.
- Read the Bible and pray for 10 minutes every day? Done.
- Be honest on my taxes? Done.

That's what we're looking for right? We'd love to have a list of 8-10 things in front of us that we could just do and then move on with life knowing that God has forgiven us. Here's the deal, there is a list, but it has nothing to do with doing good works. The list isn't about helping old

ladies across the street or being honest on your taxes (those are things we should do regardless).

Our first responsibility has to do with confession.

1 John 1:9 (NLT) says, *“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”* I mean right here in this verse alone it maps out the whole deal. We confess, He forgives.

Proverbs 28:13 (NLT) says, *“People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.”*

Psalms 32:5 (NLT) David says, *“Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”*

I mean I don't think that Scripture could be any more clear on this idea. When we confess, when we acknowledge our sins, God forgives us.

Now at this point some of you are probably thinking, “Hey, I've got this down because I screw up a lot. I've gotten really good at admitting that I'm wrong.” That's good, Scripture calls us to confess but there's more.

Our second responsibility has to do with repentance.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT) says, *“Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.”*

Acts 3:19 (NLT) says, *“Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.”*

Repentance is almost like stage two of the process for you and I. We've become really good at admitting our wrongs but not so good at making the needed changes to ensure that we don't continue to go down the same road. That's what repentance is in the first place. To repent is to turn away from. Repentance is all about us planting a foot in the ground and making a 180 degree turn in the opposite direction. Look again at that passage in 2 Chronicles, it says we're to "turn" from our wicked way. The passage in Acts say we should "turn" to God. God's not interested in our words, He's interested in our actions.

1 John 3:18 (NLT) says, *"Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions."*

James 1:22 (NLT) says, *"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves."*

So we want God to forgive us, but we don't want to do anything different in how we're living our lives? There is no other area where that kind of thinking makes sense in life.

- I want to get a promotion at work, but I refuse to show up on time.
- I want to have a retirement, but I refuse to stop spending money on stuff I don't need.
- I want to get fit, but only if I never have to stop eating junk food.

In other words, while our forgiveness comes from God and isn't about our good works, God does expect us to put something into the mix. He expects our lives, the actions of our lives to reflect our heart's desire to be forgiven.

Jeremiah 17:10 (NLT) says, *"But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve."*

We're not fooling God with our empty words. God is fully aware that you're just spouting off meaningless words and that you have absolutely no intention of really changing your life.

What God is looking for from us is a sincerity of heart and a genuine desire to change. Not perfection, not mistake free living but a genuine heart felt desire to allow Him to continue working in our lives. Be encouraged and keep moving forward.

Spend some time chewing on these questions:

1. How often do you come to God seeking redemption without repentance?
2. What areas of your life are you in need of true repentance in?
3. What are you going to do differently today to start walking in repentance?





# Relentless Grace #3

Let's land the plane on this idea by looking at, at least a two of the reasons we sometimes don't feel forgiven. There are of course bunches of reasons, but here's what jumps out to me.

## We confuse condemnation with consequences.

Condemnation is from God, separation from God, you're not a part of the family of God, etc. I hope over the last several days, that we've made a case that if we come to God with a heart-felt confession and a desire to change, that God grants us forgiveness. Where I think we get confused though is that we still deal with the consequences of our poor choices and we assume that consequences and condemnation are the same thing - and they are not.

- God forgives us and we are free from condemnation. But the consequence of our poor decision means that we still lost our job.
- God forgives us and we are free from condemnation. But the consequence of our poor decision means that trust has been broken in our marriage relationship.

Understanding this difference is crucial because I often hear people get these ideas confused. We treat God like some sort of genie in bottle and as soon as we confess our sin and choose repentance we want him to magically take away all of our troubles. Even in light of God's forgiveness there are still consequences that we have to deal with because of our poor decisions. You can be forgiven and free from condemnation, but consequences may still remain.

Secondly, we've forgotten that the devil's main objective in this battle of life is to destroy us.

1 Peter 5:8 (NLT) says, *"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."*

Paul says that we're to pick up the "Shield of Faith". If you've been a Christ follower for any length of time then you realize that the devil has become skilled at targeting you exactly where it hurts. The devil fires flaming arrow after flaming into your life in an effort to destroy you. Maybe for you it's the flaming arrow of hatred, anger, lust, jealousy, pride, doubt, fear, despair or distrust.

The goal of the arrows, the purpose of the arrows being shot into our lives is to create distrust and to create doubt in regards to the faithfulness of God. "You know, maybe God doesn't know what He's talking about." "Maybe I am justified in my anger and resentment." "Maybe I should live in fear." "Maybe I'm supposed to feel hopeless." "Maybe I'm too big of a screw up to be forgiven." "Maybe God doesn't have a master plan for my life." "Maybe God doesn't really care about me after all." Don't miss this, that's the goal, "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." The devil's goal is to slowly but surely erode your trust and belief that God is for you and has forgiven you.

So Paul encourages us and tells us to pick up the Shield of Faith. Believe that God is for you. Romans 8:31 (NLT) says, “*What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*” What are the “*wonderful things as these*” that Paul mentions in that verse. For the first 30 verses of Romans 8 Paul loses his mind talking about the goodness and faithfulness of God to us even in the midst of our screwed up lives. That’s the “*wonderful things*”. And what shall we say about such “*wonderful things*”? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Let me end with this last reminder and verse. If you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, then claim this verse for your life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT) says, “*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*”

You can be forgiven. Be encouraged and keep moving forward.