



SESSION 2



He Chose to Forgive Us

When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's cross.

Colossians 2:13-14 MSG

No sin is written with indelible ink.
Albert Haase, Living the Lord's Prayer

passages that day? In what ways, if any, did you find it meaningful or different than reading on your own?

VIDEO: *HE CHOSE TO FORGIVE US* (15 MINUTES)

Play the video segment for session 2. As you watch, use the outline provided to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

Nails fix broken things. They join together things that were separated. They make things whole. God used nails to accomplish his plan.

The most notorious road in the world is the Via Dolorosa, the "Way of Sorrows." According to tradition, it is the route Jesus took from Pilate's hall to Calvary.

The path to the cross tells us exactly how far God will go to call us back. The nails in that cross show us the lengths God will go to cover our sins and restore our relationship with him.

GROUP DISCUSSION: CHECKING IN (8 MINUTES)

A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others. Before watching the video, briefly check in with one another about your experiences since the last session. As time permits, discuss one or more of the following questions:

- Briefly share your experience of the session 1 practice, "The Starting Point for Joy." The focus of this practice was to set aside time each day to listen to God. How did you do? Did you find it difficult or relatively easy? Why?
- What was your experience of identifying a "watchword" each day? To what degree were you able to follow through on taking your watchwords seriously?
- Author N. T. Wright describes the necessity of putting aside our natural reactions and of reading the Bible humbly, "without knowing in advance what God is going to say." In what ways, if any, did you have to set aside your natural reactions in order to hear something new from God?
- What was it like to read and reflect on the daily Scriptures, knowing everyone else in the group was reading the same

Paul tells us “we were God’s enemies” (Romans 5:10). An enemy is an adversary—one who offends, not out of ignorance but by intent. However, God “reconciled [us] to him through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10) and “canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross” (Colossians 2:14 NLT).

Between Jesus’ hand and the wood there was a list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years.

Your sins have been blotted out by Jesus. “He has forgiven you all your sins: he has utterly wiped out the written evidence of broken commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14 PHILLIPS).

Jesus couldn’t bear the thought of eternity without us—and in spite of the fact that we were his enemies—he chose the nails.

Jesus knew that the purpose of the nails was to place our sins where they could be hidden by his sacrifice and covered by his blood. As his hands opened for the nails, the doors of heaven opened for us.

GROUP DISCUSSION (35 MINUTES)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

Receiving the Gift of Reconciliation

2. Imagine you have decided to give a “just because” gift to someone you know well, such as a good friend. You put a lot of thought into it and take time to create or purchase

something you are certain will make this person very happy. As the time for giving your gift approaches, you begin to imagine your recipient's reaction.

- Describe the kind of response you hope your gift recipient will have. What is the best response you could hope for—the response that would convince you that your friend has not only truly received and loved your gift but also recognized your heart in giving it?
- Now imagine a year has passed. You're helping this same friend prepare for an upcoming yard sale when you notice your gift among the items in a box designated for the sale. Which of the following would you most likely conclude?

My friend no longer values me or our relationship as much as he/she used to.

My friend takes me or my gift for granted.

My friend has had a change of heart about my gift.

My friend must not have truly received or loved my gift in the first place.

Other:

- How might your discovery of the gift in the yard sale box impact the way you relate to your friend?

3. Max described how God left his home on a quest to bring us home. His purpose was reconciliation—to offer the gift of peace to those who were his adversaries. Here is how the apostle Paul describes the human condition and what God did for us through Christ:

[God] made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News (Colossians 1:20–23 NLT).

Paul described our condition prior to reconciliation as that of “enemies.” The Greek word Paul used was *echthros*, a derivative of the Greek word for *hatred*. Here, the literal translation of *echthros*—*enemies*—would be *haters*. It conveys the idea of “irreconcilable, deep-rooted enmity . . . someone from whom one can expect only harm and danger.”⁸

To better understand what this enemy condition really means, set a timer for one minute and then use the space provided below to speed write a list of whoever comes to mind in connection with the phrases “enemies of God” or “God haters.” For example, the list might include wicked

characters from the Bible or world history, or categories of those who have committed evil acts such as human traffickers or terrorists.

After one minute, go around the group and read what you wrote, but with one addition: add the name of the person sitting on your left as the last name on your list. After everyone is done reading their lists, use the questions that follow to continue your discussion.

My list of “enemies of God” and “God haters”

- What similarities or differences do you notice about your lists? Overall, what do they suggest about your view of what it means to be an enemy of God?

- What is it like to hear your own name included on a list of God’s enemies and to know that it’s true—that it accurately describes your condition before you gave your life to Christ?

- In what ways, if any, are you tempted to resist, minimize, or otherwise rationalize this truth about yourself? What makes it hard to accept that it really is true?

4. Reconciliation is God’s gift to his enemies.* In the passage we read in Colossians 1:20–23, the Greek word translated reconciled is *apokatallassō* whose root means to alter or exchange. In reconciliation, God offers his enemies friendship in exchange for hatred. “To reconcile,” writes one theologian, “is to end a relation of enmity, and to substitute it for one of peace and goodwill.”⁹

Keeping in mind the definitions of reconciliation and enemies (from question 3), read the Colossians passage again, this time from *The Message*:

All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross. You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually *dying* for you, Christ brought you over to God’s side and put your lives together,

* “All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. . . . For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:18–19 NLT).

whole and holy in his presence. You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted (Colossians 1:20-23 MSG).

- The promise of reconciliation is peace with God—we stand “whole and holy in his presence.” This is the opposite extreme of being God’s enemy. Do you find this truth about yourself—that you are whole and holy in God’s sight—easier to believe and accept than the truth about being God’s enemy? Why or why not?
- Paul acknowledges that even though we have been reconciled to God, it’s possible to drift away from our assurance—to effectively walk away from God’s gift. It makes sense that we might distance ourselves from the painful truth of our enemy status with God, but why might we also distance ourselves from the truth of our reconciliation?
- Briefly review the scenario in question 2, including the statements listed under the second bullet point. What parallels, if any, do you recognize between these statements

and the reasons we might find ourselves drifting away from the assurance of our reconciliation?

- How would you describe what it means in practical terms to “stay grounded and steady” in your reconciliation?
5. Max pointed out that it wasn’t an angry mob, jealous religious leaders, or even Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus. It was Jesus himself who chose the nails. “No one can take my life from me,” Jesus said, “I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again” (John 10:18 NLT).
 - Why do you think it matters so much to understand this—that Jesus was not a victim but one who made a sacrificial choice from a position of authority?
 - Part of the invitation of Lent is to take seriously things we might otherwise gloss over—not only the gravity of sin and our need for forgiveness but also the depth of Christ’s love and the magnitude of his sacrifice for us.

Max said, "The nails in the cross show us the lengths God will go to cover our sins and restore our relationship with him." What hopes or fears come to mind when you consider taking Christ's love for you more seriously than you do right now?

Walking Together through Lent

6. At the end of the session 1 group discussion, you had the opportunity to make a request of the group and to write down the best ways you could be good friends to one another.
- Briefly restate what you asked for from the group in session 1. What additions or clarifications would you like to make that would help the group to know more about how to be a good friend to you? As each person responds, add any additional information to the session 1 chart. (If you were absent from the last session, share your response to session 1, question 6. Then use the chart to write down what is important to each member of the group.)
 - In what ways, if any, did you find yourself responding differently to other members of the group in this session based on what they asked for in the previous session? What made that easy or difficult for you to do?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: WHAT I WANT TO REMEMBER (2 MINUTES)

Complete this activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session . . .

LENTEN PRACTICE

Before concluding, briefly review the session 2 Lenten practice, "Making Peace with God."

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together with prayer.