

The Gift of Forgetting
From the Series, “The Different Gifts of Christmas”
By Phil Brainerd
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Introduction

Have you ever forgotten something? There’s something you should have done, and it just slipped past you. It’s a bad feeling, isn’t it?

Sometimes, it’s something small. So, we just give ourselves a mild slap on the forehead. And we say to ourselves, “How could I forget that?” Or maybe it’s something big. Then, it’s not just a bad feeling - That’s a really crummy feeling.



We can try all kinds of things to help. Some people keep lists of “things to do”. Some people put everything in a calendar. Then there’s the simple, “tie a string on their finger” trick. But somehow, every now and then, things just slip through.

Forgetting produces a bad feeling. But there’s something worse: Being on the receiving end of forgetting. In other words, being forgotten. That’s a bad feeling, too.

When I was young, I had a problem with this. My birthday came within a few days of the beginning of the month. Why did that cause a problem? Let’s compare it to today - Today we have computers and all kinds of sophisticated planners. With those things, we get “pop-up” reminders. Prior to computers, people could only write things on a calendar. So, on a regular basis, I would get birthday cards and gifts late. People would say, “I’m so sorry this is late. I turned the page on the calendar, and there was your birthday.”

For me, this wasn’t so bad - I eventually received the card and/or gift. But sometimes, people completely forget important events. Or at least, they forget us.

That’s a real problem at Christmas. Christmas is the time that you hope to be a part of everyone’s celebration. You want to be around family and friends. If people forget you, well, that stinks. Maybe you didn’t get the card from someone who normally sends it? Maybe you didn’t get invited to the party? Being on the receiving end of forgetting is, as we said, a bad feeling.

But let’s ask a question: Is there ever a time, when it’s a **good thing** to be on the receiving end of forgetting? Could such a thing be?

We're in our Advent series, "The Different Gifts of Christmas". Today, we have something different - We're going to talk about "The gift of forgetting".

Let's start by considering a well-known Christmas story. Two-Thousand years ago, some shepherds were spending the night looking over their sheep. All of a sudden, an angel appeared to them. The angel brought along some friends - Lots of friends. They had a very important message. Here's what they said.

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:13-14)

Look at that: "...on earth peace". On the date this message is being presented, we're observing the second day of the Advent holiday season. On this day, we consider the topic of peace.

Peace. Peace is one of those things that everyone wants. Maybe it's the parent of small children? Think about that rare quiet moment when the kids aren't fighting with each other. Maybe it's the busy office worker whose phone is always ringing. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to have some quiet so you can get ahead on your work?

But that's not the kind of peace we're talking about. When the angels appeared to the shepherds on that night so long ago, they proclaimed a different kind of peace than most people would expect. To understand it, you have to understand the state of our world.

Let me give a warning: There may be totally new stuff ahead. If you're one of our regulars, some of what you're about to hear is review - It's familiar. If you're new, it could be that you're about to hear something totally new. This may be unlike anything you're ever heard before. So, hang in.

You see, when we as human beings look around, we don't see everything. Much of the universe is invisible to us. Imagine that you wake up one morning and you look out your window. Maybe you see a bit of green - Some trees and bushes. Maybe you see a street. Maybe you see your neighbor's house. Whatever you see, normally you see something that's pretty stable - Maybe even quiet.

But if you could see the world through the eyes of God, here's what you'd see: You'd see a battle. All around us is an invisible world. In that world, there are titanic forces at war with each other. Most people are totally unaware of it.

Let's ask a question: Where did this all come from? Who's fighting in this war? We learn about it in the Bible. Let's read:

1 Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
2 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
3 "Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles."

(Psalm 2:1-3)

You see, a long, long time ago God created the heavens and the earth. God is the great king of this earth and the whole universe. He sits on the throne. He placed the first humans in the garden of Eden with the intention that they would rule the earth under his leadership.

Sadly, Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden. Another way of saying that is to say that they **rebelled** against God. They didn't know it, but when they did that, they started something bigger. As the human race grew, more and more people joined in. Now, it's everyone - It's a world-wide rebellion against God. From the lowest to the highest, we are all involved in the conflict.

Here's where somebody raises their hand, and they say, "Excuse me - I'm not involved in any rebellions!" Sadly, it's possible to be involved in a rebellion without knowing it. Let me give you an example. Many of you are familiar with Martha Stewart. She's a businesswoman who shares all kinds of helpful advice on gracious living. She talks about recipes and decorations for your home and a whole lot more.

When you become as successful as Ms. Stewart, you make a lot of money. Now, there a problem with making money: You have to pay taxes on your money. You also have to follow **rules** for managing your money and your properties.

Martha got into serious trouble with the government in 2004 when she was charged with insider trading and tax evasion. She was found guilty and spent 5 months in federal prison. In every trial, the defendant gets to make a plea: Guilty or not guilty. She pled, "Not Guilty."

Now, here's the problem. Sometimes in life, it doesn't matter what you think. When you live in a country, you are responsible to learn the laws of that country. If you break the laws, ignorance is not an excuse. If you break a law and you are caught, you will be punished. It doesn't matter if you don't think you're guilty. Ignorance may be taken into account when it comes time to determine the punishment. However, you are still guilty.

Let's say you know the laws, but you don't agree. Nevertheless, the law is the law. You are expected to follow the law whether you agree or not. Again, the fact that you don't think you're guilty does not matter in a court of law.

There's another level to all this. We have to ask the question: "Who made the laws?" We live in a world where governments make the laws. In the United States, it may be a local government. It might be a county or a state. Or it might be the federal government. Here's the point: ***If you break a law, you are in essence rebelling against the people who made the law.***

In a world run by human beings, it could be that a given law is unfair. You could argue that breaking laws made by fallible humans is not always such a bad thing. So, here's the next question: Is there such a thing as a perfect law? Let's read something:

The law of the Lord is perfect... (Psalm 19:7)

Yes, there is such a thing as a perfect law - The law of the Lord. "The law of the Lord is perfect."

What allows God to make perfect law? Let's read something that God said to the prophet Isaiah:

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."

(Isaiah 55:8-9)

You see, God is infinite. He is all-wise. He is all-knowing. Those things allow him to make the best law. He is also good. He is holy. The word "holy" means several things: One is to say that God is free from any moral blemish. He is perfect. Those things, allow him to make perfect law.

If we break the laws of earthly rulers, we ***rebel*** against those rulers. If we break the perfect laws of God, we rebel against ***him***.

How many people are there on our planet? At current count, more than seven billion. How many of them have broken God's laws? The apostle Paul tells us:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)

There are more than seven billion people on our planet, and all of them have sinned. All have rebelled. That's a whole lot of rebellion.

Recall, in our universe, there are lots of invisible things - Things we can't see. That's one of the things that makes dealing with sin difficult. We don't always see the sin. And, we don't always see the results.

So sadly, yes, we have all participated in the rebellion. That's why God looks down from heaven and sees a warzone.

Here's where we need to ask a really hard question: What should God do to people who have rebelled against him? The apostle Paul has more to say about the problem of sin and rebellion.

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)

What should the perfect God, who wrote the perfect law, do to people who have rebelled against him? We're told that the wages of sin is death.

Well, this is all bad. What do we do? Do we just sit around waiting for judgement? No. Why? Because of what the angels said: "...on earth peace". When the angels came, they brought a message from God. Here's the message: **He is making an offer of peace.**

How does that work? Let's think this through. All have sinned. The wages of sin is death. So, in order to offer us peace, we have to do something about the problem of sin. So here is what God is willing to do: **He is willing to offer to us the gift of forgetting.**

Let's read from the prophet Isaiah:

"I, even I, am he who blots out
your transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more.
(Isaiah 43:25)

Look at that: "...and remembers your sins no more." So, God offers to us, to you and to me, the gift of forgetting. He is willing to forget our sins, so that we can have peace with him.

Now, we could stop here and enjoy this wonderful truth from the Scriptures. However, it becomes even more precious if you understand how it works. So, let's take a few minutes to understand this.

The first thing we see is that God **blots out** our transgressions. What does that mean?

You see, everything that you have done in your life is seen by God. Think about that. There is nothing you've ever done that is invisible to God. Scary, huh? And you know what? He **remembers** everything he sees.

The apostle John saw a vision of this. In his vision, he saw the end of the age. Here's what he was allowed to see:

12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.
(Revelation 20:12)

According to this, everything that everyone has done is written in a book. That includes the good and the bad. Here's what God's offering: He says he's willing to **blot out** the bad.

Notice, he doesn't say "erase". We've all tried to erase things. When you erase, there is always a little something left over. God says he's willing to "blot out" our sins. That way he will remember them no more.

Let's consider what this looks like in the eternal realm.

You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
(Micah 7:19)

This is a symbolic image: God will throw our sins into the depths of the sea. I heard of a pastor who was very creative. He had someone make a pool in the front of his church. Then, he gave everyone a pebble. Then, he had everyone get up and walk to the front of the church. There, they all took turns throwing their pebbles into the pool. Once the pebble went in, people couldn't see it anymore.

That's creative. Only it's limited. Here's why: Our sins are not like a pebble. Our sins are like a boulder - A boulder so big that we could not possibly pick it up and move it. Instead of picturing a pebble, picture that. Then imagine that a giant comes along - A giant so big, that he can easily pick up the boulder and hurl it out into the ocean. It goes a hundred miles out and sinks into water so deep that no one will ever find it. That's the picture here. God is willing to "hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea". And once there, he remembers them no more.

In another place, it says this:

...as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
(Psalm 103:12 NIV)

There are only two ways to measure direction on planet earth: There's north and south, and there's east and west. They're different. Here's why: There **is a limit** to how far you can travel with north and south. If you go far enough north, you're at the north pole. Then, you can only go south. If you go far enough south, you're at the south pole. Then, you can only go north.

But east and west have no limit. You can travel east. And travel some more. And you never reach the end of east. It's the same with west. There's no limit.

That's how far God will remove our sins from us: As far as the east is from the west. Once they are removed, he will remember them no more.

Let's ask another question: How does God do this? There's a word that mobsters on TV and in movies sometimes use: "Fuhgeddaboutit". In other words, "no big deal". Is God like the mobsters we see on TV and the movies? Does God look at our sins and say that? Does he think our sins are no big deal?

No, God is much, much more. There are things that go along with being the King of the Universe. The perfect God is also the perfect judge. He is responsible to make sure that justice happens. If he just lets everything go that wouldn't be justice.

How about the serial killer? Does God say, "Hey, you killed 20 people. You tortured them before you murdered them. Fuhgeddaboutit!"

No. We read earlier that sin has wages: "The wages of sin is death." For true justice to occur, a price must be paid. When there is sin, **someone has to die**.

That's the most wonderful part of Advent. Justice came through Jesus Christ. We only read part of that verse. Here's the whole sentence.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he didn't come to have a big party on the earth. He came for many reasons, but one of them was to die for the sins of the world. He died to pay the penalty for our sins. The apostle Paul wrote about it:

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

So Christ died for our sins. He paid the price. Because he paid the price, God can offer us the gift of forgetting.

Here's where this becomes practical: What do you have to do to receive this gift? Are you taking notes? Here's what you have to do: Ask! Let's read what the psalm writer, King David, asked of God when he sinned:

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. (Psalm 51:9)

Ask God to forgive you. He will happily do it. If you'd like to learn how, contact us. There are some important links at the end of this article.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Forgetting is a bad feeling. Being at the receiving end of forgetting is even worse. Unless: ***The forgetting is on purpose.***

Our Lord Jesus Christ came to the earth 2000 years ago. He came, not to be invited to a party, but to die. When he died, he fulfilled the requirements that allowed the Great King of the Universe, the perfect judge, to forgive our sins. And forgive means forget.

Ask God to forgive your sins. And he will give you the wonderful gift that we've learned about today: The gift of forgetting.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net