

Celebrate Jesus' Gift of Forgiveness From Sins



"Jesus did not come simply to make bad people good. Jesus came to bring dead people to life." That quote from Christian activist Shane Claiborne sums up the reason Christians celebrate Easter. Because Jesus came back to life on Easter morning, he offers his followers new life as well.

The good news of Easter is that although we're still sinners, Jesus forgives our sins when we confess them. We no longer have to be burdened with our wrongs and the guilt that accompanies them. But that can be tough to remember on a day-to-day basis—for adults as well as teenagers.

In *Group Magazine's* recent survey of more than 26,000 Christian teenagers, half of them agreed with this statement: "I've done things no one really knows about that impact my ability to feel loved by God." The first hurdle is finding someone to confess these burdens to. If your teenagers aren't comfortable talking to you about their sins, they may be able to open up to a youth leader or pastor who can assure them of God's mercy and grace.

The next hurdle is letting go of the remaining guilt. As longtime youth leader Jeanne Mayo said, "We must teach kids not only to repent from sin but to deal with Satan's harassing mind games long after God has wiped the slate clean." Past mistakes don't have to mean lifelong regret. That's a message you can share with your kids long after the Easter fanfare has quieted for another year.

Forgiveness is a gift from God, but then he puts the ball in our court. We, in turn, must forgive others, too. Youth minister Andy Dish expounds on this important topic at SimplyYouthMinistry.com.

Colossians 3:13 spells it out very clearly: "Forgive as your Father in heaven forgave you." On a daily basis, God must get sick of me. But he still forgives me. If God the Father can forgive me for all my stupidity, attitudes, thoughts, and words, then I can forgive others.

1. Forgiveness is a choice. Sure, we don't have to. It's all up to us. We can hear what Paul tells us in Colossians and just toss it away. We all have a choice—and others are watching our choices.

2. Forgiveness is necessary for healing. When you forgive, you're trading the poison inside of you for God's love. Until that happens, you'll walk around with poison inside, dying little by little.

3. Forgiveness is a command. ...but I thought you said it was a choice? It is. But God calls us to a higher calling. He calls us his children and representatives, so we must follow and obey. Bottom line: God says we must forgive because he loves us and wants us to share his love with others.



Forgiveness sounds like a wonderful concept. But putting it into practice—and accepting it—can be challenging for people of all ages. Check out these interesting stats about forgiveness:

- In the groundbreaking *National Study of Youth and Religion*, researcher Christian Smith asked teenagers "How much has religion helped to relieve your feelings of guilt by providing you (with) forgiveness?" Kids' responses were:
 - A lot—27%
 - Some—25%
 - A little—15%
 - None—18%



- In a Gallup Poll, 94% of respondents said they thought forgiveness was essential. But 85% said they'd need outside help to forgive someone. Only 48% of people said they usually tried to forgive others.

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Spark some in-depth conversations about Easter and forgiveness by asking these questions:

1. What does Easter mean to you? How would you explain its importance to a friend who doesn't know Jesus?
2. How often should we ask God to forgive our sins? Does being forgiven wash away all your guilty feelings? Why or why not?
3. What does forgiveness feel like to you? How is it evident in your life after you've received it?
4. How good of a "forgiver" are you, and why? What makes it difficult to forgive when you know you should?



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. Your Easter celebrations will remind teenagers that God loves them and offers them complete forgiveness.
2. Your teenagers won't feel burdened by sin and guilt.
3. God will help your family members freely and frequently forgive one another.
4. The good news of Easter will give your teenagers joy and hope long after the holiday is over.

Verse of the Month

"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ... So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God." (Romans 5:8, 11)

Our merciful God made the ultimate sacrifice on Good Friday. Even though Jesus was sinless, he took all the weight of our wrongdoing on himself. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again on Easter, we not only have the assurance of forgiveness but are God's friends who will spend eternity with him in heaven if we believe in him.

Going Deeper

What did Easter mean for God as a parent? Check out this devotional excerpt from Lane Palmer. To read it all, visit SimplyYouthMinistry.com and type in "The Heartbreak of Easter."

At Easter, we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ came back from the dead after paying the ultimate price for our sins. We celebrate the fact that salvation is available through trusting in the risen Savior of the world. But sometimes we forget: There was more than one sacrifice that was made on the hill called The Skull where Jesus hung on the cross and poured out his life.

There was also a Daddy. He watched in heaven as his precious Son was spit on, insulted, tortured, and finally murdered by people who had no idea who they were killing. The heart of God the Father must have been shattered into a million pieces as the land grew dark and Jesus cried out to his Papa: *"Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!"* (Luke 23:46).

That's why this Easter you need to remember and celebrate not only the earthly side of the gospel message but the heavenly side as well: *God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners* (Romans 5:8). While we were headed for destruction—while we were selfish, sinful people, while we were clueless about the destiny of eternal souls—a Daddy chose to love us and chose to let his one and only Son be crushed by the gears of crucifixion. Let the tragedy and triumph of that first Easter convince you that you have a heavenly Daddy who loves you too much to live without you.

To consider this further, read Psalm 22. It was written from the perspective of Jesus as he was hanging on the cross. Read it and imagine how Jesus felt and how the Father felt as he watched Jesus suffer for you.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Ben Goldwasser and Andrew VanWyngarden formed this Grammy-nominated band almost 10 years ago. Their 2007 debut was a critical smash. Despite their small output, the band was on many best-of-the-decade lists. Their sound is described as "shape-shifting psychedelic pop."

Albums: *Congratulations* (2010), *Oracular Spectacular* (2007)

What Parents Should Know: Like many bands in this genre (The Flaming Lips, for example), MGMT's lyrics are often completely obscure. Songs that are decipherable glorify free love and push back against authority.

What MGMT Says: "We realized that when we smoked pot, we're more relaxed and get into the music a little more and [are] just kind of laid back, so we started smoking pot before we play.... We're also inspired by fans who bring us free drugs."

Discussion Questions: Why do many people have such an easygoing attitude toward marijuana? What are some reasons people give for legalizing pot? Should it be legal? Why or why not? Read 2 Peter 2:19. How does this verse apply to drugs? How might taking drugs affect our relationship with God? with other people?

Christian Artist

Background: Formerly known as the Michael Gungor Band, this group of musicians is a force in modern worship. Gungor co-wrote the hit song "Friend of God" with Israel Houghton. His latest album flirts with a Sufjan Stevens sound, complete with tinny piano, banjo, and airy harmonies.

Albums: *Beautiful Things* (2010), *Ancient Skies* (2008), *All I Need Is Here* (2007)

What Parents Should Know: Gungor's music is heartfelt, beautiful, and compelling. The band has a heart for teenagers, as they've led worship for Acquire the Fire conferences across the country.

What Gungor Says: "Atheism is very in vogue right now. This is kind of wild to me. Being somewhat of a chronic doubter myself sometimes, I can understand agnosticism, but to me, straight-up atheism seems like a pretty depressing faith choice.... You really can't escape faith.... To say that you believe in nothing is a self-contradicting statement."

Discussion Questions: Why do you think atheists believe there's no God? Read John 20:24-29. When have you felt like Thomas? Why do you have faith in God? What keeps your faith strong? Do you have any friends who are atheists? How can you witness your faith to them in a non-confrontational way?