

September 14, 2014

Standard
LESSON RESOURCES

SEEK[®] THE ABUNDANT LIFE



Forgiveness and Restoration

Mid-Winter Hope

by Nancy Hoag

I didn't feel right. I knew there was a problem. But my doctor couldn't determine what was wrong with me. All the tests he ran came back with normal results.

"Vitamins," he suggested. "Walk more, eat better . . ." And I tried, but daily I told my husband, "I really do not feel well."

**"I've forgiven him.
Otherwise, he
would own me."**

More than one year had passed when I collapsed in a local store and was hospitalized. Once again, tests revealed nothing.

"You have the heart of a much younger woman," the cardiologist said.

"I'm finding nothing wrong," the gastroenterologist reported, and I was released from the hospital.

Several days later, however, I woke up with relentless pain in my face. I called my dentist, and within hours he was saying a front tooth had decayed from the inside out. The x-rays showed the decaying had been going on for perhaps two years, which meant my tooth could not be saved. "It's possible the poisons from that tooth have been traveling through your body," my primary care physi-

cian suggested. "That's why you've not felt well."

What followed was an extraction, days in bed, antibiotics, pain pills, three-plus months recovering, and the cancellation of the travel plans we'd been looking forward to for more than a year.

And I was angry. How could my dentist not have known that my tooth had been infected for months, even years? How could doctors have not suspected a hidden infection?

Not until we attended a neighborhood barbecue—with my husband saying I looked beautiful to him, even with the space where my tooth should have been—did I decide to stop being angry.

We hadn't been seated long when a neighbor arrived with a beautiful stranger on his arm, a stranger who could only make it to her chair with assistance and a cane. But why?

"An anesthesiologist messed up," she said. For the rest of her life the left side of this woman's body would be useless. "A permanent brain injury and around-the-clock caregivers," she added. "But I've forgiven him. Otherwise, he would own me."

Her words convicted me. I knew that I would have to forgive my dentist and doctors and release the anger I was feeling. There was no denying that I had suffered, but my suffering

was coming to an end. The other woman's life had been changed forever.

A few weeks after the barbecue, I was studying the mountains outside our window. Another Montana winter was on the way. My husband and I were married in the middle of a Montana winter; he taught me to ski here and took me floating and fishing on the Yellowstone River. Mid-winter I've learned to laugh at the snow drifting down inside my collar, because I know spring will come. Mid-winter I remember the fields east of town will one day grow grains for a bountiful harvest. Mid-winter I've learned to give thanks not only for snowy showers but also for soup suppers and board games in the homes of old friends. This mid-winter I will also be grateful that no caregiver will be bathing and dressing me like the woman I met at the barbecue. This mid-winter I will remember that dentists and doctors are human. I will also remember that I have been forgiven much by God, friends, and family. I will remind myself to give thanks

in all things because God's Word promises, "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60:20). I will remember that our mid-winter clouds will one day part, and I will praise the God who is my hope regardless of my circumstances.

When do you need to be reminded of God's forgiveness?



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Regrets?

by Christopher Harris

There's a famous song that includes the line, "Regrets? I've had a few . . ." That line could be my theme. But a few regrets? More like a zillion! There are many things I've said or done that I would like to do over, erasing my faulty judgment!

It was a terrible experience that I would like to erase from my past.

It all started when I was 4 and stole a bag of candy at the grocery store. I loved candy but didn't have any money, so I just stuck the bag under my shirt. My mother didn't notice until we got home, then back to the store we went. If I could do that morning over, the bag would've stayed on the shelf.

In elementary school, somebody dared me to call the teacher a name. I did! And while I can't remember what I called her, I do remember being sent to the principal's office, where I got a lecture. It was pretty embarrassing, and I would definitely want to erase that episode in a do-over.

I was an avid reader, and in one of the books there was a house with a secret passageway inside the walls. I decided our house probably had one as well and took a hammer and made a hole in the wall looking for it! There

was no secret passageway, of course, and I got in big trouble with my parents. I'd love to redo that period in my life and leave the hammer alone!

A few years later, I was fascinated by something I saw in a comic strip. Smoke filled a stage-like area and suddenly a person appeared. That looked like fun, so I got a large piece of tin and placed it directly behind one of the chicken houses. Then I lit a fire with paper and wood I had placed under the tin. But smoke didn't gush out like it did in the comic strip. Disappointed, I went back to the house, thinking the fire would put itself out.

Later I looked out the back door and panicked. The chicken house was on fire! Fortunately my father was



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a firefighter and made short work of the flames. No chickens were hurt, but it was a terrible experience that I would like to erase from my past.

Not only do I have regrets from my childhood; some things I'd like to do over happened when I was old enough to know better. My car's brake pedal started going almost to the floorboard. I ignored it for a while. Big mistake! By the time I decided to see the mechanic, I had no brakes at all and sailed into a busy intersection on a red light, colliding with a truck. That was a scary Wednesday morning; a do-over would've had me calling the mechanic the first time the brakes gave me trouble.

My life has been full of things I'd like to do over. And I am not alone. People throughout history have done things they regretted and wished they could do over, and they lived with the consequences of their actions.

Of course the great thing if you're a Christian is that there is a way out. According to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In a sense, God gives us a chance to do over our past mistakes by forgiving us. He even promises to forget them as well!

We are still responsible for our actions, but in God's sight we are washed clean! And that's something you'll never want to do over!

When have you been given one of life's rare "do-overs?"

Where You Live!

by Michael C. Mack

Questions and Activities for Small Groups Based on the International Sunday School Lesson Text.

1. If you could develop a new and improved version of something, what would it be? What are the limitations of the old version? What would you change?

Read Jeremiah 31:31-37

2. Identify each of the "I will" statements in today's passage. In your own words, what does God promise He will do?
3. What differences do you see between the old and the new covenant?
4. Why was there a need for a new covenant? What were the limitations of the old? Which party is to blame for not keeping the terms of the old covenant?
5. If you were Indiana Jones, looking for the location of God's law under the new covenant, where would you look? What significance does that hold for you personally?
6. What relationship-imbued words do you see in this passage? What does each one indicate about God's intentions for us?
7. Read Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25. How does Jesus' death make this new covenant possible?
8. It's more probable for the sun to stop shining or for you to measure the universe than it is for God to ever give up on you. How fully do you believe that?

For more Small Group ministry resources visit www.smallgroups.com.

The Power of Forgiveness

by James L. Snyder

When I was a child playing with my friends, we had a very handy rule that I wish I could bring over into my adult life. If someone made a mistake, all he or she needed to do was yell, “Do over!” If you yelled that before anybody else said anything, you had the option of trying again.

Wouldn’t that be nice in the adult world? How many times I wish I could have yelled “Do over” when I made some kind of a mistake!

Forgiveness is similar to giving someone a do-over. The foundation of all forgiveness is what Jesus Christ did on the cross. There is no person who is ineligible for God’s plan of redemption.

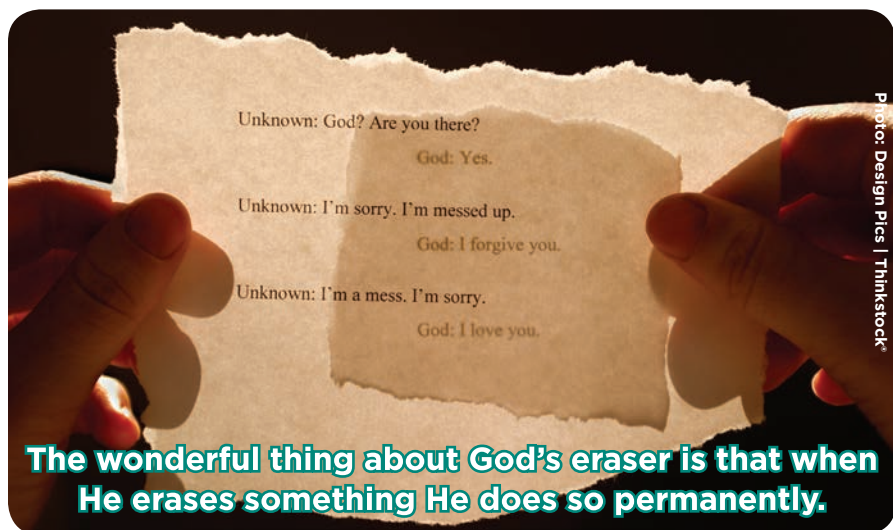
The power of forgiveness is seen in our ability to restore a brother or

sister who is fallen. In effect, restoration opens the door for a do-over.

How often have we seen a brother or sister plagued with guilt from sins of the past? It only takes a few moments in fellowship to realize that feelings of shame may be keeping them from enjoying the fullness of life as Jesus redeemed it.

When Peter asked Jesus about how often he should forgive his brother, Jesus said, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22). Jesus was impressing upon Peter, and us, that God has a huge eraser.

The wonderful thing about God’s eraser is that when He erases something He does so permanently; not



like some of us who say we forgive somebody but constantly remind them of what we have forgiven.

When we truly realize the significance of God's forgiveness, we are prompted to forgive others in return. One of the great joys of the Christian life is extending forgiveness to people who need it. The apostle Paul made this clear in his epistle to the Galatians. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (6:1). Temptation is so powerful that we must help each other to resist and bring each other back when someone is caught up in rebellion against God.

My willingness to forgive a brother or sister reveals very clearly that I understand my own vulnerability. The one who forgives easily is the one who understands what temptation is all about.

Regardless of my past, when I begin to focus on God and live with His forgiveness, He begins a restoration process that only He can do. "And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you" (Joel 2:25). When I reflect on the grace He has shown me, how can I not forgive others?

When people refuse to forgive, what happens to them?

SEEK® Him Daily

Monday, September 15

The Steadfast Love of God
Jeremiah 32:16-23

Tuesday, September 16

Provoking God
Jeremiah 32:26-35

Wednesday, September 17

Very Soon My Anger Will End
Isaiah 10:20-25

Thursday, September 18

I Will Surely Gather Them
Jeremiah 32:36-44

Friday, September 19

The Wolf and Lamb Live Together
Isaiah 11:1-12

Saturday, September 20

Surely God Is My Salvation
Isaiah 12

Sunday, September 21

Hope for a Distant Future
Jeremiah 32:1-9, 14, 15

Lesson for September 21

Anticipation of a New Future
Jeremiah 32

Key Verse

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:31).

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Hope for the Future

Jeremiah 31:31-37

31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

35 Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.



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