

FROM RED LETTER CHALLENGE

FORGIVING

CHALLENGE



A 40-DAY LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

ZACH ZEHNDER

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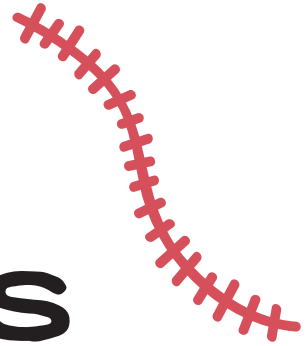
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INTRODUCTION:

SCARS

 **SECOND CHANCES**



It happened so fast that I didn't have time to take evasive action. I barely had time to think. There wasn't even time for my life to flash in front of my eyes.

All I can remember was seeing, out of the corner of my eye, a black pickup truck coming straight for my driver's door at tremendous speed. Then the crunch of twisting metal, the crackle of breaking glass, the WHOOMP of the billowing airbag, and darkness.

Almost instantly, I lost consciousness.

The day was July 31, 2001—the transition summer between high school and my first year at Concordia University near Milwaukee. The Zehnder family was having a reunion in Angola, Indiana, and I was behind the wheel as we drove back from hitting some golf balls at a driving range. My older brother and a cousin were in the back seat, while another cousin was in the front passenger seat.

As I entered this intersection, I was completely unaware that I had just run through a stop sign. The car in front of me didn't stop, so I assumed there was no stop sign—a dumb mistake. The cross traffic did not have to stop, so when I entered the intersection, I was blindsided by a pickup going close to 60 miles per hour.

I remember coming back to consciousness, but only briefly, as my brother said, “Are you all right, Zach?”

I felt all right, although I couldn’t move. The pickup truck had struck my door, which caved in, pinching my waist against the center console, where you find the cupholders. I could wiggle only enough to tell that I wasn’t paralyzed. But I couldn’t free my legs. Then I dropped back into oblivion.

When I regained consciousness, the medics were there, but they couldn’t get me out. Back to darkness...

When I came to again, I could hear the mechanical whirr of a tool being used to pry open my door. Emergency workers had arrived on the scene with a “Jaws of Life”—a powerful hydraulic tool with a “spreader” that opens up crunched-in car doors. It’s like a can opener on steroids.

I remember mumbling something about whether my brother and cousins were all right, and then it was off to la-la land again.

When I finally returned to consciousness, I remained alert as they transferred me to a stretcher. Shockingly, I felt completely normal and almost wondered if I could have walked to the ambulance. But they weren’t taking any chances in such a bad accident.

Authorities had alerted my parents at the reunion and assured them it was no big deal. They really undersold the potential seriousness of the accident. Therefore, my parents were stunned when they arrived on the scene just in time to see me being rolled on the stretcher to the ambulance.

I learned that my brother and cousin in the back seat were all right—although the cousin in the front seat had some bleeding in one ear. It’s possible that my head might have struck his ear when the airbag went off. Unfortunately, he lost some of his hearing in that ear. The driver of the pickup truck was fine, and we learned he was from a Christian family. We were enveloped in prayer.

It was a miracle that we all lived and were mostly injury-free. I came out unscathed, except for a little scar on my chin that did not even require stitches.

July 31 became my Second-Chance Day.

I had felt a calling to be a pastor when I was a freshman in high school, but as the years went by, that calling began to fade. I never became part of a wild party scene, but I was beginning to move away from my calling.

The accident was a wake-up call—my Jonah moment.

The prophet Jonah famously ran from his calling, which was to preach repentance to the Ninevites. But God stopped him in his tracks, and Jonah wound up in the belly of a huge fish, where he finally came to his senses. I too wound up trapped in the belly of a beast, except my “beast” was my dad’s Honda Accord. Jonah was swallowed by the jaws of the great fish, while I was freed by the Jaws of Life.

But my greatest sense of freedom came that very night, when I got down on my knees and thanked God for His protection. That night, I decided to answer the call to become a pastor, and one week later I enrolled in Concordia’s pastoral ministry program.

Today, I am a fourth-generation pastor in the Zehnder family.



DO YOU HAVE
A HARDER TIME
RECEIVING FORGIVENESS
FOR YOURSELF OR
GIVING FORGIVENESS
TO OTHERS?



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

When I left the hospital that day in 2001, I was in possession of two things:

- 1 A TICKET FOR RUNNING A STOP SIGN
- 2 A SCAR ON THE BOTTOM OF MY CHIN

This scar is precious to me today. It represents the moment when God gave me a second chance at life. Our God is a God of Second Chances...and Third Chances...and Fourth Chances...and...You get the idea.

Our God is a forgiving God. But do we *really* believe it?

One question I often ask people is: Do you have a harder time receiving forgiveness for yourself or giving forgiveness to others? When asking this, I have found the vast majority of people struggle with receiving forgiveness. While we have a long way to go to be more gracious with and forgiving of others, we are typically the least forgiving of ourselves.

This fact leads me to the following conclusion: You cannot be forgiving of others until you have received forgiveness for yourself. We forgive others by learning to receive God's forgiveness for ourselves.

Thankfully, in each of our life stories, someone has taken the initiative to grant us total freedom. His name is Jesus. It may sound surprising, but the primary goal of this book is not to learn how to forgive others. You will be going even deeper to a point that is likely much more difficult and painful. This is primarily a book about receiving God's forgiveness for yourself. I'm all for reconciliation in our society and extending forgiveness to others. But it starts with encountering Jesus. Once you have received the grace of Jesus, it compels you to be forgiving of others.

The scar on the bottom of my chin is a constant reminder to me of God's grace. God's forgiveness. My scar has turned into a powerful, pivotal moment and story—because that's what scars do.

Scars tell powerful stories.

Did you know that the resurrected body of Jesus still carried scars? Scars are a surprising feature of a resurrected body. On the surface, scars seem to be a defect. Wouldn't we expect an upgrade in our resurrected body—one without blemishes, one without any marks of suffering?

So why would God allow the scars of Jesus to remain? Is it so that we would forever remember our sin? To constantly remind us of our guilt and shame? That would be out of character for God. Remember, Romans 8:1 says, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** God doesn't want us to continually dwell on our shortcomings. So what does God want to tell us through the scars of Jesus?

**YOU CANNOT
BE FORGIVING
OF OTHERS UNTIL
YOU HAVE RECEIVED
FORGIVENESS
FOR YOURSELF.**

God made scars. They were His idea. He created human skin with the ability to heal, but many times the healing leaves a scar. Some scars may have little meaning to you, but other scars may have a lot to say. The scars of Jesus have the most to say.

The Gospel writers Luke and John both describe the resurrected Jesus bursting into a room filled with His disciples who were quarantined out of fear. Jesus allowed His disciples to see and touch His nail-scarred hands—the evidence they needed to prove it really was Him.

Thomas earned his nickname, "Doubting Thomas," that night. He said, **"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."** John 20:25

Jesus responded, **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** Thomas said to him, **"My Lord and my God!"** John 20:27-28

For as much grief as we give Thomas about his one statement of doubt, he would go on to be an incredible influence for the cause of Jesus. Thomas, by most historical accounts, was the first disciple to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the nation of India and would eventually be martyred for his faith in Jesus.

The scars of Jesus turned a Doubting Thomas into a devoted disciple of Jesus. Likewise, His scars have the ability to mark us and truly change us forever.

The scars of Jesus tell the story of an innocent man, who died a brutal death for guilty sinners. This innocent man was also fully God. Through His death and resurrection, those same guilty sinners receive a free gift of grace that allows them to be in right relationship with God for eternity, now and forever. Not only does this grace usher us into heaven after we die, but it also brings us into a right relationship with Him today. And being in relationship with God in this world allows us to experience great purpose, meaning, and fulfillment.

Pastor and poet Edward Shillito witnessed the horrors of World War I firsthand. As he saw the wounds of his friends and allies, he reflected upon a Jesus who knows about human pain. It led him to write this beautiful poem:





"THE HEAVENS FRIGHTEN US;
THEY ARE TOO CALM;

IN ALL THE UNIVERSE
WE HAVE NO PLACE.

OUR WOUNDS ARE HURTING US;
WHERE IS THE BALM?

LORD JESUS, BY THY SCARS,
WE CLAIM THY GRACE."¹

- EDWARD SHILLITO



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

It's one thing to look at Jesus's scars. It's another to receive from His scars what He truly wants to give you—His grace. His grace forever marks you as God's child. And if that is true, then His grace ought to extend from us to others in this world. You would think that followers of Jesus would be known as the most forgiving and gracious of people. And yet, this is far from reality.

Jesus is known for grace. Christians are known for judgment.

Grace and judgment, by definition, are polar opposites of one another. Grace is getting a free gift you don't deserve. Judgment is getting exactly what you deserve.

I have often struggled with this reality and find it hard to believe that a people associated with Jesus could be so far away from the life and example of Jesus. Something has to change.

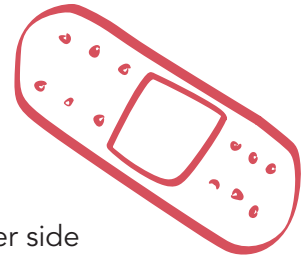
We can't just grit our teeth to become more forgiving of others. So, what do we need to do?

**MANY OF US
CARRY WOUNDS
ON THE INSIDE
THAT WE HAVE
NOT PROPERLY
DEALT WITH.**

First, we must understand that on a level much deeper than our physical scars, many of us carry wounds on the inside that we have not properly dealt with or allowed God to heal. We may be the only ones aware of just how many deep wounds we carry. It's possible that these are a result of another person's actions against us, but some of the deepest, darkest hurts are those we may have brought on ourselves.

"Reconciliation" is a word used widely by many secular and spiritual leaders. Reconciliation requires two parties to

come together. Each party must walk over to the other side, but I believe it is the Christian's responsibility to take the first step in that direction.



The only problem is that far too many Christians walk to the other side still carrying personal wounds without having dealt with them appropriately. Is it possible that if we are already coming to the table wounded, we could be doing more damage to one another? How can we help solve world problems and injustices if we ourselves haven't experienced true healing and freedom?

To receive total freedom, the first step is knowing that God Himself has truly forgiven you.

Isaiah 53:5 declares: **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."**

Over the next 40 days, you will experience the incredible forgiveness Jesus offers you. My prayer is that along the journey you will allow God's grace, experienced through His wounds, to heal you. Your wounds will turn into beautiful scars that tell an incredible story about an extraordinary God!

Bring all of your shame; bring all of your guilt. Bring the stuff you've been suppressing—the stuff buried underneath the couch cushions. It's time to pull it all out. And the baggage you've been toting around wherever you go? Bring that, too. Bring it all to Jesus, and if you do, I can promise that you will experience freedom like you never thought possible.

In his book *The Weight of Glory*, I love the way that C.S. Lewis describes the freedom that Jesus offers to us. He says, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”² Jesus declares to us in John 10:10b: **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** There is a battle raging on for your heart and soul, but Jesus assures the victory in that battle.

In fact, it’s already been won.

One last thing about that fateful day on July 31. This wasn’t just the day that I was almost killed in a car accident. This wasn’t just the day God gave me a second chance. And it wasn’t just the day when I decided to become a pastor. July 31 was the day I married Allison—in 2004, three years to the day after the accident. This wasn’t planned. In fact, I had no idea that we were getting married on the same life-changing date until my brother brought it up during his best-man speech at our wedding reception. So this truly is a day of redemption for me.

When Jesus returns to redeem all of creation, the Bible sometimes presents it as a wedding, with Jesus as the groom and the Church as His bride. This will be the day when all things are made new—when pains are gone, tears are wiped away, car accidents are a thing of the past, and forgiveness is fulfilled.

When Jesus comes back, maybe He’ll even do it on a July 31 sometime in the future. But any day is fine with me.

WHAT WILL THIS 40-DAY CHALLENGE JOURNEY LOOK LIKE?

The answer to every spiritual problem in existence is always to look to Jesus.

And that's exactly what we are going to do in *Forgiving Challenge*. If you struggle to understand God, simply look to Jesus because He reveals the character of God. The best way to learn what true, real, and perfect forgiveness looks like is by examining this question: "How did Jesus forgive?"

There are many powerful stories of Jesus's forgiveness of others in the Bible—a Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well, a woman caught in adultery, Zacchaeus the tax collector, and a rebellious child known as the Prodigal Son, to name a few. But my favorite story of forgiveness is when Jesus forgives one of His disciples—Peter. Peter is Jesus's right-hand man, which makes the gift of forgiveness all the more meaningful. This book will largely focus on the forgiveness that Jesus gave to Peter.

Over the first five days, I'll introduce you to the Five Phases of Freedom using the acronym SCARS.



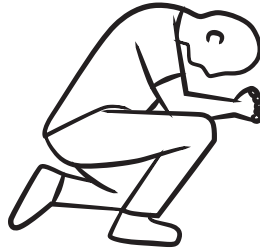
On Days 6 to 40, we will dive deeper into each of the Freedom Phases. Each week, we will look at the unfolding story of Jesus and Peter to better understand our own stories.

DAYS
6-12



The topic of **SIN**
and how we miss
the mark

DAYS
13-19



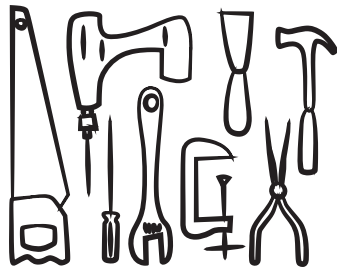
The practice and
importance of
CONFESSION

DAYS
20-26



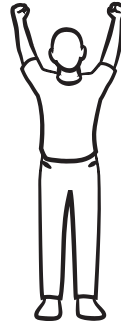
God's declaration of
ABSOLUTION for
every person

DAYS
27-33



God's words of
full **RESTORATION**
available to all

DAYS
34-40



How to walk in complete
freedom through the process
of **SANCTIFICATION**

My hope is that after seeing God's forgiveness and freedom offered to Peter, the over-arching challenge in this workbook will be to help you receive God's forgiveness, allowing you to be free.

The greatest impression on humanity remains the scars of Jesus. His forgiveness leaves a greater impact on the world than any of your sins could ever leave. If God's forgiveness has left such a significant signature on humanity, then I wonder if our greatest mark on humanity could be God working and bringing freedom through our own scars.

This will not be an easy process. It will be painful. It will be difficult. But if you persevere and complete the process and receive God's forgiveness, Jesus will bestow more freedom on you than you ever thought possible.

Remember Jesus's words when He opened the scroll in Luke 4:18: **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."**

The one whom Jesus will set free in this 40-day challenge is you.

Dr. Karl Menninger, a well-known psychiatrist and self-proclaimed atheist, once said that if he "could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75% of them could walk out the next day!"³

If an atheist can understand the power of forgiveness, how much more should followers of Jesus!

Welcome to ***Forgiving Challenge: A Life-Changing 40-Day Journey to Freedom.***

Are you ready?

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you begin your journey, here are a few helpful tips to maximize the impact that this 40-day challenge can have in your life.

1 INVITE SOMEONE TO WALK WITH YOU.

Most of the greatest challenges that are conquered in life are not meant for individuals to tackle alone. Our hope is that you will do this challenge with at least one other person. If you are joining in this challenge with your small group or your church, it's still important that you have one person who can help to hold you accountable for the duration of this challenge. This person should be someone you can trust deeply, is walking as a disciple of Jesus, and is mature in the faith. After finding an accountability partner, identify specifics, such as how often you will check in with one another and what questions you will ask each other at those check-ins.

2 WRITE IT DOWN.

After the first five introductory days, Days 6 to 40 will offer a daily challenge to complete. Because of the inner focus of *Forgiving Challenge*, most of the daily challenges will revolve around specific personal questions to answer. Our hope is that you won't gloss over these and jump to the next day, but that you will spend time being honest with the questions. Francis Bacon once said, "Reading maketh a full man...and writing an exact man."⁴ In other words, writing will force you to be more precise in your thoughts. Spending an average of an extra 10 to 15 minutes a day writing your thoughts down will put you in a great place to experience the freedom God has for you!

3 DON'T GIVE UP.

You will not do this challenge perfectly. Give yourself grace. This challenge goes beyond checking boxes just to get it done. It's a challenge that will bring you more

fully into the grace, forgiveness, and freedom that Jesus offers. We have found that the most vulnerable day—the day you’re tempted to give up—is “the day after perfect.” If you miss a day or struggle with a day, don’t give up. Instead, give yourself grace and pick up the next day. Keep walking.

4 SHARE THE WINS.

Join the thousands of others who are embarking on the journey. Use #ForgivingChallenge at any time on social media to share quotes, stories, or testimonies of what God is doing in your story. Sharing your wins publicly will not only encourage others to do the same, but it will also give people the opportunity to glorify God through your Freedom Journey!

THE 40-DAY FORGIVING CHALLENGE IS ON!



DAY 1

SIN

Sin is a small word that packs a mighty punch.

In a culture where we have become addicted to being offended, one of the most offensive things you could say to someone is that they are a “sinner.” We live in a world that likes to accept and affirm all decisions and choices, when in reality, every single one of us is a sinner.

Paul, a follower of Jesus in the first century, declares in Romans 3:10, **“There is no one righteous, not even one.”** Later, in verse 23, he elaborates to tell us that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

Without first understanding and accepting that you are a sinner, you will never be free.

But what exactly is sin?

Sin is derived from an old archery term meaning “to miss the mark.” If the bullseye is the mark you intend to hit, then technically, anything other than bullseye is considered a sin. If you picture a dartboard, that means that no matter if you throw a dart and hit the Triple 20 or completely miss the board, you have sinned. Any attempt that doesn’t hit the intended mark, the bullseye, is a sin.

You can imagine that this is a pretty difficult standard to hit every time. That's exactly my point. You cannot attain the perfect standards that God has set out for you. Even if you just miss a little bit, you still miss.

If you are truly honest with yourself, you have fallen short of what you want for yourself. If you are like me, you have been trying to become a better version of yourself for decades now. You thought that you wouldn't still be dealing with particular sins, bad habits, or addictions. Personally, I am hard-pressed to find anyone in this life who has lied to me or disappointed me more than myself. I know I'm not the only one who feels this way.

And yet, there's a twisted perception of reality that thinks if you just become better and wealthier, buy a better house, get a greater job, just keep improving, etc., then you will be happy and all will be well. I want to remind you that not even the very best version of yourself will ever be good enough for God and will never even fully satisfy you.

The version of yourself in your head, the one with the six-pack abs, cash falling out of your pockets, and a job in a high-rise office, will be just as disappointing to you as the real version of you right now. The version of yourself with the big house, white picket fence, new Tesla, and kids who lead the National Honor Society, will not complete you. You'll find something new about yourself that you don't like. Why? Because you are sinful.

Let me start the freedom experience, as the author of this book, by saying this to you:

"Hi, my name is Zach Zehnder, and I am a sinner."

I have missed the mark. I still miss the mark. And I fully believe, even with right intentions and after receiving the grace of God in my life, I will continue to miss the mark. Sometimes I miss the mark by a little bit. Just barely. Sometimes I miss the mark by a lot. My sins include pride, lust, greed, and wrongful comparison. At times I have been apathetic in my faith, harsh, or even unmerciful to others. I have pursued the god of comfort far too often. I have passed up opportunities to serve others to instead serve myself.

The last thing that I would want you to tell me, if you truly care about who I am, is that you affirm me for who I am fully today. Please don't. Because I am not okay with the wrong parts of me. And as a follower of Jesus, I desperately desire to be a more faithful follower of Jesus. I hate that sin still gets in my way.

The last thing you will hear from me in *Forgiving Challenge* is that I think you are perfect the way you are. You are not. You are sinful. And I would hope that the reason you are reading this book is not so we can have a fake, plastic, inauthentic experience, but so that we can deal with the broken, the messy, and even the worst parts of your story. This is the only way you can truly experience God's freedom, which you may have never thought possible.

Don't hear me wrong. God loves you. Deeply. But He cares about who you are becoming too. Deeply.

God loves you for who you are, but His freedom doesn't leave you just as you are.

In fact, even though the consequence of sin is separation from God, we don't have to remain separated from Him. When we were broken, sinful, and messy, God sent His Son, Jesus, to come and rescue us. God took the first step. Jesus is unafraid of our sin, and He is willing to step into our mess to lift us out.

Psalm 40:2 declares, **“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.”**

We have a God who brings freedom to our lives through His ultimate rescue. We have a God who is greater and bigger than sin. I love the lyrics from Elevation Worship’s song *Raised to Life*: “Sin was strong, but Jesus is stronger. Our shame was great, but Jesus you’re greater.”⁵

Just as there is a God who loves you, there is an enemy, the devil, who hates you. He is constantly fighting against you. The devil wants you to stay stuck in your sin, to reflect on it, to be defined by it, to suppress it, and to deny it. Our God is not only greater than sin; He is greater than the devil, too.

Sin can ruin you, but it doesn’t have to. The acknowledgement of sin begins the process of freedom that God so desperately wants you to receive.

The admission price into freedom begins with an admission of your sin.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, not only can your sin be defeated, but what you will see in this challenge is that God can even take the worst parts of our stories, even our sins, and use them for His glory.

This 40-day challenge is for sinners to experience freedom. Welcome, sinner.

On Days 6 to 12, you will be introduced to Peter and the sin for which he is most known. Along the way, you’ll be challenged to identify the places and times in which you have missed the mark. Heads up, this will likely be the most painful week. I promise you, though, your pain will have purpose.

DAY 2

CONFESSION

As a result of our sin, all of us are born into this world separated from God. This is known as original sin. But we are also all born with a conscience, which helps us determine right and wrong.

Contrary to popular belief, it is entirely appropriate for us to feel sorrow and guilt after committing a sin. It's appropriate because, in fact, we are guilty. This is the natural response that we ought to experience. The apostle Paul lays out the two options in 2 Corinthians 7:10: **"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."**

Wow! Paul declares that sorrow can bring either repentance or death. It's what happens after you sin; what you do with your sorrow, that makes all the difference; it determines whether you'll experience freedom or not.

Although people say we live in a "post-Christian" nation, as recently as 2019, the Pew Research Center said that 65 percent of Americans still self-identify as Christians.⁶ Collectively, we do not have a problem identifying ourselves with Jesus, but we have a problem truly understanding what a life marked by the grace of Jesus looks like. Sadly, in a nation filled with supposed Christians, few depend on Jesus to overcome sin. LifeWay research found that "only 22% of American men and 33% of American women said they depend on Jesus Christ to overcome sin."⁷

Any pursuit of freedom outside of Jesus will always lead to more bondage.

The devil wants to take your natural feeling of guilt and turn it into lifelong shame. After all, there is a big difference between guilt and shame.

**GUILT IS: "I DID SOMETHING WRONG."
SHAME IS: "I AM SOMETHING WRONG."**

Guilt brings conviction. God can use guilt to bring us to our knees in confession—and confession is the key that unlocks our prison cell. It brings freedom. Andy Stanley says in his book, *Enemies of the Heart*, that confession has “the potential to free you from your guilt...Remember, the purpose of confession is not to relieve your conscience; it’s to effect change and reconciliation.”⁸

Shame, on the other hand, brings condemnation. Satan uses shame to imprison us, to condemn us to death. Shame hits at your core identity and leaves you with constant feelings of inadequacy. The devil wants you to carry that shame with you wherever you go.

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

The devil devours you from the inside. He will prowl around and roar at you with false accusations to convince you that you not only did something wrong, but you are something wrong. He will try to place labels on you, and sometimes, sadly, he will even do it through the people who love you. But I know from personal experience that the most negative person speaking to me in this world is not anyone else. It’s me. If the devil can get you to carry around that shame, he knows you will never experience the full, abundant life and freedom that Jesus offers to you. Are you going to let the devil win and turn your guilt into shame? If so, how’s that been working out for you?

There is another option. You can bring your sorrow, your guilt, and whatever level of shame you are experiencing to Jesus. In Jesus, you will experience His total forgiveness. Instead of elevating your guilt into shame, Jesus will remove your guilt by His grace. And it all starts with a wonderful practice called confession.

Look at what the apostle John says to us in 1 John 1:8-10: **“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”**

John reminds us that every one of us has committed a sin. If you say you haven't, well, John just called you a liar. So there you go. You just lied. Now you can join the rest of us sinners in this challenge!

In the church tradition that I've grown up in, we begin every worship gathering by confessing our sins before God. One time, a gentleman who had come for a few months scheduled a meeting with me. He said he enjoyed many aspects of our church, but he so disliked the practice of confession that he decided he was leaving our church. He explained that it's pointless to make this communal confession because God doesn't want us to remember our sins any longer. He has already paid for them, so to confess like this is not trusting that God has done this mighty work.

I tried to explain to him that the reason we confess our sins before God is not so that we experience more guilt, and certainly not shame. But rather, we do this because confession puts us in a place to ultimately experience God's kindness. Any acknowledgment of our sin—and the sorrow we experience because of it—is an important part of confession, but it is never the end goal. I remember telling

this man, “If you walk away from confessing your sins more focused on your own brokenness than on God’s kindness, than you have completely missed the point.”

Romans 2:4 declares this truth for us: **“Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”**

Repentance is the process of changing, or turning, from a particular sin. Until we truly turn from our sin, we will not experience the full freedom that God wants for us! But remember, it is not through our power, grit, hard work, and perfection, but rather, it is through God’s kindness that we will ultimately experience His freedom.

What truly changes us from the inside out is that God has been kind toward us, in spite of our sin. Through His forgiveness, He offers a free gift that you absolutely do not deserve—grace.

In *Recovering Redemption*, Matt Chandler writes, “For what’s broken in us—what’s aching for recovery—is beyond our ability to fix. And from the moment it broke, all attempts to redeem it by ourselves are doomed to futility and failure. We need God. Or else. Not just once. Not just to get His signature on our heavenly hall pass. But forever. We will never get over needing Him.”⁹

When we confess our sins to God, we give Him an opportunity to do His saving work in our lives. We confess our sin to God so that we hear His words of forgiveness over our lives. Without God’s forgiveness, it is impossible to experience freedom.

On Days 13 to 19, you will learn about the powerful practice of confession. In confession, you are given the opportunity to experience the kindness of Jesus. You will see that the same kindness Jesus so willingly gave to his friend Peter is also offered to you.

DAY 3

ABSOLUTION

What does it truly mean to be forgiven?

There are two common definitions of the word forgive:

- 1 TO CANCEL A DEBT**
- 2 TO STOP FEELING ANGRY OR RESENTFUL TOWARD SOMEONE FOR AN OFFENSE, FLAW, OR MISTAKE**

When we receive the total forgiveness of God, our debt is canceled and the Lord's righteous anger is gone. God's forgiveness is not either/or. It is both/and.

Today, let's look at the first definition—canceling a debt.

Human beings love justice and law stories. Just look at how many *CSI*, *NCIS*, and *Law and Order* shows there have been. It doesn't take too much creativity to add one of these shows to network television. Slap a new city on it (LA, New Orleans, Miami), and you've got viewers ready to eat popcorn and binge. If Netflix is your jam, look at the "Top 10 Trending," and you're likely to find at least a couple of trial or crime documentaries. Why? Because we are ruled by law and justice in this world.

In God's economy, we have already admitted that we are sinful; therefore, we are all guilty. Every one of us. And yet, directly after the verse I shared with you on Day 1, which declares our guilt (Romans 3:23), we read this passage:

"...and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24

Justification is to be made right before God. If sin separates us from being in a right relationship with God, His justification, offered to us in a gift of grace, brings us back into right relationship with Him.

But how is this possible? Because, again, we're not righteous. If God is truly all-knowing (omniscient), and He is everywhere at once (omnipresent), then how can we be righteous? Did we somehow get into His blind spot? Is God so busy with other stuff going on in the world that as long as He sees us in church every now and then, we're okay? No, it's bigger than this.

To explain, let me share a metaphor that I heard in one of Pastor Matt Chandler's sermons.¹⁰ He tells us to picture a courtroom, where you and I are the defendants. We know that we are, in fact, guilty. When it is our time to speak, we even stand up and declare our guilt. And yet somehow, when it's decision time, the judge bangs the gavel down and declares us innocent. All charges dropped.

Absolution is the declaration that you have been forgiven. You have been formally released from any guilt, obligation, or punishment. It is the announcement that your sins have been paid for. The debt has been canceled.

In this world, we face a choice. We can receive that declaration of innocence or reject it and receive punishment for our sins. Even worse, we can reject the offer of forgiveness and then try to work our way out of the punishment.

The apostle Paul warns us against this foolishness in Galatians 2:16a: **"We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ."**

We are not justified by works of the law, which means at our best we're still lawbreakers. We will not be made right, we will not be declared innocent, simply by behaving in a way that's acceptable before God. The good news is that the banging of the gavel and the declaration of our innocence and forgiveness is not based on whether or not we have been obedient to the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

You will not be able to save yourself. You will not be good enough. You will never perfectly fulfill the requirements of the Law. You can't be perfect.

But there is a person who lived a perfect life. He lived a life full of good works and full adherence to the Law. His name is Jesus. Because Jesus was perfect, He was the only one capable of bringing forgiveness of sins to all people. Jesus came into this world on a mission to save sinners by bringing forgiveness to all of those who call on His name.

Without God's forgiveness in our lives, we would never experience freedom in this world. It's impossible. Some people may behave like they are free and look like they are free, but it's a lie. You cannot be free without God declaring you innocent. Jesus came to set all of the oppressed free. He, and He alone, had this special call on His life. And He knew it.

The apostle Paul tells us this so clearly: **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."**

1 Timothy 1:15a (ESV)

Sin is costly. There are consequences to our bad actions, thoughts, and deeds. And God is not going to let sin go unpunished.

In the Bible, God the Father is often referred to as a judge. We also encounter “judges” all the time in the form of friends, coworkers, and acquaintances who evaluate our actions. But the only judge who matters knows everything about your story. To solve the “sin problem,” His answer was to send His Son Jesus into the world on a rescue mission. Amazingly, Jesus took all of the consequences of our sin upon Himself. A sinless man carried the weight of all of your sin, all of my sin, all of humanity’s sin—past, present, and future—with Him when He willingly, sacrificially, gave His entire life for us on the cross.

Jesus suffered a brutal death for you. In fact, at the time they didn’t have a word to describe the horror and brutality of those who were tortured on a cross, so they came up with a new word: “excruciating.” In Latin, this means “out of the cross.” Jesus was whipped, beaten, and suffered greatly. Not only this, but He was betrayed by His closest friends. As He was hanging on the cross, struggling to breathe, nearing the end, the Gospel of John says the very last phrase Jesus uttered was one Greek word—*tetelestai*. In English, it is translated: “It is finished.”

After this, Jesus bowed His head and gave up His Spirit. Interestingly, the word *tetelestai* was also written on business documents or receipts in New Testament times to indicate that a bill had been paid in full.¹¹

***TETELESTAI* = PAID IN FULL**

The devil thought that Jesus was finished. But the only thing that was finished was the payment for our sins.

We owed a debt we could never pay. Jesus paid a debt He did not owe!

The same Spirit that Jesus gave up on Friday would bring resurrection power on Sunday. The resurrection is the objective evidence that the bill has been paid in full. It has been well said that Christ's resurrection is the Father's "Amen" to His Son's declaration, "It is finished." His empty tomb and His resurrection are indisputable testimony that the Father accepted His Son's payment for sin on our behalf.

When Greek readers saw the word *tetelestai*, they would know that what Christ accomplished at the cross was the full payment of all of mankind's sins.

Including yours.

Your sins are no more special than mine. Your sins are not in a different category than mine. Your sins are no greater than mine. And like mine, your sins have been paid in full by the blood of Jesus.

Will you reject this or will you receive this?

Let these words sink in. In fact, go ahead and write your name in the blank below.

_____, **YOU ARE FORGIVEN IN THE
NAME OF THE FATHER, BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST, AND
THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. YOU ARE FORGIVEN.**

On Days 20 to 26, you will discover how the sacrifice of Jesus paid in full the consequence of not only Peter's sin, but your sins as well.

RECEIPT

TRANSACTION #19:28

LYING
STEALING
GREED
PRIDE
ENVY

TOTAL:

UNPAYABLE
UNTELESTAI



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

DAY 4

RESTORATION

As great as it is to be freed from the consequences of our sin through the absolution of God, His forgiveness extends further than that. Many don't get to experience complete freedom because they stop at absolution. They know that they have been freed from the punishment of their sins and that they are good eternally with God, but many refuse to enter into the next Freedom Phase.

While I was in seminary, I once preached a sermon highlighting freedom. Some of the most daunting, scary sermons I've ever preached were at seminary in front of classmates and professors. After this class was over, the professor graded my sermon. He said, "Zach, you really explained freedom *from* sin well, but as a listener of your message, there's also freedom 'to *something*.' You failed to bring that out. B-minus."

B-minus isn't the worst grade I got at seminary. But I don't want you to come away with a B-minus when it comes to understanding the freedom God is offering you. So, today I'm taking another crack at my professor's advice.

Yesterday's topic of absolution is "freedom from," and today's topic of restoration is "freedom to."

The freedom that God gives you is not only freedom from sin, but freedom to a life of purpose. God's freedom is greater than simply a pardon and release from punishment. He also wants to release you to be a world-changer working alongside Him.

If we go back to Matt Chandler’s analogy of the courtroom from yesterday, when the judge declares us innocent, even though we are not, I think all of us breathe a little bit easier. To be declared innocent after our laundry list of sins is shocking. We don’t deserve it.

At the same time that this declaration of innocence is happening, we are also fully restored. It’s not that you get absolved, and then after a few years of “proving yourself” you are restored into the person God has called you to be. Absolution and restoration happen at the same time.

However, the understanding of restoration seems to unfold more slowly for some people. It’s hard to wrap our minds around. If I put my own cards on the table, I don’t tend to wrestle with the idea of God paying for my sins. I can see the cross. I know the cross is an aspect of my sin and rebellion. And I know that the sacrifice of Jesus paid for my sins.

Where I struggle is believing that I can still be the person that God has called me to be. I struggle to think that God really enjoys me and could use someone like me because I’ve woefully failed Him in the past. It’s hard *not* to picture Him angry with me after how good He has been to me, and yet I’m still struggling with the same sin that I’ve told Him over and over I’ll never do again.

FREEDOM FROM SIN
FREEDOM TO PURPOSE

Restoration hits at identity, and identity is something the enemy loves to attack.

Absolution takes away the guilt. Restoration takes away the shame.

Just as God has fully absolved you, you need to also see that He has fully restored you.

Pastor Timothy Keller writes, "Jesus' salvation is not only like receiving a pardon and release from death row and prison. Then we'd be free, but on our own, left to make our own way in the world, thrown back on our own efforts if we're to make anything of ourselves. But in the Gospel, we discover that Jesus has taken us off death row and then has hung around our neck the Congressional Medal of Honor. We are received and welcomed as heroes, as if we had accomplished extraordinary deeds."¹²

Your past doesn't keep God from using your life in a powerful way. In fact, until you walk in the full restoration that God makes available to you, I don't believe you will fully experience the freedom that God has for you.

You don't just have a just judge, but you have a loving Father as well.

God delights in you like a good father would delight in his son or daughter.

I remember when each of my two sons began to walk. They took two steps, fell down, and we freaked out like they had just won the Olympics! We took videos and sent them to our close friends and family, and then posted them on social media with the hashtag #NextUsainBolt. In the videos, my sons took a few steps, but they also fell flat on their butts. No one who watched the video, including myself, saw

my kids take a few steps and thought they were clumsy clowns for falling. We were celebrating the fact that they were walking, however unsteadily.

That's a picture of how God sees you. He cheers you on. He encourages your pursuit. He wants you to hear loud and clearly today that two steps forward and one step backward is still a step forward. So keep stepping. You are moving in the right direction.

Having a loving Father in heaven, who is not only a just judge, changes everything. No offense to any judges out there, but hanging out with a judge just doesn't sound much fun. Judges seem like they would constantly be quoting rules and laws. But hanging out with dad? That sounds fun. I can play golf with my dad. I can watch a ball game with my dad. I can learn from my dad.

God the judge declares you innocent and fully restored into right relationship with Him. Then He bangs the gavel, takes the robes off, and starts hanging out with you.

Your past sins are cast aside, and you are restored into making a difference in this world. This relationship not only means that you are God's son or daughter, but also that you become a co-worker with Him in this world. You get to work for Him and with Him on an eternal mission.

Yesterday you heard the words "I forgive you."

Today, write your name in the blank to complete this sentence from God:

" _____, I love you."

On Days 27 to 33, you will understand that, like Peter, you too are not only absolved of your sin, but restored into a life of meaning and purpose in this world.

DAY 5

SANCTIFICATION

I love the story that my South African friend, Mark, shared with me about a season of his life in which he was dead broke. At the time, he was given a Christmas card from an aunt, who wasn't really known for her great generosity. Thinking it was just a Christmas card, he chucked it in the back seat of his car and drove around with it in his pile of junk for weeks. Meanwhile, he was really struggling to make ends meet and had a very hard several weeks trying to piece his life together, trying to figure out which meal—lunch or dinner—he would eat that day.

Finally, he was cleaning out the back seat of his car one day, and he found this unopened Christmas card. When he opened it at last, he found a significant amount of money that his aunt had given to him to help him get through his financial ordeal. All along, he had been sitting on a gift of financial freedom but still living in financial bondage. The gift had been there, but he didn't receive it. He didn't open it and live out the freedom that the gift provided.

It is possible to have the full gift of our sins forgiven and the full restoration of our identity through Jesus's sacrifice and still not live in freedom. Don't hear me wrong: Jesus has done all the hard work for you! But until you open the gift and live out the freedom that the gift provides, you will stay in a sort of bondage. Jesus didn't give you absolution and restoration so that you wouldn't do anything with it.

He gave you absolution and restoration so that you would enjoy those gifts. Not just eternally, but here, right now. Freedom isn't only available in heaven. It's available for you to experience now.

You do not experience freedom in this world until you step into a life of sanctification.

Sanctification, by definition, is the process of being freed from sin, or being purified or made holy. Sanctification is, by the way, a lifelong process. While absolution and restoration will never be things that we can do, sanctification is a process that we work on, in conjunction with God, for the rest of our lives. It's never perfect and never complete, but when we participate with God in this process, freedom truly is experienced.

While each one of us is called and restored back into a life of purpose through God's grace, the path of sanctification often gives us a second chance in an area in which we previously failed. From an eternal perspective, we'll never right our wrongs because Jesus did that for us, but I am most fascinated by how God oftentimes will bring meaning and purpose into our lives from some of the worst parts of our stories.

Our greatest stumbles produce our greatest stories.

That's why some of the most successful addiction counselors were at one point addicted to drugs themselves. In fact, a key part of recovery through Alcoholics Anonymous is the 12th and final step. Check it out: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."¹³ The final step to full freedom is taking the thing that was against you and using it to help bring freedom to others.

God rescued you so that you could help rescue others!

Are there any sins, any scars from those sins, that God wants to use through you to help free others?

Sin is the most powerful weapon that the devil throws at us in this world. But when we walk in true freedom, God can take the weapon that was meant to destroy you and turn it into a weapon that not only brings purpose to your life, but brings freedom and salvation to others.

The body of Jesus was nailed onto an instrument of death called a cross. The cross, which the enemy used to kill Jesus, would eventually become the symbol of our victory. Jesus used the enemy's weapon to destroy the enemy and bring freedom to all of us!

God has a degree in bringing deliverance out of destruction.

This is what Jesus did for us, and this is the opportunity we are offered today! Total freedom comes when we take the former sins that have been against us, oppressing us and slowing us down, and give them over to God. Not only do we experience God's forgiveness, but He then puts us in a place to use our lives and tell our stories. We are able to do this with and through the power of Jesus!

The SCARS process is not always simple. It's usually ugly, and it will leave a mark. But your scars can help tell the beautiful story of Jesus. Mike Foster writes, "Too many of us believe the lie that we need to sanitize our scandals, brush away our grief, and cover up our scars."¹⁴ Sanctification is an opportunity for God to work through your scars to help bring freedom to others.

Every scar tells a story. When you tell your story of how Jesus brought grace into your life, you end up bringing freedom to others. This is what the apostle John reminds us in Revelation 12:11a: **"They triumphed over him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."**

The “blood of the Lamb” is the blood that Jesus shed for us on the cross. He is known as “The Lamb of God” all throughout the Bible. John reminds us that the power of our stories, rooted in THE story of Jesus, will bring ultimate freedom and victory over our enemy.

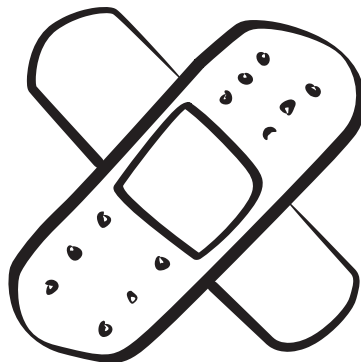
THE BLOOD OF JESUS + OUR STORY > THE DEVIL

I want you to know that God has chosen you and filled you with His Spirit to make a difference in this world. In a world filled with division, unforgiveness, and bitterness, we are the forgiven sons and daughters of God, and we have the opportunity to bring freedom to others just as God has brought freedom to us.

Imagine how the world might change if we truly walked in the power of God’s freedom.

Sanctification is the opportunity for you to be fully free. Be free and tell your story!

On Days 34 to 40, you will be given the opportunity, like Peter, to be completely free from your sin, and in response, to live a holy life pursuing Jesus and bringing the freedom you’ve experienced to others.



DAYS
6-12

OF THE

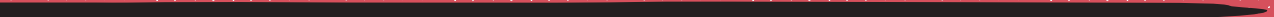
40-DAY



CHALLENGE

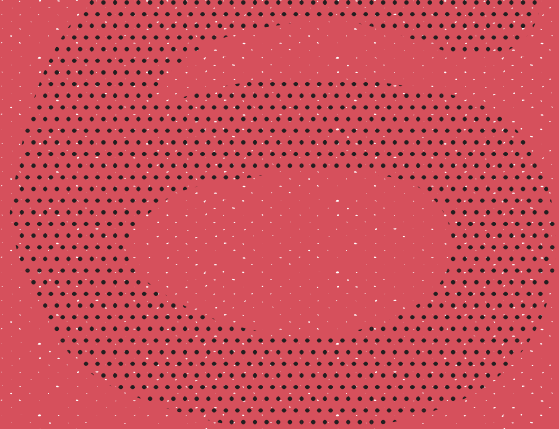
S.C.A.R.S.

SIN



DAY 6

SNUB-NOSED TO BIG BOULDER



Make no mistake about it: The Bible is all about Jesus. The story of Jesus as Savior of the World frames the entire book from Genesis to Revelation. Inside the pages of the Bible, Jesus offers not just an invitation to be saved by Him, but to walk with Him and let Him be the Lord of our lives today. One of those invitations was very clearly given to a man named Peter.

You could argue that Peter is the only other fully formed character in the Gospels besides Jesus. He is listed first chronologically in any story that mentions the disciples, and he is mentioned more than five times the number of any other disciple. "He is referred to almost 200 times in the New Testament. The disciple John is mentioned only 31 times," says Michael Card in *A Fragile Stone*.¹⁵ He also plays the most vital role in the first twelve chapters of Acts.

This week, we will be introduced to the disciple Peter, and to a series of big blunders by which many define his life. I believe the story of forgiveness that Jesus will offer to Peter is the most personal and relational story of forgiveness in all of the Bible. While Jesus is the hero of the Bible, Peter serves "as a 'foil' to Jesus," says Adam Hamilton, a pastor and author: "A foil is a supporting character whose part contrasts, highlights, and even exalts the qualities of the lead character... Just as Jesus reveals and represents God, Peter represents all who seek to follow Jesus."¹⁶

My hope is that as we examine this story of forgiveness, you will begin to see yourself in the character of Peter. As you watch Jesus so amazingly give grace to him, my hope is that you too would know that Jesus offers grace to you—and that not only would you receive this grace, but, like Peter, you will learn to walk in it and be fully transformed by it.

If you ever visit New Zealand, you might choose to stop by a hill on the North Island called Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu. No joke. If that's too much of a mouthful, the short form is Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateapokaiwhenuakitanatahu. It is listed in the Guinness World Records as the longest official place name in the world.

The name means: "The summit where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, the climber of mountains, the land-swallower who travelled about, played his nose flute to his loved one."¹⁷ As strange as this name is, it's quite biblical. A name in the Bible is often a description of the person himself or herself—or what the parents would like their child to become.¹⁸

Names are significant, and every now and then in the Bible, God changes someone's name. This is important to know because when we are first introduced to the biblical character known as Peter, he has a different name: Simon. At the time, Simon is fishing on a boat because fishing was the family business. This was his future before Jesus met him.

The very first recorded words that Jesus speaks to Peter are found in John 1:42: **"You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated is Peter)."**

Peter starts as Simon, but Jesus immediately declares that he will now be Peter, even though he hasn't done anything to earn a new name. Interestingly, the name Simon is a Greek nickname that means "snub-nosed." More commonly, Simon was a derivative of Simeon, which means, "God has heard." The name that Jesus gives to Simon is Peter, which means "the rock, or big boulder."

I like that Jesus changed his name *before* Peter ever did anything to earn it. Oftentimes, we get it wrong by thinking that God will only love us, accept us, forgive us, and ultimately free us if we first prove to Him that we are worthy of His love and acceptance. Even after his name is changed to Peter, if you look into his life as portrayed in the Gospels, Peter did not live up to his new name many times. You could argue that you see a lot more "big blunder" in Peter than you do "big boulder."

In *Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple*, Pastor Adam Hamilton says, "How could Jesus call Simon a rock? After all, this man is going to blow it consistently. He will be less like a rock and more like a reed or blade of grass, easily moved, swayed, or broken. He will miss the point again and again."¹⁹

Even after receiving grace and a new identity in Jesus, there are still times we fail to live up to the name that God places on us. And yet, He still calls us by our new name.

This is what God does. He comes into our stories and invites us into a new calling. He gives us a new identity. He declares that who you are and who you've been doesn't have to follow you into the future. When God changes someone's name, it's because He's calling him or her to live out a new mission or new identity in this world. Jesus saw some great potential in Peter. Everyone else saw Simon the

snub-nosed, but Jesus saw Peter the rock. Through this name, He gave Peter a vision of what God sees in Him.

Just as God saw something in Peter, He sees something in you too. Jesus sees in you what you can be—regardless of what you’ve done or what other people have said about you. God loves you for who you are, but His love doesn’t leave you just as you are. He desires you to step into the identity that He’s won for you by His grace.

You might think that you are not special enough for Jesus to call someone like you. Even if Peter didn’t do anything of note to receive this new identity, certainly He was chosen because of his place in this world, right? Wrong. The more you look into Peter’s story before he met Jesus, the more you see that there really wasn’t much that stood out.

In the Jewish population, there was a class of people, going back hundreds of years before the time of Jesus and Peter, called *am ha’arertz*. The phrase literally means “the people of the land.” The term has a complicated history, but according to Adam Hamilton’s *Simon Peter: Flawed but Faithful Disciple*, “by the time of Simon Peter it meant people who were poor, uneducated, lower class, and particularly people who were not careful in their observance of the Law.”²⁰

In addition, Acts 4:13 describes Peter (and his disciple friend John) as unschooled and ordinary men. And yet, through this ordinary, unschooled man, we have a person who would become the right-hand man of Jesus.

After Jesus called Peter to be His disciple, the text says that immediately Peter followed Him. This was the sort of guy that Peter was. All in. Peter became the

outspoken leader of the disciples. He was a natural-born leader who was never afraid to speak his mind or to make a bold move. In fact, Peter was the only disciple who had the courage to jump out of the boat and walk on water toward Jesus, even with a wild wind buffeting their vessel. You could make the case that he was one of Jesus's best friends in the whole world.

In the midst of so many great actions, moments, and words, and with so much done for him and entrusted to him by Jesus, the big boulder, however, is most known for a series of three big blunders. Peter would fail Jesus miserably.

The story of Peter and Jesus is significant for you and me, because much like Peter, we've been given a new name and identity in Jesus. And yet despite all that He's done for us, we still fall woefully short of God's expectations. In *Forgiving Challenge*, we will discover that even though we continue to miss the mark, God will relentlessly pursue us, just as He pursued Peter. If Jesus can forgive someone like Peter for what he did, He can forgive you too!

So what sin did Peter commit? We'll find that out on Day 7.



C H A L L E N G E

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

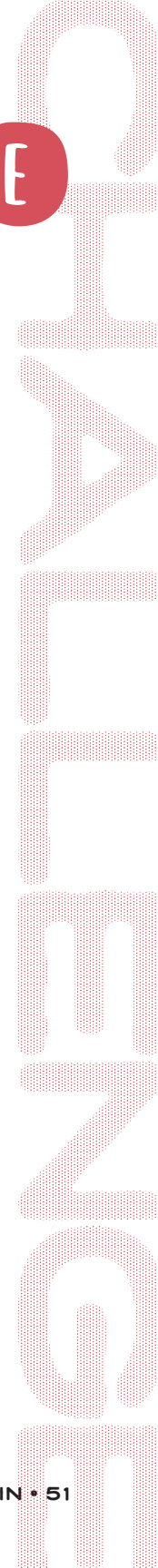
Do you know why your name was chosen?

What does your given name mean?

Do you live up to your name or fall short of your name?

What name(s), or identity(ies), do you currently carry that are most important/significant for you? Explain.

Is there a particular name(s) that you long to hear someone call you? Explain.



DAYS
13-19

OF THE

40-DAY



CHALLENGE

S.C.A.R.S.

CONFERENCE



SSION

DAY 13

CONFESSION ALTERNATIVES

Scientists discovered that animals have two different reactions when they feel threatened or are in dangerous situations. They will respond with a “fight or flight” mentality. They will either attack or flee. God has even designed some animals’ bodies to look their scariest when they are planning to fight:

- The hippo will open its mouth to reveal its massive teeth.
- The lizard will puff up its neck.
- The rattlesnake will rattle its tail.

Other animals display a “flight” reaction through unique behaviors:

- The possum will play dead.
- The chameleon will change colors, attempting to disappear.

Humans may have similar reactions when we experience conflict. Some of you may clench your fists, grit it out, or think of how to get even. This is a fight reaction. Others want to flee the situation by ignoring the pain, pretending it didn’t happen.

The flight reaction is perfectly encapsulated in a cruel practical joke that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (author of Sherlock Holmes) played on friends—although it is probably an urban legend. He sent a telegram to twelve friends with the words,

“We are discovered. Flee!” Supposedly, after receiving this telegram, all twelve friends fled and ran far away.³² The point of this urban legend is to remind us that we all have sin in our life. These twelve friends had all done something wrong, and rather than facing the consequences, they chose to flee.

When it comes to our sin, just like with conflict, these are the two ways we naturally want to respond. Many will try to fight against it with everything they have, and others will try to run as far away from it as they can.

However, you do not help your progress along the path to God’s freedom by using your own strength to fight sin or by running as far away from your mistakes as you can.

Every one of us sins. It’s what we do after our sin that makes all the difference.

Many don’t experience the freedom that God has for them because they don’t take the necessary next step of confession. Before we dive deep into why confession is important, let’s first explore four alternatives to confession that people often choose. All four of these responses fall into a “fight or flight” response, and all four are empty wells that will leave us thirsty and unsatisfied.

FIGHT: BLAMING OTHERS

We can go all the way back to the very first sin of humankind, committed by Adam and Eve, to see why we are so prone to blaming others. Although they were given an entire garden of trees and fruit to eat from, they chose to eat fruit from the one tree that God commanded them to avoid. After committing this clear act of rebellion, instead of taking responsibility for their sin, they blamed each other. When confronted with their sin, Adam actually takes a shot at not only his wife, Eve, but even at God.

“The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.’” Genesis 3:12

You gave me the woman, he said, as if blaming God. And the woman gave me the fruit. Not my fault. Eve follows suit by blaming the devil.

“The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’” Genesis 3:13b

Do you ever wonder why we so often say, “The devil made me do it”? Eve taught us this trick.

Other people and circumstances in our lives certainly influence the decisions we make, but it is a very dangerous practice and slippery slope that we walk on when we refuse to take responsibility for our own actions.

FIGHT: TRYING HARDER

“I just can’t forgive myself...God could never forgive someone like me.” Have you ever said this? Or thought this? Believe it or not, while it may appear noble on the outside, this is a form of reverse pride that is extremely dangerous. What you are proclaiming with a thought like this is that you are in a special category of people, or your sins are in a special category of sins that God cannot ultimately conquer. This thought displays a lack of faith by declaring that as big as God’s grace is, it’s not big enough for you.

When you pursue this line of thinking, it’s natural to believe that if God cannot save you, then you will have to try to save yourself by your own self-righteous efforts. You make your life all about adhering to the Law of God and racking up as many good works as possible. Sadly, a lot of self-confessed sinners go down this empty,

exhausting path. A LifeWay research study asked self-confessed sinners what they are doing about their sin. They found that only 37 percent of Christians marked “depending on Jesus Christ to overcome sin,” while 38 percent of Christians marked “working on being less of a sinner.”³³

This approach will only imprison you further, because it is impossible to save yourself. Don’t hear me wrong: It’s a noble pursuit to live a life of good works and adhere to God’s Law, but we should do these works out of compulsion by how good our God has been to us—not to earn our salvation. The only thing that trying harder to save yourself will do is leave you exhausted.

The Gospel is not about trying harder; it’s about trusting.

FLIGHT: DENYING YOUR SIN

The ultimate “flight” response to sin is to flat-out deny it. If Satan can convince us that we have not sinned, then there is nothing inside of us that compels us to confess or change anything in our lives. When we deny that we are sinful, we miss out on experiencing the total freedom and healing that Jesus offers to us. According to a recent Lifeway research study, “2 out of 3 Americans confess to being a sinner (67%). The rest don’t see themselves as sinners (8%), don’t think sin exists (10%), or preferred not to answer the question (15%).”³⁴

Satan is known as the “father of lies,” and he has been working overtime the past few decades teaching moral relativism and rejecting universal truth. It’s getting easier and easier to find people who will whole-heartedly accept you for who you are and even embrace the sinful parts of you that should not be embraced or encouraged. Even more depressing is that there are many Christians, and even churches, that have bought into the lies and are now spreading them.

While this 40-day challenge will ultimately help you experience freedom and even challenge you to use the freedom from your sins to bring glory to God, nowhere in this book will you find me celebrating you for your sin or helping you believe that you are not sinful.

FLIGHT: MINIMIZING YOUR SIN

It's easy to come up with excuses and find ways to justify why we committed a sin in the first place. To make ourselves feel better, rather than working our way through the freedom process, many of us try to take a shortcut by simply believing our sin was not a big deal. How many of these excuses have you used?

"I WAS YOUNG AND WILD."

"I HAD NO CHOICE."

"IT WAS JUST ONE NIGHT OF LOVE."

"IT WAS JUST ONE WEBSITE."

"EVERYONE ELSE WAS DOING IT."

"I JUST WANTED TO TRY IT ONCE."

In all of these statements, we are trying to minimize the seriousness of our sin. By minimizing our sin, not only do we minimize the sacrifice of God's Son Jesus, but we also make ourselves more susceptible to the enemy's attacks. Remember, what many people may deem to be a small sin, is still a sin.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, an old Scottish preacher, once wrote, "I must never think a sin too small to need immediate application to the blood of Christ."³⁵

Some of the worst sin habits and addictions often start with something that feels small and innocent. Sin, unless properly dealt with, always escalates.



THE ONLY THING
THAT TRYING
HARDER TO SAVE
YOURSELF WILL
DO IS LEAVE YOU
EXHAUSTED.



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

The devil wants you to take your guilt and bring more shame into your lives. Any pursuit of blaming others, trying harder, denying your sin, or minimizing your sin will ultimately keep you in bondage. Here's why: You are guilty.

The beautiful truth about God and His Gospel is that you don't have to run from your sin any longer. God wants you to face it, but He doesn't need you to fight it. He's already won the battle for you by fighting and destroying sin.

You were saved by grace alone through faith alone. Matt Chandler writes, "Therefore, God gets all the glory alone. And when you understand this one basic issue, you'll stop going into you and start going into the Lord—just laying out all the smelly, rotten groceries, shaking all the stuff out of your pockets, bringing it all out into the open, and saying, 'Here, would you please get rid of this for me?' If your spouse or your kids or your boss or your parents ever pick out a piece of your character or attitude that needs fixing, you can just take your pitiful self straight before Him and say, 'Jesus, come and get it.' Because your satisfaction comes from His work, not yours."³⁶

Your sin will imprison you. but the grace of Jesus will free you.



C H A L L E N G E

WHAT'S YOUR ALTERNATIVE?

1 Are you more prone to a fight or flight mentality when it comes to conflict? Why?

2 Which of the four confession alternatives are you most likely to use: Blame, Try Harder, Deny, or Minimize?

3 How have any of these alternatives worked out for you in the past?

4 Memorize Romans 6:23: **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

DAYS
20-26

OF THE

40-DAY



CHALLENGE

S.C.A.R.S.

ABSOL



UTION

DAY 20

SURGERY NEEDED

My wife, Allison, grew up on the mission field in West Africa in a small country called Togo. During her time there, she noticed, among some of the tribes, that if a boy stubbed his toe, a friend or the mother would strike the rock that had hurt the child. If a girl fell out of a tree, then her brother would smack the tree. They were trying to set things right by hitting the tree or rock that hurt the other person. But hitting a rock or a tree doesn't make anything right, of course. In our society, we may have a similar reaction if we do something like run into the corner of a table in the dark. We might instinctively slap our hand on the table in anger.

Sometimes, we react in the same ineffective way when we're confronted by sin. When we are hurt by sin, we lash out, sometimes at completely innocent people. Then we brush it off by saying, "I'm having one of those days." We need to invite Jesus into those days.

As we mentioned on Day 2, only 22 percent of American men and 33 percent of American women say they depend on Jesus to overcome sin. This means that the majority of us are trying to find other, creative ways to try to put things right. But the only way to conquer sin is to depend on Jesus.

The process of finding forgiveness and spiritual healing in Jesus can be compared to the healing process for physical injuries, in which wounds turn into scars. This is not always an easy process, and many times it can even be extremely painful.

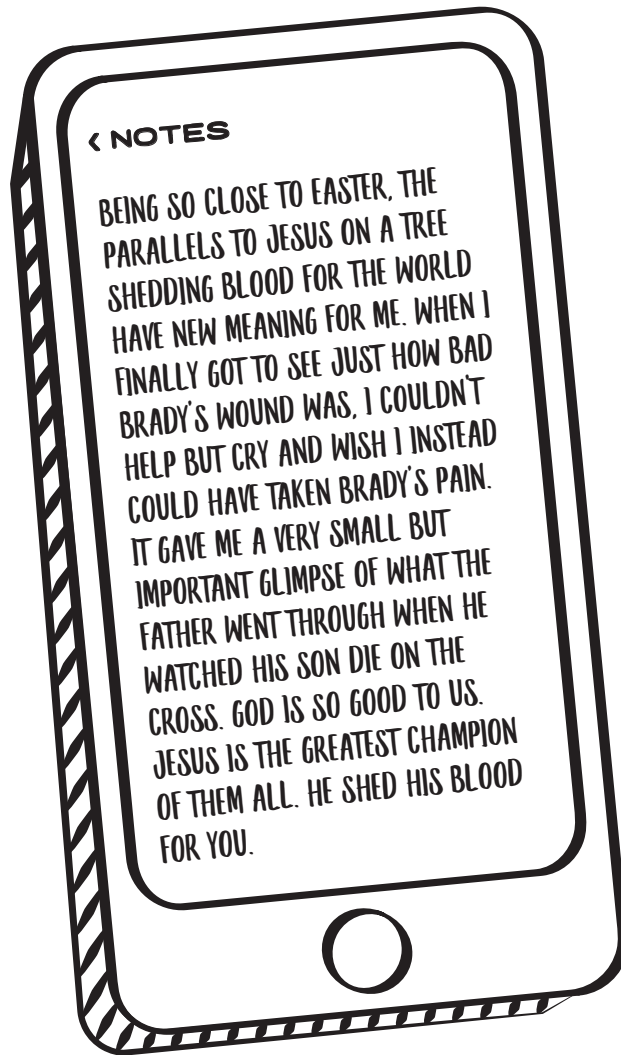
One of my scariest moments of parenting was right before the Easter season in 2018. My son Brady was seven at the time, and we were hosting a church staff party at our house. The adults were just about ready to eat, and all of the church staff kids were playing outside. As I was praying a blessing over the food, Brady came charging into the house with a type of cry that I had never heard before. It wasn't a loud, piercing cry, but a fear-filled cry. He had been climbing a tree in our backyard, and as he had done hundreds of times before, he jumped down from the tree, expecting to land on his feet. But this particular time, he stumbled as he was jumping. On his fall down the tree, an extremely spiky branch dug into and lacerated his armpit, peeling off a large chunk of skin. Not to get too graphic, but the surgeon would later describe what happened to his armpit as similar to peeling a banana. He had a layer of skin about 5 inches long and 2 inches wide literally just hanging like a banana peel.

Although I struggled because of his pain to get a clear look at what was going on in the moment, I knew this was serious. Brady grew up with an incredibly high pain tolerance, so I knew this was different. I rushed him to the hospital and, amazingly, was greeted by a nurse who attended our church. I didn't need to say anything to her. She knew this was serious just by looking at my face. They took Brady into the emergency room and brought in a surgeon.

Immediately, Brady went into surgery and my wife, Allison, and I were left alone in the lobby of the hospital.

Everything in the couple of hours leading up to this point was a blur to me. Adrenaline had kicked in, and it wasn't until that moment alone in the lobby that I had a little bit of time to process what was going on. But it all started with me and Allison just sitting there with one another, holding each other and crying. It was so hard for us to see our son go through this.

As we were there, I jotted down these words in my notes on my iPhone:



I then opened my Bible, and the very first verse that I read filled me with the comfort I needed in a desperate moment:



I AM THE LORD,
THE GOD OF ALL
MANKIND. IS
ANYTHING TOO
HARD FOR ME?

- JEREMIAH 32:27



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

A couple of hours later, we saw Brady. The surgeon used more than 60 stitches to essentially put the “banana peel” of skin back where it belonged. Those stitches would turn into a pretty killer scar that tells a pretty killer story. Brady not only made a full recovery, but is now using that very same arm to light it up on the Pee-Wee flag football fields!

As painful as the healing was for Brady, part of this process was the surgeon entering into the place where Brady got hurt to ultimately bring healing.

The freedom process that we are undergoing requires similar healing. The process of healing will not be without pain for you, but the most painful part of the healing process has already taken place in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus went to the cross to shed His blood to fulfill the requirements and pay for the sins of the world. Yours, mine, and the whole wide world's. Past, present, and future.

Our week of absolution is about hearing God's declaration of forgiveness over us, and as we enter into it, I want you to most hear His forgiveness in the deepest, darkest, most shame-filled places of your story. You cannot do this on your own. You need Jesus.

Hearing His forgiveness in those deep, dark, shame-filled places will require us to revisit them. When we do, we'll find that this same Jesus who went to the cross to pay the price is unafraid and willing to go back to those painful memories. He will enter into your worst moments with you. Jesus is waiting for you. He's the surgeon you need to heal.

Will you allow Jesus to enter into your worst moments?

C H A L L E N G E

NOTHING IS TOO HARD

Write this verse from Jeremiah 32:27 three times:

"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

Do you believe the words in this verse?

What is the hardest thing(s) you need God to do in your life?

When it comes to your sin, what are the deep, dark, shame-filled places that you need the surgeon Jesus to heal?

Do you believe He can bring healing into those places?

DAYS
27-33



S.C.A.R.S.

RESTO



RATION

DAY 27

THE KINGDOM IS AVAILABLE

Congratulations! You made it to restoration week!

This is the week we are going to start to see how all of the pieces fit back together. That is ultimately what restoration is about. It's about bringing something back to its original state. However, because God is a master restorer, He doesn't just put things back to their original condition. He brings them back to something even more beautiful, effective, and glorious.

Before we jump back into the powerful story of Jesus forgiving Peter, I want to take a broader look at God's ultimate desire for full restoration.

Many people have a false assumption that the ultimate goal of Christianity is to come to a relationship with Jesus Christ so that when you die you can go to heaven. If that were the end goal, then you could stop at Day 26 in *Forgiving Challenge*.

Make no mistake about it: It will be a glorious day, moment, and eternity when we finally see Jesus in heaven! I love the promise of Romans 8:18: **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** Far more often, however, Jesus focuses *not* on escaping this world so one day we go up in the clouds to heaven, but on bringing heaven down to earth.

In *Red Letter Challenge*, I encouraged people to read and do the words of Jesus (the red letters). After reading through all of the commands that Jesus gave to His disciples, I located five targets to become a great follower of Jesus: Being,

Forgiving, Serving, Giving, and Going. While my previous book was primarily focused on looking at the commands of Jesus, if you were to look at the entirety of all that Jesus said, all of His red letters, He spoke far more on the subject of the Kingdom of God than anything else. The very first documented words of His public ministry are found in Matthew 4:17b (ESV): **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** The Greek word *eggiken* usually is translated as “at hand” or “has come near.” It is a verb form indicating a past and completed action.

Dallas Willard says in *The Divine Conspiracy*, “This kingdom is not something to be ‘accepted’ now and enjoyed later, but something to be *entered* now. It is something that already has flesh-and-blood citizens who have been transformed into it and are fellow workers in it.”⁵⁴

The central message that Jesus came to announce was that the Kingdom of Heaven is available to all—now. It had always been available prior to Jesus, but His arrival, coming down from heaven to earth, brought new accessibility. The light coming into the darkness brought this reality to life like never before seen.

While God’s kingdom is at hand now, there are other kingdoms at work now as well. This is ultimately why we are still struggling to be free. There is still a spiritual battle raging as we speak. Just as there is a “now” aspect to God’s kingdom, there is also a “not yet” aspect to fully seeing God’s restored kingdom. Ultimately, that is why Jesus urges us to pray these words in the Lord’s Prayer, found in Matthew 6:10 (NASB): **“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

N.T. Wright said in his groundbreaking book, *Surprised by Hope*, “Jesus’s resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is all about.”⁵⁵

Jesus came to announce His kingdom, to reveal what His kingdom looks like, and through His resurrection to show us that His kingdom will be victorious.

He was far more interested in renewing, recreating, and restoring this world, not in blowing it up and destroying it. We see this in the overall scope of what Jesus said, His words in the Lord's Prayer, and also in the revelation of John in the final two chapters of our Bible. From beginning to end, the Bible is about God's full restoration of the world, of which humanity is an integral piece of the entire puzzle.

When you think about God restoring the entire world, it gives you an entirely different perspective and approach to life today. It means that we can not only enter into that kingdom through the blood of Jesus, but now we can participate in it as well. What we do in this world does in fact matter. Someone once asked the great reformer, Martin Luther, what he would do if he knew that Jesus was coming back today. Luther responded that he would plant a tree. Why? Because if God is about full restoration, then the little things we do in this world matter. His belief is that somehow in the new, fully restored kingdom of God, the tree that he planted would be utilized, loved, and give even more glory to God.

Until Christ returns again, we would do well to play our part in His total restoration of the whole world. Again, we return to words from N.T. Wright:

"The point of the resurrection...is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die...What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether...They are part of what we may call building for God's kingdom."⁵⁶

C H A L L E N G E

HEAVEN TO EARTH

God's ultimate desire is the full restoration of this world. Amazingly, God has created us in His image. And if He is the Master restorer, we are His mini-restorers in this world. Because we are made in God's image, when Jesus prays, **"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,"** we get to be a part of bringing heaven to earth today in some way.

As you look at your life—the people, circumstances, and community in which you live—list five areas, things, or people that you believe need God's restoration.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

How can you bring heaven to earth in the above areas?

Your challenge today is to restore or start restoring one of the five areas mentioned above.

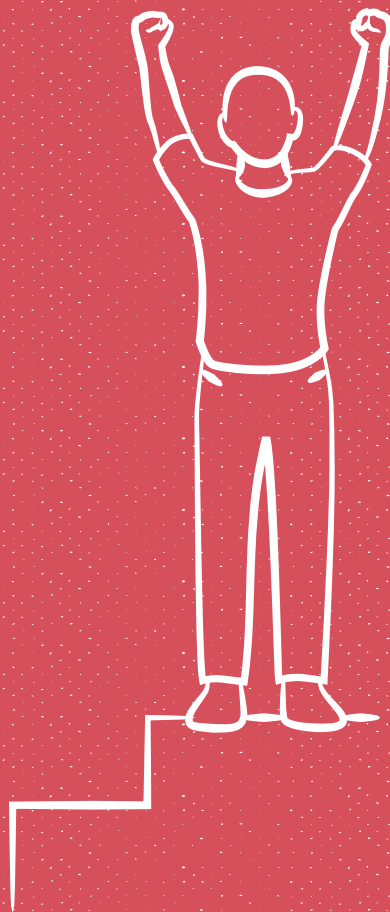
What did you do? Share on social media using #ForgivingChallenge.

DAYS
34-40



S.C.A.R.S.

SANCTIF



ICATION

DAY 34

FREEDOM MOUNTAIN

You have made it a long way on this journey, but you have one final important step to take to truly be free. To get to the top of Freedom Mountain requires many steps, some more difficult than others. However, before we reach the mountaintop experience of freedom together, let's review where we've been so far.

SIN

It is difficult to get to the top of Freedom Mountain. You spent a lot of time training for this climb and now you're mustering up as much strength as you can to begin. However, you are shocked as you struggle to take even a single, solitary step in the right direction. As you try to navigate your way to the top, you stumble and fall. You keep veering down paths you were never intended to follow. Your errors begin multiplying, and now an already difficult climb is becoming impossible. Every error adds heavy baggage to the climb, and you are exhausted. For some reason, even if you can't rationalize it, you feel the need to keep holding on to the baggage. Now, it takes everything inside of you to attempt a single step. Eventually, you crash. The climb is over. You've failed.

CONFESSION

You admit that there is no way to get to the top on your own. You confess that the mountain is too big, and you are too weak. Your journey is over. A deep sadness comes over you. But in your sorrow, another man suddenly comes down the mountain and finds you lying there. He's got some exciting news to share with you.

He asks you to follow Him. He lifts you up, leads you around a bend, and shows you a new path.

There's something unique about this man, even if you can't explain it. He claims this path will lead all the way to the top. But as you examine the path, it doesn't appear all that impressive. It certainly doesn't look appealing. It's rather narrow. Nobody would choose this path on their own. You wouldn't even know how to find it if it hadn't been shown to you. You remind Him that even if the pathway leads to the top, you can't get there. Your bags weigh far too much. You do your best to describe what is in each and every bag. But you've forgotten what is in some bags, while you remember only small details about other bags. As sorrow comes over you, the man shows great kindness. Nothing about the bags that you are describing seems to faze this man.

ABSOLUTION

The man then offers to carry your bags for you. To be sure, you can use the break. They have been weighing you down, and you are ready to release them. As He reaches for your first bag, you notice a nasty scar in the middle of His hand. He picks up your first bag, then your second, your third. You lose count, and honestly you didn't even realize how many bags you were carrying. Pretty soon, He has picked them all up. At first you were impressed by this man's kindness, but now you're staggered by His amazing strength. You would have never guessed by looking at Him that He could be so strong. The bags felt like bricks to you, but He throws them over His shoulders like bags of feathers. How is this possible? Surely this man will eventually tire, but it certainly doesn't look like it anytime soon.

RESTORATION

This man walks with strength, and there's a joy in His steps. He never once complains about the weight of your bags or makes you feel guilty about having to

carry them. Instead, He talks on and on about how excited He is for you to join Him at the top. He assures you it's a view that you've never seen before. When you get thirsty, He asks for your empty water bottle, taps on a rock, and somehow water flows from the stone, filling the bottle. What in the world!?! As you drink, this fresh water tastes like no other water you've ever had before! Somehow, even though you just chugged a full bottle, not a drop is gone. It's still filled to the brim. This makes no sense.

There's only a short distance left until you get to the top. The last steps are difficult, so you'll need some nourishment to sustain you. The man starts a fire and begins cooking over this open flame. Soon, you're eating the best fish you've ever had in your life. But where in the world did He get this fish? After eating, He calls you to follow Him again. With every step up the mountain, He is more and more giddy. He's so excited you are with Him.

SANCTIFICATION

You are almost to the top. The man runs ahead to ensure that everything is in order for you when you reach the peak. But just as He leaves, you notice how steep and dangerous this last step truly is. If you don't land the step well, it would have severe consequences. Because of the high grade, you can't fully see what's on the other side of the mountain. Doubt and fear begin to creep in. You wonder if the view is even worth it. You're reminded that the path He led you on didn't look that impressive. Maybe this view won't be impressive either. Besides, you have made it up pretty far and can see some cool things where you are. Taking this final step would require great courage. Do you really have what it takes? In the midst of your doubts and fears, He shows up again. He can sense your nervousness, so He offers to take the step with you. He reaches His other hand out to you, and you see a similar scar on this hand as well. He invites you to take this nail-scarred hand and take the final step with Him.

Will you take the last step?

I hope you would say, "Yes!"

And yet, can you believe it, this is the step that keeps so many from total freedom.

In the above illustration, as in life, there are several exit points that you can take on your journey to be free. The earliest exit point is when you commit a sin. If you refuse to bring your sin to God, you will never be free. The next exit point is refusing to believe God paid the price for your sin. Another exit point is refusing to believe that God fully restores you. At any point, any of these refusals will only lead to more bondage.

The final exit point, however, is the saddest for me. It's where I see so many leave the journey. What a tragedy that one can be so close to freedom, and yet they don't experience it because they were one step short. Jesus didn't do all that He did for you so that you stop short anywhere. Jesus stepped down so that you would step up with Him.

True freedom doesn't happen until you step up into the freedom God has won for you and wants for you. This process of stepping into freedom is called sanctification.

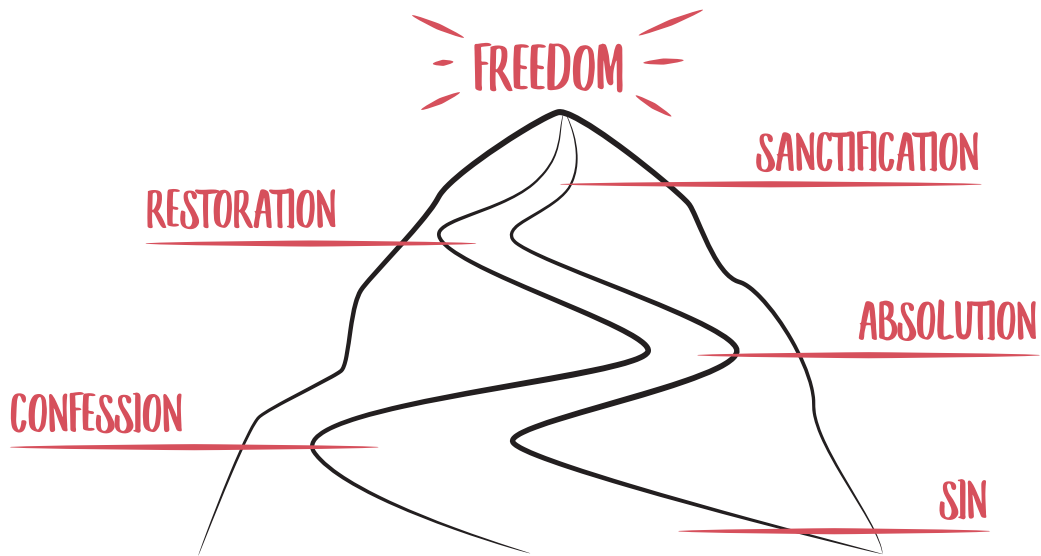
As we mentioned on Day 5, the definition of sanctification is the process of being freed from sin. Other definitions of sanctification are to be holy, or set apart, but the ultimate purpose is to be free. It's when we live a holy and set-apart life that we are truly free.

With sanctification, we participate in this process with God's Holy Spirit inside of us. We cooperate with God in sanctification. However, the devil knows that the best

place to attack us on our journey to freedom are the places where you and I are the most involved. He will throw everything that He can against us in this last and final step. This, by the way, is why so many leave the journey of freedom here.

In fact, Satan will make this last step seem impossible. But remember the Good News. God has called you to ascend to the mountaintop, and you can rest assured that He's given you everything you need to make it all the way up. The God who was with you after you fell taking the first step is still with you as you take the last step. Come, and ascend to the top of Freedom Mountain.

My question to you again is: "Will you take the last step?"



THE FINAL CHALLENGE

Peter would go on to write some amazing words that are recorded for us in the Bible. He says in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

There you have it. You are chosen, royal, holy, and special. On top of that, you—the one who has received mercy—are a messenger of God in this world. He has called you to go and share this light with others. The time for you to step into this calling has never been more pressing than right now.

As I said at the beginning of this book, one of the most common words used to describe Christians is that we are judgmental. We are not known for being a forgiving people. It’s time for that to change! In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus said that we should pray these words: **“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”** **Matthew 6:12**

We forgive others as God has forgiven us. This book was written because many of us have a harder time dealing with our own forgiveness than we do forgiving others. Therefore, I wanted to help people know that they are truly forgiven by God. I believe that once you know you have received God's forgiveness, you can't help but become a forgiving person yourself. His grace and kindness in our lives is contagious.

Forgiven people become forgiving people.

That's my final challenge to you. Take the very forgiveness that Jesus has given to you and give it away to others. Go and forgive others. Although forgiveness is good for everybody, forgiven people ought always to take the first step. Let's not wait and withhold forgiveness until the time is just right, but rather, let's go and give it away today.

Levi Lusko writes, "You have to win the war inside before you can win the war outside."⁸² Jesus has already won the war for us. Now let's go and multiply that victory.



FORGIVEN
PEOPLE
BECOME
FORGIVING
PEOPLE.



#FORGIVINGCHALLENGE

C H A L L E N G E

FORGIVING OTHERS CHALLENGE

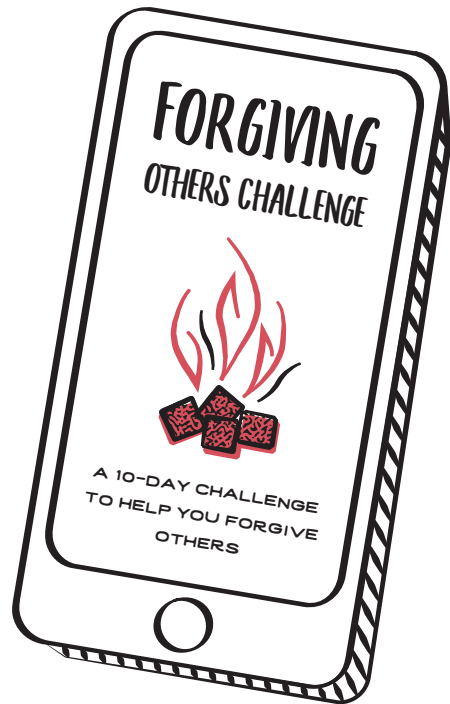
Who do you need to forgive? Write down the names of people God is putting on your heart to forgive. Who on this list owes a debt to you that you can agree to forgive right now? To whom are you holding anger or resentment that you can let go of today?

Pray by name for each of the people you need to forgive. Ask God for the power to forgive them, just as He has forgiven you. Ask God what specific step(s) you need to take in regard to each person on this list for you to continue to walk in freedom.

Much more could be said on how to forgive others.

Go to www.ForgivingOthersChallenge.com to continue the forgiveness journey. There you will find an ebook called *Forgiving Others Challenge: A 10-Day Challenge to Help You Forgive Others*. If you enter the code "IAMFREE" at checkout, you will receive this ebook for **FREE**. Consider this my gift to you for going on this journey together.

God bless you!





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zach Zehnder is a husband, father, speaker, author, and pastor. He is married to Allison Zehnder, and they have two boys, Nathan and Brady.

His life mission is to challenge people of all ages to become greater followers of Jesus.

One of Zach's more notable accomplishments was in November 2014. He preached a sermon that lasted for 53 hours and 18 minutes. In doing this, he broke the Guinness World Record for the Longest Speech Marathon. The event raised enough money to purchase a home, which was given to Hand in Hand of Lake County, Florida, a ministry that helps addicts recover.

In 2017, Zach finished what would become the bestselling book, *Red Letter Challenge*. In 2019, his wife, Allison, led the charge in writing *Red Letter Challenge Kids*. Zach and Allison continue to write books and speak about the importance of following Jesus.

Zach currently serves as President of Red Letter Living, LLC, and as a Teaching Pastor at King of Kings Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

Read more about Zach or request him to speak at your conference, church, or event at www.redletterchallenge.com/zach.

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#CHAPTER89

JOHN 21:1-25

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, **"Friends, haven't you any fish?"**

"No," they answered.

He said, **"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."** When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

Jesus said to them, **"Bring some of the fish you have just caught."** So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, **"Come and have breakfast."** None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, **"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"**

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, **"Feed my lambs."**

Again Jesus said, **"Simon son of John, do you love me?"**

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, **"Take care of my sheep."**

The third time he said to him, **"Simon son of John, do you love me?"**

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, **"Do you love me?"** He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, **"Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, **"Follow me!"**

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."** Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, **"If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"**

This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

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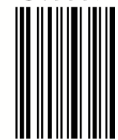
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