

FORGIVING CHALLENGE ~ Week 6

## **SCARS to STARS**

***“Jesus said to [Peter], “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This He said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)***

***And after saying this He said to him, “Follow me.” John 21: 17b-19***

Raise your hand if you own a cell phone? (Go ahead – show of hands if you have a cell phone.) I’m not going to ask you to take it out of your pocket now. Maybe you already have it in your hands so you can scroll social media, or look at funny cat videos during this sermon. (You laugh because you know you do that kind of thing.)

On your cell phone there is an app that lists all your contacts. The names of people you know, their numbers and email addresses – its all there. These are the people who send email and text messages to you. These are the people who know you and whom you know. These are the people who care about you and whom you care about.

In social media like FaceBook and Instagram there are organizations that ask you, “Follow Us.” When you click to “follow” someone, these are the people and the groups that you enjoy, and you want to see more, and know more about them. And when you “follow” someone, you’re will see them more, and be more influenced by them. And this “follow” feature is really a big deal. Businesses will pay a lot of money to place their advertisements with anyone with lots of followers. And it’s a big deal because you are shaped by who you choose to follow.

In life, there are people we follow. We all need someONE or some people who build us up, people we look forward to, and we DELIGHT to be with them. And they also DELIGHT to be with you. When you see their social media post, your spirit brightens. You want to know what’s new in their lives. When you receive an email

or a text, you see their name and immediately your day just got better. These are the people you shape and mold – the people whose loneliness you ease. And they do the same to you.

Here's a BIG question: Who do you DELIGHT to BE WITH? Who is it who builds you up? Who shows interest in how you are *really* doing? When you've had some bad news, who will call, or come over, or reach out to you – without being asked? Who do you turn to for advice? Whose name and face come to your mind? Everybody needs someone – or some people – like that. Who is it for you?

The word “follow” is a powerful word. Everybody “follows” somebody. Today I want to talk with you about following Jesus.

Many people – and even we ourselves – get the notion that Jesus is just about fire insurance. He makes sure you miss hell. Jesus forgives you and gets you to heaven. Period. No more. But that's not following Jesus. And that's not the sum total of what Jesus calls you to.

Don't get me wrong. It IS true that Jesus has forgiven you. He loves you so deeply that He freely chose to give up His life, to suffer, to endure the hell you deserve, and die on a cross. He did it all so you can be forgiven, and forgiven you are accepted by God into heaven. This is all a gift of God. Heaven is not earned or deserved. It was won completely by Jesus and it is offered to you with no strings attached.

And this is a BIG DEAL that God has forgiven you. In these weeks of “*The Forgiving Challenge*,” we've called God's forgiveness of all your sins “absolution” and we spent a week soaking this in. God is also THRILLED to have you as His. This is the Restoration that we spent all last week rejoicing in.

This week Jesus invites you to live WITH Him. When you live with Jesus, you have peace in your heart and mind. You rest calmly and quietly in Him, even when problems and tragedy invade your life. Living WITH Jesus is loving other people from your heart, wanting their best. Living WITH Jesus is leaving behind your need to manage the impression you make on others, stop from using

people like your family to make you look good. Following Jesus is being content with who God made you to be and what He's given. Living WITH Jesus is to be filled with compassion for others, and patience, and Joy. Living With Jesus is being secure in God's love, and using your abilities and skills to the fullest to gift back to God. When you live WITH Jesus, you delight in Him. He is whom you seek more than anything else.

This is what God calls you to. This is the freedom we have been striving for. This freedom Jesus expressed in just 2 short, simple words, "Follow Me."

We have been using the S.C.A.R.S. acronym. It helps us remember the process God uses to set us free. S is **SIN** – that's true about us all.

C is **CONFESS** – bring that sin to God and ask His forgiveness.

A is **ABSOLUTION** – this is the forgiveness God's declared. Your debt of sin has been cancelled.

This is often – sadly – the place where a lot of us stop. There are some who say "okay, God paid for my sin. I'm good eternally. Whew!" That's good. That's enough for me.

Friends, don't stop there! Because God not only paid your price, but He's interested in fully **RESTORING** you, because He is so delighted and in love with you.

S is **SANCTIFICATION** – and finally this is where freedom comes. Freedom is the "WITH Jesus life." You'll be with Jesus in heaven eternally. But your "WITH Jesus" life begins now. It's a life of delighting in knowing Jesus and living close to Him. It's experiencing the joy, peace, kindness, goodness, and deep love of God.

This week we will spend on Sanctification and this is **the process of being freed from sin, purified, made holy**. It's freedom from having your life ruled by sin. Freedom to live in the gifts Jesus wants to give you. It's delighting in Jesus and He delighting in you.

I have really enjoyed, and I've grown a lot in these weeks of "*The Forgiving Challenge*." I hope looking at how Jesus treated

Peter has been really great for you too. This week we will see Jesus give this freedom to Peter.

Peter sinned. He denied knowing Jesus three times when Jesus needed someone to stand up for Him. Instead, Peter crumbled. Filled with guilt, Peter thought he was disqualified -- too bad for being with Jesus anymore. Pete went back to what he knew -- Fishing. But rather than making him live with this guilt, Jesus showed up on a shore where He cooked them breakfast. And Jesus invited the disciples to eat with Him.

At the meal a conversation happened between Jesus and Peter. This was where Jesus asked Peter three times "Do you love me?" Jesus fully forgave and restored Peter of his sin. Every time Peter responded to Jesus's question, Jesus responded back with "*Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.*" What does that mean? Well, often times in the Bible, a spiritual leader, or pastor would be called a "shepherd." So, Jesus here is saying to Peter, "*I want you to be the pastor of the first church. Peter, you are a leader, and the sheep are going to need you. Because sheep need a shepherd.*"

This is a true story. You can look it up. In Istanbul, Turkey in 2005, some shepherds left their sheep to graze while they went and had breakfast. While they were gone, one sheep jumped off a cliff and died. Then 15-HUNDRED sheep – One THOUSAND – FIVE Hundred sheep - followed the first one and jumped off the same cliff. You would think after the sheep saw each other jumping off and dying, they'd be like, no, not for me. But 1500 of them did this. First one died. Second one died. Third one died. 450<sup>th</sup> one died. Amazingly, more than 1000 survived! You might wonder, how they lived? Well, the first 400 or so that jumped created like a soft, wool pillow at the bottom, so that by the last 1000 sheep were falling onto this like soft, wool, trampoline sheep pillow type of thing. Boing. Boing. Boing. This was the first SkyZone, the first Urban Air trampoline park. If only the shepherds had been around to stop the sheep from jumping over. Sheep NEED a shepherd!

Jesus reminds Peter that sheep need a shepherd. Jesus cares for His people. He went to the cross to save them. Jesus is going away. He wants them cared for. Peter, you are that shepherd. I want you, Peter, to lead My sheep. **SO, WILL YOU**, Peter? Will you follow Me?

But Jesus doesn't just tell Peter, be a pastor, be a church leader, he elaborated. Jesus shared a WHOLE LOT MORE about what's involved for Peter to follow Jesus. Look at what Jesus says:

***“Jesus said to [Peter], “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This He said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this He said to him, “Follow me.” John 21: 17b-19***

Jesus was telling Peter, “This will not be easy. You will die if you follow me.” That's what He means by someone else will dress you and lead you to where you don't want to go. Jesus literally had just experienced that in his brutal crucifixion. They dressed Jesus and led him to the cross.

We would think this would be really bad news, right? But, hang on -- Actually Jesus here was very clearly giving Peter a second chance. Jesus forgave Peter, loved Peter, and now was giving Peter a whole another shot, not just at Pete's calling as pastor, but a second chance to be the man Peter always wanted to be. He was giving Peter a chance to live up to the name that Jesus had given to him, the big boulder, the rock, the faith Jesus' people would need.

Remember, at the Last Supper Peter said, “I'll never deny you, Jesus. Even if all these other jokers do, I'll never disown you. I'll be faithful all the way to the end. You can count on the Rock.” And what did Peter do. Disowned. Denied.

So, what is Jesus doing here? First, He's restored Peter to be the shepherd. And, second, He's also giving Pete a second chance to ultimately do the thing that Peter wanted to do most for Jesus, to be faithful to Him.

He's asking Peter to follow Him. To Live the WITH Jesus life. But take a look! -- Jesus doesn't FORCE him. And He won't force you either. He *invites* you *graciously*. And notice – although He asks Peter AND you to follow, it's not your choice that's the big deal here. It's Jesus' invitation that opens the way for you.

A few weeks after this breakfast and Pete's restoration at the lake, came a holiday called Pentecost. Thousands of people from all over the world were there. There's chaos and confusion. Then ...

***“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.”*** Acts 2:14 And Peter gave an incredible, bold, passionate sermon. Think about this...with the same mouth that denied Jesus so cowardly, he now is courageously preaching a sermon that not only brought 3000 to the waters of baptism, but also began the church.

Only 52 days after Peter couldn't say the name “Jesus” in front of one single solitary servant girl, Peter was courageous before a crowd of thousands! How is this possible? It's possible because Peter became FREE through the forgiveness of Jesus. He lived the rest of his life on earth WITH Jesus.

So cool. Peter lived up to his name. The rock. The big boulder. Even when it cost him everything.

History tells us that Peter was killed for his faith. Peter was led to be crucified, and die in the same manner as Jesus. As they were nailing him to a cross, Peter said he was so unworthy to die the same as Jesus. He asked to be hung upside-down on the cross. Peter, the rock, as he hung upside-down on a cross fulfilled in that moment the very thing he proclaimed at the Last Supper, “I will die for you.” Peter was faithful to the end.

Peter went from a total coward to being totally courageous. This is what freedom looks like.

Freedom for you probably won't involve speaking to thousands of people, or being nailed upside down to the cross. It might – but probably not. Your WITH JESUS life will be as unique to you as God has made you unique. God will use your unique experiences and abilities and your unique wounds – just as He did with Peter.

I began by saying that we all need people we delight to be with, and who, in return, delight to be with us. Soldiers who are away from home, really long to be back with their wives and girlfriends. This is an actual letter from a GI in World War 2. Lt. Henry Milton James served in the Army in Europe, and he wrote to his girlfriend back home. Listen to the absolute delight he feels towards her. He wants to be with her so much! He wrote: *My sweet, darling, precious Honey-babe: December [1944] is with us and Xmas is just around the corner. I only wish that the end of the war was as close as Xmas is! .... Anything so that I can get home to you that much sooner. I am going nuts without you. I miss you and love you so very much. .... I pray for you and think of you and the joys that I had while we were together. .... Well, sweetheart, must close now. Best of everything to all at home and all my enduring love and kisses to you. Your Guy always, Hank”*

Isn't that just great? His desire to be with her is wonderful! Hank did survive the war. They were married and he lived to be 99 years old.

This kind of love to be with someone is what you are invited into with Jesus. Sanctification is the WITH- Jesus life.

A man named Bill Gaultier took Thomas a' Kempis' "Familiar Converse with Jesus," and put it into a letter. Listen to the description of, and the longing for, living with Jesus.

*Dear Jesus,*

*When you are present to me, all is good and nothing seems difficult; but when I forget you, all is hard and empty.*

*Jesus, your voice to me is the most precious sound in existence. If I don't hear you speaking inside my soul, all other comfort is worth nothing, but if you speak but one word to me I am greatly comforted. .... Yes! What a happy moment it is – no matter how difficult my situation is – when you call for me!*

**Blessed to Keep Jesus on My Mind**

*Oh, how foolish I am when I go into any situation without having you on my mind, Jesus. What vanity for me to desire anything outside of you. The world without you profits me nothing. To be without you is grievous hell; and to be with you Jesus is sweet Paradise. When*

*you're with me no enemy can hurt me. To find you is to find the real treasure – the Good above all good – and to become the richest person on earth.*

**Jesus is My One Soul Friend!**

*But I fear that I may soon drive you away Jesus, that I'll turn to outward things and lose the favor of your presence. If I turn from you and lose you Jesus, where will I go? Who else can I turn to as my friend? Without a friend I cannot live well and Jesus you are above all a Friend to me – my one Soul Friend – and without you beside me I'd be sad and desolate. You are the One, Jesus, who I trust and rejoice in above all others! I'd rather have the whole world against me than to have you offended with me. Among all those who are dear to me you stand out Jesus. You are the One that I especially love. .... You are good and faithful above all friends.*

**I Long to Have a Pure Heart for Jesus!**

*.... Jesus, my one consuming desire is that you would be in me .... Yes, Lord Jesus, I long to be pure and free within, devoted entirely to you, and not entangled with any creature. Help me to carry my heart pure toward you so that I can be free from all worldliness and can see clearly how good you are. Oh, to be drawn into you by your grace, to see your glory, to attain to that heavenly happiness, to be emptied of all but you, to take leave of all but your kingdom, to be with you alone Jesus and to be made one with you.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, when your grace comes to me I am made strong and able for all things. But without your grace I am poor and weak and the best I can hope for is your discipline to re-awaken me to seek your face. And when I do need to be disciplined by you please help me not to be discouraged, but to stand with my thoughts fixed on you, enduring whatever hardship comes upon me for your glory.*

*Jesus, you know that I want always to be in the springtime of enjoying your love, but sometimes I need the winter season. Sovereign Lord, you have ordained the seasons, including those that don't feel good, and I love you for this too! Help me to remember that after winter comes spring, after night comes day, after the storm*



*comes a great calm. More than that, help me to trust that all seasons are good when I live them with you Jesus.*

*I love you Jesus! You are the best Friend I could have!*

*Love, (YOUR Name)*

Friends, THIS is heart crying out for the WITH Jesus life. THIS describes true freedom.

Jesus invites you.

Admit your sin. Confess it. Be forgiven and given heaven. Be restored in His love for you. And live now, all your life, and forever in heaven WITH Jesus. Close to Him. In the fullness of His blessing. Come to Jesus and be FREE!

Amen.