

Christians often live in a feast or famine mode when it comes to forgiveness. Either we focus on the forgiveness and minimize the sin, our need for confession and pardon (the feast), or we dwell on the sin and confession and slight forgiveness and pardon (famine).

John M. Drescher tells this story. A pastor was in his office when a woman from his congregation asked to speak with him. She had carried a terrible burden and needed him to listen and tell her what to do. Many years before, she had been unfaithful to her husband and she had carried the guilt of that sin with her ever since. The pastor asked her several questions.

“Do you believe what you did was wrong?” “Oh, yes! I know it was sin. I broke one of God’s commandments.” That, he told her, was conviction.

“Were you ever sorry for this sin?” “Every time I think of it. And I think of it every day.” That, he said, was contrition.

“Are you still committing this sin?” “No, it was just the one time.” That is repentance, turning from the sin.

“Did you ever ask God to forgive you?” “Many times. Maybe thousands.”

“Let me give you God’s word for you. God says, ‘If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9).

The pastor watched as a look of peace and joy spread over the woman’s face.

Psalm 51 begins, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.” We know that God’s love never wavers, even when ours does and we turn away. When we come to our senses and turn back to God, we find that God is waiting for us, ready to receive us, ready to forgive. Conviction, contrition, repentance, forgiveness. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.