

Can God Really Forgive Me?

Allen Webster

“God could never forgive me. I’ve done some awful things.” How many times has that thought passed through the synapses of human brains? Does it frequently lodge in your “gray matter”? When you are alone at night with just your thoughts, are they thoughts of despair, hopelessness, and frustration?

The private thoughts of a prodigal boy in a pigpen in the far country give us some hope (Luke 15:11–32). That boy was an invention of the Master storyteller to express a message about forgiveness and about a Father’s all-encompassing, incomprehensible love. It is a sermon of hope when the devil preaches despair.

The hungry prodigal knew his rich father would not go to bed without supper that night. *But his son would.* The more he thought about it, the more he realized that nobody on his father’s farm would fall asleep with a growling stomach. *But he would.* Even his father’s servants had “bread enough and to spare” (Luke 15:17). *But he didn’t.*

Since the father in the parable represents the Father in the Bible, we can draw some interesting conclusions from the phrase, “bread enough and to spare.” God has never been stingy with His blessings. He “giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not” (James 1:5; cf. 1:17).

Take bread, for instance. When Israel’s children needed some in the wilderness, they had all the manna they wanted: “Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer¹ for every man” (Exodus 16:16). When a widow shared with Elijah what she thought was her last meal, God refilled her meal barrel, and no matter how much she dipped out, it stayed full until the famine ended (1 Kings 17:15–16). When Jesus fed five thousand men (beside women and children), the famished people ate all they wanted; still there were twelve baskets left (Matthew 14:20). When He

“opened His buffet” to four thousand another day, they, too, ate their fill² and had seven baskets extra (Matthew 15:37).³

When we think of man and see the magnitude of his sin, we can hardly understand how a single sinner can be saved; but when we think of God and see the magnitude of His love, we can hardly understand how a single one could be lost.

Have you considered that God loved sinners better than He loved His own Son? *How can you say that*, you ask. He “spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all” (Romans 8:32); but He spares sinners. He poured out His wrath upon His Son and made Him (the Innocent) the substitute for sinners, that He might lavish love upon us (the guilty) who deserved His anger.

Since God “freely give[s] us all things” (Romans 8:32) and withholds “no good thing . . . from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11), what can we count on when we make the journey back to our Father from the far country?

With God, there is grace enough and to spare. No one has gotten up from God’s table still needing a snack of grace. Is your case a difficult one? Have your sins been shocking and frequent? Are your spiritual diseases strange and complex?

Consider that He who made the earth and stretched out the heavens like a tent to dwell in has no bound to His strength nor limit to His might.⁴ In six thousand years, He has never failed at anything—will His first failure be saving you? Will your case prove too strong for omnipotence, boggle the mind of omniscience, or overtax the love of omni-benevolence? If He made you (Genesis 1:27), He can *remake* you (2 Corinthians 5:17). If He claims you (2 Corinthians 6:18), He can cleanse you (Acts 22:16). His “hand is not shortened, that it cannot save” (Isaiah 59:1).

After all these years, is there still “bread enough” on God’s table of grace? Isaiah issued this invitation twenty-seven centuries ago: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7).

It still stands. God offers “abundant grace” (2 Corinthians 4:15) and “abundant mercy” (1 Peter 1:3; cf. Titus 3:5–6), yea, “exceeding abundant” (1 Timothy 1:14). He is able “to save them to the uttermost”⁶ that come to Him (Hebrews 7:25). Peter said, “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly⁷ into the everlasting kingdom” (2 Peter 1:11). Paul concluded: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”⁸ (Romans 5:20).

Let’s put this plenteous grace to the test in a real world of really bad sinners. Did God live up to His promises?

- The **publicans and sinners** were acknowledged (by others) and admitted (by themselves) to be notorious transgressors of God’s Law. Yet when they came to Jesus, they always found grace enough and to spare (cf. Luke 15:1–2). More than any other group, they satiated themselves with the Bread of Life (John 6:35; cf. Matthew 9:10–11; 11:19; Mark 2:15–16; Luke 5:30; 7:34).
- Take the cases of the **sinful woman** whose reputation (literally) followed her (Luke 7:36–50), and the woman who was caught in bed with someone besides her husband (John 8:1–11). Would grace cover such scandals? Yes! Both found that Jesus had grace enough to cover their fleshly—but forsaken—sins.
- What about a **traitor**—one of the inner circle who forsook the Lord with his eyes open, even after he had been warned? (Matthew 26:34). Peter denied his Master three times the night the Friend of Sinners most needed a friend. He cursed and swore that he did not even know “the man” (Matthew 26:72). Could grace cover such a high-handed misdemeanor? Yes. Jesus forgave Peter. But surely he was on probation; certainly he was counted second-rate—damaged goods. No; less than two months later, Jesus tapped him to be the keynote speaker at the greatest revival of all time (Acts 2). He featured him as the key character of the first half of Acts of Apostles, used him to write two Scripture books, and placed him as an elder in a local congregation (1 Peter 5:1–2).
- Those on **whose hands God saw crimson stains** that matched His Son’s blood type were told, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Three thousand of them washed their hands

“in the fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins” that very day (Acts 2:41; cf. Zechariah 13:1), and many others took Him up on His offer in coming weeks (Acts 2:47). It would be hard to imagine a case today that could be the equal of the Pentecost sinners.

- What about **moral delinquents**? Without doubt, perverts and swindlers and drunks are not welcome at the Father’s banquet. Right? Again, we find they are—provided they repent. Paul wrote of some who had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals,⁹ thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners (1 Corinthians 6:9–10). But by God’s grace, they had been washed, sanctified, and justified (6:11).
- **Saul of Tarsus**, who was public enemy number one in the kingdom of heaven at the time, tested the “grace enough and to spare principle” as perhaps no other individual has. He was a blasphemer of God and a murderer of innocent Christians. He organized and supervised the mob killing of Stephen, for instance, who left a wife and child on earth¹⁰ when the fatal rock prematurely sent him into eternity (Acts 7).

Surely, Saul would find that grace could cover only so much—and that he had long ago crossed that line. No, he also found “bread enough and to spare.” Years later he wrote of himself—still calling himself the “chief of sinners”—as one “who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy . . . and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant” (1 Timothy 1:13–14). Is it any wonder that Paul wrote more of grace than any other New Testament writer—in fact, more than all the others combined?¹¹

Can God forgive you? Yes! Will God forgive you? Yes. The question is, “Do you really want to be forgiven?” Are you willing to take God on His terms?

What are His terms?

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| Learning | — John 6:44–45 |
| Faith | — Acts 16:31 |
| Repentance | — Luke 13:3 |
| Confession | — Romans 10:10 |
| Baptism | — 1 Peter 3:21 |
| Faithful Living | — Revelation 2:10 |

Take God at His Word. Trust in Him. Obey Him. Live with Him forever!

Endnotes:

¹omer, is literally, “a heap.” It could also be translated “a sheaf.”
²chortazo, “to gorge; supply food in abundance.”
³Since Jesus knew all things, could He not have prepared “just enough”? Perhaps these nineteen baskets are mentioned in the Bible just to show us that God always gives extra.
⁴Charles H. Spurgeon, *Miracles and Parables of our Lord*.
⁵panteles, “entire, completion.”
⁶plousios, “copiously, richly.”
⁷There is a beautiful play on words that is not immediately seen in the translation. The first “abound” (*pleonazo*) means, “be more, increase.” The second “abound” is a different word (*hyperperisseuo*). It is a compound word made up of *hyper*, “over, above, beyond,” and *perisseuo*, “to superabound, be in excess, be superfluous.” So this word is an intensified hyperbole carrying the meaning, “to be beyond excess.”
⁸The phrase “abusers of themselves with mankind” translates the word *arsenokoites*, which literally means, “two males on a couch.”
⁹Most commentators believe that the men selected in Acts 6 (among whom was Stephen) were deacons and thus would have met the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3, among which are a wife and child.
¹⁰Ninety-Nine of the 131 times the word *grace* is found in the New Testament, Paul used it. Of course, Jesus, who never used the word while on earth, gave a whole series of “grace parables.” Although the word is not used in them, they do cover the concept in detail.



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