

No Person Is Beyond Forgiveness

- Greet group members as they arrive. After a few minutes of social conversation and fellowship, begin the study.

You will need:

- *Nothing's Too Hard for God* Small Group DVD
- TV
- DVD player
- Bibles (NIV or other easy-to-read translation)
- New believer material

Introduction

SAY As we begin our discussion, I want each of us to think about how we would respond to the following questions.

- ? **Do you remember a time when it was hard to forgive someone, and how you felt?**
- ? **Did you forgive that person?**
- ? **Was there a time when you were the person who needed someone's forgiveness?**
- ? **Did you want their forgiveness?**
- ? **Have you ever wanted God's forgiveness?**
- ? **Think back to the person it was hard for you to forgive. Do you think God could forgive that person?**

Video Segment 1

SAY Today (Tonight), we are going to watch a video that will help us discover that no one is beyond forgiveness.

- Play DVD track 1 (approximately 7½ minutes), then pause for discussion when prompted by the video.

DVD **"The grace of God"—is it enough to cover even the worst of sinners?** (*Allow responses. Answers may include "God's riches at Christ's expense," etc.*)

SAY Grace can be a difficult concept to understand. Think back to a moment when you needed someone to forgive you for a wrong you committed against him or her. Think about the guilt you may have felt, and how you wanted forgiveness.

When you wrong someone, you don't necessarily deserve to receive their forgiveness and relief from your guilt. Grace is when you receive forgiveness and relief from your guilt even though you don't deserve it.

- Ask someone to read **Ephesians 2:1–10**.

SAY We have been saved by grace and not by works. We did nothing to earn or deserve the grace that God extends to us. Let's look at a few more passages in the Bible that show God's grace in action.

- Ask someone to read **Luke 23:39–43**.

? **How was God's grace acted out in this passage?** *(Allow responses. Answers may include Christ forgave the thief even in his last hours of life, etc.)*

- Ask someone to read **Acts 9:1–19**.

SAY To give you a little background on Saul, he was well-known for his hatred for Christians. This trip to Damascus wasn't the first of its kind. Saul wanted to see Christians dead. In the video, Scotty referred to a "Damascus Road experience." When this phrase is used, it paints a picture of an extraordinary encounter with God. Saul's Damascus Road experience dramatically changed his life in this one fantastic encounter.

? **Knowing this, what does this tell us about God's grace?** *(Allow responses. Answers may include: God's grace extends to those who hate Him, His forgiveness is boundless, etc.)*

- Ask someone to read **Romans 5:8**.

? **Let's go back to the opening question that was asked: Is the grace of God enough to cover even the worst of sinners?** *(Yes! Allow for additional discussion, if desired.)*

SAY Let's discuss some of the concepts that were mentioned in the first part of the video.

? **First, what is sin?** *(Allow responses. Possible answers may include: displeasing God, breaking a rule, doing something that is wrong, etc.)*

? **Is there someone worse than you, who has done more wrong than you have done?** *(Allow pause for thought.)* **Is there someone who is better than you?** *(Allow pause for thought.)*

- Ask someone to read **Romans 3:23** and **Romans 6:23**.

? What do we discover from these passages? (*Allow responses.*)

DVD Are there levels of sin, or does God really look at each of us and our sins as being the same? (*Allow pause for thought.*)

SAY So, it's not about levels or quantity of sin, it's about the truth that all of us have sinned. This brings us back to everyone's need of God's grace. Remember what we read in Ephesians? We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8), and not by how much good we do, or how small our sin is in comparison to the person next to us. It's futile to compare ourselves, either as better or worse, to those around us. We should understand that none of us deserves forgiveness, but that God's grace is big enough for everyone.

Video Segment 2

SAY Let's watch the rest of the video and discover what happened next on Eric's journey.

- Resume DVD (approximately 6½ minutes) then end with discussion.

? How can I know I'm forgiven? (*Allow pause for thought.*)

SAY Let's think back to the Scripture passage where Saul had his Damascus Road experience.

? How did Saul know he was forgiven? (*Allow responses. Answers may include: because of his unique encounter with God, because his heart [attitude] changed, etc.*)

? How do we know that we are forgiven? (*Allow pause for thought. Answers may vary.*)

- Ask someone to read **Romans 8:1** and **10:9**.

? What does *condemnation* mean? (*Allow responses. Answers may include a condemned person is one who has judgment pronounced against him or her, etc.*)

? So, what can we learn from these verses? (*Allow responses. Answers may vary.*)

- Ask someone to read **John 3:16**.

? What does *perish* mean? (*Allow responses. Answers may vary.*)

SAY In English, *perish* literally means *to die*. So, this verse means that if we believe in Jesus, God's Son, we will not die spiritually, but we will have eternal life. God's grace is really that amazing and simple.

Everyone needs God's grace and forgiveness, and maybe some of us have never experienced the grace that we've heard in this video, or discussed here. I would like to give each of you the opportunity to accept God's forgiveness and experience His grace.

- Allow time for responses. Feel free to pray your own prayer, or use the following.

God, I understand what sin is, and that I have sinned against You. I also know that You offer forgiveness. Please forgive me of my sins. I accept Your forgiveness and Your grace. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to take my punishment. Help me live a life that pleases You. Amen.

? What should our attitude be toward those who have lived terrible lives? *(Allow responses. Answers may vary.)*

SAY We all know of people we view as terrible because they committed certain sins, the list can be long. It is important to have the right attitude toward these people who appear to be beyond forgiveness

- Ask someone to read **Matthew 18:21–35**.

SAY We should have compassion on them. We needed forgiveness, just like they do. Remember, all of us are in need of God's forgiveness.

? Since God has offered me forgiveness, how should I respond to others who have wounded me? *(Allow responses. Answers may vary.)*

- Ask a few people to read **Matthew 6:14,15; John 13:34,35; and 1 John 4:19–21**.

? Who is our brother from what we heard in Matthew? *(Allow responses. Anyone—family, neighbor, those we come in contact with.)*

? Would you say we need to extend forgiveness to those around us? *(Allow pause for thought.)*

Note

If someone in your group receives salvation, it is good to be able to give the new believer some new believer materials.

Also, be sure to connect new Christians with a new believers discipleship class as they begin their new walk with Christ.

Conclusion

SAY Let's think back to that person we didn't want to forgive. It was probably very difficult to forgive that person.

Sometimes we may feel like we want to be God's "avenging angel" that hands out punishment. But as we've discovered, we need to extend forgiveness and kindness even to those who seem to be outside the boundaries of God's grace. As we show forgiveness, we demonstrate one benefit of being forgiven.

Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean we're off the hook. Eric, from today's story, still had to pay for the crimes he had committed. Even though he received freedom in Christ, he spent time in jail for his actions. Yet, God showed him grace by giving him strength to endure during the punishment.

As we close in prayer, let's thank God for His gift of salvation and ask for His help to forgive those who have wronged us.

- Ask for prayer requests from those who need forgiveness or those who struggle with forgiving others. Pray your own prayer or use the following.

Dear God, Thank You for forgiving us of our sins. We understand that forgiveness is free—a gift offered by You. We accept Your gift. Help us to forgive those who have wronged us and not to hold unforgiveness in our hearts. Thank You for Your grace. In Your name we pray. Amen.