



## Section One: **FINDING FORGIVENESS**

If you're like most people, there's probably a chapter of your life you'd like to erase or go back and do over. It might have been as far back as highschool or college. It may be a recent relationship. We've all made bad decisions we can look back and laugh about. But most of us carry memories that will never elicit anything but shame and regret. So, what do you do? You know what and whom you should avoid in the future. But what do you do about what you already did? Or what are you doing?

People often dumb down their dumb decisions by comparing them to other people's dumb decisions. Perhaps you've tried that, It certainly takes the edge off-- for a while. Then there's the "Well, nobody's perfect" approach. And while that's true, it doesn't change anything. It certainly doesn't remove the shame or erase the guilt. Excuses and explanations are like aspirin. They provide temporary relief, but eventually the pain returns. Coping mechanisms help us cope. But coping mechanisms don't wash away the past. And at the end of the day, that's what we all need. Something that will wash away our mistakes--our sin.

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**Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death.**

● Coco Chanel

Perhaps the previous two paragraphs surfaced memories you work hard to keep hidden in the recesses of your mind. So why dredge them up now? Here's why. Moving forward in your faith journey may require some looking back. While that may be uncomfortable, it could also be liberating. Addressing lingering shame and regret can lead to an experience that ignites personal faith in a way you may not believe possible. Experiencing personal forgiveness for personal sin is often the starting point for personal faith.

*Section One:*

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

1. What do you wish you could do over?
2. Do you resonate with the idea that you need to forgive yourself? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe you need forgiveness? Why or why not?

**To forgive is to set a  
prisoner free and  
discover that  
prisoner was you.**



Louis B. Smedes

## Section Two: **THE MESSIAH**

In the first century, John the Baptist showed up in the region of Judea preaching and baptizing. In addition to the gospels, John the Baptist is referenced in the Quran as well as by the Jewish historian Josephus. John's message was harsh. Yet thousands flocked to the Jordan River to hear him.

Many believed John was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. But he rejected that title. Instead, he claimed to be a forerunner of one whom God would send. His role was to prepare Israel for what was about to take place in their midst. He was the warm-up act, so to speak.

**"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps whose sandals I am not worthy to unite." - John 1:26-27**

One Afternoon, while baptizing in the Jordan River, John looked up and saw Jesus standing in line, waiting his turn. John's response was staggering. Leveraging fifteen hundred years of sacred Jewish tradition, he declared.

***"Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" - John 1:29***

This statement is so packed with implication that it requires some detailed explanation.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the law, the Israelites discovered that God included provision for sin. When an Israelite sinned, he was required to sacrifice an animal. The animal's blood covered, or atoned for, the sin committed. This was a bloody and poignant reminder of the cost of sin and the need for forgiveness. No one believed the blood of an animal was equal in value to the blood of a human being. But according to Jewish law, the blood of an animal was enough. The challenge was that sacrifices had to be done repeatedly. There was no final sacrifice for sin.

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**Salvation was bought not by Jesus' fist, but by His nail-pierced hands; not by muscle, but by love; not by vengeance, but by forgiveness; not by force, but by sacrifice.**

● **A.W. Tozer**

With that as a backdrop, consider the gravity of John's statement when he pointed at Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God"-- literally, the lamb God has provided for us. This Lamb, this man, would "take away" the sins of the world. According to John, through Jesus, sin would be lifted up and carried away once and for all. But not just Jewish sin. John was

clear. Jesus would carry away the sins of the entire world. Jewish sin. Roman sin. Gentile sin. Your sin.

No one understood the significance of John's declaration that day. But toward the end of Jesus' ministry, the truth of John's words came into sharp focus. Jesus had not come to take away the sins of the world in symbolic fashion. He was the sacrificial Lamb of God who would literally take upon himself the sins of humanity. Through his voluntary death, he would lift up and carry away the sins of the world, once and for all.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus gathered with his apostles to celebrate Passover. During the meal, he said something that shocked and perhaps offended everyone in attendance. The Jews had celebrated the Passover meal for around fifteen hundred years. It traced its roots all the way back to the night Israelites left Egypt. God instructed the Israelites to take the blood of the lamb and place it on the doorframes of their homes. Death would pass over the homes marked by the blood of the lamb.

As Jesus broke the bread and distributed wine to those gathered with him that night, he announced that from that night forward, when they gathered for Passover, they were to commemorate something other than their ancestors' departure from Egypt.

And he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." - Luke 22:19-20

From that night forward, the Passover was to represent his blood, soon to be spilled on their behalf. The bread was to remind them of his body, which in a few short hours would be broken for them. Jesus was making an outrageous claim. He had already rattled the status quo on several occasions when he claimed authority to forgive sin. Now he was claiming to be the sacrifice for sin.

The next day, as Jesus took his last breath while hanging on the cross, his followers believed they were witnessing a tragic and confusing end. But Jesus had predicted his own death as the necessary sacrifice for sin. His death was the final sacrifice for sin. His death was the final sacrifice of God's final "lamb".

### *Section Two:*

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. Why is the title "Lamb of God" significant?
2. According to the text, how is Jesus connected to our need for forgiveness?
3. Why was Jesus' death necessary?

### Section Three: **ONLY ONE PERSON**

Christians believe Jesus was the Lamb of God who picked up and carried away the sin of the world. That's great news for you. Here's why. You don't have to forgive yourself; yourself has already been forgiven.

The sin you've tried to make up for, pay for, and find redemption for has already been made up for, paid for, and redeemed. It happened two thousand years ago when the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world—including your sin.

About twenty or so years after Jesus' crucifixion, the apostle Paul described the significance of that tragic, glorious event this way:

*He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

*- Colossians 2:13-14*

Through Christ, God has "canceled" your sin debt. When you place your faith in Christ, your sin is forgiven. Your debt is canceled. You don't owe God and you don't owe you. While other faith systems give you something to do, Paul says it's all been done. God did what you could not do. Jesus took your sin and carried it away. Forgiveness is a gift God made available to everyone. But like any gift, it must be received.

Every faith tradition offers an answer to the question of what to do when we can't forgive ourselves. But only one person ever offered himself as the answer to that question.

#### *Section Three:*

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. According to this section, what is required of you to receive God's forgiveness?
2. How do you feel about the idea that your sin has already been canceled?
3. What is standing in the way of you accepting God's forgiveness through Jesus?

## BOTTOM LINES FROM WEEK THREE:

● Experiencing personal forgiveness for personal sin is often the starting point for personal faith.

● In all of history, only Jesus offered himself as the answer to the question of what to do when we can't forgive ourselves.

● You don't have to forgive yourself; *yourself* has already been forgiven.

## FOR THE NEXT GROUP MEETING:

*Read and complete the questions for Week Four.*

At the next group meeting, we will examine grace. In everyday life, grace is radical, because we think life is all about getting what we deserve... good or bad. But grace is something different. It's about getting what we don't deserve. And it's key to the way we relate to God.

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**I am a most noteworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely. I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whole purpose to enjoy His marvelous Presence.**

● Christopher Columbus