

DAY 4

RESTORATION

As great as it is to be freed from the consequences of our sin through the absolution of God, His forgiveness extends further than that. Many don't get to experience complete freedom because they stop at absolution. They know that they have been freed from the punishment of their sins and that they are good eternally with God, but many refuse to enter into the next Freedom Phase.

While I was in seminary, I once preached a sermon highlighting freedom. Some of the most daunting, scary sermons I've ever preached were at seminary in front of classmates and professors. After this class was over, the professor graded my sermon. He said, "Zach, you really explained freedom *from* sin well, but as a listener of your message, there's also freedom 'to *something*.' You failed to bring that out. B-minus."

B-minus isn't the worst grade I got at seminary. But I don't want you to come away with a B-minus when it comes to understanding the freedom God is offering you. So, today I'm taking another crack at my professor's advice.

Yesterday's topic of absolution is "freedom from," and today's topic of restoration is "freedom to."

The freedom that God gives you is not only freedom from sin, but freedom to a life of purpose. God's freedom is greater than simply a pardon and release from punishment. He also wants to release you to be a world-changer working alongside Him.

If we go back to Matt Chandler’s analogy of the courtroom from yesterday, when the judge declares us innocent, even though we are not, I think all of us breathe a little bit easier. To be declared innocent after our laundry list of sins is shocking. We don’t deserve it.

At the same time that this declaration of innocence is happening, we are also fully restored. It’s not that you get absolved, and then after a few years of “proving yourself” you are restored into the person God has called you to be. Absolution and restoration happen at the same time.

However, the understanding of restoration seems to unfold more slowly for some people. It’s hard to wrap our minds around. If I put my own cards on the table, I don’t tend to wrestle with the idea of God paying for my sins. I can see the cross. I know the cross is an aspect of my sin and rebellion. And I know that the sacrifice of Jesus paid for my sins.

Where I struggle is believing that I can still be the person that God has called me to be. I struggle to think that God really enjoys me and could use someone like me because I’ve woefully failed Him in the past. It’s hard *not* to picture Him angry with me after how good He has been to me, and yet I’m still struggling with the same sin that I’ve told Him over and over I’ll never do again.



Restoration hits at identity, and identity is something the enemy loves to attack.

Absolution takes away the guilt. Restoration takes away the shame.

Just as God has fully absolved you, you need to also see that He has fully restored you.

Pastor Timothy Keller writes, "Jesus' salvation is not only like receiving a pardon and release from death row and prison. Then we'd be free, but on our own, left to make our own way in the world, thrown back on our own efforts if we're to make anything of ourselves. But in the Gospel, we discover that Jesus has taken us off death row and then has hung around our neck the Congressional Medal of Honor. We are received and welcomed as heroes, as if we had accomplished extraordinary deeds."¹²

Your past doesn't keep God from using your life in a powerful way. In fact, until you walk in the full restoration that God makes available to you, I don't believe you will fully experience the freedom that God has for you.

You don't just have a just judge, but you have a loving Father as well.

God delights in you like a good father would delight in his son or daughter.

I remember when each of my two sons began to walk. They took two steps, fell down, and we freaked out like they had just won the Olympics! We took videos and sent them to our close friends and family, and then posted them on social media with the hashtag #NextUsainBolt. In the videos, my sons took a few steps, but they also fell flat on their butts. No one who watched the video, including myself, saw

my kids take a few steps and thought they were clumsy clowns for falling. We were celebrating the fact that they were walking, however unsteadily.

That's a picture of how God sees you. He cheers you on. He encourages your pursuit. He wants you to hear loud and clearly today that two steps forward and one step backward is still a step forward. So keep stepping. You are moving in the right direction.

Having a loving Father in heaven, who is not only a just judge, changes everything. No offense to any judges out there, but hanging out with a judge just doesn't sound much fun. Judges seem like they would constantly be quoting rules and laws. But hanging out with dad? That sounds fun. I can play golf with my dad. I can watch a ball game with my dad. I can learn from my dad.

God the judge declares you innocent and fully restored into right relationship with Him. Then He bangs the gavel, takes the robes off, and starts hanging out with you.

Your past sins are cast aside, and you are restored into making a difference in this world. This relationship not only means that you are God's son or daughter, but also that you become a co-worker with Him in this world. You get to work for Him and with Him on an eternal mission.

Yesterday you heard the words "I forgive you."

Today, write your name in the blank to complete this sentence from God:

" _____, I love you."

On Days 27 to 33, you will understand that, like Peter, you too are not only absolved of your sin, but restored into a life of meaning and purpose in this world.