

Does God forgive and forget?  
Do I have to forgive and forget?  
Will God forgive me if I can't forget?

# *Forgive* & **Forget?**

By Daniel Kunau

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible, King James version.

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If I can't forget, have I forgiven?

*Must I forgive, again?*

Does God expect me to forgive **AND**  
forget?

*What if I can't forget?*

Is it possible to forgive and forget?

**What is forgiveness?**

**DOES GOD FORGIVE AND FORGET?**

*What does forgiveness look like?*

Is it enough to forgive once?

**If I don't forget, can I be forgiven?**

# How do you explain to a five year old girl how God can *know* everything, yet *forget* our sins?

For 10 years I worked with Children's Church at a church located in southern Colorado. I say worked with, instead of taught, because I'm sure they taught me more than I ever taught them. Kids are incredibly honest, and you can learn a lot if you listen to what they are really saying. One day a little boy announced to the class, "Dad's the boss at our house 'cause Mom said so, and what Mom says, goes!" I truly experienced the depth of their honesty when I overheard a little girl talking to her best friend. She said, "What hurts me more than when Mommy spansks me, is when Mommy spansks Daddy."

My heart would ache for those kids. Even in our small church there were several four and five years olds who were the acting adults in their family. These kids would help their younger or even older siblings get ready, and sometimes help keep them in line. For some of those kids, things that are considered child abuse, they considered normal. I wondered how those little kids could go through a day, much less through life, with such heavy burdens. Maybe God dishes out grace the same way the lunch ladies did when I was in school. The lunch ladies would discriminate. When a tiny first-grade girl went through the line, she would get a small scoop of mashed potatoes. The lunch lady would tell her, "Here Honey, if you can eat all of that, come back and I'll give you some more." When a husky twelfth-grade football guard came though, the lunch lady would say, "Here, I'll save you a couple of trips," and scoop three giant portions onto his plate. I began to think that maybe God hands out grace in a similar fashion. A hulking football player who seems to have his life in order only gets a little scoop of grace on his plate. God might say, "Here's enough to get you through the day." But for those little kids who were raising their parents and their siblings, every day God would start out with three big scoops knowing 'there's more where that came from if you need it.'

*"You said 'God knows everything,'  
so how can God know everything  
yet forget our sin?"*

I had instructed the class that they could ask me anything about God or the Bible and I would give them an honest answer, although that answer might sometimes be 'I don't know.' One day, we had a guest speaker who taught about how God forgets our sins and tosses them into the Sea of Forgetfulness. As soon as the lesson was over, two little girls made a beeline for me and asked, "You said 'God knows everything,' so how can God know everything yet forget our sin?" I was so proud that they asked me. I began to give them the answer my pastor had told me just days before, "Well, that's one of the great mysteries of God, God's ways are higher than ours and we just can't understand it." At this point, the little girls started walking away. I thought, "Where are you going? I'm trying to answer your question." Now maybe you have noticed that women, no matter what their age, have this gift of looking at you and saying what seems like a thousand words with one look. One of the little girls turned around and gave me the look that just shouted, "If you don't know, just say so!" Then one little girl said to the other, "Let's go ask Pastor Jim, he'll know!" I was crushed because I knew Pastor Jim had the same answer that I was trying to give them. I also knew that if those little girls didn't buy my answer as an adequate answer for children, then it shouldn't be an acceptable answer for me – an adult who studied and taught the Bible.

Those two little girls were usually a trio of little girls. I was thankful that the other little girl wasn't there that day. I was glad that she didn't hear me when I got the answer so terribly wrong. When you first saw the third little girl, it was obvious that she dressed herself. I don't know if she even owned a hairbrush. Her shoes were often on the wrong feet with mismatched socks and her jeans were full of holes. In spite of that, this little girl had an incredible boldness and a huge love for people, animals, and everything. She would go up to people and ask them, "How are ya?" If they said fine, she would get right in their face and look right into their eyes and say, "Really?" Then she would wait for an answer. At this point, most people would pour out all their concerns and worries.

A year or so earlier, when the little girl was four years old, she had been coming for a few weeks to the class. One day when all the children were outside playing, she came over to me and asked, "You know that thing that Sharon and you

have been talking about where you ask Jesus to come into your life and you get to go to heaven? I'm just wondering, how old do you have to be to do that?"

I felt my Bible College training kick in, "Well, that's called the Age of Accountability," and I started to educate her. She interrupted me pretty quickly, "No, I mean years old...like four, or five, or ten?" She curled up her nose really hoping it wasn't more than five.

"It's not any specific age," I said. "First you have to realize that you are a sinner."

"Oh! I'm a sinner all right! One of the worst ones ever!" She said. "It's just awful the things that I've done."

"Okay. Well, second, you have to realize that since you are a sinner, you are worthy of death and the wages of sin is death, and there is nothing you can do to undo that."

"Oh yeah," she told me. She'd tried everything, she was just hopeless, and nothing worked. She didn't know what to do. "What else?" she asked.

"Then you need to realize that Jesus Christ came here for that purpose. To live a sinless life so He could pay the price for our sin. Through His death, we can have forgiveness and go to heaven." There was silence as I was trying to think of what else I needed to say.

"You mean we could do that, like, right now?"

"Errr, yes! Would you like to do that?"

"Mmm hmm!" she exclaimed.

We knelt right there, and I said what I thought would be an age-appropriate prayer and she repeated it. I kept thinking about how young she was, and wondered if she was really old enough to understand what we were doing. I decided to watch her to see what might come of this decision. Instantly she had boldness for her faith. When she started Kindergarten, after the first week, she ran over to tell me exactly how every one of the 20 plus kids in her class responded when she told them that Santa Claus wasn't real, but Jesus was. She told me which ones believed her, and which ones did not.

One of the best barometers for measuring someone's spirituality is listening to how that person talks to God. When I let some of the kids pray in Children's Church, I knew better than to ask the little girl to pray unless we had plenty of time. I knew she had made the rounds that morning before church and knew what everyone was going through and would pray for every person and their needs and their pets' needs and their families. What really impressed me was how much of her prayers were over spiritual needs. She would pray for someone's daddy because he needed to be saved. She would always start every prayer the same. "Dear Jesus, thank you for this beautiful day, and thank you for everything that has happened."

**T**his little girl wasn't perfect though. One Sunday, she ruined my entire Easter morning lesson. I wanted to illustrate to the children how difficult it would be to lay down your life for someone, so that they could better understand the price that Christ had paid. There had just been a terrorist attack on a cruise ship, with a hostage killed and thrown overboard. I reminded them of the attack and said, "We need to decide, if terrorists came in here and kidnapped us, who would be picked for the terrorists to execute?" I asked for volunteers. I wanted them to think about who would be willing to die for the rest of them. After four or five seconds I was ready to move on when suddenly the little girl raised her hand. She blurted something out and it shocked me so much I had to ask, "What did you say?"

"Pick me." She said louder, "I'll do it."

"You would lay down your life for your friends that quickly?"

“Well, yes, of course, because if they picked someone who wasn’t saved, they wouldn’t go to heaven, and I know that I’m saved, so I’m ready. I’ll do it.”

With that response, she had totally ruined my next illustration. I was going to ask them who would lay down their life for the terrorists, the enemy? Obviously the terrorists were not saved, so she would have volunteered for them too. She truly demonstrated the love of Christ.

As I watched this young girl grow and blossom, I began to understand that she had as real a salvation as anyone.

A year or so later, I thought I heard her say something that concerned me. I asked her to clarify what I thought I had heard. The little girl revealed a series of tragic events to me. Under the care of a household member’s supervision, she had been violated. It had happened several times, by several different boys. I asked her if she had told her mother. When she shook her head no, I found her mother and told her. Her mother responded that she would check into the matter to see if it had really happened. “Good,” I responded. “If it is true, are you going to call the authorities, or am I?” “Well, let me check into it before you call the authorities,” she responded. She did check, and she did call the authorities.

This little girl’s life was turned inside out and upside down. Her parents ended up getting an ugly divorce. She had to see cops, a psychiatrist, go to court, and all the other things associated with child molestation, custody, and divorce. She needed at least ten scoops of grace to get through this and get on with her life. She seemed to do just that as if nothing had ever happened. Even in class I would ask her to pray and all her prayers still began the same way, “Dear Jesus, thank you for this beautiful day, and thank you for everything that has happened.”

Normally those words would sound hollow. Every day isn’t beautiful, not to me anyway, but she actually lived that way. In Colorado, there are usually about five to 10 days where the sky is dreary and overcast and the world feels bland. Those days make me want to hibernate. On just such a Sunday morning, I was dragging myself to the Church, running late, and when I got there, she was running up and down the sidewalk pointing excitedly, chirping at everyone. “Look at the sky? Look at the sky! It’s so beautiful! Look! Look! The sky’s silver!”

I looked up at the dingy gray sky and said, “No, that sky is gray.”

“No! It’s silver! Look!”

I looked once more to amuse her. “No. That’s a dull, dreary gray.”

“Oh, but haven’t you ever heard that there’s a silver lining behind every cloud?” God most certainly has a sense of humor because at that very moment angels must have opened the clouds just enough to let a sliver of light shine through the clouds. “Over there!” She exclaimed, “Look!”

As ornery as ever, I replied, “That’s not silver, that’s white.”

The little girl smiled and said, “Oh! But look it’s a silvery white!” She skipped away to find more appreciative ears. She lived every day this way, and she meant it when she said, “God thank you for this beautiful day.” How could she continue though with the rest of her prayer? “Thank you for everything that has happened.” How could she say that? How could she possibly mean that? She never brought up the traumatic events that had happened; she never mentioned them. I started to wonder if she had mentally blocked it out or maybe she had forgotten about it. So I stopped worrying about her then, and decided that was between her and God.

Not too long after the gray/silvery-white sky day, when I thought all the kids were outside playing, I was arranging things in the room. I heard an eerie noise like the death cry of a wounded rabbit. It’s the most effective coyote call there is, saturated with agony; the cry draws coyotes from miles around. It makes your blood curl and your hair stand on end, and if you ever hear it, you’ll remember that sound for the rest of your life. In the room, I heard just that cry of agony. It wasn’t very loud and was followed by a slight *thump, thump, thump*. Another cry of pain and then *thump, thump, thump*. I wondered if someone outside was killing a cat. What’s going on? It didn’t really sound like it was coming from outside, so I searched around the room. That’s when I found the little girl wedged into a corner like she was playing hide and seek. She was perfectly still. Too still. I realized she was holding her breath.

I knelt down to her level and asked, "Are you alright?" When she turned around her little forehead was dark red and puffy, her eyes were nearly swollen shut from crying, and the front of her dress was soaked with tears. Until that point, I had never heard her raise her voice. She screamed, "I don't wanna go to hell! I don't wanna go to hell!" She repeated this over and over.

As I tried to calm her down, I said, "You don't have to worry about that. Don't you remember, right here in this room when you asked Jesus to come into your heart?"

"But I can't forget! I can't forget! I don't wanna go to hell, but I can't forget." She sobbed harder and took a quick breath. "The harder I try to forget, the more I remember it!"

"No, don't forget, remember that you asked Jesus to come into your heart?"

"No, you don't understand."

Then she explained to me that the person, the same person who was supposed to be supervising and protecting her when she was violated, had apologized to her and told the little girl she had to forgive them. The person told her she had to forgive them just like God forgave her, and that the Bible said "if you don't forgive like God forgives, then your sins won't be forgiven." This person told her that since God forgives and forgets our sins, this little girl had to forget what had happened or she hadn't truly forgiven them, and she was headed to hell.

*When God forgives, He never mentions it again. ... God CANNOT forget anything, because God knows everything.*

I was floored. I didn't have an answer for her horrible dilemma. My first thought was that I needed to find a safe place to lock this child up until she was in her 20's or something. My second thought was that there was going to be a justified homicide, or two, maybe three, or four. Then I realized that not only was that unchristian and illegal, but worst of all, it wouldn't do anything to solve her problem. So, I got angry at God. "God, she's only six years old! How could you allow this? Why would you do this? God, you OWE her an answer. I don't have an answer, and I don't have a clue how to answer this question, but YOU allowed this to happen, so YOU need to answer her."

I looked down into those two little tear-reddened eyes that were screaming, "Please. Please help me. I need an answer."

I angrily told God, "She needs an answer. Send an angel, DO something, and I would really love to hear this answer! I am as clueless as she is, and we need an answer right now. God, do something for this little girl." At this point, that precious little girl gave me that look that I was so familiar with, the one that said, "If you DON'T know, then just SAY so!" Inside I was screaming at God, "God, do ANYTHING! Help her! She needs an answer right now! Use anything, in fact, I don't even have to hear it, but just speak to her through an angel or something. Use anything. God, even use me." To my surprise, words started pouring out of my mouth but what those words were completely shocked me! "Don't you dare forget what happened. God knows everything and even if He did forget when you asked for forgiveness, He knows the person who did this to you. He knows what they did. He knows what you're going to think before you even think it. If anyone was going to think of it again, then He would know again. When God forgives, He never mentions it again. He never brings it up to your account. He doesn't hold that against you. God CANNOT forget anything, because God knows everything. He always has and He always will."

The little girl looked up at me and cocked her head to the side. In the silence I could almost hear the gears turning. She blinked a couple of times, said, "Oh! Okay," and went skipping off with a great big smile. I was left there thinking, "God, I hope we didn't just lie to her because what I had said didn't make any sense to me." What had made perfect sense to the little girl completely contradicted my understanding of Jeremiah 31:34b, '...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.' So I decided to go and check it once again.

I had read that verse so many times that my Bible would almost open up to the very page. I knew exactly where it was in the upper right hand corner, but this time my Bible opened to a different passage. I looked at the bottom of the left page and right in the middle of Ezekiel 18:22 I read, 'All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him...' I thought if that was the same word that was used in Jeremiah 31:34, my whole theory about what God forgets was ruined. Well, it was the same word, and that word was *Zakar*. *Zakar* is used all 18 times that the word

'mentioned' is used, and all 9 times the word 'record' is used in the Old Testament. The KJV never associates *Zakar* with the word 'forget.'

I had a difficult time accepting that. As I struggled with it, I began to realize that the reason that I thought God had to forget my sins was because it was completely incomprehensible for me to think that God could remember my sins – knowing ALL the sins I had committed – and not hate me. How could He ever let me into heaven if He didn't forget my sins? Many years later, when I studied the actual meaning of the words of Romans 9:23, I learned that God created me for the very purpose of demonstrating the extreme depth of God's mercy. How could I be a demonstration of God's mercy if my sins had been completely forgotten? If God forgives and forgets, wouldn't that require me to do the same?

*It was completely incomprehensible for me to think that God could remember my sins ... and not hate me. How could He let me into heaven if He didn't forget my sins?*

As she grew, the little girl somehow managed to thrive despite her conditions. Around thirteen years of age, she outgrew Children's Church, and life for her seemed to be going pretty well. One day I thought I heard her mention something about suicide, so later I caught up with her and asked how she was doing.

"Oh, I'm fine," she shrugged.

Just as she had done so many times when she was little, I got right in her face and looked her right in the eyes. "Really?" I asked.

Recognizing that I had turned the tables on her, she responded, "Well, there is this one thing. My biology teacher asked us how could God be real? What color is God? How much does He weigh? We can't measure God, so how could that type of God create this whole universe? What if it all just happened by chance? What's the use of living if that's all there is?"

I nodded at her. "Do you know what I do when I have doubts?"

She looked at me, eyes wide with shock, "YOU have doubts?!"

"Everybody has doubts occasionally. When I have doubts I look at the alternatives."

"Like what?"

"Well, like chance. What color is this chance?"

"Well ... it's invisible."

"How much does it weigh? How do you measure chance? How powerful is chance?"

"Oh, really powerful, 'cause look at everything here. It has to be really powerful."

"No," I said. "That's where you are wrong. Chance has zero power. Chance can't tip a coin balanced on its edge. Chance can't create one molecule. Chance is just a word that we give for mathematical probability. Chance isn't anything. Chance doesn't even exist. Also, how smart is chance? How well could chance design a universe like the one we live in? I don't have enough faith to believe in chance, or anything less than an all-powerful and all-knowing God."

She looked away with a grin, "Okay, I see your point. I guess I don't either."

A few months after that conversation, she contacted me. Again I asked her how she was doing. "I'm doing really well, but I want you to know one thing. If I die, or get killed, even if it looks like there's a suicide note, I want you to know it wasn't a suicide. This person (the one who had told her to forgive and forget or she was going to hell) did it." I told her that we could get her attorneys; we could get her out of that house.

“No, no!” She exclaimed. “I’ve been witnessing to them. They told me they might go to Bible Study with me, and even had a Bible out on the counter.” She was willing to risk her life in order to witness to them, even if they never changed.

*“I don't have enough faith to believe in chance, or anything less than an all-powerful and all-knowing God.”*

Several years later I contacted her to ask for permission to tell her story, knowing that she would never discuss it. “It’s such an amazing story.” I told her. “Would you mind if I shared it with other people to tell them about forgiveness and forgetting?” She replied, “Well, the thing that bothers me the most about this is that professing Christians might hate the people involved in my story. What if these people lose their salvation because they can’t forgive?” That was the only thing bothering her, that other people, once they learned what had happened, might not be able to forgive those involved and might end up in hell.

Before I could say anything, she looked me in the eyes and asked, “Have YOU forgiven them?” I immediately wanted to shy away and blurt out an answer like, “Who? Me?” I wasn’t the one who needed to forgive. She gave me the look that said, “Don’t you dare! I want an answer!”

So, I turned, looked her right in the eyes and said, “Yes, a thousand times.” Our eyes briefly connected, she teared up a little, and turned away nodding in affirmation. It seemed that in the instant our eyes were connected I heard her heart say, “Yes, ten thousand times. Every day. Every single day.” The one thing that I do know is that when I looked in her eyes, I saw true forgiveness. It is not something you forget.



*This is a true story, only names have been changed to preserve anonymity.*

זָכַר

Zakar ~ remember, mention, record

יִזְכְּרוּ

Yizzakeru ~ to be mentioned

אֶזְכָּר

Ezakar ~ I will remember

## Scriptures for further study

... be sure your sin will find you out. Numbers 32:23

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14

**...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Jeremiah 31:34(b)**

... for thine eyes *are* open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: ... Jeremiah 32:19

**All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him ...  
Ezekiel 18:22**

All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: Ezekiel 18:24

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, ... Ezekiel 18:30

None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: Ezekiel 33:16

... I will judge you every one after his ways. Ezekiel 33:20

... Surely I will never forget any of their works. Amos 8:7

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:12

... for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; Matthew 10:26

every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account ... Matthew 12:36

But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.  
Mark 11:26

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Romans 14:12

Every man's work shall be made manifest: ... it shall be revealed by fire; I Corinthians 3:13

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. I Corinthians 13:12

... even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. Colossians 3:13

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Hebrews 4:13

