



FORGIVENESS

Learning to do the Impossible: A Biblical Study

H.

About This Study

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

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FORGIVENESS

Introduction: what is forgiveness?

H.

There's a song that I always listen to when I think about giving and experiencing forgiveness. It's called "Forgiveness" by Matthew West. I think this song will help explain what we're going to be learning about in the next couple weeks:

"It's the hardest thing to give away
And the last thing on your mind today
It always goes to those that don't deserve"

The idea of forgiveness seems easy at first glance. It's easy to forgive an accident or to forgive a child when they made a mistake. I know that for some of you, forgiveness seems like such an unimaginable concept. It's a lot to work through, especially if someone hurts you so much, it damages your mind, heart and soul. However, forgiveness isn't something people deserve or have to earn. It's something we all need. It's an act of compassion, which means it's given even when it's not asked for.

"It's the opposite of how you feel

When the pain they caused is just too real
It takes everything you have just to say the word...
Forgiveness"

Forgiveness doesn't mean to forget that all the things that we suffered never happened. It doesn't mean that you aren't justified in your anger. It's okay to feel angry, hurt, and afraid. At some point, though, you need to let go of all of that. It's not something you can do right away and the anger won't go away overnight. You have to start somewhere.

"It flies in the face of all your pride
It moves away the mad inside
It's always anger's own worst enemy
Even when the jury and the judge
Say you gotta right to hold a grudge
It's the whisper in your ear saying 'Set it free'"

We've all been hurt in the past, some of us more than others. Forgiveness is a process that where

we acknowledge the pain and make an effort towards letting it go. Letting go of the anger means no thoughts of revenge or hoping that the person that hurt us will suffer. It also means that you can't lord your success over the ones who hurt you like getting a flashy new car and going "nah nah I'm doing so much better than you." That's not forgiveness. That's being petty.

"Show me how to love the unlovable
Show me how to reach the unreachable
Help me now to do the impossible"

Holding onto your anger actually makes us victims of our circumstances. It's so easy to play the victim card and get sympathy for others, make excuses for ourselves because we've been too hurt. In contrast, forgiveness asks us to selflessly love the ones who hurt us. It doesn't always mean letting that person back into your life. It means to genuinely hope that they will let go and move past whatever hurt they have in their lives and become better people.

"It'll clear the bitterness away
It can even set a prisoner free
There is no end to what it's power can do
So, let it go and be amazed
By what you see through eyes of grace
The prisoner that it really frees is you"

There was a time that I wanted revenge on those who hurt me. The pain that I suffered and the anger I felt blinded me for a long time until I learned that there was a common thread amongst those who have hurt me: they were all suffering from something and instead of trying to get past their hurt, they end up hurting others instead, myself included. For me, forgiveness was necessary to break this endless cycle of hurt.

"I want to finally set it free
So show me how to see what Your mercy sees
Help me now to give what You gave to me

Forgiveness"

One surprising thing about forgiveness is that in letting go of the anger and hurt, you experience a peace that makes you unafraid of the ones who've hurt you in the past. There will come a time when you can finally look that person who hurt you in the eye and feel nothing towards them except the unconditional love that God put into your heart.

Since this is the year of Mercy, I invite all of you to join me on this journey in learning how mercy and forgiveness can change your life forever.

Reflection:

1. What do you think is the hardest aspect of forgiveness? Why do you think it's so hard to forgive?
2. How has forgiveness or a lack of forgiveness affected your life? How do you perceive forgiveness now?

Action:

Offer prayers towards those who haven't forgiven yet during this two-week journey. Ask God to help you let go of all the anger and hurt that you have towards them. It's not gonna be easy, but I promise you that the process will be worth it.

Sacred Heart of Jesus,

have mercy on us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 1: Why we all need mercy

H.

Today's Scripture

Genesis 3, Revelation 12:1-6

"Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start..."

Why does anyone need forgiveness? Because at some point in our lives, we hurt God in the same way that Adam and Eve hurt God in the Garden of Eden.

Most of us know the story pretty well: God created Adam and Eve and told them not to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then Eve gets tempted by the serpent, both she and Adam eat the fruit, they get in major trouble and God banishes them from Eden. (Seriously, Adam and Eve. You had one job!)

The banishment from Eden seems like a downer ending for Adam and Eve, but remember that the word "genesis" means beginning. This is only the first chapter of what we now call "salvation

history." Even as He gives punishment to Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, Divine Mercy was already at work.

So how exactly does God grant mercy on Adam and Eve? Take a look Genesis 3:15

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel."

For the longest time, I did not understand this verse. I used to read it literally, seeing God addressing the snake throughout the entire verse. But there's a deeper meaning to the verse. The Catechism of the Catholic Church cites this verse as the "proto-evangelium," the first Gospel, the first prophecy in Genesis that foretells Christ con-

quering death and sin. How exactly does this verse foreshadow Christ?

Christ is the descendant of Adam and Eve, which means that he is the "offspring" that will strike at the snake's head.

But wait! There's more!

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

"Furthermore many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen the woman announced in the Protoevangelium as Mary, the mother of Christ, the 'new Eve.' Mary benefited first of all and uniquely from Christ's victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life."

Basically, Jesus and Mary are both the key to salvation history. Jesus becomes the new Adam and Mary, the new Eve. If you're looking for Biblical evidence, there are two verses that offer proof:

One is at the Wedding of Cana, when Jesus calls Mary "Woman" just before He is about to perform His first miracle. The other is at the Cross, when he called Mary "Woman" one last time and asked John to take care of her, saying "Behold your Mother." In asking John to take care of Mary, Jesus metaphorically made Mary our own spiritual mother.

Need more biblical evidence? Check out this passage from Revelations 12:

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

Compare that with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The lady in the image is standing with the sun behind her, the moon at her feet, and wears a mantle that looks like the night sky. She wears a cinture, indicating that she is with child. Also, note that the name Guadalupe basically means "the one who crushes the serpent."

Reflection:

1. How do you think Adam and Eve's fall from grace relates to your life?
2. What is your perspective on Mary and her role in salvation history and Divine Mercy?

Action:

Today, in your prayer time, ask Jesus and Mary to help soften your heart. If you have any resentment or lingering anger, ask Jesus and Mary to help you let it go. Listen to Audrey Assad's "New Every Morning" because it summarizes how the story all began and how the story continues on now. In spite of the Fall, God's mercy and Jesus's promise allows us to rise above it.

O happy fault that gained for us so great a redeemer. Blessed be the name of Jesus and Mary! Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 2: The Purpose of our Problems

H.

Today's Scripture

Genesis 37, 42-45

Providence Grows From Hardships

I always believed that everything happens for a reason. It's never clear right away and sometimes, the worst things in our lives will never have an explanation that we can understand for as long as we live. Still, most of the things that we've experienced in our lives can either be used for the better or as an excuse. It all depends on our perspective.

Take the story of Joseph, for example. As a young man, he was Jacob's favorite child. In *Joseph: King of Dreams*, the young Joseph was starting to develop a huge ego because of his parents' favoritism and the foretelling dreams he was having. It made his brothers so jealous that they ended up selling him as a slave to Ishmaelites.

Joseph makes a new life for himself as Potiphar's slave and for a time, he prospers. However, Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce him and then frames him for attempting to rape her, sending him to prison, where he stayed for at least two years. But even in prison, God was with Joseph, putting him in a position of power, even in imprisonment. Then, two years after interpreting the dreams of two prisoners, Joseph got the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and was granted the position of governor soon after.

But then, as Joseph was helping the people of Egypt during the seven years of famine, his brothers come in, all the way from Canaan, seeking food because the famine spread far and wide. Although Joseph ini-

tially acted hostile towards his brothers by testing them, he finally forgave them after seeing that they learned from their mistakes. All at once, Joseph realizes that God allowed all those bad things he suffered for a reason. After Joseph and his brothers reconciled, the entire family was brought to Egypt, reunited once again.

Forgiveness can bring together what pain and anger have torn apart. Joseph could've held a grudge against his brothers forever or refused to give them any food. Instead, once the brothers showed their collective regret, Joseph felt compelled to show them compassion.

If you want a more recent example, listen to the story behind the song "Forgiveness" by Matthew West. I understand that this may not happen with you and whomever has hurt you in the past or whomever is hurting you now. Part of the emotional healing process is acknowledging the ways that the hurt in your life actually changed things for the better. It might be hard to see now, but think about it this way: you're still alive. You were able to live on past whatever pain and suffering you had. Even if you're still in pain, you can offer that pain to God and use it to help someone.

As Laura Story said, sometimes our blessings come through raindrops and healing comes through tears. What if the trials in our lives are really God's mercies in disguise? Take some time to contemplate that, sisters in Christ. May Divine Mercy be with you and help you heal the wounds in your heart.

Reflection:

1. When did something good emerge out of something bad in your life?
2. Do you think all hardships will lead to healing? Why or why not?

Action:

Offer up the pain that you have right now and the pain that lingers from the past. Ask God to help you create something good from all of it.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 3: The Difference Between
Forgiveness and Vengeance

H.

Today's Scripture

Jonah 4

The story of Jonah is both a comedy and a tragedy. It's comical because of the irony: a prophet actively trying to hide from God while all the pagan pirates and the city of Nineveh were more than willing to ask God for mercy when the situation calls for it. It's tragic because Jonah didn't understand God's mercy towards the Ninevites and the pirates and refused to forgive his enemies. Instead, he held onto his desire for vengeance.

I understand the desire of having revenge all too well. Back in college, I constantly listened to Taylor Swift's "Better Than Revenge" because I was majorly angry at a friend of mine who hooked up with my first boyfriend. It wasn't because I still had feelings for said ex-boyfriend, though. It was because I wanted him to be miserable for the rest of his life. The same desire for revenge came around again when I had my first panic attack and the people in the room showed no compassion to me. I was determined to be a successful person, to make more money and live in a big city just like Taylor Swift said in her song "Mean."

In the long run, though, all those revenge fantasies got me nowhere. After college, I ended up moving back with my parents with no job prospects. What made things worse was that I was still struggling with anxiety on a daily basis. It took me years for me to finally stop thinking of myself as a victim and ask God to really help me heal from everything I went through.

The key to forgiving someone without wanting vengeance is to change the narrative. I'm not saying to act as if nothing ever happened. I'm asking you to stop seeing yourself as the victim here. Forgiveness isn't a game of losers and winners, of victims and attackers. It's about two or more people who are all suffering because of a certain event or action and all are in need of healing.

One thing I learned in the process of forgiving all those who hurt me was that they all had their own pain and sufferings in their lives. For a while, I felt sorry for those who hurt me. They could've learned how to work through whatever pain and hurt they had in their lives. Instead, they continued the vicious cycle of pain and suffering and inflicted their hurt onto me.

The cycle of pain, suffering, and vengeance can only be broken by having compassion, mercy, and forgiveness towards those who have hurt you. Because someday, that chance for reconciliation may be lost forever. Never let your last words to anyone be hateful ones, no matter how angry you are at them.

Today's song is a really old one, called "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" The song talks about wondering if we will be with our loved ones in Heaven, but the the title of the song is what speaks to me. Will the constant cycle of pain, suffering, and revenge in our lives be broken? The Lord has the answer to that, of course.

Lord, help us to find compassion and mercy in our hearts.

Reflection:

1. How often do you seek revenge or retaliation instead of forgiveness in a situation? Did getting that revenge or evening the score feel as well as you expected? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever broken a cycle of vengeance in your life? How do you think you can break one going on now?

Action:

In your prayers today, ask God to help you break this vicious cycle.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 4: Let Fear and Anger Out, Let Love In

H.

Today's Scripture

Matthew 5:38-48, Psalm 27

Stop me if you've heard of this country song or sang along to it whenever you heard it on the radio: "I pray your brakes go out running down a hill, I pray a flowerpot falls from a window sill and knocks you in the head like I'd like to..." Whenever you pray for those who've hurt you, do your prayers sound like that?

This is not what Jesus meant when he said pray for your enemies. Turning the other cheek does not mean becoming a doormat, either. Back in biblical times, whenever someone struck a person on the cheek, the aggressor would strike with the back of his right hand as a way of marking the recipient of the violence as his social inferior. Turning the other cheek would force the person to hit them again, but using the palm of his right hand since nobody used their left hand for any form of social interaction at the time. Being slapped with the palm of someone's hand meant being acknowledged as that person's equal, even in conflict. In other words, turning the other cheek means standing your ground in a nonviolent manner.

One way that we can turn the other cheek towards our aggressors is to let go of the anger inflicted upon us and retaliating with selfless love. Sometimes, it comes in the form of just snarking at them in a very polite way. Other times it could mean killing them with kindness. But if the violence is especially strong, the best thing we can do is just treat the aggressor with compassion and mercy.

Having selfless love for those who've hurt you means wanting them to be happy. And I mean legitimately wanting happiness for them and not saying it sarcastically or bitterly. This selfless love has to come from the heart. Do they deserve this selfless love? No! None of us deserve to have selfless, unconditional love in our lives. It's not something we're entitled to. Nor will it be something that happens overnight. It all starts with letting go of our anger and fear.

After all, as Yoda said: "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Listen to Francesca Battistelli's "If We're Honest" and pay attention to the lyrics. One thing I love about this song is that it reminds us that we are all in need of God's mercy. The good news is that His mercy is infinite.

Reflection:

1. What exactly are you afraid of? Are you afraid of getting hurt again? Are you afraid that the person who hurt you will never change and continue to inflict pain to others? Are you afraid of being a victim of circumstances?
2. What are some ways to show selfless love and still stand your ground? Did you react to past issues with violence or flight or taking a third option?

Action:

Offer all of your fears up to Jesus. Take a deep breath and pray as you breathe sisters. Let the fear and anger out. Let God's love come in. After all "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?"

Saint Jerome, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 5: "Father Forgive Them..."

H.

Today's Scripture

Luke 23:34

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."-Luke 23:34

Back in November of 2015, I got the chance to venerate the relics of St. Maria Goretti. I learned a lot about Saint Maria Goretti that night.

Too many people pay too much attention to the fact that Maria refused to give her virginity over to Alessandro and forget that she made an effort in fighting for her life. According to what I learned that night, Alessandro left the room after stabbing her nine times, rendering her unconscious. However, Maria regained consciousness while Alessandro was gone and dragged herself to the door to open the latch and scream for help. Unfortunately, Alessandro heard her opening the latch and proceeded to stab her five more times. The damage that Maria suffered from these stab wounds led to her death.

It disgusted me that a 19-year-old boy lusted after an 11-year-old girl so much that he was willing to kill her in order to get his way. He wasn't even sorry for killing her and tried to say that she attacked him. The judge, of course, didn't believe him. And yet, one moment of forgiveness changed everything. In prison, Alessandro Serenelli received a vision of Maria Goretti giving him fourteen white lilies, one for each time he stabbed her. Through this kind gesture, Maria Goretti told Alessandro that she forgave him.

After receiving that vision, Alessandro Serenelli repented. He was released from jail three years before the actual end of his sentence because of how different he was from when he was imprisoned. His murder broke up the entire Goretti family and yet when he approached Maria Goretti's mother on Christmas Eve, she chose to forgive him. He became a Franciscan and devoted his life to God. And in spite of what everyone thought about him, Alessandro chose to forgive himself.

Fr. Martins, the priest who celebrated the Mass, asked everyone to pray a litany asking St. Maria Goretti to help them forgive the people who've hurt them and to most of all forgive yourself. I prayed this litany during the Offertory hymn. It was a powerful experience for me because I had no idea if the people who've hurt me were even sorry for what they did. And yet through forgiving them, I chose to let my anger go.

I realize now that the pain people caused me was basically the collateral damage of whatever hurt they had to deal with. In spite of the things I suffered, the hurt that I endured in the past led to me finding my strength. So as unlikely as it sounds, if you are one of those people that hurt me and you are reading this, know that I love you as my brother or sister in Christ and that I forgive you and that I am praying for your happiness. Dear sisters in Christ, I hope that you will find the strength in your hearts to do the same to those whom you find hard to forgive.

Reflection:

1. Do you think you would've forgiven Alessandro the way Maria Goretti and her family did? Why or why not?
2. Are there any sins or crimes that you consider to be unforgivable? Why do you consider those things to be unforgivable compared to others?

Action:

If you're struggling to forgive someone in your life, check out the song "Losing" by Tenth Avenue North. Offer a prayer to Saint Maria Goretti and ask her to help you forgive those who hurt you and to forgive yourself as well.

Saint Maria Goretti, pray for us!



FORGIVENESS

Day 6: Learning to forgive yourself.

H.

Today's Scripture

Luke 15:11-32, John 8:1-11

These two passages are very familiar ones. I want to focus on something these two passages have in common: through the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Adulteress, we can learn how to forgive ourselves. It's hard enough to let go of the anger and resentment and the pain we have towards other people. Forgiving ourselves is just as hard, if not harder.

When the Prodigal Son rehearses his speech for his father, he doesn't see himself as worthy of being his father's son. Instead, he sees himself as a slave, given how far he had fallen. However, when the time comes and the Prodigal Son starts his speech, his father cuts him off before the son could ask if he could be a servant. Instead, the son is restored to his rightful place in the family. In a similar way, when Jesus asks the Adulteress who condemned her, she only said "No one, sir." She didn't blame her accusers or try to justify her actions or beg Jesus to forgive her. And yet, by simply acknowledging that she was finally alone with no one to accuse her, she received forgiveness.

One often misunderstood aspect about God's grace is that we have to deserve it. Nobody deserves God's grace or mercy. It's instead given as a gift, whether we feel like we deserve it or not.

The Catholic Church holds everyone up to a high standard because our purpose in life is to be a saint. At the same time, the Church loves us so unconditionally that no matter how far we fall, we can return to the Church, ask for forgiveness, and receive that grace. It does not mean that we take advantage of that grace. It doesn't mean that we don't deserve that grace.

So what does it mean?

It means that God is asking a lot from us when we receive His mercy.

Today's featured song is "Come to Jesus" by Mindy Smith. The song talks about how Jesus is always going to be here for us. I like to think that it's sung in the point of view of a guardian angel. May we all come to Jesus, ask for His mercy, and leave all the pain and shame behind.

Reflection:

1. Who do you identify with most in the passages? Do you identify with the sinners (the Prodigal Son and the Adulteress), the condemners (the other son and the Pharisees), or the one who forgives (the father and Jesus)? Why do you feel drawn to them?
2. What will you do with the gift of mercy that we have been given? Will you let go of all that is past or hold onto it and forget about the gift we received?

Action:

Forgive yourselves, sisters in Christ. God already has. And if you're not certain of that, I suggest heading to Confession as soon as possible.

Guardian angels, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 7: The Three Questions About Confession

H.

Today's Scripture

John 20:21-23

Why do we need Confession?

Even though most of us aren't people who would commit violent crimes, we still have a tendency to sin. We sin whenever we hold onto our anger towards someone and say bad things to them, whether just once or constantly or behind their backs through gossip. We sin whenever we clutch onto our envy and resentment, wishing bad things on other people. We sin whenever we let our thoughts linger on the physical attraction of a person without acknowledging that there is a soul inside that body.

Matthew Kelly compares Confession to cleaning out your car. The car starts out clean, but over time, it gets dirty with all the stuff you put inside it, the food and drinks you spill, and treading mud. Not to mention that on the outside, a car will gather lots of bugs on the windshield, bird poop, and general dirt and grime from constant travelling. So once a month or so, we clean out the car. Take out all the trash, vacuum the floors, and take the car to a car wash so that it'll be clean inside and out.

The car will get dirty again eventually, but that's a part of life. We will always be in need of God's mercy. To deny this is tantamount to lying to yourself.

Why do we need to confess our sins to a priest?

Each of the Sacraments has a physical encounter as well as a spiritual one. There will always be a part of us that needs to speak to someone about all the wrong things we have done. We will always need to hear that we are forgiven. God chooses to do that by working through a priest. Whenever we are in Confession we confess our sins directly to God through the priest. After saying that we are sorry for our sins, we are given a penance and hear the priest absolve our sins.

How often should we go to Confession?

The Catholic Church advocates frequent Confession. Pope Francis goes twice a month. Pope John Paul II went every week. Pope Pius XII went every day. Now all of these popes are good and holy men, so their frequent Confession may sound daunting. But think of frequent confession as you would going to the gym or some other kind of exercise routine. Just as an athlete trains on a daily or weekly basis in order to prepare for a major event, people who go to Confession frequently helps our soul grow stronger and prepares us in the fight against future temptations. It doesn't matter how often you go, though, if you don't allow the grace of Confession to change you.

Reflection:

1. How often do you usually go to Confession? What are your perceptions on the sacrament?
2. What have your experiences been with the sacrament of Confession? What graces have you received from it?

Action:

Start going to Confession once a month. You'll see a lot of huge changes at first, but then the changes will become more gradual over time. Trust me when I say you won't regret it.

Saint Padre Pio, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 8: The Fruits of Confession

H.

Today's Scripture

John 21:15-19

Let's take a look at a person who committed a sin that some people still haven't forgiven. He betrayed Jesus around the hour of his death, abandoned Jesus even when he swore up and down that he would always be there for his Savior. In spite of the fact that he betrayed Christ, though, he still became a great leader. In fact, he becomes the head of the Church.

Yep, Saint Peter had an experience with confession, just as every other sinner to come to Jesus. The denial he made during that night that Jesus was put on trial was forgiven when Jesus asked Peter "Do you love me?" three times.

This particular passage is a favorite of my friend Kristin who converted to the Catholic church recently. I asked her to share her story of her first Confession as she was preparing to be received into the Catholic Church on Easter Vigil. She's also a fan of shows about vampires like me and the way she describes the fallen state of our souls is just perfect:

We are born vampires due to original sin. Like vampires, we are driven into the black night of our sins and transgressions, subconsciously terrified of being burned alive by the pure light of Christ. Like vampires, we're driven away from pain and toward hedonistic pleasure, largely propelled by the forces of fear, anger, hate, lust, and greed. We live entirely for ourselves and see others only as a source of food for us—emotional affirmation, physical pleasure, and social recognition—and we'd best eat them before we're consumed ourselves. We drive our greedy jaws into others without a

thought, a care, or a twinge of remorse, and suck them dry, all in a desire to quench our endless thirst, our neverending desire to fill the emptiness within ourselves with something. In the midst of all this, the deep terribleness of the human heart, Christ the Slayer wants to kill our vampiric selves and ensoul us, which He does so well through the Sacraments. He calls us out of the darkness, and He watches us as we pathetically stagger out from the shadows, crouching, cringing away from the Light.

I spent my first Confession, sitting in very comfortable chair in a cheery, bright, well-lit office, feeling with every fiber of my being that I was about to go up in smoke as I rattled off my list of sins before the priest. And go up in smoke, my ego did. I stumbled around, slowly realizing for the first time the depths of what I've done to Christ and Christ in others. My scarred heart, rife with manipulation, greed, carelessness, and selfishness, was laid bare before me in the harsh Light, no longer fancied up by the clever illumination of the night.

The priest gave me my penance, a single Our Father, and instructed me to meditate on the mercy of God. Not only did I meditate, I was sucker-punched by this overwhelming Divine Mercy toward me. The emptiness inside of me was filled with the infinite waters that gushed from His Sacred Heart. It'll be a lifelong process of torching my ego, repairing my heart, and fighting for my soul. I know that even after I am received into the Church, I'll be in Confession again and again. But I embrace the Cross which burns away my sins, and ask "Can we rest?"

As Saint Augustine said, our hearts are restless until they rest in Christ. When we learn to forgive ourselves, we enter into the light and find our rest in His arms.

Reflection:

1. Which part of my friend's testimony did you relate to the most? When did you act like a "vampire" towards someone?
2. How has Divine Mercy impacted your life?

Action:

Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and intercede for the "spiritual vampires" in your life.

Saint Peter and Saint Augustine, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 9: Admitting you have A Problem

H.

Today's Scripture

2 Samuel 11-12:1-25, Psalm 51

Today's passage is definitely soap opera worthy. Heck, give this story to the writers of Game of Thrones and you could easily see this happening on HBO: A king lusts over the wife of one of his soldiers, sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, and then kills her husband by sending him over to the front lines where he was guaranteed to die.

This is one of King David's worst moments. If this was a Shakespeare play, it could've been a serious permanent tragedy. And yet, in spite of all the drama, there was some good that came out in the end.

But what can we learn from all the tragedy and heartache?

Aside from the obvious "Don't give into the idea that the grass is greener on the other side," I want to reflect on 2 Samuel 12:1-15, when Nathan confronts David about committing adultery with Bathsheba and killing her husband. After Nathan tells David the parable of the rich man killing his neighbor's favorite lamb and prophecies what will happen to David's wives, David finally admitted that all the things he did was a sin against the Lord.

And while the Lord chose to forgive David, the forgiveness came at a great cost: the life of the son that he and Bathsheba conceived in their adultery. During those days that David grieved for the loss

of his child, he wrote Psalm 51, which is one of my perennial favorites. Danielle Rose sang a gorgeous version of this Psalm that I highly recommend you listen to.

The first step to accepting God's forgiveness, like the beginning of many 12-step programs, is to admit that you have a problem. Acknowledge your weakness and recognize that you are in need of God's mercy, forgiveness, and grace. At the same time, don't dwell on the fact that you have done wrong and think that God will never forgive you for the things you've done.

The reason why we have the Sacrament of Confession is because we should never dwell in the shame of our sins. Humility, like all things, is a balancing act. We can't be proud of our sins, but we shouldn't dwell on our faults to the point that we feel like we're worthless. Instead, we ask God for help because He is the only one who can help.

Reflection:

1. Do you talk more about your own issues or other people's problems? Why? How hard is it for you to admit that you struggle with something?
2. What is your perspective on sin? Do you agree with people who say "Only God can judge" or do you feel too ashamed of the things you've done?

Action:

Pray an examination of conscience tonight. There's a Jesuit version called the Examen that lets you reflect on the whole day.

Saint John Vianney, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 10: Struggling with Habitual Sin

H.

Today's Scripture

Romans 7:14-25, 2 Corinthians 12:5-10

Everyone has their weaknesses, their vulnerable spots, the parts of their souls that are the most susceptible to temptation. Some people have a very bad temper. Others struggle with gossiping or lying or with emotional chastity. Even if we're not addicted to "hard substances" like alcohol or drugs, our tendency to desire sin can lead us to one of four addictions: wealth, pleasure, power, and honor. Sin can be a bad habit to have and at some point, you might be wondering "Why do I keep going to Confession for the same sin over and over again?"

It helps to know that we are not alone in our struggle with habitual sin. Saint Paul recounts of a thorn in his side that he asked God to take out of him three times. But for some reason, God didn't remove that thorn. Today's passage from 2nd Corinthians said "[The Lord] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." Basically, God can use the worst parts of ourselves in order to create the best versions of ourselves. We can testify to God's strength because we are able to live good and holy lives in spite of the things we struggle with.

Scott Hahn compared going to Confession frequently to going to the doctor. We pay so much attention to our physical health. We need to give our spiritual health just as much, if not more, attention and care. Confession, as Scott Hahn said, isn't an interrogation or confessing to a cop. It's our way of gaining spiritual healing on a weekly to monthly basis. By going to Confession regularly, even if it's for the same sin, we learn humility. We might even get to the root cause of whatever causes us to fall into that same sin and finally set ourselves free of it.

Today's featured song is "Your Grace is Enough" by Matt Maher. As a cradle Catholic, I had some initial issues with the song because I was raised to believe in "faith and good works." However, I understand now that receiving grace is the starting point, the thing that drives us to do good works for the Lord. Scott Hahn said that frequent Confession has changed his life. I pray that it does the same for you.

Reflection:

1. What are some bad habits you constantly struggle with? Do you have a short temper or a tendency to gossip? How do you think God can help you with those little sins as well as with the bigger struggles?
2. Which of the four addictions do you feel are the most tempting? How do you think you can practice the opposite virtues? (The four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. CCC 1805-1809)

Action:

Pray for those who are struggling with addictions.

Saint Paul, pray for us.



FORGIVENESS

Day 11: It's Never Too Late

H.

Today's Scripture

Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 23:39-43

No matter how far you feel you've fallen or how long it's been since you last talked to that person, it is never too late to ask God for forgiveness, to forgive yourself, or to start forgiving the ones who've hurt you. In short, mercy and forgiveness have no expiration date.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard reminds me of all the conversion stories I heard over the years. Everyone who worked at the vineyard received the same wages, even the workers who were hired at the eleventh hour. The people who worked the longest didn't see it as fair, but it actually was. In the same way, God's mercy and forgiveness are given equally to everyone, even to those who sincerely ask for it at the last minute.

My friend, Francine*, has a complicated story worthy of a soap opera, but it ends very happily for all those involved. Her father Tony* left her mother and married her mother's best friend Natasha*. Though her father and his new wife stuck around for most of Francine's childhood, she carried a lot of anger and resentment towards both of them. It got to the point that when Francine was pregnant with her third child, she and her father stopped talking to each other. 14 years later, however, Tony and Francine reconciled again. The twist to this story, though, is that by that point, Francine had already forgiven him.

If you need any more proof that it's never too late to receive mercy and forgiveness, read the passage from Luke's Passion narrative. The thieves crucified next to Jesus were rebuking him for a while. One of the thieves wanted to be taken down. The other thief, known traditionally as Saint Dismas, rebuked the other thief, understanding the reality of their situation. St. Dismas knew that he and the other thief deserved to die for their crimes, but also realized that Jesus was innocent. He pleaded for Jesus to remember him. In return, Jesus said "Today, you shall be with me in paradise."

Today's song is "You Never Are" by Francesca Battistelli. It's a song dedicated to those who feel like they are beyond redemption and forgiveness.

*Names are changed to protect privacy.

Reflection:

1. What was something that you found hard to forgive or haven't forgiven yet? Why has it been so hard to let go?
2. What do you think was the most profound thing you've learned from this study?

Action:

If you haven't allowed any mercy or forgiveness into your life, whether for yourself or for others, let today be the start of a new chapter and let God write His mercy, compassion, and forgiveness into your life for yourself and for everyone else in your life.

St. Dismas, pray for us.