

## **Closing the Door on Sin**

Closing the door on sin is probably one of the hardest things a Christian does in their lives. And being “sinful” in the Coptic community is probably the second hardest thing in a Christian’s life. Even if we wanted to close the door on sin, God knows we can’t do it alone. None of us have that power, and so, He sends us a helper. Because of our weakness and our limited nature, He sends us a *free gift* called Divine Grace.

This gift is given to those who do not deserve the love of God. It’s given to those who are the weakest, the most sinful, the ones who aren’t worthy to lift up their hands and cry to God. This *gift* is freely given by the compassion of the Savior so that, “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” Romans 5:20. This gift is given to those who are unworthy of God, so that they may taste the sweetness of God and recognize the bitterness of their sins. This gift was given to me by the indescribable compassion of God.

The stories in the Bible are true, God truly loves sinners. I don’t know why, but He does. He loves sinners and He loves to offer them new lives.

This gift turned a prostitute into Saint Mary of Egypt, who gave up earthly pleasures to live in the desert; it turned a murderer into Saint Moses the Strong, a man who gave his life to asceticism. It transformed a man who persecuted the Christians into Saint Paul, the man who suffered for the sake of Christ. And this gift transforms people like you and me, it allows Christ to show us the light after living our lives in darkness. He takes the weakest sinners by the hand, and He transforms their lives!

This love made me realize how precious my status as a sinner was to God. I wished to be a sinner in the eyes of God for the rest of my life. I couldn’t believe this was the compassion of the Savior towards sinners. He physically changes our lives. He allows us to feel the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He allows us to know our sins, He opens our eyes to the wisdom of His Word so we can comprehend theology despite never learning it. He gives us so many gifts in order to save us from our corruption. And He allows us to taste His sweetness almost literally on our tongues so that we never want to leave His presence. I mean, gifts are nice but don’t get me wrong, the more gifts He gives you, the more sinful you were. God is offering you so many free gifts in order to drag you out from the depths of your darkness.

I know it seems almost unimaginable that God could care for us like this. But He cares for you in an indescribable way. If you are a sinner, you are different. You are cared for

by God despite being unworthy. The other people in church are living holy lives, and yet God truly seeks out the one lost sheep.

You're probably wondering how you can access the fountains of Divine grace. As I said before, this gift is reserved for the worst sinners. It is given to those who cry out to God from the depths of their heart, even if it's for a single moment. Saint Mary of Egypt cried to God with all her heart and she was granted the intercession of the Theotokos. Saint Moses the Strong looked up to heaven and cried, "if you are the true God, reveal yourself to me!". These saints cried to God and once He answered, they gave up their sinful lives almost instantly. God saw that they were yearning for the compassion of the Savior. Crying to God in repentance opened the fountains of Divine Grace and changed their lives. I imagine these Saints offering their sinful lives was like a sweet smelling aroma, rising up to God.

Many of us fall into despair when we realize we're living lives far away from God. It's so easy to feel hopeless, because we forget that God wants us to come back to Him. Pope Shenouda once said, "whenever you are fighting one of the thoughts of despair, answer it with the saying of Micah the prophet, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me." He contrasts the darkness of despair to the light of the Lord. How can the Lord be a light to me when I am falling in despair? By trusting that God is the one who saves us from our sins. God is waiting and "knocking at the door", He is ready to give us grace, to give us hope. Approach God in prayer and tell Him, "One day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, Than dwell in the tents of the sinners" Psalm 84:10. This verse is so beautiful because it expresses our love towards God: we wish to be with the Lord even if that means standing at the door and only experiencing a glimpse of His goodness. The lowest position with the Lord is better than the highest position with the wicked; to even discover a sliver of God's love is incomparable to any sin or earthly desire.

God is waiting for you with open arms whether this is the first time you're coming to Him, or the 100th time. When you feel like God will never love you because of all your sins, remember the Samaritan woman whom Christ loved and offered a new life. And when you feel like God can't accept your repentance another time because He has already given you too much, remember the Prodigal Son who was thrown a feast for returning to the Father again. God is truly waiting for us to meet Him, to return to Him, and to encounter Him in our daily lives.

I pray that God may give us repentant hearts and allow us to experience His Divine Grace that transforms our lives.