

DAY 2 FORGIVING

Couches typically look really nice on the outside. But have you ever lifted up the cushions?

Before you do, take a moment to prepare your heart and soul for the horrors you are about to experience. In fact, you may even want to put on a hazmat suit! If you're like our family, you're going to find M&M's, quesadillas, pizza crusts, potato chips, Lego pieces, and possibly the Zika virus. It's all under there.

On the surface the couch looks great. In fact, we've even had people come over and sit on our couch.³ It looks fine on the surface, but deep down in the cracks is lots of junk.

Our lives are like this. **On the surface many of us look great, but on the inside we are a mess.** We put the highlight pictures of ourselves on social media so everybody thinks everything is great. We look amazing online, so we think we've fooled everybody into thinking we have no major problems in our lives.

We even do this at church. We walk in and act like we're politicians: hugging people, kissing babies, and shaking hands. We try to make everything look flawless, but underneath there's a bunch of stuff we are not so proud of. And sometimes other people can be intimidated because they assume they

must be the only ones with a mess under their couch.

The reality is that deep inside each one of us there is a great deal of hurt. All of us carry that around. We're hurting, we're experiencing pain, and many of us are not free because we're held captive to the past. It's like an old couch that we can't get rid of - we keep encountering the mess.

But God doesn't want you stuck in the past, because **if you can't let go of the past you'll never be able to move into the future.** He has taken your mess and nailed it to the cross so you don't have to keep beating yourself up about it. He wants you to experience His grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says it perfectly: "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

In every world religion besides Christianity, you have to do something to have "salvation" or "eternal life." And many of those religions are growing more quickly than Christianity, because they make more sense. Grace is free! We don't deserve grace! So it's difficult to accept.

Brennan Manning says, *"Put bluntly, the American church today accepts grace in theory but denies it in practice. We say we believe that the fundamental structure of reality is grace, not works--but our lives refute our faith. By and large, the gospel of grace is neither proclaimed, understood, nor lived."*⁴

He goes on to say, *“Jesus comes not for the super-spiritual but for the wobbly and the weak-kneed who know they don't have it all together, and who are not too proud to accept the handout of amazing grace. As we glance up, we are astonished to find the eyes of Jesus open with wonder, deep with understanding, and gentle with compassion. This is the God of the gospel of grace.”*⁵

My grandpa once talked to a woman in her nineties who had only a couple of weeks to live. She said, “I’ve been in church my whole life. I’ve served on every committee. But I don’t know if I’ve done enough good things to enter into heaven. I don’t know where I’m going when I die.” My grandpa was able to explain to her that she is not saved by what she has done, but by what God has already done. He has already forgiven her of her sins and she can be confident of her salvation.

How sad that a woman can hear all the “right” words and be in all the “right” places for over nine decades and still never truly receive God’s forgiveness. I hope that when my grandpa talked to her, she finally felt confidence and assurance in God’s grace. Grace assures you that everything has been taken care of. **There is no sin too big that God did not die for on the cross.**

All of us are in desperate need of God’s grace. The second full week of our 40-day Challenge will focus on receiving God’s forgiveness and learning how to forgive other people.

2/40

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#REDLETTERCHALLENGE