

Living Lent | April 7

## God's Grace Has No Exceptions

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*The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”*

*Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.*

*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

**Hebrews 10: 15-25 (NIV)**

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### Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Long before mobile phones became the normal means of communication, my landline phone rang at 2:30 in the morning. Usually that meant it was either an emergency or a wrong number. Startled from my sleep, I grabbed the phone prepared for bad news. The voice on the other end of the line was frantic, but familiar. The caller was a church member, let's call him Tommy, who apologized for calling during the night, but quickly explained his desperation.

I had known Tommy for years. He was a good guy, married, with two kids. I could tell

that Tommy was at the bottom of the well emotionally and spiritually. He said he hadn't slept well in several days because of struggling with a deep sense of guilt. During our conversation Tommy seemed consumed by the ghosts of his youthful and recent sins. More than once he said, "I am underserving of God's grace" and "I'm not sure that Jesus can forgive my sins."

As a young pastor, I was relieved it wasn't a trauma call, and I was trying to think how to respond in a helpful way while still in the fog of being almost awake. Off the cuff I suggested three things: First, I said, "Being undeserving is a prerequisite to receiving grace." Second, I proposed, "I'm not sure which sin is bothering you most, but if it includes a violation of one of the Ten Commandments, I think you are covered." And finally, I added, "If God has forgiven the sins of other human beings for thousands of years, it might be considered arrogant to think that you are an exception."

After a long pause, Tommy said, "I've never thought about it that way before. I think you are right. Even my sins can be forgiven."

Today is Good Friday, a day we reflect on the suffering of Christ on the cross. Let us be reminded that all our sins, from the simplest to the most horrendous, were nailed to that cross, and because of God's grace, we are forgiven.

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### ***Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ***

Dr. Barry Howard serves as the Lead Pastor of the Church at Wieuca, a diverse, mission-driven congregation in the Buckhead Community in North Atlanta. The Church at Wieuca has been serving the Community of Buckhead and beyond from the corner of Peachtree and Wieuca since 1956, providing Christian hope and inspiration to generations. The congregation of Wieuca has as its stated aim to bring about life transformation that leads to transformed individuals, families, communities and ultimately a transformed world. The Church at Wieuca has stood in the gap in reaching out to help the Children of Morningstar in the past and continues to do so now. Dr. Howard and his wife, Amanda, reside nearby in Brookhaven, Georgia. Barry also serves as a columnist and leadership coach for the Center for Healthy Churches.

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