

36 FREEDOM THROUGH CHRIST



Receive

Hebrews 2:11-18

“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:17-18, NIV)



Reflect

Jesus, who was also tempted, understands what I am going through. Does this truth help me look Him in the eye when I sin?

Have I ever really thought about the fact that Jesus was truly tempted by Satan in the desert? Or have I assumed that because He is Jesus, it was easy for Him?

What would it look like to turn to Jesus for comfort and reassurance? What's holding me back from doing that?

Most of us can remember a time in which a good friend or loved one empathized with us during a difficult situation: “I know how you feel. I’ve been there. I get what you’re going through, and it’s going to be okay.” These words convey comfort and solace; they make us feel less alone and they offer hope for recovery and healing. These verses from Hebrews remind us that Jesus is that friend. He, too, faced temptation during His 40 days alone in the desert. He, too, suffered sorrow, pain, grief, and even fear. Jesus gets it. And because He gets it, because He knows what suffering feels like, He offers us real comfort, reassurance, and hope.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I want to come to You truthfully, as I really am, flaws and all. Help me trust You.*

Consider What’s Real: Do you ever feel compelled to hide your true self from God? Do you approach Him as someone you’re not, masking the worst parts of yourself, pretending to be someone else? Don’t forget, God created you; He created the uniquely original person that is you. He knows you inside and out, including your darkest parts. In fact, He knows your transgressions before they even occur. Today, try to approach God in prayer as honestly and as openly as possible. You might even begin your prayer with a statement like, “Here I am God. Here’s the whole me,” and then sit back and see how that feels. You might be surprised by how liberating such unedited honesty is.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 139:11-12

37 FORGIVENESS THROUGH CHRIST



Receive

1 John 1:1-10

“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.”

(1 John 1:8-9, NIV)



Reflect

Despite my messes, Jesus, who died for my sins and has given me eternal life, won't reject me. Does this or will this change how I feel about myself or how I relate to others?

Am I coming to God truthfully, presenting my whole self?

Am I honest with myself about the depth and breadth of my sins?

Sometimes we hesitate to confess the full breadth of our sins, even to God Himself. Sure, we cover the minor sins, but the ones that cause us the most shame remain unspoken. These sins sit heavy on our hearts and minds as we wrestle with feelings of unworthiness and guilt. But the truth is, God wants to hear about our deepest, most private, most shameful concerns, not because He wants to punish us, or because eternal life is dependent on the purity of our souls, but because He wants to relieve us from the heavy burden of our sins. God wants nothing more than to take our burdens from us and replace with them rest, peace, and love.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I offer You this burden on my heart and ask for Your forgiveness in exchange.*

Consider What's Real: Every sin, no matter how big or small, separates us from Him. And regardless of how terrible we consider our very worst sin, God wants to take it from us, and give us peace in its place. So today, let's get real with ourselves and with God. No more deceiving ourselves and God; no more hiding our worst sins. List your sins, either on paper or in your mind, being ruthlessly honest and including even the sins that make your cringe the most. Then lay these sins before God, ask Him for forgiveness and begin to close the chasm that sin has created.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 51:1-6, Proverbs 6:21-23

38 COMPASSION



Receive

Psalm 103:8-13

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” (Psalm 103:8, NIV)



Reflect

Do I trust the Lord's compassion for me?

Do I really view God as a compassionate father or more as an all-powerful ruler?

Is there a part of me that is afraid God will punish me?

As flawed human beings who struggle to forgive those who have wronged us, it's hard to imagine a God who is so deeply and thoroughly all-forgiving. We might say we've forgiven a friend who has hurt us, but more often than not, deep down, we haven't truly let it go. God, on the other hand, genuinely forgives and relinquishes his anger. He lets it all go and offers us a clean slate, a fresh start, over and over again, no matter how many times we need it. As the old adage goes, “God forgives and forgets”—He doesn't hold our sins over our heads.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, help me understand the depth and breadth of Your compassion and love for me. And help me offer that kind of compassion and love to the people in my life, too.*

Consider What's Real: God not only offers us an endless supply of mercy, compassion, and love, He expects us to strive to do the same with others. Yet how often do we judge those around us, condemning them for their sins, offering not love and grace but criticism and unkindness? It's so easy to point out the flaws of others, yet be blind to our own.

Additional Verses to Consider: Matthew 18:21-22, Micah 6:6-8

39 HEALING AND WHOLENESS



Receive

Luke 7:36-50

“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.” (Luke 7:47, NIV)



Reflect

Have I been set free by Christ's love?

Have I allowed God into my darkest places?

Have I allowed myself to experience the incredible liberation that comes with God's forgiveness and love?

In order to be forgiven, we have to let the forgiver in. Asking someone for forgiveness requires that we open ourselves up entirely, not only admitting our wrongdoing but also admitting our vulnerability, fear, and insecurities—our inner-most self, including all of our hang-ups, neuroses, and sins. Jesus knows how difficult this is. Just as He knew what a risk the prostitute took in approaching him in humility and love to anoint His feet, He knows that when we truly ask for forgiveness we are opening ourselves up to a place of vulnerability and risk. Only those who are humble enough to recognize the depth of their sin—like the prostitute in this story—can appreciate the complete forgiveness God offers.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I come to You completely open and ready to ask Your forgiveness. Please forgive my sins and breathe gratitude into my heart.*

Consider What's Real: Sometimes we hide our deepest sins from God, reluctant to come clean with Him and reveal our truest, most flawed selves to Him. Yet according to Luke 7:47, in doing this, we are missing the very best opportunity to understand and experience true gratitude and love. *The Message* translation of Luke 7:47 reads this way: “She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal.” Name the sin you keep hidden even from God Himself, and embrace the first step toward being fully forgiven and fully grateful. The more honest our confession, the more grateful we are for God's overwhelming grace.

Additional Verses to Consider: Psalm 103:1-5, Psalm 51:15-17

40 TRUE GRACE



Receive

Romans 3:9-20

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”
(Romans 3:19-20, NIV)



Reflect

*Admitting my sins and committing my life to Christ forever means that I'll be spending it with Him forever. Have I allowed this radical truth to transform my life here and now?
How often do I make excuses for my sins, unwilling to take responsibility for them or even denying that I have engaged in sinful behavior at all?
Am I ready to get real with God about my sins?*

So often when we are accused of wrongdoing we get defensive, unwilling to take responsibility for our mistakes and eager to blame someone else. But God doesn't let us off the hook so easily. He holds us accountable—not because He requires us to “pay” for our sins, but because He knows that admitting our sins and asking for forgiveness is the first step in growing a real relationship with Him. In fact, the whole reason God gives us His law is so that our sins are more readily apparent to us, prompting us to approach Him in humility and repentance. It's true, we will err again and again, but with each return to God, our relationship with Him deepens.



Respond

Ask for Change: *Lord, I am ready. I know I can't do this on my own. I need Your forgiveness.*

Consider What's Real: Today, come completely open and vulnerable to God and pray this prayer of repentance [fill in the blank with the sin(s) you hold most tightly]. Lord, I come to You in trust and love. Please forgive me for _____. Give me an undivided heart; transform me from the inside out so that I will come to know You a little bit better each day.

Additional Verses to Consider: Romans 5:20-21, Romans 6:14