

How Can I Ever Forgive Myself (Part 8)

It's been a long journey. For two months we've looked at forgiving yourself, perhaps the hardest person to forgive. In this article, we'll uncover the final two steps to forgiving yourself and accepting God's forgiveness. But first, let's remember the steps we've already learned.

Step #1: Own you sin

Step #2: Own *all* your sinning

Step #3: Accept yourself where you are

Step #4: Mourn the loss of your ideal self

Step #5: Humble yourself

Step #6: Bring your sins to God and embrace His promises

Step #7: Confess your sins to another person

Step #8: Stop comparing yourself to others

Step #9: Quit punishing yourself

And now, let's wrap up this look at self-forgiveness with the last two steps.

Step #10: See the good that can come from your past sins

Do not misunderstand. As Paul said in **Romans 6:1**, none of us sin so that good may increase. However, look at Paul's own example in **I Timothy 1:15-16**.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

I have no doubt that Paul felt guilt and shame about his sins before entering Christ (and the ones he committed after entering Christ, for that matter). I often wonder how he felt if he met Stephen's family. But he was able to see some good. He would forever stand as an example of God's mercy and grace. If he could be forgiven, then anyone can be forgiven.

Because of your sins, you are uniquely suited to reach people in similar states and declare God's grace to them. Let's face it; older brothers rarely do that great of a job reaching out to prodigals. But penitent prodigals can be of real help to each other.

I get it. You would rather be the person who didn't sin than the person who can help other sinners because you've been there, done that. But hopefully you dealt with that issue back in steps #3 and #4. You accepted yourself where you are and you mourned the loss of your ideal self. Now you are recognizing that God is able to do exactly what He said in **Romans 8:28**. That is, God is able to use even your own past sinfulness for your good and the good of others if you continue in love for Him.

There is another side of this point that is a little bit harder to grasp. Phillip Yancey quoted a recovering alcoholic friend:

I prayed every day that God would take away my thirst for drink, and every day when I woke up my first thought was Jack Daniel's whiskey. Then one day I realized my craving for drink was the very reason I pray every day. My weakness drives me to God (Phillip Yancey, [What Good is God? In Search of a Faith that Matters](#), FaithWords, New York, 2010, kindle edition, location 3079).

This fellow would rather have been a person who never drank. But he learned that it was the sins of alcohol that opened his eyes to his need for God. God could have let Satan leave you in your small sins, sins you could have overlooked and covered up. Instead, He let you get so far gone you couldn't help but see how much you needed Him. Without the sins that have made it hard for you to forgive yourself, you may have blissfully walked into Satan's trap. But now your eyes have been opened and by God's grace you can walk out. Thank God for that.

Step #11: Keep forgiving yourself

I wish I could tell you that you can work through those first 10 steps and then it's all over. But it really doesn't work that way. This forgiveness is rarely a one-time decision that you carry with you forever. Rather, Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour you. He is happy to toss your old sins up in your face again and again. He will do whatever he can to get you to doubt your relationship with God. If that means bringing something to your memory, he will. If that means introducing you out of the blue to someone who participated in or was impacted by your old sins, he will. If that means bringing someone into your life who refuses to forgive you and tosses your sins up in your face, he will. If that means tempting you to commit those old sins again, he will. If that means letting the cat out of the bag with some new person you hadn't yet trusted your confessions with, he will. If that means letting you believe you have the sin beat, giving you enough pride to hang yourself, and then cutting your legs out from under you (cf. **I Corinthians 10:12**), he will. Satan is powerful, cunning, and baffling. Don't underestimate him. But never forget that is Satan. It isn't God.

When those feelings come back, declare, "Get behind me, Satan," and hang on to God's promises and God's forgiveness.

Finally, after going through this process, you are not going to become sinless. We are all still growing (**II Peter 1:5-8**). That means you will fall again. Don't let that be permission to run headlong into sin. But don't be so shocked when it happens that you decide you need to go ahead and heap all the punishment for all your sins back on your head. Instead, keep on hanging on to Jesus. Pick your cross back up and follow Him. Forgive yourself again. Remember that God Himself will "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (**I Peter 5:10**, ESV). God is working on that. You can trust Him. You just keep working with Him (**Philippians 2:12-13**).

Forgiveness is hard work. It takes continual and repetitious leaning on God. It takes constant maintenance and vigilance. But it brings peace and serenity that can only come as a fruit of God's Spirit. Don't keep yourself weighed down with the guilt and shame Jesus died to set you free from. Accept God's forgiveness; forgive yourself.

--Edwin L. Crozier