It's time to set someone free!

Freeze Frame Living

Moving Past the Mental Pictures of Someone's Sin

Dr. Eddie Lawrence
Appreciation

My family knows better than anyone else, the amount of time that is invested in each sermon I preach and book that I write. I am so thankful to them for giving me time and space to give myself to the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Thank you Mikki for your tireless support and unwavering encouragement in my life. What a wonderful wife you are! Thank you Andrew, Kara Beth, Elliott and Nathan for allowing Dad to spend time at the computer studying, digging, and typing till it’s done.

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Thank you to those of you who read this work. I pray that the Holy Spirit would use it to bless you and
strengthen you so that your walk will be well-pleasing to the Lord. Be blessed in Jesus Name!
Abraham was a man who lied and slept with his maid, yet so many people still talk about how great he was. Another man people give much honor to is Moses. Moses was a murderer and at times a man who lost his temper. Why are people still honoring him today? Another man held in high esteem by the church is David. However, he committed adultery; he lied, and gave orders for an innocent man to be killed to cover up his immoral affair. Despite all of this, so many people still hold David up as a great man of God.

What about Peter? People talk about how great Peter was. He walked on water. They must have forgotten that he cursed and denied the Lord. He lost his temper and couldn’t keep his mouth shut. He was somewhat of a braggart. But to hear some people, you would think that Peter was a truly wonderful man.
The last man I will mention is the Apostle Paul. People give him a lot of respect despite how he locked up Christians, had them arrested and cast his vote to see them killed. I mean enough of giving honor to all of these failures! Right? I hope you disagree with what you have read so far, I sure do.

For the sake of those who may be reading the first few paragraphs of this book and want to lay it down, in no way do the aforementioned statements represent my feelings about these truly wonderful men of God we read about in Scripture. I said all of this because we all can be guilty of a wrong mentality toward others. These kind of statements are made by people who are guilty of what I call freeze-frame living. Freeze-frame living is the problem which causes us to look at people through their past mistakes instead of through the grace of God. Have you ever been watching a movie and it just froze on one frame? You sat there with you eyes glued to that one frame. Usually after a second or two, the mistake is handled, and the movie advances.
This often happens in real life. We are tempted to focus on one frame of someone’s life and never advance to where they are now. We freeze them in place, usually in the middle of a failure. I’m glad God doesn’t do that to us. The Bible presents its heroes in real life, failures and successes.

Let’s face it; most of us do not have a problem honoring Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul. I certainly do not have a problem with it. We know they were men who failed, but somehow we accept their failure and realize that God could still use them. However, we deny the truth of God’s Word if we think that the grace and forgiveness of God is just for these great men who lived so long ago. You may get angry at an author making statements like I made to begin with; but are you guilty of thinking such thoughts about people whom you do know personally? It may be that you even struggle with feeling that way about yourself. You may have difficulty moving past your failure into your future. I pray this little booklet will
help demolish such negative thinking about others and yourself.

Freeze-frame living is where you focus on someone and all you can think about is the worst day of their life, that one time when they really lost it, that big mistake they made. In this frame of mind, it is difficult to imagine that person’s life independent of the sin they committed or the hurt they caused you. The snapshot of that sin becomes etched in your mind, framed and hung for your constant viewing pleasure.

In Genesis 19 we have a literal picture of what it is to become frozen in place. The city of Sodom fell under the judgment of the Lord. Before the fire and brimstone fell, Lot and his family were able to escape. We find in Genesis 19:24, “Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah from the Lord out of the Heavens. So He overthrew those cities and what grew on the ground.” God unleashed judgment. Do you remember God’s direction to Lot and his wife to leave
and do not look back? That is the call of the Lord on our life. We do not look back to where our heart used to be. We do not look back to the past that is behind us. We do not look back to that world of sin that we used to be engaged in. Jesus also warned us of the wrongness of the heart in the person who puts their hand to the plow and looks back.

Genesis 19:26 reveals the sad event in the life of Lot’s wife. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. I imagine somewhere over there, buried underneath the surface in that ancient sand would be Lot’s wife frozen in place. She got out of Sodom, but Sodom did not get out of her. Her body left Sodom but her heart remained there. Her heart was still in the place of judgment; therefore, she became frozen in place and that is how we see her today. She made a choice that stopped her in her tracks. Her family moved on, but she was left behind. So when we think of Lot’s wife, we visualize her body frozen in place with her head
turned back toward Sodom. We see her paralyzed in the place that should have been only in her past.

I think we do that to other people who have made the mistake of looking back, yet due to the grace of God they have been restored and are moving on. They no longer want to go back to Sodom. They realize that their sin has been judged. Their sin was judged at Calvary. It is under the blood of Jesus and now they are moving on. But if we are not grace conscious, we will look at them and refuse to see them moving on in Calvary’s grace; instead, we see them like Lot’s wife, frozen in the place of their sin. Even though God’s Word says the judgment of their sin is now behind them, we want to hold it before them.

I find it interesting that we believe God forgave Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul and used them mightily; but for some reason, we believe God cannot do the same for people we know. Especially people whose sin has in some way caused us personal pain.
The Bible says, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” We have all failed. All a person has to do to experience failure in life is to be born. Am I minimizing failure? No. I am just saying that the pot does not need to call the kettle black. We have all failed. We are all sinners. We must learn to remove our pointing finger of criticism and use it to help hold up a mirror to our own face. Then we will see the reflection of another sinner and be reminded of what grace has done for us.

In Isaiah 53, the Bible mentions, “All we like sheep have gone astray, each one to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” A-L-L which spells the word “all.” “There is none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10). Literally, not even one single human being is righteous apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We do not need to view people like we do Lot’s wife. We need to realize that people today need the grace of God just like the great men of old needed it.
In Luke 22:60 we read, “But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you are saying. Immediately while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.” Peter denied Christ, but thank God we don’t leave Peter by the fire cursing Christ. If we were to leave Peter standing at the fire cursing, we would never see him on the Day of Pentecost with tongues of fire over his head preaching. Thank God we know that he is restored. In Luke 22:61 we discover that after Peter denied Jesus, the Bible says, “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He said to him, before the rooster crows you will deny me three times so Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Envision this in your mind. Jesus is arrested. He is going in to be tried. The disciples have scattered like a covey of flying quail. Peter draws near and when asked about Jesus, he begins denying that he knows him. He ends up denying three times that he knew Jesus and even cursed Him. “I don’t know Him! I don’t know that man!” The Bible says at that moment the rooster crowed. Luke records for us that as Jesus was being
carried to the place where he was to be tried when the rooster crowed. When Jesus heard the rooster crow, he turned and he saw Peter. Peter was the coward who went further than the rest of the cowards. Yet, he became the denier. He had earlier bragged that he would never deny the Lord even if it cost him his life. Those boastful words were still warm when he began cursing and denying that he ever had anything to with Jesus. He failed miserably—just like you and me.

Aren’t you glad that Jesus did not take a snapshot and put Peter in a freeze-frame? Do you know what I am talking about? That single frame becomes frozen in place and will not change or advance until you press the play button to move it forward. Peter, however, did freeze that moment in his mind and it took the forgiveness and restoration of Jesus to move him forward again. Others also forgave Peter and he became the leader in the early church.
If Peter were walking this earth today, I know he would gladly testify, “I thank my Lord that on the night by the fire when I denied him and the rooster crowed and He looked at me, that he did not take a snapshot in his mind choosing to always view me through my sin.”

The Bible records for us in John 21 that the Lord appears to Peter after the resurrection and restores him while they fellowship by the seashore. The Lord asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” and Peter replied, “You know I love you Lord.” Then Peter was given clear direction from the Lord, “Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep.” Then we arrive at Acts 2 where God needs a preacher man to inaugurate one of the greatest births of all history, the birth of the church. Who does God choose for that glorious and important occasion? He chose Peter! I am glad He did not freeze-frame Peter by the fire while he was cursing Him. Peter is the man He chose. Peter preached on the day
of Pentecost and the rest of the story is life-changing history. Jesus saw Peter’s future instead of his failure.

Thankfully, that night when Jesus saw Peter in his act of denial, he did not take that freeze-frame snapshot so he could always hold it up before Peter saying, “Peter, I refuse to believe you could ever change. You are a coward. Here is the proof. Look at it.” Unfortunately, that is what we are tempted to do to people today. We place them in a freeze-frame. We are living in the freeze-frame mode!

We believe that grace is for Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul, but maybe not for that person who has so mistreated us. In your mind may be etched that occasion when he/she lost their temper, chewed you out and cursed you. Though it was 17 years ago, that freeze-frame is seen in your mind when you see that person. All you can see is that past failure regardless of how much they have changed. Even though they long ago repented and have been faithful in the church
serving the Lord, you refuse to release them. You choose to remember that they messed up one day and you will not let it go. You have set up a freeze-frame in your mind. Thank God that life is a motion picture and not a snapshot. We try to make it a photo album. We keep the photos of our best moments and Satan the dark photographer tempts us to keep an album of our negative moments. Sometimes, he convinces us to keep the bad snapshots of our own lives as well. We look at them and refuse to believe that any good could ever come again. He accuses and blames and gnaws at us just hoping that we will fold under the pressure of our past failures. He paralyzes us with his shrewd use of the bad pictures of our lives.

Maybe there was a time in your marriage when it was threatened with unfaithfulness. However, it was long ago and you thought it was forgiven because there has been repentance and restoration. Yet you keep looking at that snapshot of that occasion, that time when your pain was so deep and unbearable. I declare to you,
dear friends, the same grace that enabled Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul to be forgiven and to go on to be productive and useful for the Lord is the same grace flowing from the throne of grace today. We have to be people of grace. We have all failed.

In the state of Colorado there are some of the highest mountains that can be found in our whole nation. There are also some of the deepest mines. It is interesting that you can go to some of the highest altitudes and deepest depths in the state of Colorado. But you know what is even more interesting? Those high mountains and those deep mines are both in the same state—the State of Colorado. This is a pictorial representation of people. Some morally may appear to be a lot better than others. Their lives seem like mountaintops compared to the depths in which we have lived in the deep caverns of wickedness. They may not have done immorally what other people have done down in the depths. But when the Bible teaches us about our true nature, every one of us, regardless of
our outward actions, are all in the same state. It is called the state of sin. Apart from the grace of God, we would all be forever trapped in this state of sin. Yet, God in His grace through His Son has rescued us. He has brought us up and out! He now sees us as sons and not as sinners.

Finger pointing does not do any good. You can take two corpses, put one on one side of the room and the other on the opposite side, with their fingers pointing at one another, but both are dead. You can put a thousand dollar suit on one of them and rags on the other, but they both are still dead. You can put diamond rings on one of them and put coal tar on the other’s hands, but they both are still dead. The point being, this is the picture of any man/woman without the grace of God that comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul said it in Ephesians that we all are dead in trespasses and sin before the grace of God finds us. He declared in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it
is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” The fact is we have all sinned and we are all sinners. Through Jesus blood, we become sinners saved by grace.

I am glad to receive that grace and forgiveness of God. When we need it for ourselves, we should readily receive it. Some people however do struggle receiving God’s grace. Our hearts tell us we deserve judgment and we find it hard to think we could be forgiven.

Then in our pride there are times when we think that God’s grace just can’t reach others whose sin has hurt us. Are you getting this? Freezing those frames in your mind, wanting people to be like Lot’s wife, frozen in a place of rebellion and disobedience forever is not the answer to any one’s problems.

Who on this earth wants to be judged by their worst day? I do not want to be judged by my worst day. Paul said there is some things of which we are
ashamed to speak. If we had a confession party all of us would probably be picky about what we confessed. Now, if I am being a little too honest, just take it. The bottom line is that all of us from time to time have had a bad day when we mess up. When such a day comes along, you do not want somebody freeze-framing you and thinking that is the way you are 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In Seminary we use to make up ways to have fun. We did not have any money to go out so we had to think up creative ways to have fun. Sometimes we would make prank calls to one another where we would pretend to be the chairman of some pastor-search committee from some big church. A seminary student just sits by the phone waiting for it to ring hoping for an opportunity to go preach somewhere. This is especially true for third year students who are getting ready for graduation. Knowing that guys are anticipating such a call, we would call and say something like, “Yes, I want to talk to Rev.
(and say their name). This is Deacon Jones down here at Okeechobee Baptist Church in Okeechobee, Mississippi and we got a big old church down here, a big old parsonage and a big salary package. We heard that you are a pretty good preacher boy and we want you to come down and preach for us this Sunday. What do you think?” This would get them all excited and after they would respond that they are open to considering the offer, we would tell them, “Great! We’ll talk about it tomorrow in Greek class.” Then we would burst out laughing. We would have lots of fun doing things of that nature.

We were living in Memphis, TN, right in the middle of the Bible belt. We did a lot of preaching down in churches in Mississippi and over the state line in Arkansas. It was during my third year when one evening the phone rang at our house. My wife, Mikki, answered the phone to hear an unusual voice on the other end of the line. The man said, “This is Brother Joe Murphy from Highland Baptist church down here in
Senatobia, Mississippi, and I would like to speak to your husband about coming down and preaching for us.” Mikki says, “Sure it is, John!” He said, “Well, is Reverend Eddie Lawrence there? I would like to speak with him.” “Sure you would, John!” He attempted to speak to me again but Mikki thinking that is was my buddy John, pulling a prank, went on and on until finally he says, “Ma’am I don’t know what is going on but I’m not John and I need to talk to your husband.” She then realized that it was the real deal. I spoke to Joe who in spite of his rude welcome still invited me to come preach. I eventually became the Senior Pastor at Highland. We were so glad that Bro. Joe did not freeze-frame Mikki and mark us off the list. It was only by the grace of God, because if he as the Chairman of Deacons had gone by his first exposure to us, I would have never gotten to talk to him. He would have hung the phone up and said, “Well, mark that couple off the list, they’re crazy.” All of us have times like that. We do something stupid, sinful or silly.
I had a funny mishap on the day I was preaching a trial sermon at the first church I ever pastored. I had preached almost everything I knew and the message had gone on for a total of about 10 to 12 minutes. I was letting it roll. When I came down from behind the pulpit to extend the invitation for people to come forward to the altar for prayer, I caught the microphone cord around my ankle and fell all the way to the wall. I am glad the wall was there or I would probably still be falling. Nobody got saved that night! But thank God they had some grace and realized that just because you might trip and stumble does not mean you cannot pastor a church. They called me as their pastor anyway. And we had five wonderful years there. Maybe they thought it would never be boring with me around. I’m really glad they did not freeze-frame me and gave me another chance. We had a great experience with them.
We all are guilty of doing or saying something stupid from time to time. I had a preacher friend who shared one of his embarrassing moments. Picture this in your mind if you will. He is in a funeral home, standing in front of the coffin and looking down at the beloved one that has passed away. A person comes up next to him. They are both peering down into the coffin at her. They are sharing with one another what a good woman she was and what a good life she had lived. The person standing by my preacher friend begins telling him about the behavior of some of her children. He says something along the line of, “Did you know that her son is doing so and so?” My pastor friend looked at him and said, “Oh, that’s just awful. Why if she knew that it’d just kill her.” He immediately realized what he said and quickly followed apologetically saying, “Oh my goodness, did you hear what I just said? Please forgive me.” We all do stupid stuff from time to time. We have all failed in some way or another. It is important that we realize that those moments do not have to mark us for a lifetime.
Now, let us reflect seriously on this issue. First, we must realize our sin and our failure is very, very serious. It nailed Jesus to the cross and because of it we deserve to be eternally separated from God. We are all in the same boat without Jesus. That boat is called sin. We are all sailing the same waters which are called death. Also, we are all headed toward the same destination. That destination is called Hell.

Thank God for His marvelous, wonderful grace. Secondly, we all need forgiveness. As we have already mentioned, we have all failed. As a result, we all need forgiveness. Unfortunately we tend to forget this when we freeze-frame somebody. Is there somebody who has given their heart to Jesus but you have difficulty seeing them at the throne of God? Can you see them in Heaven? Can you see them as forgiven?

Sometimes we cannot forgive others because we hold them responsible for our problems. Our mentality causes us to believe if we forgive them then we have to
realize that we have got to face our own issues and problems, but as long as we have got somebody else to blame for everything that has happened to us, it lets us off the hook. It is like Adam, “Well, Lord it was this woman.” And Eve, “Well, Lord it was the snake.” We call this the blame game and it is very common among everyone today. We do not want to take responsibility for our own actions and realize that we have failed.

The next step is we have got to repent and be forgiven. We all need it. Sometimes people have difficulty forgiving themselves. I believe this is a result of a person not wanting to take full responsibility for their actions which is known as a pride issue. You may not be able to fully believe you did it, but you did. As horrible as it may have been, you have got to take responsibility for it before you can experience true repentance and receive true forgiveness. We all need forgiveness because we have all failed.
Is there someone you have frozen in place that you are refusing to forgive? Is there someone that is now serving the Lord, trying to do the best they can do for Jesus, but you still see them in that place of failure? What snapshots are you carrying around that you need to tear up? It is marvelous that Jesus did not freeze-frame Peter by the fire nor has he freeze-framed you?

This leads me to the third thing I want to mention to you. God can and God does change people. My life has been changed. If you are saved, you have been changed. You went from darkness to light, from heading toward Hell to heading toward Heaven. Instead of sitting at a bar in a club, you are sitting in a pew at a church. People’s hearts can be changed because they can be washed in the blood of Jesus and they can receive a new nature. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. All things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.” Increasingly, we must become a body of believers that stands firmly on the truth that God can
change people and God does change people. It does not matter how horrible a life they have lived--Jesus can cleanse them and make them new creations.

The church needs to be a transformation station, a place where lives are constantly being cleansed by the blood of Jesus. I am not talking about turning over new leaves and trying to do better, I am talking about repenting of sin receiving the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is the only way to get to Heaven. The message of the cross is all about God doing what had to be done for us to be saved.

I heard an interesting story once about a man who went to visit a church. He drove up in the parking place and as he got out of his car someone drove up beside him and honked their horn. They said, “You parked in my parking place.” They were real rude to him and that kind of disturbed him; however, he went on in the church and found a Sunday school class. Upon entering the class, he found an empty seat and
sat down. A few minutes passed and someone came in, looked at him and said, “That is my seat, you took my place.” They were very rude to him which again was disturbing to him. After class, he went into the sanctuary for the worship service and found an empty place in a pew. He had a seat and right before the service started, someone came to him and said, “You are sitting in my seat, you took my place.” This was a different person and very rude which again disturbed the man again. In the middle of the worship service the congregation started worshiping and asking Christ to come and dwell in their midst.

As this stranger stood, all of a sudden he started changing and the glory of God could be seen upon him. He held out his hands and they saw the scars in his hands and looked down where he had sandals on his feet and noticed his feet had been pierced. Someone began to realize what was happening and said, “Who are you? What is this? What are you
doing?” He turned to them and said, “I am Jesus and I took your place.”

God so loved you and me that He sent His Son to take the ugliness and wretchedness of our sin upon His Son. He then took the pristine, pure, holy, righteousness of Jesus and placed it on us. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. We owed a debt we could not pay and He paid a debt He did not owe. He took our place. That is grace. When there are people around us who have hurt us and have failed, when they get introduced to this grace, please dear friend, do not see them as who they were. Instead, see them as who they have now become through the blood of Jesus. Realize except for the grace of God, there go I. We have all failed. We all need forgiveness. We can all be changed. Loose the freeze-frame mentality off your life and began to walk in the complete repentance, forgiveness, and grace of God.
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