

Q: Listening to these two, what do you think about the possibility that you could get do-overs with God if you needed them?

word from God

Bible study

A SECOND, THIRD, AND SIXTY-THIRD CHANCE

How Jesus treats sexual failures.

Read John 8:1-11 with your students.

Jesus was just hanging out one day when these religious folks decided to test him. They brought to him a woman in desperate need for a do-over. She had been caught in the midst of having sex with a married man. The law demanded that this woman be killed for her sinful act.

Q: If you were going strictly by the rules, does this passage leave any question that the woman was guilty?

Q: How many times have you ever been caught doing something you knew deserved immediate punishment? A few times, huh?

- Have you ever been caught in act and dragged to "the authorities"?
- What was the outcome? Did you receive mercy or were you punished to the full extent of the law?

Jesus does a really interesting thing after this woman's accusers challenge him for an immediate verdict in this trial. He bends down and just starts writing in the sand. Wouldn't you love to know what he wrote? (I heard someone say once that they thought that perhaps Jesus was writing in the sand the names of the all the women the Pharisees and teachers of the law had slept with in the past.) The bottom line is that we do not know—but whatever he wrote sure freaked them out.

Slowly, one by one, the Pharisees leave the scene after Jesus challenges them with the words, "Anyone here without sin can cast the first stone." The fact is, Jesus was the only one in that crowd who had the right to cast that stone. But he didn't, either.

Q: Does this story give you reason to believe Jesus is for us or against us? Discuss that.

Q: Did this woman deserve a do-over? Why or why not?

Q: When we make mistakes regarding our sexuality, do we deserve do-overs?

Q: Why do we get them?

One of the last things Jesus says to this woman is, "I don't condemn you."

Q: Do you believe most Christians feel they're in a place where they don't feel condemned by God when they mess up sexually?

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **A Second, Third, and Sixty-Third Chance** (page 99).

YOU'LL NEED

- copies of **A Second, Third, and Sixty-Third Chance** (page 177), one per student
- pencils

Your Bible probably includes a note that this story is not in the earliest and best manuscripts. See William Barclay's comments on page 126 about this.

You may have already looked at this passage from a different perspective in **Boundaries**. For additional questions and further insight, see page 126.

A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, "Can anyone in the room tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?" There was a short pause, and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up. "Sin," he said.

Q: Do you believe you're in a place with God where you can say, "I don't feel condemned by him despite my sexual screw-ups"?

Q: How can we get to a place in our spiritual lives where feeling no condemnation from God is a regular part of our experience with him?

The last thing that Jesus says is, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Forgiveness and a do-over was offered to her on a plate. It was free of charge and available to her. All she had to do was receive it. But then Jesus goes on and says, "Hey, stop sleeping around." It seems that part of a do-over is the chance to get it right. Or in her case, using Jesus' language in the story, to stop getting it wrong.

Q: Why do you believe Jesus put that expectation on this woman caught in adultery? Why do you think Jesus commanded her to stop doing what she was doing?

Q: How hard is it to "just say no" to those things that have entrapped us in the past?

Q: What's your attitude about do-overs for people you know who take them for granted and make the same mistakes over and over again?

Q: If the woman had repeated her sin and been brought before Jesus again, what do you think he would have said to her?

To help students personalize God's willingness to let them have a do-over, use the questions from **A Second, Third, and Sixty-Third Chance** (page 177 in this book) as material for large or small group discussion or personal individual reflection.

the last word

case studies

WHO ME?

Common examples of folks who need do-overs and our own need for a fresh start.

There's a Spanish story about a teenage son who packed up and left home. He ran away, yet the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to locate him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." On Saturday 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

—Bits and Pieces, October 15, 1992, p.13

So many of us are looking for forgiveness. The fact is that we as Christians can find it in Jesus who sets us apart from the rest of humanity. Have a listen to some of these really difficult—yet true—stories of people who are in desperate need of do-overs, and then we'll discuss them together.

I guess it all started when I was about 12. My older brother got a copy of a porno magazine and hid it under his bed. One day I was searching for something and found it—it wasn't very well hidden. I had never seen anything like that in my life and I was blown away that women would allow themselves to be photographed in positions like this.

“Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor, Marghanita Laski—one of our best-known secular humanists and novelists—said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me."

—John Stott,

The Contemporary Christian
(InterVarsity Press)

“To repent is to come to your senses. It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying "I'm sorry," than looking at the future and saying, "Wow!"

—Frederick Buechner,

Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC
(HarperCollins)

It started slowly at first—I would sneak into his room and just slowly go through all the pictures. I was a little grossed out in the beginning, but the more I looked at the magazine the more attractive it became to me. I can't really remember when it happened first, but I sure can remember how good it felt. Masturbating felt so good that all I could think about all day while at school was getting home to do it again. Here I am 12 years old and obsessed with these sexual feelings. Man they felt good.

I guess when I was about 14 those urges to want to masturbate got stronger and stronger. I remember once on a youth group trip to the beach those feelings got so strong inside me that I had to literally run into the bushes. At this point in my life I was masturbating sometimes up to four or five times a day—talk about a problem.

I'm twenty now. For about six years I've been seeking a solution to this problem, but nothing seems to be getting better. My stack of porno is so high I can barely see over it. There is a nude beach about 50 miles away from where I live, and I spend most weekends down there taking pictures when ladies are not looking. I hate what I do and who I am, but something just drives me to do this. I need help so bad, in fact, I wish I could just start all over again.

What a mess. Here's someone in desperate need of a do-over. The kind of do-over that only Jesus can give.

- Q: Where do you think this person's problems first began? What could he have done about it back then to stop himself from getting in this huge hole?
- Q: If this person came to you with this story of his life, what's the first thing you would tell him that he would need to do? What's the second? How about the third?
- Q: From the sound of this person's account, do you think he feels the "no condemnation" that Jesus spoke about to the woman caught in adultery?
- Q: How can this person get to a place where he believes Jesus doesn't condemn him for what's taking place?
- Q: What do you believe Jesus' phrase "Go and sin no more" means here? What are some practical things that this person can do to make this command a reality?

This is so hard to talk about. I have never shared this with anyone before—it just makes me feel so dirty and abused. You'll have to bear with me as I tell my story—I have never done it before.

We were such a close family. I would stay over at my cousin's place down the road nearly as much as my own. My uncle seemed just as much my father as my own. Our families did everything together—vacations, field trips, barbecues—you name it. We loved each other so much.

That is, until my 15th birthday. I'd planned to spend this special night at my cousin's house—we were going to do a sleepover the way we'd done so many times before. My cousin fell asleep way too quickly that night—we had a lot more fun planned than what we actually did. I was a little bored now that she had fallen asleep so I went downstairs to watch a bit of TV.

Because of this person's issues with desire and responsibility, see also chapters 4 and 6.

This is the tough part. From seemingly nowhere my uncle came into the TV room and sat down beside me. I gave him a big hug as he wished me another happy birthday. What he gave me was the worst birthday anyone could ever have. I don't need to go into the details, do I? I suppose you can imagine what happened next. My favorite uncle forced himself on me in a way that is only designed for intimate married lovers. I tried to scream but he told me that he would tell everyone that I forced him to do it to me. Somehow back then that made sense...so I did nothing.

He is in jail now. I finally had the courage to come forward and tell my mom what happened. No one believed me at first. Perhaps that was one of the worst things about the whole situation. I can remember overhearing discussions my parents had about the possibility of me making this up. That really hurt. No one really believed me until my favorite cousin stepped up and shared with everyone that this had been happening to her for years.

It has been seven years since that night. I have never had a boyfriend and, truth be told, I hate men. Whenever I am touched by a man I feel filthy. All I can think about whenever a man approaches me is my 15th birthday. It wasn't very happy.

This is a really tough story to hear. Tough maybe because some of us in this room might be able to relate personally. Let's process what we've heard.

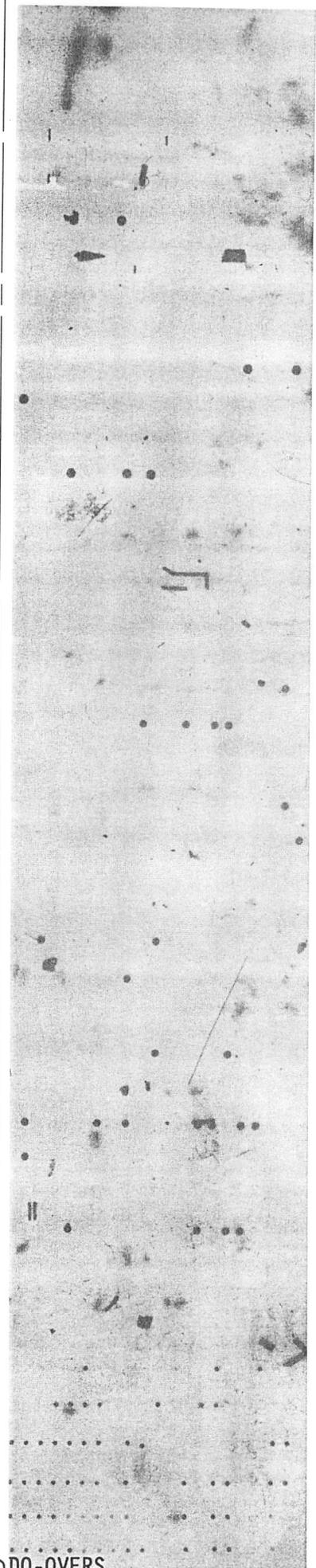
- Q: A lot of people who go through times of sexual abuse feel guilty for what's happened. Why do you think this is?
- Q: Although this woman was the victim, does she still need a do-over? Why or why not? If so, how might her do-over be different from her uncle's, if at all?
- Q: What advice would you give a person that shared a story like this with you?
- Q: What do you think Jesus would want to say to this lady?

It happened so quickly. He was my boyfriend for only a few weeks when we went on a special date. After dinner and a movie we went up to this special place that he had heard about. We were having such a good night and everything seemed to be going so well.

He parked the car and we could see the city lights spread out underneath us like a blanket. Believe me, romance was in the air. We started to make out a little, just gentle kissing really. As our kissing became a lot more enthusiastic, I could tell that he was becoming very excited. (Don't tell anyone, but I was too.)

He started to slip his hand under my blouse, and I tried to pull back. I never had had anyone touch me there before. My head was screaming at me to stop him from doing this, but my body was screaming just as loud to let it keep going. Before I knew what was happening, his other hand was grabbing downstairs, and I knew that at this point it just had to stop. I pushed him away with all my might and tried to get out of the car, but he jumped on top of me and locked the door.

Before I knew it, my skirt was lifted way up and his pants were down. It was impossible to resist—he was way too strong for me. It was over nearly as soon as it had begun. I wanted to be angry with him for what he had done, but you know what? I was a lot angrier with myself. Perhaps I shouldn't have worn this skirt, I thought to myself. Maybe Mom was right—it did send the wrong message. I did allow him to touch my breast, so surely the signal I gave to him was



that I was willing for more.

Well, that was about a month or so ago. He has not called me since, and I have never told anyone. There was no way this was rape. Surely it could never be that if there was even a small part of me that wanted it to happen. I just can't believe I lost my virginity that way. I suppose there is nothing to stop me from having sex with anyone I'm attracted to now. It's not like I can regain my virginity and be pure for the man I'm going to marry, is it?

- Q: Was this girl to blame in any way for what happened that night in the car? Why or why not?
- Q: Do you think she's right? Is there no way it was rape? Why?
- Q: What advice would you give this girl if she came to you and told this story?
- Q: How important is it for her to not feel condemnation for what has happened? Is it possible for her to forgive herself for what she perceives is something that she let happen? How can she do this?
- Q: An important issue in this story is the feeling that she can never regain her purity. Is this true? How does your answer relate to the kind of do-overs that Jesus offers?

The point in interacting with these stories is to see how important the need is for do-overs in our lives. We all need them at one point or another, and Jesus can come through with them no matter how messed up the situation appears. We need to learn how to trust and believe that do-overs are free gifts from God, given so we can live lives that honor him.

- Q: What is the one thing you're going to take home from this discussion? Can you share that with the person sitting next to you?
- Q: We all need do-overs at some point and I am betting a bunch of you need them now. What can we do as a community of people who love each other to help each other receive do-overs from Jesus?

To close this meeting I would like you to get in groups of three or four with the same gender and share with each other—in as little or as much detail you like—an area where you need a do-over. Be as honest as you can. If you feel like you need additional help, please let me know that after we're done here. After you share, spend some time praying for each other, focusing specifically on asking God that you would be free from condemnation for this stuff and that you might be able to receive your very own do-over. Let me remind you of our agreement to keep things shared in this room appropriately confidential. Do you have any questions about confidentiality? Okay, let's take about 10 minutes to share and pray.

In other words

video opener

LES MISERABLES

VIDEO

Do-overs give fresh starts.

The movie, *Les Miserables*, is based on the novel by Victor Hugo. In this clip you will

For more information on confidentiality, see page 25.

Listen to the buzz and time this as loosely as you wish.

see Jean Valjean (jon val-jon—use your best French accent—played by Liam Neeson), just released from prison, on his way to report to his parole officer. He's told he cannot sleep on the street, so he finds a meal and a bed at the home of a bishop. In the middle of the night Jean wakes and steals the bishop's fine silver. He's caught by the police, and what happens next is a remarkable example of a do-over. Instead of turning him in, the bishop tells the police he gave this man all the silver and, in fact, he forgot to take the candlesticks. He experiences forgiveness and is given an opportunity to leave the past behind and start over.

Introduce the video clip and show it to your students.

- Q: If you had been the bishop, what do you think you would have said when the police brought the man back with the stolen silver?
- Q: Obviously this ex-prisoner did not deserve the type of do-over that the bishop gave him. Why do you think the bishop showed such remarkable grace?
 - How do you think you would have felt if you were the man?
- Q: If you had been the bishop, what would you have hoped the man would now do with his life?
- Q: Can you think of any other examples of incredible do-overs in real life, books, or movies? Describe what happened and discuss whether or not the people involved deserved that do-over.
- Q: Can you think of a time when you ever got a do-over or an unexpected gift of grace?

As we're going to see, it's part of who God is to give us do-overs when we mess up.

small-group Bible study

SCARLET LADY

The profile of a person who got serious do-overs from God.

If your group is largish, break it into teams of half a dozen with the following assignment.

I'd like each group to read Joshua 2:1-21, Joshua 6:20-25, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25. Then write a "Once upon a time..." story about Rahab, including what you take to be the moral of the story. In about 15 minutes, I'll ask you to read your story to the rest of us.

Do everything you can to ensure that each group receives wild applause for its efforts.

- Q: What do you think is the most important thing that comes out of Rahab's story? Why do you think that's important?
- Q: Why do you think God works with people like Rahab? Why not a queen or a Joan of Arc type? Why the proprietor of a whorehouse?

Look at 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 with your students.

- Q: How does this passage relate to the story of Rahab?

To help students further personalize the story of Rahab and apply it to their lives, use the questions from **Scarlet Lady** (page 178 in this book) in large and small group discussions, or as a tool for individual reflection.

YOU'LL NEED

- TV or video projection unit
- VCR or DVD player
- *Les Miserables* video, cued to the clip, beginning 3 minutes after the Columbia logo ("You can't sleep here"), ending 6½ minutes later ("And now I give you back to God")

If your students are using *What (Almost) Nobody Will Tell You about Sex*, you can direct them to **Scarlet Lady** (page 106).

YOU'LL NEED

- Bibles
- pencils
- paper
- copies of **Scarlet Lady** (page 178), one per student

For variety, assign one or more groups to the same task with Hosea 1:1-9 and 3:1-5.