

Session 3: Missing the Mark

How Does God Forgive Me? How Can I Forgive?

READY

Imagine that the game or match is on the line and your number is called. You make the free throw or you don't. You make the penalty kick or you don't. You make the hole big enough so the four yards can be gained or you don't. You make a birdie or you don't. If you succeed, you win; if you miss, you lose. You either become the hero or the 'goat.'

1. Describe a time when you dropped the ball, fell short, or really messed up when everybody was counting on you. What did it feel like to be the 'goat'? What broke down?
2. Why do you think we feel so bad when we fail or miss the mark?

God never intended for us to be the 'goats.' God created us to live as heroes and champions. But in our messed-up world we all fail and fall short of the glory God desires. Sooner or later, everyone blows it. The amazing thing is that we don't have to live in failure and sin!

SET

Messed Up

In living for God, it seems we drop the ball a lot. In times when we need to love, we treat someone badly. When our thoughts need to be pure, we lust. When we should tell the truth, we lie. When we should honor our parents and listen to their advice, we do our own thing. When we should give our all in practice, we give in to comfort and slack off. When we should love God and our neighbors, we ignore them.

Read Isaiah 64:5-6.

3. According to verse 5, how do our failures and sins affect God's feelings? What does verse 6 state about our best efforts to hit the mark?

The word sin is an athletic term that means missing the mark. God has a bull's-eye that we miss regularly. Missing God's mark could leave us discouraged and feeling like God should

kick us off His team. Thankfully, God doesn't work that way! God knows what we're made of and recognizes that we're not capable of saving ourselves. Because of His deep desire to be in relationship with His children, however, God made a way.

God Longs to Forgive and Restore Us

Read Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:13-14.

4. According to Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:13-14, only God has the power to rescue, redeem, and forgive us. From what things does He rescue us? What is the attitude of His heart toward each of His people?

Once we invite Jesus into our lives, He releases us from the guilt of our failures. He redeems?buys or wins back?our freedom, totally canceling any debt we owe.

Staying on Target

Our heart's desire not be the "goat" helps us realize how our relationship with God works. If you blow a big play, you're not off the team, but your relationships with your teammates and coach can be affected. Likewise, if you blow it in life with God, your wrong choices will affect your relationship with Him and your effectiveness in life.

Read 1 John 1:6-9.

5. How does 1 John 1:6-7 describe the impact of our sins? When we blow it, what do we have to do to receive God's forgiveness and gain a fresh start?

To keep open our relationship with God and to maintain our freedom from the sinful garbage that would ruin our lives, all we're asked to do is confess our sins. Confession means to agree with. God simply wants you to agree that you fell back into an old rut?a wrong, hurtful attitude or behavior pattern. Each time you do that, God promises to forgive you, to wash out the junk, and to help you start clean. Believe it!

GO

The Traps of Unforgiveness

Just as God's enemy and ours?the Great Deceiver, Satan?wants to mess up our relationship with God, so too he hopes to ruin our other relationships and keep us from experiencing the freedom that Jesus won for us on the cross.

Read Matthew 6:14-15; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; and Hebrews 12:15.

6. Look carefully at each of these three passages. What traps are set for us when we don't take the path toward forgiving those who have offended us?
 - Matthew 6:14-15?
 -

2 Corinthians 2:5-11?

- Hebrews 12:15?

Freedom from the Traps

God doesn't minimize our offenses or sins, and we shouldn't minimize the offenses or hurts that others inflict on us. Authentic forgiveness does not deny hurt or ignore anger. It doesn't excuse a person's wrong or hurtful actions. Forgiveness does not forget, but it does make room for another's humanness.

Read Colossians 3:12-15.

7. Verses 14-15 highlight three godly traits that we need to put on like clothing if we're going to be able to forgive. What are the traits and from where do they come? How strong are these traits in your life right now?
8. Verse 13 states, "Just as the Lord has forgiven you." Why do you think this phrase is included? Consider the implications on the way you respond to people who've hurt you.

Read Romans 12:16-19.

9. A destructive cycle begins when we hurt people and they in turn hurt us. How do we break out of this destructive cycle (verses 16-18)?
10. What does it mean to "leave room for God's wrath"? Why do you think God is so possessive and assertive about vengeance belonging to Him (verse 19)?

We can only forgive because God first forgave us. Forgiveness doesn't come naturally. It's a process that can take some time, but once we've allowed ourselves to truly feel anger, sadness, and hurt, we can move toward forgiveness. As we forgive, we take our offender off our hook and put him or her on God's. God is far more protective of us than we are, and He's far more qualified to avenge our hurts. As we release the desire for revenge, we can live in freedom, love, and hope. In forgiveness, we prevent a root of bitterness from destroying our hearts, joy, relationships, and effectiveness.



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