

# DAY 1

## SIN

Sin is a small word that packs a mighty punch.

In a culture where we have become addicted to being offended, one of the most offensive things you could say to someone is that they are a “sinner.” We live in a world that likes to accept and affirm all decisions and choices, when in reality, every single one of us is a sinner.

Paul, a follower of Jesus in the first century, declares in Romans 3:10, **“There is no one righteous, not even one.”** Later, in verse 23, he elaborates to tell us that **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”**

Without first understanding and accepting that you are a sinner, you will never be free.

But what exactly is sin?

Sin is derived from an old archery term meaning “to miss the mark.” If the bullseye is the mark you intend to hit, then technically, anything other than bullseye is considered a sin. If you picture a dartboard, that means that no matter if you throw a dart and hit the Triple 20 or completely miss the board, you have sinned. Any attempt that doesn’t hit the intended mark, the bullseye, is a sin.

You can imagine that this is a pretty difficult standard to hit every time. That's exactly my point. You cannot attain the perfect standards that God has set out for you. Even if you just miss a little bit, you still miss.

If you are truly honest with yourself, you have fallen short of what you want for yourself. If you are like me, you have been trying to become a better version of yourself for decades now. You thought that you wouldn't still be dealing with particular sins, bad habits, or addictions. Personally, I am hard-pressed to find anyone in this life who has lied to me or disappointed me more than myself. I know I'm not the only one who feels this way.

And yet, there's a twisted perception of reality that thinks if you just become better and wealthier, buy a better house, get a greater job, just keep improving, etc., then you will be happy and all will be well. I want to remind you that not even the very best version of yourself will ever be good enough for God and will never even fully satisfy you.

The version of yourself in your head, the one with the six-pack abs, cash falling out of your pockets, and a job in a high-rise office, will be just as disappointing to you as the real version of you right now. The version of yourself with the big house, white picket fence, new Tesla, and kids who lead the National Honor Society, will not complete you. You'll find something new about yourself that you don't like. Why? Because you are sinful.

Let me start the freedom experience, as the author of this book, by saying this to you:

"Hi, my name is Zach Zehnder, and I am a sinner."

I have missed the mark. I still miss the mark. And I fully believe, even with right intentions and after receiving the grace of God in my life, I will continue to miss the mark. Sometimes I miss the mark by a little bit. Just barely. Sometimes I miss the mark by a lot. My sins include pride, lust, greed, and wrongful comparison. At times I have been apathetic in my faith, harsh, or even unmerciful to others. I have pursued the god of comfort far too often. I have passed up opportunities to serve others to instead serve myself.

The last thing that I would want you to tell me, if you truly care about who I am, is that you affirm me for who I am fully today. Please don't. Because I am not okay with the wrong parts of me. And as a follower of Jesus, I desperately desire to be a more faithful follower of Jesus. I hate that sin still gets in my way.

The last thing you will hear from me in *Forgiving Challenge* is that I think you are perfect the way you are. You are not. You are sinful. And I would hope that the reason you are reading this book is not so we can have a fake, plastic, inauthentic experience, but so that we can deal with the broken, the messy, and even the worst parts of your story. This is the only way you can truly experience God's freedom, which you may have never thought possible.

Don't hear me wrong. God loves you. Deeply. But He cares about who you are becoming too. Deeply.

God loves you for who you are, but His freedom doesn't leave you just as you are.

In fact, even though the consequence of sin is separation from God, we don't have to remain separated from Him. When we were broken, sinful, and messy, God sent His Son, Jesus, to come and rescue us. God took the first step. Jesus is unafraid of our sin, and He is willing to step into our mess to lift us out.

Psalm 40:2 declares, **“He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.”**

We have a God who brings freedom to our lives through His ultimate rescue. We have a God who is greater and bigger than sin. I love the lyrics from Elevation Worship’s song *Raised to Life*: “Sin was strong, but Jesus is stronger. Our shame was great, but Jesus you’re greater.”<sup>5</sup>

Just as there is a God who loves you, there is an enemy, the devil, who hates you. He is constantly fighting against you. The devil wants you to stay stuck in your sin, to reflect on it, to be defined by it, to suppress it, and to deny it. Our God is not only greater than sin; He is greater than the devil, too.

Sin can ruin you, but it doesn’t have to. The acknowledgement of sin begins the process of freedom that God so desperately wants you to receive.

The admission price into freedom begins with an admission of your sin.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, not only can your sin be defeated, but what you will see in this challenge is that God can even take the worst parts of our stories, even our sins, and use them for His glory.

This 40-day challenge is for sinners to experience freedom. Welcome, sinner.

On Days 6 to 12, you will be introduced to Peter and the sin for which he is most known. Along the way, you’ll be challenged to identify the places and times in which you have missed the mark. Heads up, this will likely be the most painful week. I promise you, though, your pain will have purpose.