# FOREWORD

I am a painfully slow reader. So I must be ruthless in the good things that I choose not to read. I did not begrudge the time it took to read the first edition of this book (then titled *Experiencing God's Forgiveness*). I started it because John Ensor is an admired friend. I finished it because it is a very good book. And now I welcome this gospel-centered revision. I expect that what I wrote of the earlier book will be true of this one as well.

I love the God-centeredness of this book. At one point I wrote in the margin, "John's great strength is reasserting the greatness of God in a way so compelling that God-neglecting moderns might feel it." In another place I wrote, "This book is a celebration of the greatness of Christ's work on the cross." And the cross is not the measure of our worth, but of God's. Christ's death for us is grounded firmly on "the value [God] places on himself and his own glory as a loving God." The book is a God-entranced vision of glorious forgiveness. "For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt" (Psalm 25:11).

The book succeeds because *it is biblical.* It is saturated with the Bible. John has a sweeping knowledge of Scripture and interprets it carefully. He would agree that the sieve of human thought is God's thought. So he says, "Only a truth-soaked mind can reshape our opinions, attitudes, responses, and decisions." It is a vibrantly truth-driven book.

It also succeeds because *it is real.* It connects with life. John writes with the savvy of one who has seen the legal and justice system from the inside. He has struggled with the most impossible crises. He has lost friends in murder. He has gained friends from converted criminals. He knows the street. He has learned some deep things; "If I come across a man raping a woman, I cannot love both of them in the same way." His God-centeredness grew in abortion wars and drug deals and manifold cases of abuse. What you read here has been tested in fire.

The book succeeds because *it is full of compassion and hope.* The

glory of God is mainly the glory of his mercy. And the way to make it known is to move from guilt to gladness by faith. Under God the persons that count most are the broken, trapped, hopeless sinners. "God desires to make his *mercy* the apex of his own glory in the eyes of all creation. It is the ultimate reason for the creation of the world and the plan of redemption."

But for all its emphasis on compassion, *the book is not sappy.* John is Jesus-like in his utter freedom from sentimentality. He is, in fact, strikingly blunt. "Murmuring is God-hatred in the acorn stage." Our deepest problem is not our "woundedness" but our "waywardness." There is such a thing as "healthy shame." The wrath of God is "terrible . . . fierce . . . awful." One thing God will not forgive is the "discounting of the Great Work of grace wrought by the Spirit."

Yet for all its bluntness *it is a happy book*. "To believe means to trust that God's outworking plan will in the end lead to [our] joy and his glory." "The faith we are to place in God is a glad willingness to trust that he will provide for us everything that will truly make us happy in the long run." John is gripped by the great truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

*The Great Work of the Gospel* is God-centered good news. It is the kind of message that will make deep, strong people and deep, strong churches. It will release people from the self-absorbed rationalizations that keep us from the fullest engagement in the global cause of God. So I am hopeful that for God's sake the gladness on the other side of guilt will also be the gladness of the nations—in God.

—John Piper
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