

The Apostles' Creed (Part 11) – The Forgiveness of Sins

Matt Chandler – November 8, 2015

[Video]

Male: I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...

Female: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...

Male: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

Male: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Male: He descended to hell.

Female: The third day he rose again from the dead.

Male: He ascended to heaven...

Female: And sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty...

Female: From whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Male: I believe in the Holy Spirit...

Female: The holy catholic church...

Male: The communion of saints...

Male: The forgiveness of sins...

Male: The resurrection of the body...

Male: And the life everlasting.

Male: Amen.

[End of video]

Well, how are we? Doing okay? If you have your Bibles, grab them. Exodus 34 is where we're going to camp out. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. As always, I want you to see that what we're talking about, where I'm getting the things I'm saying, I'm not making up out of thin air, but I'm really digging them out of the Word of God.

As we end or move toward ending our series on the Apostles' Creed, this is one of those weeks that I've been looking forward to. If we could... I know we can't because of how we're built out. This is one of those messages I would rather sit in my living room and make an appeal for you to hear and kind of press in some ways and try to pull out of you some things.

I have deeply been in prayer about our time together and what God might accomplish in our time together as we consider the reality of the forgiveness of sins, both in regard to know God has forgiven us and then also how we then are enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to forgive others. Let me set up the dilemma before we solve the dilemma.

In 2013, Justine Sacco was a 30-year-old senior director of Corporate Communications at IAC. IAC is a leading Internet media corporation. If you've ever been to Ask.com or used Urbanspoon, IAC owns those two things. She was on her way home to South Africa around the holiday season in 2013, and she began to Tweet to the couple of hundred people who followed her really silly Tweets about the indignity of travel.

If you've done a lot of travelling, specifically if you've done a lot of travelling internationally, she began to just lament some of the indignities of that. On her flight from New York to London, I believe right before she took off, she Tweeted that there was a German man who smelled, and she was lamenting the fact that she was going to be in first class with this smelly man for the next five or six hours before she landed in London.

When she landed in London, she said, "Ah, good to be back in London, home of cucumber sandwiches and bad teeth." Then right before her 11-hour flight took off from London and headed to South Africa, she tweeted that she was heading to Africa, made a joke about AIDS, and then made a joke about how, in her whiteness, she wouldn't get AIDS. Then she turned off her phone, and the plane took off.

She went to sleep on that flight in first class. I'm sure she lay flat bed, living the dream. That Tweet went viral. By the time she landed in South Africa, her name and that Tweet was the number one trending thing in the world. She lands and turns on her phone, and the first text she gets is from an old high school friend who she hasn't talked to in years who just said, "I'm so sorry this is all happening to you." She had no idea what that text meant. Then her phone just exploded.

As Justine gets off of that plane, her whole world is gone. She is fired from her job. The hotels she had booked at would not host her because those who worked those hotels threatened to boycott if they housed her. Her life was threatened. Even her family and extended family members there in South Africa who had spent their lives working with Nelson Mandela's National African Congress, had been avid supporters financially and in their time and space and energy to push back the darkness of racism and the despicable way Africans had been treated.

You have this family who had spent its life trying to push back the darkness now being engulfed by this enraged Internet mob that ultimately destroyed Justine's life. I don't want to in any way make light of how foolish you have to be to post something like that on the Internet. I'm not trying to soften really anything about what she said. I think it was foolish and idiotic, but I don't know that it deserved death threats. I don't know that it deserved her having to move and hide for an extended period of her life. I don't think it involved this giant fallout for her family that occurred.

Really, one of the things that stuck out, not just about Justine's case but dozens of others, is that although in our justice system, public shaming is no longer part of our system, still the rule of the human heart is still our world, our hearts, we love to see others get punished. We love to watch them get punished. We want them to get punished. In fact, we live in a day and age in which outrage is all the rage. We're looking for something to be furious at. News outlets and people and blogs... It's built around that. What are we going to be enraged about today? What are we going to be frustrated about?

We live in a punishment-obsessed world. We want and the world wants people to be punished. A mistake made in the public sphere or maybe in what some people assume isn't the public sphere can very quickly turn into a type of pitchfork and burn somebody to the ground and destroy their lives. Really, what happens in this environment, on Twitter, on Facebook, on news outlets is we all participate in this fanning into flame division, anger, hate. We have no view.

We lose sight of the 30,000-foot view of people's lives and the fact that mistakes are often made, and there are repercussions from mistakes, but usually, generally, the punishment fits the crime. That day is gone, and we want, we desire, we participate in the dismantling of people's lives, the joining in of division and the fanning into flame hate, anger, division. There is something satisfying to the sinful human soul about these things, and yet, for the people of God, this should not be so.

It's no accident at all that "the forgiveness of sins" is connected to "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints." I said a couple of weeks ago that we're going to watch the Apostles' Creed take a turn. We've looked at the nature and character of God, that he is three-in-one, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. As we've unpacked that, now the creed has begun to turn. Now we're looking at how this plays itself out on the ground. Since this is God, what does that mean for us? What does that mean for our lives?

We're beginning to see it. Last week, we covered that we are part of the church universal, yet we're called to one another to commune with one another. We used Lan Leavell's phrase, "to marinate," to take on the flavor of one another, to become a people where we were once not a people. What we see happening now in the creed, as we have now said, "Okay, the Holy Spirit has come, created a people, and now the people become the platform by which the forgiveness of God is made visible.

I have two points in our time together. It's simple. First, God forgives. That's the first point. The second point is that the people of God, that communion of the saints that we talked about last week, becomes the platform on which the forgiveness of God is made visible to the world around us. With that said, we've been reading the creed together. This is week 11. We have one more week of the creed before we ease into *Advent*. We have to do this two more times. Will you stand with me as we read the creed together?

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius

Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen."

Why don't you go ahead and have a seat? On our sentence, on our phrase for the week, we're talking about *The Forgiveness of Sins*. I have some good friends whose daughter is smarter than all of us, and she just began her college career at Stanford, you know, that place you couldn't get into. It has been interesting watching her navigate the difficulties of a completely secular school that is filled with people who have never really met a Christian and ultimately don't understand what Christians believe.

This beautiful, brilliant young woman is sitting in classes, and she's in this dormitory where people will often begin to talk about Christians and talk about what Christians do and what Christians believe and how Christians go about their lives with nothing other than what they have absorbed from the media they have watched. They have been disciplined, if we can use that word, in how to view and think about the Christian faith.

One of the popular narratives most people believe about who we love, who we serve, and what we believe as Christians is that we believe that all people are miserable sinners who are trudging through religious steps in order to please God, and God is just constantly frustrated and angry with us, and if we don't line ourselves up with how God designed us to work and operate, he's going to destroy and damn all of us.

That narrative is not true. In fact, the God of the Bible, even if you want to make the argument out of the Old Testament... I don't want to take away from any of the confusing, "What in the world is that?" that happens in the Old Testament, but even if you look to the Old Testament, you see that God is gracious and merciful and forgiving.

If we're going to really look at God being a forgiver, and therefore we can be forgiven and extend forgiveness to others, then take probably one of the most well-known stories in the Old Testament. The Bible tells us that the people of God... If you think back to last week, the people of God are those persons who are in right relationship with him, right? God is the Father of some and the Creator of all. The people of God were enslaved in Egypt, and they began to cry out because of hard labor.

They began to go, "This is cruel. This is unfair." They were prisoners. They were beaten. They were abused. They were used. They're crying out to God, and God hears them, and he sends Moses. Moses doesn't want to go, so he sends Moses and Aaron to be the conduit through which his power flows. They show up in Egypt, and through some miraculous signs rolled out by the power of God, the people of God are set free from slavery.

You know the story. Moses leads them across the Red Sea. The Red Sea parts. God flexes his might over all of the creative order, and the people of God are led out of slavery and toward the Promised Land. After they get across the Red Sea, Moses heads up onto Mount Sinai where he is communing with the Lord. The people of God have gathered in the valley below.

Depending on who you read, there is all sorts of debate on how long Moses is up on the mountain. I don't think it's more than a few weeks before the people of God begin to get concerned that Moses hasn't returned, and they feel like they're abandoned and that God might have led them out here to die and to kill them all.

They approach Aaron, who, by the way, was supposed to stay up on the mountain with Moses but came back down to the people, and they cried out to Aaron, "What are we going to do? God has abandoned us here." Aaron says, "Give me the gold from your ears," which was the mark of a slave. "Yours, your children, your spouse's. I'll take all the gold." Aaron fashioned a golden calf.

Listen to the audacity of this. He presents the golden calf before the people of God and said, "Behold, the God who has delivered you from the Egyptians." That's crazy. God, the great I Am, who has just flexed, supernaturally broken almost all of the laws of the known universe to step in and save and deliver his people. Within weeks, his people have forgotten his goodness, forgotten his grace, are questioning whether or not he can be trusted, are questioning whether or not he's good.

They then fashion a golden calf and say, "This is who delivered us. This is who made the way. This golden calf, something we made with our own hands from the marks of our slavery." Then, to make matters worse, the Bible says that after that, they began to eat and drink, and the Bible uses the word *play*.

Basically, upon the presentation of this golden calf, the people of God get drunk and start some sort of sexual depraved orgy while God speaks with Moses on the mountain. This is the scene you would

expect lightning and thunder and death and destruction and the valley below to be filled with blood. Yet, that's not how God plays it. Look with me in Exodus 34. We're going to pick it up in verse 5. We're going to read through verse 9.

"The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.'" Two points from this text. One is that God forgives. Second is that the people of God are the platform on which the forgiveness of God is made visible, both to the people of God and to the world around them.

1. *God forgives.* If you look there in the text, starting really at the end of verse 6, you begin to get these character attributes of God, who God is, what God is like. Here's what we read about God, that God is merciful, that God is gracious, that God is slow to anger and abounding (that's a lot of it; it abounds) in steadfast, unshakable, unmovable love. The steadfast love of God is just that. It's steadfast. It doesn't run out very easily. It's not a cup-half-full kind of love. It's abounding, and it's steadfast.

Before we just keep pushing through here on this idea, I want to stop and let you kind of interact for a second with your own heart and with the Holy Spirit of God. Do you honestly believe that this is what God is like? If you just stop for a second and kind of shift out of the, "I just go to service and listen to whoever is preaching," and just stop for a second, do you believe that God is these things? Do you honestly believe God is gracious? Do you really believe he's merciful? Do you think he's abounding in love, or do you think his love has run out?

See, what you think about God is immensely important. See, if you do not believe that God is these things, that he is merciful, that he is gracious, that he is slow to anger... Maybe there are all sorts of issues in your heart, and it's convoluted. Maybe your father was not slow to anger. Maybe he was

quick to anger. Maybe your mother was quick to anger. Maybe all you've ever known is quick-to-anger people.

To think of slow to anger is a category you really can't fix in your head. It's really hard to make God angry because of his abounding love, because of his graciousness, because of his mercy toward those of us who believe, because of those who are in right relationship, the people of God. Right? We are in right relationship with him.

Yet, if this is who God is, that he's merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and he keeps that steadfast love for thousands, then forgiveness is the ultimate expression of God's unique beauty. Forgiveness is the ultimate expression of the Godhead and all he is in graciousness, mercy, abounding love. Forgiveness becomes that picture, that thing that helps us understand and see most clearly who God is.

If we're going to talk about forgiveness, let's define it real quickly. If you have children who are first through fifth graders here, they'll be learning about forgiveness today as they've gathered to look at these same realities. I'll just put it on the screen. *Forgiveness* is releasing someone from their wrongs fully, freely, and forever. When we're talking about forgiveness, that's what we're talking about.

If you don't quite... You kind of have this, "Yeah, I get forgiveness," but you're not quite sure how to define it, this is how we're going to define it for your children. It's a great definition for us. I believe this is how the Bible would define forgiveness. We're letting someone out of their wrongs fully (not holding on to a little piece of it), freely (we're not making them pay restitution), and forever (we're letting it go forever).

We're going to talk about some of the complexities of that here in a little bit, so if that feels impossible to you, welcome to the community of faith, the communion of saints. Again, this is the stage on which this plays itself out. Here's what I want to do because this is what the text does. If we're saying God forgives, what does God forgive us of?

We see it there in verse 7. There are three things. "**...keeping steadfast love for thousands...**" We have three things. "**...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...**" There are three things listed here that God, in his generosity, in his abounding love, in his steadfast love for you, forgives you and me of. Here's what it is.

A. *Iniquity*. Iniquity is a premeditated choice that carries with it some continuing disregard for repentance. It's a premeditated choice. We refuse to repent upon those first kind of, "I know, I shouldn't have done that." Let me give you a verse that helps us understand iniquity. In Micah 2:1, the Bible says, "**Woe to those who devise wickedness [iniquity] and work evil on their beds!**" I don't think he's talking about sexual sin because here's what comes next. "**When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand.**"

Here's iniquity. Iniquity is me lying in bed at night and thinking through, premeditating on how I'm going to give myself over to depravity and wickedness. I am premeditating my rebellion against God, going against God's good design and going against what God has called me to as a man or woman designed in his image for his glory. It's premeditated.

To give you a picture we see in the Bible, think of David and Bathsheba. If you don't know this story, are not a Christian, haven't been around, and you just know David as David and Goliath, David has a heart that loves God, and he is a train wreck. I love him. Gosh. I feel most comfortable in God's delight in me as I read about David who so loves the Lord and is so busted up.

David is supposed to be out at war. It was a time when kings went to war. Instead, he's up on his roof. He sees a woman named Bathsheba who is bathing. He asks a question of one of his servants. "Hey, who is that bathing?" He didn't turn his eyes, like he knows he should've. The servant answers, "That is Uriah the Hittite's wife. That is your friend's wife, David. Your friend who you've bled with, who you've been in battle with, who you actually named. Your friend Uriah, that's his wife. That's who that is."

In an act of premeditation, David sent for her and took her. I feel I know enough about the human heart and mind and soul after 20-something years of ministry to believe that David felt remorse and guilt and shame that next morning. Do you know what he did with it? Nothing. He hid it. He buried it. He pushed it down. This premeditated rebellion against God and what is right led to a hardening of his heart to not confess his sin before the Lord.

That then ultimately led to him scheming to have Uriah killed when we find out Bathsheba is pregnant. It's the premeditated giving of ourselves over to wickedness that leads to what the Bible will call a seared conscience. See, sin always will take us further than we thought we would go,

right? If I could use some common examples, nobody stumbles into murder or stumbles into adultery, right?

We make specific choices, and there is a check in our spirit. We disregard that check, and we keep pushing through, and our hearts become seared. Our consciences become seared, and we're able to do things we would have never believed we could do, all the while justifying our doing it. That's what we see in David and Bathsheba. This is iniquity, premeditated giving of ourselves over to wickedness, where we disregard the check in our hearts that knows it's wrong and continue to pursue it.

Now, hear me. For some of you, the thing I'm describing right now isn't some type A, "Let me get my notes out." I'm talking to you. You know I'm talking to you. You know you're doing this right now. You have, with predetermined zeal, given yourselves into some really wicked things, some sinful things. You are messing around, pursuing relationships with people who aren't your spouse.

You're doing it right now. You're single, and you're pursuing sexual devious relationships with people you barely know. You're giving yourselves over. You know it's wrong, and you're stepping into it. The Holy Spirit, if you're a Christian, is checking you, and you're ignoring it and already in your head going, "I'm going to go ahead and do this. I know it's wrong. If tomorrow night, I know this person is out," or, "This is when my wife is going to be gone," or, "This is when my husband is going to be at work, so I'm going to step into this because nobody is going to see."

God sees. This isn't some sort of English lesson. This is your life. You have given yourself into iniquity. God help you. Your conscience could get seared, and you could be handed over to all sorts of destructive, horrific things. Yet, here's why I'm so glad you're here. Look right at me. God forgives this. Look at me. You have not gone too far.

See, one of the big lies when it comes to sin is once we realize we're waist deep in sin, we feel like we can't turn back. We're already waist deep. We might as well just plunge all the way in. Listen. That's a lie. You don't have any secrets from God. He knows this. Look at me. He forgives this. It's not too late. The forgiveness of God on high is available to you right now.

You have not gone too far. You are not too far gone down this road. You being here tonight is an objective evidence of God's willingness to step into the mess you have given yourself over and begin to pull you out and clean you off. God forgives iniquity. It's not too late.

B. *Transgression*. Transgression would be presumptuous sin, arrogant sin. This is to choose to wilfully disobey. It carries with it a bit of a different nuance than the one we just covered. It's not so much premeditated as in the moment, you're just going to do what you want to do. It's not like you laid in bed at night and thought, "Oh, this is how I'm going to give myself over to this," or, "You know what? When my wife goes to work, or when my husband goes to work, or in this space when nobody sees, this is what..."

It's not premeditated as much as it has come up, and you have just decided, "I don't care. I'm going to do what I want to do." This is giving yourself over to the hunger in your stomach, whatever it is, to be driven by your appetites. In the morning, to say this would be sinful, to do this would be sinful, but you don't care. You're going to do it. It's the sin of presumption. It's arrogance.

It's when you knowingly lie, when you knowingly steal, when you knowingly give yourself over to lust, when you knowingly sit there and meditate and become more and more angry with another person. Listen. God forgives this. You have not gone too far. It is not too late. Listen. It's not too late. The third one is the one I think everyone probably already knows about.

In fact, even those who might not because Christians are arguing the validity of this word in shaping a culture toward what is morally good and upright. David Brooks, who is an Op-Ed writer for *The New York Times*, wrote a whole book arguing that the word *sin* is a very important word for moral flourishing among a people.

C. *Sin*. Sin, in its most basic meaning, is to miss the mark, to do something against God or another person, to do wrong, doing something you know will have negative effects, or failing to do something you know is right, all of that is sin. In fact, iniquity and transgression could actually fit under the umbrella of sin. They're just nuanced versions of what sin is.

Listen to me. I just know the tension of forgiveness. That's why I would love to just sit around my living room and have this conversation, but there are 12,000 to 15,000 of you, and my house isn't that big. God forgives this. There is no sin in your life, there is no iniquity in your life, there is no transgression in your life that God cannot forgive, that God does not desire to forgive.

We see here the most heinous of sins and transgressions against the name and renown of God, and his response is not to fill the valley below with blood, but instead, because he is gracious, slow to

anger, and abounding in love, steadfast in his love for a thousand generations, then you see here his ability, his desire to grant forgiveness for all of your sins, all of your transgressions, all of your iniquities. This is the offer that's on the table.

I want to plead with you to take it. I want to beg you to take it, to pick it up. You haven't gone too far. He already sees. He already knows. It's paid for. Take the offer of forgiveness. If you look back in verse 7, God is serious about sin. Verse 7 says, "**...but who will by no means [talking about God] clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.**"

God hates sin. He hates it with a kind of wrath that is hard to get our heads around. The best way... In fact, let me be real honest. The only way I know to explain it is the way I hate everything that would rob my daughters and son of the fullness of life and joy and purpose. I hate anything that would try to steal, rob them of innocence, harm them, kill them, destroy them.

I hate it with a type of... I've said it before, and we've kind of laughed. I found a new kind of violence in me when Audrey was born. I held her, and I thought, "I could kill someone." I hadn't had that thought before. I literally had never thought, "I would kill someone with my hands." Yet, to this day, I think if you try to physically harm my family, something is going to happen in me. Something is going to break in me. Whether that's godly or not, I'll let the Holy Spirit do that profound work of peace in that moment if that's what the Lord has for me.

I'm telling you, I hate anything that would seek to destroy my children and wife because I love them so deeply. Because God loves so deeply, he hates so deeply. He hates your sin. That iniquity, that thing you're doing right now, that transgression, that thing you're giving yourself to, that missing of the mark, he hates it because he has so much love for you. Don't make this about some detached, cruel, far-off God who is power hungry. He deeply loves you. That's why this wrath is there.

That's why this forgiveness is being extended to you, because he loves you. What does he mean here? You want to just talk about just how big the scope and scale is of this thing here? He just said here that those who don't repent, those who don't pick up forgiveness that he has laid down for them in Jesus Christ, that their iniquity, their bent, their sinfulness, their transgression will be revisited upon their children and their children's children's children. Right?

What does that mean? I want to be real careful here because I know some of you in here have children who are wayward, you have children who aren't saved, and I don't want to put anything on you that the Bible isn't putting on you. First, when all is said and done, Audrey, Reid, and Norah are going to be held accountable for their own souls and their own lives. They will not be held accountable for my sins. That's not the way this plays out. They're not going to answer for my sins.

I will tell you this. My iniquity, my transgression, and my sins will affect and shape their lives. Sin carries with it collateral damage. Brother or sister, when you sin against God, you also sin against others. The effects of my rebellion against God affect not just me but those around me. Surely, we can see this. If you have children, do you remember that first moment that you were like, "Oh man, they're acting like me"?

I don't know if you've had that panic moment where they said something you say all the time, and you didn't think there was anything to that phrase until it came out of a 5-year-old's mouth, and you're like, "We have to stop saying that," or in my case, "Lauren, you have to stop saying that." I'm just kidding. We know this.

They pick up on our good things, but they also pick up on our bad things, those little ways we're inconsistent, those little hypocrisies in our hearts. Our kids see them, and it shapes them. Although my kids don't have to give an account for my sin, my sin does shape them in ways that break my heart. I'm not going to let us just stay in that, "Oh man, that's awful," kind of place because of the second point.

2. God's people are the stage upon which the forgiveness of God is made visible. God forgives, but the people of God, the communion of saints, those who God has called to himself... As you remember back last week, the holy catholic church, the church universal, and the communion of the saints, the gathering of the saints to do life with one another, that prioritization of life together, as we think about that and think about what that means, this becomes the stage on which God forgives us, and we are able then to let the world visibly see his forgiveness.

It's in this space that my children, who have seen my iniquity, who have seen my transgression, who have seen my sin, begin to marvel at the grace of God in forgiving sinners. Now, even in Christ, my sinfulness and iniquity and transgression are redeemed as a trophy of God's grace and are used in the lives of my children as a shaping force toward Christ and not away from him. That's a profound, beautiful reality.

I put here that forgiveness of sins is equally about community. It's not just about you and the Lord. There are communal ramifications for sin. In fact, in the New Testament, disciples, the church, the people of God are never more authentic than when they ask for forgiveness and forgive others. The people of God are never more authentic than when they confess their sins to one another and forgive one another. It's the stage on which the forgiveness of God is tangibly seen and marveled at.

As a young man, I was a moron. You might still think I'm a young man. I'm 41 now. I was 28 when I became a pastor. If you've been here this whole run, I just owe you that you've put up with me for so long, and that you're still putting up with me is a big grace of God toward me. I would have left me a long time ago, so thank you for sticking it out. Hopefully, I'll mature in my 50's or something, and we'll be able to enjoy some stable... Never mind. We don't have time for that.

As I'm looking at and thinking about the people of God and what The Village Church must always fight for, I've said on repeat to you (and I'm going to use this opportunity to say it again) that we must never become so clean of a community that we buy into the veneer of this area that would lie to us and say we have to have it all together, and our marriages have to be great, and our kids have to be great. We know what to do, and we know how to handle. It's absurd.

See, the self-righteous church never reveals its weaknesses and will never be honest about its brokenness. Look at me. The real church forgives. The people of God forgive because they've been forgiven. The people of God forgive because they've been forgiven. If you start to think about the dynamics at play, we have a real shot at wholeness and fullness of life because what we believe in the forgiveness of sins is that God forgives.

Then we don't feel like we have to hide when we're sinning because we know God forgives. Authenticity and deep community is birthed, the stage upon which God's forgiveness is made visible is in me being honest and authentic about my need for forgiveness. We say it like this. Nobody needs to wear a cape because nobody gets to wear a cape. Nobody can fly, so if you're wearing a cape, you're like a crazy person.

You can't fly, so pretending you can fly is just going to end up getting your legs broken. You can't fly. Christ can. We trust in Christ's ability to fly. If God forgives and the people of God, the communion of saints, the church becomes the platform, the stage on which the forgiveness of God is made

visible, how do we plug that into our grid of symmetry, clarity, community, and counsel? How do we take this idea that God forgives, is abounding in love, and plug it in?

We have to move quickly, but let's talk about this. On symmetry, some of you need to believe that you can be forgiven. You are haunted by an event. You are haunted by a season of your life. You are haunted by a struggle you currently are wrestling with. Symmetry. To develop biblical, Christian symmetry, you must embrace and believe that you can be forgiven.

Here's the second thing. Some of us need to extend that forgiveness to others. C. S. Lewis said this. I think it's important right here. He said we all agree forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it. It's so true. Now, I want to be honest and tender here. There are some wounds that go so deep and leave such a scar that forgiveness is going to feel impossible. It's going to feel wrong to forgive. It's even unnerving thinking about it in this moment.

Here's my invitation. Let us walk with you. It might take a while. Please don't feel guilt and shame about not being able to let go right now. Don't hear what we're saying today and what the Word of God is pressing on us today as some sort of condemnation on you. What a terrible way to end our time together, that on a sermon on forgiveness, you would feel condemned.

No, no, no. Let us walk with you. Let us help you. Come see us at Recovery on Wednesday nights. Come and let us walk with you and counsel you through some of these wounds, because ultimately, God does want to set you free and empower you and strengthen you to forgive. You haven't been asked to fight or overcome this on your own. Let us help you.

When it comes to clarity, clarity will hopefully help symmetry. First, there is no iniquity, transgression, or sin that is more powerful than the forgiveness of God in Christ. There is just not. There is nothing in your life that God can't forgive. You have not committed the unforgiveable sin. You just haven't. The second thing is that forgiveness of others is a command. Did you hear that? Forgiveness of others is a command.

To not forgive is to take the role of God as a just judge, and let's be honest... You're not. You're not a just judge. Yet, clarity is that God can forgive all sin, and God has asked us to forgive others. Then on community. I need to move quickly here. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the confession of sins to one another (look at this) "a breakthrough to community." He said, "In a very real way, forgiveness is

not just about absolving guilt, but it is also a reminder of what communion with God and with one another can and should be."

Bonhoeffer is saying when we confess sin to one another, that's a breakthrough in community. It's no longer about trivial, two-inch-deep things. We're getting to the heart of the matter. "Here's where I need the grace of God. Here's where I need the support of the body." Bonhoeffer is going to argue that if you and I want to walk in the type of community, that communion of saints, then confession of sin is an ongoing ethic of what happens when we come together.

We pray for one another. We're honest about where we struggle. We're being honest about our struggles with God. We're being honest about our difficulty in forgiving someone. We pray for one another. This is the ground upon which community grows so well. I'll say it again. Later today, across our campuses, we're going to have GroupConnect, and you're going to have the opportunity to come together with some other men and women and join in with a group of men and women who can do life with you, and you can practice these things together.

Maybe you're already in a group. Then you have opportunities to serve. The more you'll fight for it, the more you'll get back up and keep pressing in, the smaller the church will get, and the deeper your community will get, but as we covered last week, this is going to involve some tradeoffs and some prioritization. It's going to require some serious commitment.

Finally, on counsel, when it comes to the forgiveness of God and the community of saints being the platform by which forgiveness is made visible, how do I counsel myself? I want to be aware of my own sinfulness. How do I counsel myself and counsel others? I want to counsel myself by being mindful of what I have been forgiven for. If I can be mindful of how God has forgiven me, then I am able to extend forgiveness to others.

If I really have a good picture of what I have been forgiven of, it will be much easier to extend forgiveness to others. The more I forget what I have been forgiven of, the more self-righteous I'll become, the more I won't notice the little nuanced sins in my life, and the more I'll become judgmental and really fight against what God has for the communion of saints. That's how it fits in our grid.

Here's how I want us to end. In Luke 15, we see a parable. The parable is in three stories. I've often joked that it's like a Quentin Tarantino film. It's just like multiple stories in the same story. The last

part of the parable is what is known as the parable of the prodigal son. In the parable of the prodigal son, the youngest son asks for his inheritance, takes his inheritance, and goes and squanders it. This would have been, to a first century ear, an unbelievable story.

When the youngest son asks for his third, he's basically saying to the father... By the way, parents in that day were revered. The youngest son says, "I wish you were dead. I don't want you; I want your stuff." The father, who in first century times had all the power in the world to throw this kid in prison, to disown this kid and throw him out on the streets, gives him his inheritance.

The prodigal son runs off and spends all of his inheritance on drunkenness and debauchery. The Bible tells us that he devours the father's property with prostitutes. This brother gets himself... Then his whole life falls to pieces. He ends up covered in pig crap and mud and filth, and he's starving to death. He has this epiphany. In fact, one of the most beautiful sentences in the Bible, I think, is in Luke 15 when the Bible says, "He came to himself."

That's what I'm praying for. That's what I want so deeply for you today, to come to yourself. When he came to himself, he said, "I could go back to my father's. I could at least be a servant. I guess I can't be his son. I've gone too far. Too many transgressions. Too much iniquity. Too much sin, but maybe my father will just let me be a servant in his house because even the slaves and servants eat better than I'm eating right now."

Covered in muck and filth, steeped in shame, he begins to head home. The Bible says that the father had been watching the horizon for the son. When he saw the son, he got up and ran to the son. The son gets two things out of his mouth. "I've sinned against you. Forgive me." The father does not let him say, "Treat me as a servant." You see here a picture of repentance from the son. He has come home. He has said, "I have sinned against you. Forgive me."

The father is not interested in the son being a slave. He puts a ring on him, puts a robe on him, and they begin to celebrate. God, the God of the Bible, is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. He's a God who loves to wipe away debts and break all of the rules of a punishment-obsessed world. The father in that moment had all the rights in the world to punish the son, to put him in prison, to demand repayment for the inheritance he had taken.

There were all of these plays that the father could have played, and he played none of them. Instead, he broke all the rules of all the laws of what could be done and forgave his son in the midst of a

punishment-obsessed world. Here's my plea. My plea for you is that forgiveness sits here. It seriously just sits right here. It's there. You just have to come take it. Like the son did, you just have to come in your transgression, in your iniquity, in your sin.

You don't stop that and then come get fixed. That's not how this works. You come, covered in the muck and the mire, covered in your transgression, waist deep in giving yourself over to premeditated wickedness, life filled with sin, walking in all sorts of, "I know this is sin, and I don't care," walking in, "I know this is right, but I'm not going to do it." You come just like that. That's how we approach the throne of grace with confidence.

We come as we are today, marriage in shambles, kids far from God, in so much debt we don't know how we're going to make it, filled with anger, filled with lust, filled with rage, filled with all sorts of sexual perversions, wrestling with homosexuality, wrestling with pornography, we come as we are, broken and filthy. Look at me. He forgives.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins, all sins. I'm going to pray for us, and then I know I'm on video, so this might feel a little weird or strange, but I'm going to pray for us. As I pray, there are going to be men and women who come up front. When I say, "Amen," we're going to give you an opportunity to respond to the offer of forgiveness made available to you in Jesus Christ.

If you don't know what to do, and your heart is stirring, if you're starting to count the cost of, "If I confess, if I pick up this forgiveness, what does that mean?" We can help you with that. Here's what is on the table for you right now regardless of where you are in life: forgiveness, newness of life. That's on the table in Jesus Christ right now.

I want you to become a Christian. I want you to pick this up. I want you to grab hold of this forgiveness and walk in it, to become new creations in Jesus Christ. I'm going to pray. As I pray, there will be men and women here. They're not going to start passing the plates or anything for Communion just yet. We're just going to pray.

When I say, "Amen," there are going to be men and women here. I want to plead with you to come. Just come. Just get out of your seat the second I say, "Amen," and come grab the hand of one of these men and women and just say, "I want the forgiveness that comes in Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. I want it. I want that forgiveness. I want to be forgiven of my transgressions. I'm in

transgression. I am right now, and I hate it. I want out. I want to be forgiven of my iniquity. I want to be forgiven of my sinfulness. I'm tired of the weight of it. Help me."

Just come and say that. Let us pray with you. Let us walk with you. Let us see what God is up to in your life. Don't waste another day. Remember what happens to those who walk in iniquity. Their hearts become hardened. That pull, that tug you're feeling right now, that, "I don't want anybody to think I'm..." Forget that. Do you know what's going to happen? Your heart is going to grow hardened. Your conscience is going to become seared, and there's nothing left but damnation. Don't do that. Come, while it's today. Let's trust in Christ and be forgiven of our sins. Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the forgiveness of my own sins, for how you plucked me out of the muck and the mire. Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters, these men and women, even now, as they wrestle with you, as they wrestle with the Holy Spirit, not wanting to be honest about what is really going on in life, not wanting to be honest about what is really going on in their hearts.

I just pray, Holy Spirit, that you would break through, that you would grant life, that you would do the work of illumination. I pray that you would just put the courage in the hearts of men and women right now to respond to this offer of forgiveness. I pray that hundreds might leave these campuses as new creations, resting in all of their sin, all of their iniquity, all of their transgression, past, present, and future, being fully and freely and forever forgiven. Help us. It's for your beautiful name, amen.