

SERMON OUTLINES

GOD'S BEST-KEPT
SECRET



CHRISTIANITY IS EASIER
THAN YOU THINK

MARK MAULDING

For Pastors!

INTRODUCTION

God never intended for us to work so hard at living the Christian life, only to feel defeated and depressed every time we fail. We need to break free from our own distorted thoughts about God and ourselves and discover God's best-kept secret. When we realize what that secret entails, we'll begin to experience the intimacy with God that we long for, freedom from defeating personal struggles, and a Spirit-empowered ability to love God, ourselves, and others.

The following sermon outlines have been developed as a companion for *God's Best-Kept Secret*. I offer them as a free resource for pastors and teachers in the hope that you will find them helpful as you present this series of sermons and reveal God's hidden secret to your congregation.

As you unpack this sermon series for your congregation, encourage them to read along in the book to reinforce the message in their lives. A study guide is also available at www.GodsBestKeptSecret.com for small-group discussion.

This series may be preached in its entirety or in an abridged format. For example, you may prefer focusing on specific sermons that would be most helpful to your congregation. The comments in parentheses I have included in some of the outlines are designed to assist you in explaining certain points. I have also underlined words in each outline that may be used for fill-in-the-blank points in sermon notes or for handouts in small groups.

My hope for this series is that Christ followers and seekers alike will experience the radical freedom God has provided for them in Jesus Christ as they discover his best-kept secret.

Warmly in Christ,

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WEEK 1

SECRETS CHRISTIANS NEVER SHARE

Purpose: to challenge the hidden beliefs people have about God so they will be able to experience the joy of intimacy with him. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Would you say you enjoy your relationship with God? Let's find out.

I. The God Is Quiz

(What do you really believe about God? Let's find out. Answer the following quiz. Don't give the Sunday-school, in-front-of-people answers you think you're supposed to give. Go with your first your initial gut-level response. Speaker: It would be good if the people have this quiz in front of them to mark as you read it to them.)

TRUE OR FALSE:

1. I worship God because he is a holy God. _____
2. I enjoy God because he is a loving Father. _____
3. I am often aware of God's presence in me. _____
4. I know God loves me no matter what happens. _____
5. God is proud of me just because I am his child. _____
6. I obey God because he loves me, not so he'll love me more. _____
7. I feel unconditionally accepted by God. _____
8. I feel very comfortable calling God "Dad" or "Papa." _____
9. God is more interested in me than in what I do for him. _____
10. God never gets angry with me. _____
11. God must love me because many blessings happen to me. _____
12. I am afraid of God's punishment when I sin. _____
13. I feel as though I can never please God. _____

14. Making my life work seems mostly up to me instead of up to God.

15. I believe I must do the right things to get closer to God. _____
16. I feel as though God is often disappointed with me. _____
17. God seems good when good things happen to me. _____
18. I need to put myself in the right position for God to bless me. _____
19. God doesn't really show up when I need him. _____
20. Based on what he lets happen to me, God seems mad at me. _____

(If your answers to the first ten questions were mostly true, and your answers to the last ten questions were mostly false, your view of God is positive. If your answers to the first ten questions were mostly false, and your answers to the last ten questions were mostly true, your view of God is negative)

II. The God You Really Believe is the One You View on Your Worst Days

(When life is going well, it's easy to believe God loves you. But life doesn't always go well does it? Think about one of your worst days. As you do, what do you feel about God? Notice I said "feel" because that tells us what we believe more than what we know the Bible says about God.)

III. Your View of God through the Lens of a Selfie

- A. If you took a selfie of yourself and God, where would you be, and where would God be?
- B. Which of these selfies with God do you relate to most?
 - God is not in the picture. I am standing there alone.
 - God is far back in the background, far away from me.
 - God is on his throne. I see steps between us, but they are broken.
 - God has a stick in his hand, and I have a terrible look of fear on my face as I wait for him to punish me for a sin I just committed.
 - God has his arms folded and a frustrated look on his face that says, "Why can't you get it together?"
 - God looks disappointed as both he and I are nervously looking down at the ground beside each other.

- God has his arm around me and I have my arm around him.
- God is on his throne and tears are running down my face as I kneel and worship him.
- God is giving me a big hug, and I'm hugging him back.
- God is mad at me, and I'm crying because I always mess up.
- God is faceless, and I'm emotionless.

IV. Your View of God through the Lens of Your Family

- A. Often, a person's view of God is shaped by a family member, such as Dad or Mom
- B. The way someone significant treated us can make God seem:
 1. Distant
 2. Angry
 3. Disinterested
 4. Loving
 5. Kind
 6. Engaged
- C. Has your family shaped your view of God? This often means being very honest about your family.

V. Your View of God through the Lens of Religion

- A. Religion may have been a very bad experience for you that clouded your view of God. (Maybe religion taught you that God is demanding, angry, and punishing.)
- B. Would it surprise you if I said God is not religious?
- C. Adam was the human prototype to show us why God created us. Genesis 2:7 says, "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (NIV).

1. (“God . . . breathed” means he gave Adam oxygen and that he entered into Adam. (Breath is the Hebrew word for “spirit”.))
2. (This is when Adam came alive physically and spiritually. Why? God designed us so that we are fully human only when he is living in us. That is why we need Jesus Christ to live in us through faith in him.)
3. (We see from this that God is not religious, or he would have given Adam the Ten Commandments to live by. Instead, God gave Adam an intimate relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so he could love Adam.)

CONCLUSION:

When God replaces our warped view of him with a true view, everything changes!
It's time to stop believing fake news about God. Are you willing to uncover the truth?

WEEK 2

CHRISTIANS DON'T NEED TO FOCUS ON RIGHT AND WRONG

Purpose: to show people that focusing on right and wrong is not what God wants. Instead, he wants us to experience the personal intimacy and power of his life and love in us, flowing through us every day. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

How many of you keep checklists? Like when you have a job to do or when you prepare for a trip? Checklists are good, but not when it comes to God and Christianity. In fact, checklists for God and Christianity aren't good because they focus on right and wrong, something God isn't interested in.

I. Checklist Christianity Is a False Belief about God

- A. We believe that God wants us to focus on doing what is right.
- B. We believe that God wants us to focus on avoiding what is wrong.

II. Checklist Christianity Comes from Living in the Wrong Tree

Genesis 2:9 says, "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (NIV).

There were two trees that represented two ways of living.

- A. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents living independent of God.
- B. This tree also represents focusing on right and wrong.
- C. Adam and Even chose to eat from this tree, which programmed us all to focus on right and wrong.
- D. This is where a checklist mentality originated.

III. God Created Us to Focus on Him Living in Us

- A. God cares more about his life in us than about right and wrong.
- B. The Tree of Life represents living dependent on Christ's life in us.

IV. Jesus Restarted the Human Race

- A. God's life departed from Adam and Eve when they sinned.
- B. That's why Jesus is called the last Adam. “‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45 NASB).
- C. Jesus came to restore God's life in everyone who believes in him.

V. No Checklist for You to Accomplish in Life Exists

- A. God doesn't have a checklist for you.
- B. Exchange Try Harder Christianity for Trust Him Christianity. (Try Harder Christianity is all about mustering up my resolve to do more for God in my own strength. Trust Him Christianity is all about relying on Christ in you to live in all areas of life.)
- C. Tear up your spiritual checklist.

VI. The Christian Life Is Impossible and Easy at the Same Time

- A. It's impossible for anyone to live the Christian life perfectly.
- B. It's easy when we rely on Christ in us to through us.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28–30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (NIV).

- C. Jesus is the yoke. (A yoke was a large wooden collar placed on a cow so they could pull a heavy burden. Jesus is saying his yoke is easy and his burden is light because he is the one “pulling the burdens of our life” as we trust him to live through us.)
- D. This doesn't mean we'll never feel stressed, but we'll know where to go for help.

VII. Let the Best Person Live through You for Victory

(NBA and college-player illustration works well here that is at the end of this chapter as analogy for depending on Christ in us.)

CONCLUSION:

Take The 7-Day No-Checklist Challenge.

- A. Are you ready to stop feeling exhausted living the Christian life?
- B. Are you ready to stop trying harder to make your Christian life work?
- C. Take a moment to identify in your mind the checklist items you have been following to try to make your Christian life work. (They may include spiritual disciplines done to try to get God to bless you instead of just to enjoy him. They may also include trying to build character traits into your life instead of recognizing you have all the character you need in Christ. It may also include the sins you are not going to think about or how you plan to treat your friends and family.)

(To help you with this, I want you to take The 7-Day No-Checklist Challenge. It is a challenge to let go of all the items on your checklist and to ask Jesus Christ to live through you each day instead. The seven days is just to help get you started. I hope you will continue this after the seven days. Let me lead you in The 7-Day No-Checklist Prayer Challenge)

Dear heavenly Father, I admit that I have tried hard to live as a Christian, to keep my checklist of right and wrong for way too long. I'm ready to begin depending on Jesus Christ to live in and through me instead. Literally or in my mind, I take my checklist and burn it into ashes. Now that it is gone, Jesus, I ask you to live in and through me for the next seven days. Holy Spirit, please remind me not to go back to my checklist but to rely on Jesus instead. I pray this is the beginning of how I will live the Christian life for the remainder of my life. By your grace, Amen.

For more help living out The 7-Day No-Checklist Challenge,
visit www.GodsBestKeptSecret.com

WEEK 3

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE WEIRD STUFF ABOUT THEMSELVES

Purpose: to help Christians understand that their perceptions of who they are deep down are based on all the wrong messages they've come to believe. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

The following questions are tough, but your answers will reveal what you believe about God, the gospel, and yourself.

- Can a Christian be a liar?
- Can a Christian be a thief?
- Can a Christian be an alcoholic?
- Can a Christian be a drug addict?
- Can a Christian be a homosexual?
- Can a Christian be a sinner?

(It may surprise you that the answer to each question is “no.” A Christian cannot be a liar, thief, alcoholic, drug addict, homosexual, sinner and so on. That doesn't mean Christians don't lie, steal, get drunk, or sin. My point is that God does not define you by your behavior.)

I. Your Original Identity Was Stolen

God gave Adam an original identity which was like him. Genesis 1:26 explains: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (NASB). Identity means the deepest core of who and what you are. The original identity of Adam, the human prototype, was full of God's character.

- A. Satan stole that identity from Adam and Eve the day they died spiritually.
- B. Their “alive” identity from God was exchanged for a “dead” identity from Satan.

God said, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17 NASB).

II. Living with an Identity Crisis

- A. Unless you believe what God says about you, you have an identity crisis.
- B. Unless you believe what God says about you, you are living with a false identity.
- C. Unless you believe what God says about you, you will spend the rest of your life trying to find your identity.

III. The Search for Your Stolen Identity

- A. We try to find our stolen identity in six key areas: parents, friends, the past, social media, performance, and possessions.

Parents

(You and I begin our identity search hoping that our parents will tell us who we are. You may have grown up in a home like Tim's where you experienced a tremendous amount of rejection. Maybe it was so bad that you were told you'd never amount to anything, and you have spent your entire life so far either trying to prove your parents were wrong or you have simply given in to that false identity, accepting that they were right.

On the other hand, you may have grown up with wonderful parents who loved you, encouraged you, and told you how proud they were of you. In fact, you might go so far as to say you have a "good self-image." Be careful, though. If your parents did not raise you to know your identity in Christ, you haven't truly found your stolen identity)

Friends

(We can also look to our friends to help us find our stolen identity. We hope they will tell us who we are. We believe if we have their acceptance, that will prove we are wonderful people. We try to perform in sports, music, grades, clubs, or just screw up with the misfits. We try to wear the right kinds of clothes. We try to impress with our phone, our car, our house, or a boat. Yet this is a fleeting identity based on the opinions of others, rather than on God's opinion. How much do you strive to gain the approval of your friends?)

Past

(If you had good circumstances in your past, you may believe those former experiences define who you are to this day. Maybe you were a successful athlete, musician, or CEO. Or maybe you failed a lot in your past and made

many mistakes which are having consequences even today. If you don't like your past, you might do everything in your power to hide it and avoid thinking about it. Are you letting your past define you?)

Social Media

(The rise of social media has given many people the opportunity to connect with old friends and new ones. It can be fun—unless you use it to try to find your stolen identity. Tallying how many “likes” you have on Facebook compared to your other friends is an insidious problem. Also, it's easy to look for affirmation or adulation in hopes of bolstering your sense of who you are. God forbid what might happen to your identity if you accidentally deleted your account!

Do you enhance your image on social media by posting only pictures, vacation details, or stories that make you look good? Are you envious of others when reading their posts?)

Performance

(After you finish school, you have to perform for your boss at work to keep your job or to get a promotion. Maybe you've learned to perform at church by serving faithfully. Or maybe you've performed just trying to obey God, hoping he would be impressed and others would too. Nothing is wrong with any of those pursuits, unless you are using them to try to find your stolen identity.

It's also very easy for people in full-time ministry to let their ministry define them just as it is for people in their job or position in their company.

In what areas do you tend to perform the most to get other people's attention and approval?)

Possessions

(Whether you have a lot of money or a little money, you can easily let it define you. If you have a lot, you may define yourself as someone who has it all together. If you have little money, you may define yourself as a “no-body”. Don't let your financial status define you because God doesn't let it define you. He defines you in Christ alone!

I'm reminded of an interview I saw with one of the richest women in America, Eileen Rockefeller. She said something amazing and shocking: “It doesn't matter if we have money or don't have money; we suffer in our own ways. And the net worth of our bank account is not nearly so important, ultimately, as the self-worth.” <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/growing-up-rockefeller/2/>)

B. None of those can truly define us. Only God can ultimately.

IV. How to Identify Your Identity Lie

A. Satan whispers lies about who you are because he is the father of lies. John 8:44 tells us that “when [Satan] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (NIV).

B. Here are some examples of identity lies we believe:

- I’m better than everyone else.
- I’m invisible.
- I’m one big screw-up.
- I’m not masculine enough.
- I’m a whore.
- I’m a success.
- I’m inadequate.
- I’m a mistake.
- I’m the life of the party.

C. If truth sets us free, then lies keep us in bondage.

D. Do you know what lie Satan whispers to you?

E. Your core lie will always involve some kind of performance to make you feel acceptable to yourself, others, or even God.

F. Ask God what your core lie is about you.

G. How has that lie made you feel about yourself?

H. What activities and behaviors have you done because of that lie?

CONCLUSION:

Speaker may use the baseball illustration about Tony here. (To whom do you listen to when it comes to your identity? People? Satan? God? Only by agreeing with God will you experience true peace in your life. Take a moment to tell God that you’re ready to listen only to him and agree with him about who he says you are in Christ. Next week, we will dig into who we are in Christ in greater depth.)

WEEK 4

CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE A CIVIL WAR RAGING INSIDE THEM

Purpose: to help Christians understand clearly that they don't have a bad me and a good me living inside—only a good me. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Do you ever feel as if a civil war is raging inside you? A good you versus a bad you? This gets at the heart of our true identity. The issue of our identity must be important because Jesus spoke of it with Nicodemus, a very well-respected Jewish religious leader in his day. In John 3:3 Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (NIV).

I. The Two-Dog Debate

- A. According to this illustration, there are two dogs living inside each of us—one good and one bad. The dog we feed the most will determine whether we live a good or bad life.
- B. These two dogs supposedly represent two selves or natures inside us.

Ephesians 4:22–24 seems to support this view:

“In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and [are] renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (NASB)

- C. If you look closely, this passage is about the behavior of an old self, which is gone, and a new self, if you're a Christian.

II. Jesus Has Replaced Your Identity

The two selves or natures just isn't true. Here's why:

- A. This teaching does not help anyone overcome a sin problem, heal anyone emotionally, or restore ruptured relationships.
- B. It's also not what the Bible teaches.

- 1. Romans 6:6 says, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so

that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (NIV).

- a. “Was crucified” in the Greek means a one-time event that happened in the past and will never be repeated again.
 - b. In other words, that self or nature in you, which loved to sin, died with Jesus Christ on the cross. He or she is gone forever.
2. Galatians 2:20 says it this way: “I [the old self] have been crucified with Christ and I [the old self] no longer live, but Christ lives in me [the new self]. The life I [the new self] now live in the body, I [the new self] live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (NIV).

III. The Old Self and the Flesh Are Not the Same

- A. The *flesh* does not mean “the human body” in the majority of verses.
- B. The *flesh* is a spiritual term that refers to all the ways people use their bodies and personalities in sinful ways as a result of not depending on God.
- C. The *flesh* also represents all the ways people have learned to cope with life’s challenges apart from dependence on Christ. D. The old self is gone, but the flesh is not.

IV. Your Birth, Not Your Behavior, Determines Your Identity

Consider these two statements:

- Culture tells you your behavior defines your identity.
 - God tells you your birth defines your identity
- A. Parents often define a child as good or bad based on that child’s behavior.
 - B. Our heavenly Father defines us based on whether we are in his family, not on our behavior.

John 1:12 says, “To all who believed [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (NLT).

(Have you ever heard of the Corinthian church in the New Testament? The members of that church had all kinds of behavior problems. When this church met to celebrate communion, which you may know as the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper, each person brought food and wine for a big picnic. The group was not only ethnically and socially diverse; it was financially

diverse. The rich people brought a lot of food, but they selfishly hoarded it and refused to share with the poorer members. Some of them even drank so much wine during the celebration that they got drunk.

But look at what the apostle Paul shockingly said about them: “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2 NASB). He called them saints. You may have heard that a saint is like a grandmother who lived a godly life and prayed for you, or a person who did many good things in life and then was voted a saint after death. However, God calls every Christ follower a saint.)

- C. If you are a Christ follower, God says that you are also a saint.

Say that out loud: “I’m a saint.”

(This is why Christians can’t be a liar, a thief, an alcoholic, a drug addict, a homosexual or a sinner even though a Christian can commit any of those sins.)

V. You Are Not a Sinner and a Saint

- A. You are a saint who sometimes sins.
- B. Your ethnicity does not define you.
- C. Your sexual attractions, sexual sins, or gender identity feelings do not define you.
- D. Here are some other great things God says about you:

My Identity in Christ

Because I am in Christ . . .

I Am Lovable

I am a child of God—John 1:12

I am beloved—Romans 9:25

I am chosen—Colossians 3:12

I am loved by God as much as Jesus is—
John 17:23, 26

I am Jesus's friend—John 15:15

I am inseparable from God's love—
Romans 8:37–39

I Am Acceptable

I am accepted by God—Romans 15:7

I am righteous—2 Corinthians 5:21

I am a saint—1 Corinthians 1:2;
Ephesians 1:1 (NASB)

I am not condemned—Romans 8:1

I am completely forgiven—Colossians 2:13

I am holy and blameless—Ephesians 1:4

I Am Valuable

I am God's masterpiece—Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

I am adopted—Ephesians 1:5

I am God's treasure—Matthew 13:44

I am God's pearl—Matthew 13:45–46

I am a new creation—2 Corinthians 5:17

I am designed by God—Psalm 139:13–16

I Am Secure

I am more than a conqueror—Romans 8:37

I am complete in Christ—Colossians 2:10

I am safe in Christ—Colossians 3:3–4

I am seated in the heavenly realms—
Ephesians 2:6

I am eternally in Christ—John 10:28

I am united with Christ—1 Corinthians 6:17

Conclusion: defeat lies about who you are with the truth. Tape this list of who God says you are to a mirror. Then pick at least one statement each day and tell God you agree with him about who you are in Christ.

WEEK 5

CHRISTIANS ARE JUST AS RIGHTEOUS AS JESUS

Purpose: (1) to help those outside of Christ understand that God loves them but cannot accept them because they are not righteous, and (2) to convince Christians that God accepts them unconditionally because they are 100 percent righteous whether they sin or obey God through faith in Christ. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

How righteous do you feel right now? Do you feel as righteous as your pastor? Do you feel as righteous as Billy Graham or Mother Teresa? Do you feel as righteous as Jesus Christ? Let's see what God says about this amazing truth!

I. You Have Been Justified by Faith in Christ

Romans 5:1 makes this bold declaration: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (NASB).

- A. The word *justified* means that you are righteous if you are a Christ follower today.
- B. It is an accounting term. So let's look at your righteousness account in God's ledger.
- C. Before coming to faith in Christ, you are negative 100 percent in your righteousness account with God because of your sins and being a sinner.
 - 1. (Nothing you can do will get you above negative 100 percent, including obeying the Ten Commandments, going to church, or being a good person.

No matter what you do, you are eternally stuck at negative 100 percent.)

- 2. The moment you put your faith in Christ, God's forgiveness for your sins moves you from negative 100% to zero in your righteousness account with God.

(But just like your bank account, that's not enough if you really want to live. You need to get above zero.)

- 3. God also gives you his own righteousness at that same moment, which makes you plus 100 percent in your righteousness account with God.

- i. (Sinning cannot drop you below plus 100 percent in your righteousness account, and obeying God cannot push you above plus 100 percent.
 - ii. In Christ, you are always plus 100 percent righteous before God!)
- 4. In Christ, you are 100% righteous all the time!
- 5. Let's change the word *righteousness* to acceptable.
- 6. Before you come to faith in Christ, God loves you, but you are 100 percent in the negative when it comes to being acceptable to him.
- 7. Once you have faith in Christ, you become plus 100 percent acceptable to God whether you sin or obey him.
- 8. Because you are always plus 100% acceptable to God no matter what you do, that means God unconditionally accepts you in Christ, and you can't mess it up!
- 9. If you are a Christ follower today, why don't you say out loud, "I am 100% righteous and 100% acceptable before God!"

II. You Cannot Mature Spiritually unless You Believe You Are Righteous

Hebrews 5:13 warns that "everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant" (NASB).

- A. A child will never grow to full maturity unless he or she begins to eat solid food. (If a three-year-old is drinking Mama's milk, that's cute. If a thirteen-year-old is drinking Mama's milk, that's weird.)
- B. You begin to fully mature only when you eat solid spiritual food by believing you are righteous!

III. You Can Finally Rest When You Believe You Are Righteous

According to Hebrews 4:9–10, "There remains . . . a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his" (NIV).

- A. To *rest* means to stop doing things for God so he will love you more, accept you more, and bless you more.
- B. The problem with working for God's acceptance is that you never know when you've done enough to be able to rest.

- C. You can rest when you believe God accepts you because you are acceptable to him.

IV. Common Christian Distortions about Righteousness

- A. God declares you are righteous only because he sees Jesus in you.
- B. God is covering you with a robe of righteousness because he cannot stand to look at you as a sinner.
- C. God has given you only “positional” righteousness.
- D. God is hiding you behind Jesus.
- E. God’s forgiveness is what makes you righteous.

Second Corinthians 5:21 speaks to all these issues when it says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (NIV).

(How much of God’s righteousness did you get when you believed? Fifty percent? Seventy-five percent? No! One hundred percent! Whose righteousness is it now? God’s or yours? It’s his and now it’s yours!)

CONCLUSION:

Affirm your unconditional acceptance in Christ.

As we conclude, would you like to pray right now and let God make you righteous by placing your faith in Jesus Christ is your Savior?

God, I realize today that I am 100 percent unrighteous and 100 percent unacceptable to you because of my sin and because I’m a sinner. Today, I place my faith in Jesus Christ alone to forgive my sins and make me righteous. Amen.

As a Christ follower, why don’t you embrace the reality that you are 100 percent righteous and, as a result, unconditionally acceptable to God? I invite you to believe God and to pray the following prayer by faith:

Father, when I examine my feelings and remember my failures, it doesn’t seem true that I am righteous. Yet your Word tells me you have made me the righteousness of God in Christ. I now realize I have been trying to make myself more righteous so you would accept me more. I’m sorry I’ve done this. I realize this is error and sin. I agree with you right now that you have made me 100 percent righteous in my identity in Christ. I believe that because you gave me your righteousness, I am as righteous as you. I also choose to believe right now that you unconditionally accept me. And because you accept me, I choose to accept myself. Please make this more real to me day by day. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Make a copy of these statements and pray them often:

- God, because you say I am righteous in Christ, I agree with you and say I am righteous in Christ.
- God, because you say I'm acceptable in Christ, I say I'm acceptable to you in Christ.
- God, because you accept me, I accept me.
- And thank you God, I can't mess any of this up!

WEEK 6

CHRISTIANS DON'T NEED THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Purpose: to show Christ followers we have something better than the Ten Commandments to live by. We have grace instead. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

We were never designed to live by rules. We were designed to live by grace alone!

I. God Does Not Bless Christians Because They Obey Rules

- A. The Ten Commandments were perfect because they were based on God's character.
- B. These and 613 other commandments were a big part of the Old Covenant
- C. God promised to bless the Israelites if they obeyed these commandments and curse them if they disobeyed them.

Moses told the people, “Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God. . . . “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (Deut. 28:1–2, 15 NASB).

- D. There are twelve verses of blessings for obeying God and more than fifty verses that explained the curses for disobeying him. (Does anyone here want to live in that kind of relationship with God?)
- E. The Old Covenant laws were given to show us our sins and prepare us for a savior.

II. The New Covenant Is Superior to the Old Covenant

The Lord declared in Jeremiah 31:31–34, “Behold, days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them. . . . But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, . . . I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (NASB).

A. Here are the three pillars of the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31:

1. Who we are in Christ

(Verse 33 says God is going to write his law on our hearts. In the Old Covenant, God’s law was written on two stone slabs of rock. In the New Covenant, God writes his law on our hearts, meaning his character is placed in our hearts. This is our new heart in Christ. It is why we are as righteous as Jesus. It’s why we are saints and much more. It’s why we don’t need the external law of the Old Covenant. It’s why we’re no longer dead but are alive in Christ!)

2. Who Christ is in us

(The next verse, 34, says we will not have to tell Christians to know the Lord because everyone of us will know him. The Hebrew word for “know” here means union, just as it does in Genesis 4:1: “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the LORD’” (NKJV). What God is saying to us is that in the Old Covenant, the Jewish people were constant telling people to do something impossible—to have a close, intimate relationship with God. When the High Priest represented them in the Holy of Holies, that was as close to God as they could ever get. In the New Covenant, God changed this by spiritually uniting himself to us. This union means we are always close to God and can never get any closer. We may feel closer to God at times, but we can’t get closer. It also means we can enjoy intimacy with him 24/7.)

3. Our eternal, complete forgiveness in Christ

(Verse 34 also gives us the great news that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our sins are so forgiven that God doesn't remember them—ever. This means he never holds them against us because we are forgiven for every sin—past, present, and future—from the moment of our salvation. That is such a dramatic contrast with Old Covenant forgiveness. All of those sacrifices each year were never enough to forgive their past sins and certainly not their future sins.)

B. What was Israel's part in the Old Covenant? Obedience

C. What is our part in the New Covenant? Faith

D. Why were people blessed under the Old Covenant? Obedience

E. Why does God bless those who believe in Jesus as our Savior? Because we are in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 declares, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (NASB).

III. Christians Have Something Better than Living by Rules

A. You died with Christ on the cross to all religious rule-keeping, which includes keeping the Ten Commandments.

The apostle Paul tells us, "My brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God" (Rom. 7:4 NIV).

B. We have a new identity in Christ, since God's law (character) has been written on our hearts. (Remember Jeremiah 31:33.)

C. We have the Holy Spirit in us in place of the law to fill us with the life of Christ so he can live through us.

IV. Freedom from the Law Is Not Hyper-Grace

- A. Hyper-grace refers to someone who isn't serious about obeying God and believes they have a license to sin.
- B. Three responses to God's grace are always possible for Christians:
 - 1. Refuse God's grace—rejecting the teaching they need to live by grace and making the law and trying harder the focal point of their Christian lives.
 - 2. Abuse God's grace—taking God's grace and perverting it, diminishing sin and disobedience to the point that they think God is okay with it.
 - 3. Use God's grace—understanding the truth, that the only way to live the Christian life victoriously is to live it by grace.

Titus 2:11–12 says, “The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (NIV).

V. Grace is a person.

- A. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of grace.
- B. To live by grace is to live by Jesus Christ and all that he is.

CONCLUSION:

Let today be a new beginning for you to live free from religious rules. (Take a step of faith and pray this prayer to let go of trying to live by the law, and to live by God's grace.)

Dear Father, I admit that I have not understood that I have something better than the Ten Commandments or religious rules to live by. I realize that I have been living from a law mentality instead of a grace mentality. I'm very sorry, and I give up on trying to get you to help me try harder. I embrace my identity in Christ and Christ in me in place of the law. I want to live by grace from this time forward. I look forward to living in the freedom from the law and sin you gave me when I was crucified and raised with Christ. I also look forward to the freedom to love you, myself, and other people. Amen

WEEK 7

CHRISTIANS ARE FORGIVEN BEFORE THEY EVER SIN

Purpose: to help Christ followers understand that God has forgiven their sins—past, present, and future. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Pick your favorite sin. When I say “favorite,” I mean a sin you keep committing over and over, more than any other. In other words, what is the sin you hate but can’t seem to stop doing? Or what is a sinful habit you’ve tried to stop without success?

Now imagine that you just committed that sin again for the millionth time. Do you think in God’s eyes you are forgiven? Or do you think he looks at you with contempt and frustration? Do you wonder if God gets so tired of you committing the same sin that you can go too far and break fellowship with him?

When you can’t stop sinning, do you think you have to prove to God how sorry you are to get his forgiveness? Or do you struggle to pray the right prayer or say the right words so God will forgive you?

Here’s part of the best-kept secret about being a Christian: Forgiveness from God isn’t based on what you do. Forgiveness is based on what God has already done for you. The problem is, if you get this concept mixed up, you can live in bondage to unnecessary guilt.

I. Christians Don’t Need More Forgiveness

Ephesians 1:7 says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (NIV).

And Colossians 2:13–14 reminds us, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. 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” (NIV).

- A. God forgave all your past, present, and future sins the moment you believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior.
- B. In Christ, you already have all the forgiveness you will ever need.

II. God Is Not Waiting for You to Ask for Forgiveness

- A. Because you are in Christ, you are already forgiven before you ever sin.
- B. What about 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.” (NKJV)?

(These words were written to a group of people who didn’t believe they ever sinned. They also believed Jesus Christ didn’t have a real body but was only a spiritual being. John was also saying that those who want to become genuine Christians must first admit they have sinned.)

- C. God does want us to tell him when we sin so we can be honest with him and with ourselves.
- D. When we have sinned, we don’t need to ask him for forgiveness, but we can thank him that he has already forgiven that sin.
- E. To repent of that sin means turning to Christ in us for victory over it instead of promising God we will do better.

III. Will God Forgive Us If We Don’t Forgive?

- A. What about the Lord’s Prayer and forgiveness?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Forgive us our debts our sins, as we also have forgiven our debtors those who have sinned against us.” (Matt. 6:12 NASB).

- 1. Jesus said there are two conditions for receiving God’s forgiveness: (1) we must ask for it, and (2) we must forgive other people.

(Jesus also said, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28 NIV). Jesus went on to say that person should pluck out his or her eye. Do you see lots of people here today who have plucked out one of their eyes? By using hyperbole, Jesus was making the point that the Ten Commandments are not just about what we do; they’re also about what we think.)

- 2. A lot of Jesus’s teaching was to show people under the Old Covenant that they were guiltier before God than they realized.
- 3. He was preparing them to believe in him as their Savior.
- 4. Because we are completely forgiven under the New Covenant, we do not need to forgive to be forgiven.

IV. You Cannot Out-sin God’s grace.

- A. There is no sin which you will ever commit which God did not already forgive.
- B. No sin you commit will catch God by surprise.

Romans 5:20 says, The Law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.(NASB)

V. God Does Not Get Angry with You When You Sin

- A. He placed all his anger for your sin on Jesus on the cross.

First John 2:2 says, “[Christ] Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (NASB).

- B. God doesn’t punish us when we sin; he disciplines us.

1. The purpose of punishment is to make you pay for your sins.
2. Discipline is to get you back on track when you sin.

According to Hebrews 12:6, 11, “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. . . . No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (NIV).

CONCLUSION:

Embrace your complete forgiveness.

(Here is the bottom line: Do you believe God has completely forgiven you for your past, present, and future sins? I’m not asking if you feel like God has forgiven you. You may not. In fact, you may have been carrying around a lot of unnecessary guilt for a long time. It’s time to let that guilt go by faith. Not based on how you feel, but on the fact of your complete forgiveness.

Take a moment right now to accept God’s complete forgiveness. Feel free to use the following prayer as a starting point.)

Father, based on your Word, I believe Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for all my sins. I believe because of this, I am forgiven in Christ for all the sins in my past, my present, and my future. I also believe the punishment for my sins was placed on him and that you will never be angry with me or punish me. When I sin in the future, remind me to run toward you, not away from you. Then I can tell you my sin with the confidence that I am already forgiven. Remind me that I can repent, not promising to do better next time but turning to Jesus Christ in me. Then I can ask him to live through me so I don’t do it again but obey my Father instead. Thank you for loving me so much that I am completely forgiven now and forever. Amen.

WEEK 8

CHRISTIANS ARE DESIGNED TO BECOME STRONGER IN SUFFERING

Purpose: to show Christ followers that God designed us to experience a deeper intimacy with Jesus through the suffering and pressures of life. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

There are some things in life that we all experience. We all pay taxes. We all have struggles. We all experience suffering on some level. Would it surprise you if I told you that suffering can become a way for Christianity to become easier?

I. Christianity Is Not an Escape from Suffering

Jesus famously said, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows” (John 16:33 NLT).

A. Suffering is personal pain caused by life issues.

B. The source of our suffering can be from others, ourselves, ignorance of the New Covenant, circumstances, and Satan.

II. Don't Quote Romans 8:28 When Someone Is Suffering

This well-known passage says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (NIV).

A. People need compassion from us, not a fix when they are suffering.

B. Nevertheless, this verse can be comforting.

C. We may not always see this Scripture fulfilled in this life, but it is still true.

III. God Is Not Trying to Build Character in You through Suffering

A. You already have all of God's character in you.

Colossians 2:10 says, “In Him you have been made complete” (NASB).

B. God is trying to get his character out of you!

C. Don't pray for patience, because you have all you need in Christ already!

IV. Satan Lies to Us When We Suffer

During our suffering, Satan puts negative thoughts in our minds about God, ourselves, other people, circumstances, and the future. For example, when you've experienced difficulty, have you ever had any the following thoughts?

- God must be angry with me about something I've done wrong.
- If I were a better Christian, I would be able to handle life's difficulties better.
- If my wife [or husband] would change, I would be happy in life.
- Life is about becoming a stronger person in every situation. I need to improve.

V. Suffering Can Bring Spiritual Brokenness

(Emotional and sexual brokenness are real, but they are not spiritual brokenness.)

A. Spiritual brokenness is a positive term, not a negative one.

B. Spiritual brokenness is a threefold process:

1. It reveals our flesh and its bankruptcy.
2. It frees us from our consistent reliance on our flesh.
3. It reveals Christ in us so that we rely on him instead.

Ephesians 3:16–17 points to why all Christians need spiritual brokenness: “I pray that out of [God’s] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (NIV).

4. Many Christian know the fact that Christ is in them but don't know how to live by faith in Christ in them.

VI. How to Gauge Your Growth through Brokenness

- You begin to believe God's love for you in a much deeper way.
- Family and friends begin to feel more accepted by you. (Not sure? Just ask them.)
- Your default mode throughout the day moves to relying on Jesus to live through you in your job, relationships, health, hobbies, ministry, work—everything.
- You experience more victory over harmful habits you couldn't conquer before.
- You recognize your self-reliant, fleshly strategies more often, but realize this doesn't define you. Your identity in Christ defines you.

VII. There May be Rights You Need to Give Up to God

A. Know the difference between desires, expectations and rights.

It is helpful to consider the difference between desires, expectations, and rights. There is nothing wrong with having a desire for something. Certainly, you can have desires, for example, for good relationships, i.e., marriage, friendships, dating, a healthy body, or a job I enjoy. The problem begins, first of all, when that desire becomes an expectation, because a lot of anger is generated when I have an unmet expectation. Then, often as time goes on, out of my own disappointment, that expectation becomes a right that I believe is mine.

At some point when the desire becomes a right, I have crossed the line where I am telling God, how things should be in my life. Often at this point, I can find myself fighting with God over this right. Also, if I keep holding on, I put myself in bondage to that right, and often it becomes a major focus in my life. My attitude seems to be, for example, I cannot be satisfied until my relationship is fixed.

In letting go, or giving up a right, it is important to realize that I am giving it up to God, my Heavenly Father, Who loves me and wants His very best for me. In our example mentioned above, I still have a desire for a good marriage, but my contentment is not dependent on the state of my marriage. And, that is a great place of freedom. In essence, I am acknowledging that my life is not my relationships, my health, my job or anything else, but that Christ, indeed, is my life.

B. Understand which rights you may need to give up to God.

Here are a few of those rights: Good circumstances, good health, avoid suffering, friendships, to be married, a happy marriage, obedient children, obedient children, your reputation, a successful ministry or job, possessions, money, good feelings, you fill in the blank.

CONCLUSION:

Accept God's loving desire to reveal Christ in you through your spiritual brokenness.

(Now that you understand the rights you need to give up to God, understand that you do this so that you God may reveal Christ in you more! As we pray this prayer, there will be a time to give up those rights to God.)

(Speaker, when you get to the part of the prayer where it says "I give up these rights to you." tell the congregation to give up the rights God showed them they are holding on to. You may include them in a parenthesis in the prayer from VIII. A.)

Dear Father, I realize I need spiritual brokenness in my own life and only you can bring this about for me. I understand that my flesh is preventing me from experiencing Christ living in and through me the way you designed me to live. I give up these rights to you. I give you permission to use whatever is necessary to reveal the bankruptcy of the flesh to me, to free me from my consistent reliance on the flesh, and to reveal Christ in me so I can rely on him more and more. I pray this in Jesus's name, Amen.

WEEK 9

CHRISTIANS WILL NOT FEEL FREE UNLESS THEY FORGIVE

Purpose: to teach people how to forgive others and themselves. It also includes how to release God from any anger or disappointment we may feel towards him. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Many people believe they need to forgive, but few know how to do it God's way so they will feel truly free from the weight of unforgiveness. I want to share with you today how you can experience a deep freedom through forgiving.

I. Many Christians Misunderstand True Forgiveness

In Matthew 18:21–35, Peter asked, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (NASB).

(The religious leaders and rabbis of that time taught that a person needed to forgive someone only three times, so Peter was more than doubling the current standard. He was asking Jesus if forgiving someone seven times is enough.

Jesus told Peter to forgive seven times seventy, which is 490 times. This number was so high that what he meant was, “Peter, you always forgive.”)

II. Reasons for Not Forgiving Are Never Justified

Some of the most common justifications include:

1. We are waiting for people to admit they offended us. (If we wait for that, we may wait forever, because they may not even know or believe they did anything wrong.)
2. We believe they don't deserve to be forgiven. (You are right, except you didn't deserve for God to forgive you either, but he did anyway.)
3. We want to punish them for what they did to us. (The only person being punished when we don't forgive is us. Offending parties are going on with their lives and may not even be thinking about what happened, while we are living in emotional pain every day.)
4. We don't want to stir up hurtful feelings by thinking about what they did to us. (That's understandable to a point, but the fear of facing what happened can prevent our healing. That is why we sometimes need a trusted pastor or

New Covenant counselor to help us.)

5. We think if we forgive we are saying what they did was okay. (Actually, it's the opposite. Forgiving someone is acknowledging that what that person did was wrong.)
6. We believe as long as we stay angry with them we won't be hurt by them again. (But unresolved anger may do the opposite, making us overly sensitive to legitimate or perceived hurts by them.)
7. We believe we have to tell them we forgive them. (The truth is you only need to forgive people before God. The only exception to that is if people come to you first and asked for forgiveness specifically for what they did to offend you.)
8. We are afraid that if we forgive them, it means we can keep letting them hurt us. (That may or may not be true. Sometimes God wants us to let it go and pray for the people who hurt us to come to an understanding of what they are doing. But most of the time we need to confront them. We definitely should not allow abuse by someone. If you are in that situation, please reach out for help from your pastor or a New Covenant counselor. You may also need to call the national or local abuse hotline.)
9. We confuse reconciliation with forgiveness. (Reconciliation means after we forgive people, we reenter relationships with them. That's the ideal, but it may not always be possible. We always need to forgive, but we may not always be able to reconcile, such as in the case of sexual abuse.)

III. Forgiving Doesn't Mean Forgetting

We may never forget what someone did, but when we are healed through forgiving them, their actions will no longer hurt us.

- A. If you wait to feel like forgiving, you will never forgive.
- B. Forgiving someone is a choice to trust God whether you feel like it or not.
- C. Forgiving someone is acting like who you are in Christ, a forgiver.
- D. If they continue to hurt us, we will need to forgive every time.
- E. If they continue to hurt us, we may also need to confront.
- F. If they continue to hurt us, we may need to set a boundary to end that relationship.

IV. You Can Be Tortured by Unforgiveness

Ephesians 4:26–27 says, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (NIV).

A. God doesn’t punish us for not forgiving, but we do experience consequences.

B. Five types of torture people experience when they don’t forgive others:

1. Mental Torture

(Satan is allowed to feed our unforgiveness with further thoughts of anger. We then become increasingly obsessed by these thoughts of what people did and what we would like to do to get justice against them. That is where we want them to experience pain because of what they did. This alone is mental torture for most of us. It consumes our thoughts for long periods of time.

Some believe unforgiveness can cause certain mental illnesses. That may be true, but it is certainly not the cause of all mental illnesses.)

2. Emotional Torture

(Unforgiveness results in all kinds of other sins. Without forgiveness, these sins can be expressed through increasingly painful emotions, which grow into monsters that control us. Ephesians 4:31 describes these sins and the accompanying emotions: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

It is also well known that unforgiveness can result in depression. We see in our counseling all the time that unresolved anger turned inward can cause depression. We also see that unresolved anger turned on others can inflict depression on them!

Please know that clinical depression and anxiety are in most cases not related to unforgiveness. They are physical conditions where the body’s brain chemistry is not functioning properly because something is wrong in the body. In this case you need to see a doctor for a diagnosis and possibly medication, which God can use to help you.)

3. Relational Torture

(People with unforgiveness most often are unable to have close relationships, and they often can’t figure out why. It’s because they have a wall up to protect themselves from further hurt. In other words, they are afraid of closeness. They also give off the vibe that they will not allow anyone in, and others sense it.)

4. Physical Torture

(Human beings cannot internalize negative emotions week after week, month after month, and year after year without causing damage to their bodies. Unforgiveness is a poison that can bring great pain to us physically.)

Some believe people can develop specific physical maladies from unforgiveness, such as high blood pressure, arthritis, bulimia, anorexia, heart disease and cardiac arrest, stomach ulcers, back problems, headaches, chronic pain, and even cancer. But unforgiveness is not always behind these or other diseases and afflictions.)

5. Spiritual Torture

(Long-term unforgiveness gives Satan the opportunity to oppress people. This is not demonic possession. Demonic possession is not possible for a Christian. However, oppression from Satan can still control a Christian in varying degrees.)

V. How to Forgive from Your Heart

A. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to show you whom you need to forgive. Then write down the following:

1. The name of the person who offended you. (If necessary, don't leave God off the list—or even yourself.)
2. What that person did to offend you. (List the actual thing the person did to you.)
3. How that made you feel then or even now. (You might feel angry, hurt, betrayed, bitter, resentful, or abused, but it's essential to express your emotions to forgive from your heart.)

B. Use these prayers to help you forgive:

- Other people

Father, I'm coming to you now to forgive _____. He/She did this to me: _____ and I feel _____. _____ doesn't deserve my forgiveness. But I didn't deserve your forgiveness either, and you forgave me for all my sins when I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I forgive because you tell me to forgive even as you completely forgave me in Christ. I also realize I am a forgiver through my identity in Christ. I choose to forgive _____ even though I don't

feel like it. I release this person from what they owe me, which was/is _____ . I'm sorry for my sin(s) of anger/bitterness/revenge toward _____. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you and to believe that you can use this experience to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

- Yourself

Father, I come to you today to forgive myself. I feel _____ toward myself because I did this: _____. I don't feel as though I deserve my own forgiveness, but I know that is not the truth. You forgave me for all my sins through the death of your Son, Jesus Christ, when I didn't deserve it. If you forgave me, I can forgive me. I also realize I'm a forgiver through my identity in Christ. I choose to forgive myself. I release myself from _____ [what you did in the blank above].

I'm sorry I have lived in my sin of bitterness toward myself. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you. I believe you can use this to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

- God

(We can't legitimately forgive God because he can't do anything wrong, but we can deal with our anger, disappointment, or other negative feelings about him by releasing him from what he did that we believe he shouldn't have done to us.)

Dear God, I realize I've felt _____ toward you for letting this happened to me: _____. I release you from this. You don't owe this to me. I'm sorry I have lived in my sin of bitterness toward you. I thank you that Jesus Christ died on the cross for this sin so that I am already forgiven. I choose to trust you and to believe that you can use this to reveal Jesus Christ in me in a deeper way. In his name, Amen.

CONCLUSION:

You need to decide right now when you are going to forgive. Will you forgive today, by next Sunday? When will you do this?

WEEK 10

CHRISTIANS CAN BE CONTROLLED BY THEIR UNKNOWN LIES

Purpose: to help people discover the unknown lies that are controlling them and causing emotional and/or mental pain. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

Introduction: God wants to give us hope and heal us from emotional and mental pain. Often, this pain is caused by lies we are unaware of about God, ourselves or others. There is great freedom and healing when God shows us those lies.

I. Jesus Said He Came to Heal Our Hurt

A. He read this passage in his local synagogue to describe his ministry.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. (Isa. 61:1–2 NIV)

B. Jesus's ministry today still includes our mental and emotional healing.

II. How Does Hurt Happen?

A. Emotional pain is most often the result of sin. (Sins we experience from others, sins we commit, our incorrect perception of others' sins toward us, or living in a sinful, broken world.).

B. Trying to meet our needs apart from Jesus in us can cause emotional pain.

C. This can be summed up with the acronym SCALE:

- Security
- Competency
- Acceptance
- Love
- Esteem

D. We can spend our lives trying to meet those needs through the flesh or we can let God meet them.

E. Some emotional and mental pain needs medication to be remedied.

III. How to Identify Your Flesh Patterns

A. The *flesh* is defined as “all the ways sin controls our personalities and bodies.”

B. Flesh patterns are the strategies we have learned to try to meet our needs apart from Christ in us.

(I really like the way *The Message* describes the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21:

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lop-sided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.)

IV. Every Christian has unique flesh patterns whether negative, positive or a combination.

A. Negative flesh patterns are often negative things we do apart from depending on God which include:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| • Abusing others | • Fighting |
| • Adultery | • Getting drunk |
| • Addiction to drugs | • Gluttony |
| • Arguing disrespectfully | • Gossip |
| • Bitterness | • Habitual anger |
| • Committing murder | • Inadequacy-based living |
| • Controlling people | • Inferiority-based living |
| • Dividing people
(in a family or a church) | • Jealousy |
| • Envy | • Lying |
| • False guilt | • Performing for acceptance |
| | • Practicing witchcraft |

- Rage
- Rebellion
- Rejecting others
- Same-gender sex
- Sex between singles
- Sexual lust
- Shame-based living
- Stealing
- Viewing pornography
- Worry

B. Positive flesh patterns are often positive things we do apart from depending on God which include:

- Acting with superiority
- Arrogance
- Codependence (trying to make sure everyone is happy instead of loving them correctly)
- Exercise and nutrition for self-centered purposes
- Focusing on doing what is right and wrong, rather than what is loving
- Perfectionism to feel good about yourself
- Performing well for acceptance
- Philanthropy apart from depending on God
- Practicing “religion”
- Practicing legalism
- Practicing moralism
- Pride
- Self-reliance instead of reliance on Jesus
- Self-righteousness
- Serving God for the wrong reasons
- Spiritual disciplines for the wrong reasons (praying, reading your Bible, giving, and so on to prove to God, yourself, and/or others that you are a good Christian)
- Too much television, social media, video games, sports
- Trying to be a good Christian
- Trying to be a good person
- Trying to impress God, yourself, and/or others

(Which ones did you identify with? We will exhibit a combination of negative or positive flesh patterns but may lean more toward one or the other.)

V. Three Central Lies That Can Control Our Lives

(We see all three lies in Genesis 3:1–10, the story of Adam and Eve falling for Satan’s temptation. Speaker may read this if time permits.)

- A. Your central lie about yourself. Ask God right now to show you the main lie about you. Then ask him to show you his truth.
- B. Your central lie about others. Ask God right now to show you the main lie about others. Then ask him to show you his truth.
- C. Your central lie about God. Ask God right now to show you the main lie about him. Then ask him to show you his truth.

CONCLUSION:

Pray against each lie based on Jesus’s finished work for you.

Father, I have sinned by believing the lie [name it] and have let it control my life. Thank you that Jesus died for that sin and that you have already forgiven me for it. Based on the finished work of Jesus, I ask you to break the power that this lie, _____ [name it], has held over my life. I now thank you for the truth that you have shown me that _____ [name the truth]. Whenever I’m tempted in the future to believe this lie again, please remind me of the truth. Amen.

WEEK 11

SINNING IS NOT NORMAL FOR CHRISTIANS

Purpose: to show Christians why they don't want to sin, the source of temptation, and God's way of defeating sin. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Are you resigned to your struggle with sinful habits? Many Christians end up feeling hopeless in the face of destructive thoughts and behaviors. But you're not alone in your battle against tempting desires. God has the answer we all need to overcome sin.

I. Sinning Is Abnormal for a Christian

- A. A Christian is a saint, not a sinner saved by grace.

The apostle Paul said it this way: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus" Eph. 1:1 NASB).

- B. Remember, your new birth defines you, not your behavior.

II. Temptation Does Not Originate within You

- A. Because you are a new creation in Christ whose deepest desire is to live a righteous life, you are not the source of temptation.

Second Corinthians 5:17 states, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (ESV).

- B. Temptations come from Satan, not you.

Ephesians 6:11 challenges us to "put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (NIV).

- C. Temptations sound exactly like you talking. (Satan and his demons mimic your accent, gender, and language.)

- D. Temptation is a battle in your mind.

- E. Temptation is not sin, because even Jesus was tempted.

III. Don't Say "I Shouldn't Do This,"

- A. Have you ever tried to stop a temptation by saying, "I'm a Christian. I shouldn't do this." (Did that work for you?)
- B. When you say this, you are placing yourself under the law in an attempt to overcome temptation. (It's like telling yourself not to touch wet paint!)
- C. Any kind of law, whether God's or ours, gives no power over temptation.

In Romans 7:15, the apostle Paul said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (NIV).

(Paul, the new creation, did not want to sin. However, he appeared to be writing about the defeat he felt in his attempts as a Christian to overcome his sin habits by trying to obey the law of God. Just like you and me, he didn't want to sin, but he couldn't stop until God showed him the answer.)

IV. The Superior Sin-Stopping Option to Willpower

(When tempted, do you ever tell yourself something like this?)

- "I'm a Christian. I shouldn't do this."
- "What would my Christian friends think if I did this?"
- "I'm not going to do this, no matter what."
- "This is my last time."
- "I'll promise God I'm not going to do this.")

All these admonishments are simply law-based methods that will never work. The law and self-effort work only one way—to stir up sin.)

- A. The solution to overcoming temptation and sin is not trying to obey the law of God.
- B. It's not relying on our willpower.
- C. It's not about following rules.
- D. God's grace is the only way to overcome temptation and sin.

Romans 6:14 tells us, "Sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace" (NIV).

(If you reverse this Scripture, you will see that anytime we try to conquer sin through a rule or a law, it will defeat us. The verse would read like this: "Sin

will remain your master when you live under law instead of under grace.”)

E. Grace is Christ in you, along with his finished work!

This is why 1 John 4:4 says, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”(NASB).

CONCLUSION:

What to do when you're tempted.

(Pray something like this based on what God has done for you and to you. Think of a recent temptation. Then let me lead you in this prayer for that particular temptation.)

Jesus, because I'm not under the law but under grace, I know I'm free to _____ [name the sin]. You will love and accept me even if I do. But I don't want to do this because I know that in my identity in Christ, I'm not a _____ [name the sin] person. I'm a righteous and holy child of God. To do this is not consistent with my identity in you. I know this activity is not good for me. It is not for my benefit. It will hurt me. Please live through me to handle this temptation. I can't overcome it on my own, but I know you can. In your name, Amen.

WEEK 12

THE SECULAR AND SPIRITUAL ARE THE SAME FOR CHRISTIANS

Purpose: to show Christians that with Christ living through us, we can discover God's dream for our lives as the wall between secular and spiritual comes down. (Introduction and parentheses in the outline are for the speaker only.)

INTRODUCTION:

Do you ever think, "It's more spiritual to read my Bible than to exercise?" or "It's more spiritual to pray than to watch a movie with my family?" What if that isn't true? What if all of life can be spiritual no matter what we're doing?

I. Everything a Christian Does Is Spiritual

First Corinthians 10:31 says, "Whether . . . you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (NASB).

- A. As long as Christ is living through you, any activity is spiritual.
- B. Of course, that doesn't include behavior or activities that are sinful or worldly.

II. God Speaks to Christians Outside of the Bible

- A. The main way God speaks to us is through the Bible.
- B. There are other ways he speaks to us that will never contradict the Bible.

John 10:2-5 tells us, "He who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers" (NASB).

- C. There are several possibilities of how God may speak to us:
 - 1. (Have you ever had a sudden urge to pray for someone who came to mind for no apparent reason?)
 - 2. Have you ever had the sense that you needed to call someone but you didn't know why?

3. Have you ever had a thought with such a special quality and specificity that you knew it wasn't coming from you?
4. Have you ever made a decision and then realized you didn't have peace about it, even though your mind convinced you the decision was logical?
5. Have you ever had a Scripture verse or song come to mind when you were praying?
6. Have you ever seen a picture come into your mind when you were praying for a situation or for someone?
7. Have you ever had a dream while sleeping which you just knew was God speaking to you?)

III. You Are God's Will

- A. Enjoying intimacy with Jesus and relying on him to live through you is God's ultimate will for your life.

The apostle Paul said, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10 NIV).

- B. God created you with a divine design to fulfill his purposes for your life which include your body type, your personality type, your talents, your spiritual gifts, and your passions, and your desires.

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (NASB).

IV. Christians Can Do Whatever They Want

- A. When God gave you a new heart, he gave you the desire to do whatever you want.

- B. His dreams and desires for you become clearer over time.

(That's what Psalm 37:4 means for each of us when it says,) "Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart" (NASB).
(As Christ lives through us, those desires from him grow and grow.)

- C. God's dreams and desires give us a sense of fulfillment.
- D. They are also intended to be a blessing to other people.

- E. We've all heard that we should follow our dreams, which isn't true unless our dreams are God's dreams for us.
- V. What Are You Really Passionate About?
1. If money wasn't an issue, what would you like to do with your life?
(I don't mean moving to Hawaii and going to the beach every day! It might be an activity you're already doing. Or it might be something you've always been drawn to but haven't acknowledged until now. It might even be something you currently do as a hobby.)
 2. What makes you feel really alive?
(Identify what causes you to light up when you talk about it or get involved with it. Remember, it can be anything, not just something that sounds spiritual to other Christians. It can also be helpful to ask someone close to you if they see the same thing you identify. Focus on identifying the passion God has given to you.)
 3. What specific topics or activities repeatedly draw your attention?
(The issues or actions that repeatedly capture our focus can also point to God's purpose for us. Sometimes we can do those things full-time, but it may be that we can do them part-time along with our profession.)
 4. What spiritual gifts have you experienced that give you great joy?
(Spiritual gifts are simply the unique ways Jesus lives through you to minister to other people. You can often recognize them because of ministry activities you enjoy doing that bless other people, whether formally or informally. If you are unsure about your gifts, trying different kinds of ministry can make them clear. Taking a spiritual gifts test at your local church or online can also be helpful.)

CONCLUSION:

Are you willing to live God's dream for your life?

God wants to live in and through the special *you* he designed to bless this hurting, needy world during your time in human history. I'm reminded of an encouraging quote that captures this truth in a marvelous way. It's from Howard Thurman, an influential African American author, theologian, philosopher, educator, and civil rights leader who mentored leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr.

(Speaker: I suggest putting this quote in people's notes or on your screen when you preach.)

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do it, because what the world needs people who have come alive.”

“About Us,” Howard Thurman Center for Common Ground, accessed June 7, 2017, www.bu.edu/thurman/about/history.

(God’s dream for your life may be what you’re doing right now. It may be something you do part-time, as a ministry, or as a hobby. It may also give you new direction for what your job is supposed to be. Why don’t you pray about it now?)

Dear Jesus, I realize that up until now I’ve divided life into secular and spiritual because of my legalistic, religious mind-set. I don’t want to do that any longer. I want to live a life of freedom under your grace. I want to live your dream for my life. Starting right now, I ask you to remind me that when you’re living through me, everything I do is spiritual, everything I do is holy, everything is worship, and everything except sin glorifies God. Continue to reveal what you divinely designed me to do during my time on this earth. Amen.



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For counseling, conferences, training, and other resources online or in person, go to www.GraceLifeInternational.com.