

The God of Second Chances

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Day One

For many years now God has given me the unbelievable opportunity to encourage you to believe that God's Word is relevant to every need of your life. Quite frankly, no one is more surprised than I am to discover God could or would allow me this privilege of starting this ministry.

I really blew it big time. After being raised in a wonderful Christian home and accepting Jesus into my life at an early age, after a Christian education and good churches all my life, after much Bible teaching and knowledge, I chose to put God on the back seat of my life and do my own thing, as we say. And for ten long years I walked away from my commitment to the Lord and lived a life that brought no glory to God and damaged my testimony for Jesus.

It should remind you we serve the God of second chances. Sometimes I think maybe one major reason God has chosen to bless me with this ministry is to demonstrate his graciousness and second-chance nature. I am living proof that even though I strayed from the narrow road, he has miraculously salvaged me.

I want to encourage you to know you serve the God of second chances. The Bible gives many stories of people who, like me, needed a second chance and God gave it to them. We'll take a look at these people who blew it badly. I believe it will teach us anew never to underestimate the power of the God we serve, never underestimate what he is able to do with any mess we make, and never to give up on anyone else. No one is beyond the power of God's grace.

What is difficult for our minds to grasp is God chooses to use the lowly and weak things of this world, and when we are weak, then we are strong. Our world system teaches us survival of the fittest—only the strongest and the best make it to the top, only the most qualified can truly succeed. But God's system is just the opposite. When we give up on ourselves and admit we've blown it, we are then in a position to allow God to move in and do something wonderful with our lives.

Day Two

Have you ever felt like you've made a mess of your life? If you're carrying regret, I hope you'll lean in—because this is for you.

Do you remember Rahab? She's often referred to as "Rahab the harlot." But that's not how God finished her story. He rescued her out of that life and gave her faith and a future.

We aren't told too many details of her early life, but we know she lived a life of sin for many years. But through a series of events, she bargained for her life with the two spies from the people of God, hid them in her home in exchange for protection for her family, and survived the slaughter and destruction of her country.

Yes, she had a sinful past. Yes, she made choices she couldn't undo. But when she trusted the God of Israel, everything changed. She was spared. She married into God's people. She became part of the lineage of Jesus. Her name is even listed in Hebrews 11 among the heroes of faith. What a redemption!

Maybe you have a past that still whispers shame. Maybe the enemy keeps replaying old failures in your mind. But if you've asked God to forgive you, that sin is covered. He remembers it no more. The enemy will try to hinder and handicap you because of your past. He hopes to keep you mired in guilt and rotten memories.

If you've asked God to forgive you, your past is behind you. Let God take the guilt of your past, put it under his precious blood, and set you free to see what he can do with you. It's never too late, and nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Your past does not get the final word. God does. And he is still the God of second chances.

Day Three

One of my favorite people in the Bible is Peter. Do you know why? Because despite messing up—several key times in his life—he made a wonderful comeback. And God used him mightily. Peter reminds me that we serve the God of second chances.

Maybe you need a second chance, but you might be thinking it's too late. Maybe you've made one mistake too many. Maybe you feel like God is fed up with you and has quietly put you on the shelf. Well, think of Peter.

Peter was always making big promises. "I'll follow You anywhere." "I'll never forsake You." "I'll never deny You." "I'll even die for You." But look at his failures.

Jesus actually rebuked him and said, *Get behind me, Satan* (Matthew 16:23), when Peter gave him completely wrong advice. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter started talking about building memorials—and God interrupted from heaven, basically saying, "Peter, be quiet and listen to my Son." He stepped out of the boat to walk on water—and sank. He slept when he should have been praying—even on the night of Jesus' betrayal.

And worst of all, he denied his Lord three times. When Jesus was on trial, Peter should have stood up and been counted. Instead, he caved. He turned away. He fled.

Why would Jesus choose Peter? Because Jesus doesn't look for perfection. He looks for hearts he can restore. That brash, impulsive, big-talking fisherman became one of the greatest spokesmen for Christ and the early church. After the resurrection, Jesus didn't discard Peter—he restored him. He recommissioned him. He gave him another chance.

Maybe you've been talking the talk but not walking the walk. Maybe you feel like you blew your testimony at work, at home, or with your friends.

Listen carefully: You cannot mess up so badly that God cannot salvage you. Don't underestimate the power of the God of second chances.

Remember Peter. And ask God to do for you what he did for him. He's the same God. He hasn't changed. And he loves you just as much as he loved Peter.

Get up. Turn back. And go for it.

Day Four

Have you read the book of Hosea lately? God gave me a second chance after I went my own way for far too many years, and now he allows me the joy of serving in this ministry.

Hosea is a picture of second chances. God told him to marry an unfaithful wife and to keep giving her opportunities to return. Through that story, God showed how he would continue giving Israel chances to receive their Messiah. If you want to see second chances in action, read Hosea.

Think of Abraham. More than once, his faith failed, and he lied about Sarah to protect himself. Yet God reaffirmed his covenant with him.

Jacob deceived his father and stole Esau's blessing. Yet God redeemed Jacob, and the covenant continued through him.

David committed adultery and arranged a murder. Yet through his line came Jesus Christ. God gave him a second chance.

And the list goes on—right up to us. Every one of us has failed in some way. If we didn't have a God of second chances, we would all be lost. Maybe you've asked forgiveness for the same sin again and wonder if he will forgive you one more time. He will. He knows our frame; he remembers we are dust.

That doesn't mean there are no consequences. Sin has aftermath. But God removes our guilt and allows us to begin again with a clean slate.

We should never take sin lightly, but it is a comfort to know our God does not give up on us. Trust him today for the second chance you need.

Day Five

I so often need a second chance, how about you? But you know, sometimes we are very reluctant to give others a second chance, even though we've received them from God. Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful servant who asked the king to forgive him for the ten thousand talents he owed. He could never pay that huge debt, so in marvelous grace, the king agreed to forgive the debt and gave him a second chance. But what did the servant do? He turned around and demanded a small debt owed to him be paid immediately, and when his fellow servant couldn't come up with the money right away, he threw him into prison.

Jesus was well aware of our tendency to accept his grace and take all the second chances we can get for ourselves but to be very stingy in the way we deal with others. Twila Paris used to sing a song that says "He'll never give up on you, and neither will I, neither will I." She reaffirms even though her friend had failed again, she was not going to stop believing and hoping she will accept God's second chance for her.

Who have you given up on? Is there someone you've been tough on, when God wants you to give them a second chance and simply return some of the grace he has extended to you? In this parable of the unmerciful servant found in Matthew 18, Jesus teaches us if we aren't willing to give others a second chance and be merciful to them as he has been to us, then he will withdraw from us the grace and second chance we so desire and need.

Being merciful means you forgive someone a debt they truly owe. They deserve to pay the debt, but you let them off the hook. Have you done that lately, or have you been sticking it to someone, judging them for their failures and refusing to let them up off the floor? If you and I want to know God's blessing in our lives, we must give others a second chance.

I hope you'll live in the glory of the truth that we have a God of Second Chances, because if you don't need a second chance right now, you will soon. And I trust you'll be willing to give others that same second chance. Remember, love suffers long; it keeps no records of the wrong done to it; love always hopes and always gives second chances.