

THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

GUILT & SHAME

Living Guilt-Free through Grace



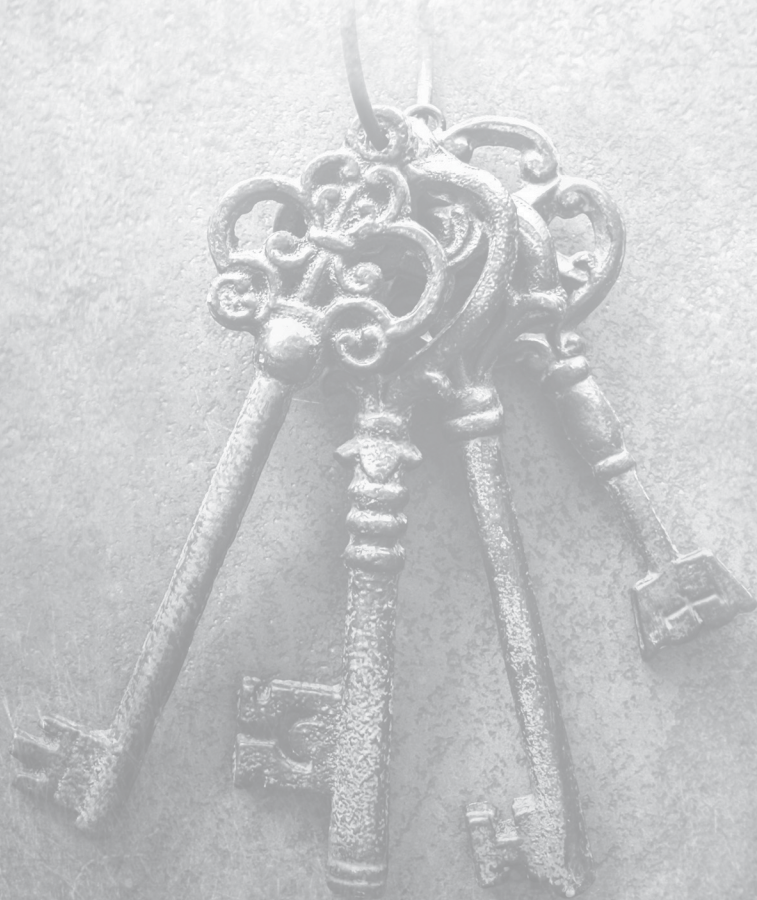
KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

GUILT & SHAME

Living Guilt-Free through Grace



KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are from the Contemporary English Version® Copyright © 1995 American Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NCV) taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (GNT) are taken from the Good News Translation® (Today's English Version, Second Edition) Copyright © 1992 American Bible Society. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (MSG) are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from The Living Bible copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. The Living Bible, TLB, and the The Living Bible logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers.

DISCLAIMER

Information, resources, and products provided by Hope for the Heart (HFTH), whether in print or electronic forms, and/or as part of any direct or affiliated website, Learning Management System, or social media platform, are general in nature and are not intended to provide or be a substitute for advice, consultation or treatment with a duly licensed mental health practitioner or other medical professional, and do not qualify participants to identify or practice as a professional mental health therapist or counselor. **Alert:** Given the sensitive nature regarding many of the topics and issues that HFTH addresses, individuals should be aware of potential emotional and/or psychological reactions that may arise due to current or past traumatic experiences, and therefore take any appropriate precautions to safeguard one's overall well-being. This information and these resources and products are intended to provide practical faith-based guidelines and biblical principles for balanced living and are not a replacement for medical advice. Professional services should be pursued whenever necessary and/or appropriate. By utilizing any HFTH information, resources or products, individuals acknowledge that HFTH is not providing direct clinically oriented mental health treatment or therapy, and that such usage does not create or constitute a therapeutic relationship between any individual and HFTH. As a condition to such use, every person who uses HFTH's information, resources, or products agrees to defend, indemnify, and hold harmless HFTH and its licensees, affiliates, and assigns, as well as the officers, agents, and employees of HFTH and its licensees, affiliates, and assigns, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, losses, damages, costs, charges, causes of action, suits, fees, recoveries, judgments, penalties, and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses), which may be made against, imposed upon, or suffered by HFTH as a result of, related to, or in connection with such use. Additionally, certain views and opinions that might be expressed in such information, resources or products may be those from sources other than HFTH and do not necessarily represent the views of HFTH nor imply an endorsement by HFTH.

HOPE INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 7
Dallas, TX 75221

Copyright © 2024 Hope for the Heart

ISBN Paperback: 979-8-88595-270-5

ISBN PDF: 979-8-88595-274-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Published in the United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

DEFINITIONS

What Is True Guilt?7
What Is False Guilt? 10
What Is Shame?..... 16
What Is God’s Heart on Guilt?..... 17
What Is God’s Heart on Shame? 19

CHARACTERISTICS

What Is the Difference between True and False Guilt?..... 26
What Is the Difference between Guilt and Shame?..... 31
What Buried Beliefs Conceal True Guilt?..... 33
What Is the Spectrum of Shame? 35
What Characterizes False Guilt and Toxic Shame?..... 38
What Are Physical Ramifications of Unresolved Guilt?40
What Are Common Guilt-Ridden Reactions to Criticism? 41

CAUSES

Why Do We Feel True Guilt?..... 51
Why Do Some People Struggle with Shame? 53
What Runs Your Life—Rules or Relationship?..... 56

What Are the Two Sources of “Good Guilt”?	60
What Is the Source of False Guilt and Unhealthy Shame?.....	64
What Is the Root Cause?.....	66
What Can You Do to Get Rid of Guilt and Shame—Forever?.....	70

STEPS TO SOLUTION

Key Verse to Memorize	83
Key Passage to Read	84
How to Reach the Target	86
How to Distinguish True Guilt from False Accusation	89
How to Resolve to Forgive Yourself	91
How to Resolve True Guilt When You Don’t Feel Forgiven	93
How to Rightly Respond to Criticism	95
How to Know You Are Forgiven.....	97
How to Replace Shame with Grace	99
How to Live Free of Guilt and Shame.....	106

SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE

111

ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

117



INTRODUCTION

“The thrill of victory—the agony of defeat.” In North America, this saying dominated the sports world for many years. Yet on a personal level, I know what it’s like to experience both extremes.

Never will I forget the crisp, fall evening when a dear friend and I attended a Dallas Cowboys football game. Coach Tom Landry executed the game plan perfectly. Quarterback Roger Staubach was never better. This night truly epitomized the thrill of victory.

Instead of scurrying away with all the fans and fighting the traffic, Barbara and I decided to stay in our seats and simply talk. As we watched Texas Stadium empty, we saw 65,000-plus vacant blue stadium seats in bright contrast to the brilliant green AstroTurf. But as Barbara and I continued to talk, instead of maintaining that thrill of victory, I began to feel the agony of defeat. My mind became crowded with guilt because of my own wrong choices in the past.

I remember saying to Barbara, “I don’t deserve to have you as my grace friend.” (She always gave me grace when I didn’t deserve it.) And then I began a litany of wrong choices that I had made over the years. Tears filled my eyes as I thought about certain people whom I had hurt—people including Barbara.

“How could I have done that?” I lamented. “How could I have thought that way!” After I had poured out my heart, Barbara took my hand and said something that stunned me. “June, I don’t think you really understand what grace is all about.”

What? I thought. *I understand grace. I’ve even taught others about grace.*

Then Barbara reiterated, “I don’t think you understand the grace of God for *you*.”

Could this be true? Could I know grace in my head, but not in my heart?

Barbara continued, “June, you apply grace to others, but not to yourself.” To be candid, I had no clue that this was true.

Ultimately, she shared truth that I knew was accurate, but truth that I wasn't appropriating in my heart. She reminded me:

“We've all been guilty of breaking God's law. June, you are no different” (Romans 3:23).

“Since you confessed your sins and have given your life to Christ, God was faithful to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “You've already received God's gift of grace—giving you the forgiveness you didn't deserve” (Ephesians 2:8–9). “Jesus forgave all your sins—past, present, and future—so that you could be saved and live guilt-free” (Hebrews 10:10).

I knew Barbara had spoken the truth, and there's nothing like truth to set us all free. What relief. What a load off my shoulders!

Unquestionably, Barbara was right. I hadn't applied grace to my own life. I needed God's grace like a blanket over my heart so that I wouldn't live with the coldness of false guilt.

If that's your need, may I encourage you to embrace God's heart on living guilt-free? Being free of guilt has everything to do with grace. There's a very good reason why grace is called “amazing.”

June Hunt
Founder, Hope for the Heart

GUILT & SHAME

Living Guilt-Free through Grace

The courtroom quiets in anticipation of what's to come. The persecuting prosecutor stands ready to hurl a long list of accusations and evidence. The accused sits alone, with no defense. All rise when the Judge enters the room.

Every explanation and excuse is looked over and overruled. Arguments are eliminated—one by one, one after another. The verdict will be rendered soon. Will the voice of authority declare “Not guilty,” or “Guilty as charged”?

The Judge has seen all the evidence and heard the testimonies of every witness. Now, the verdict is finally pronounced, punctuated by each pounding of the gavel: “Guilty! Guilty! Guilty on all charges!” And on the heels of guilt, shame often makes an appearance.

Now envision the same scene with these participants: The Accuser is Satan. The Judge is God. And the defendant is each and every human being ever created.

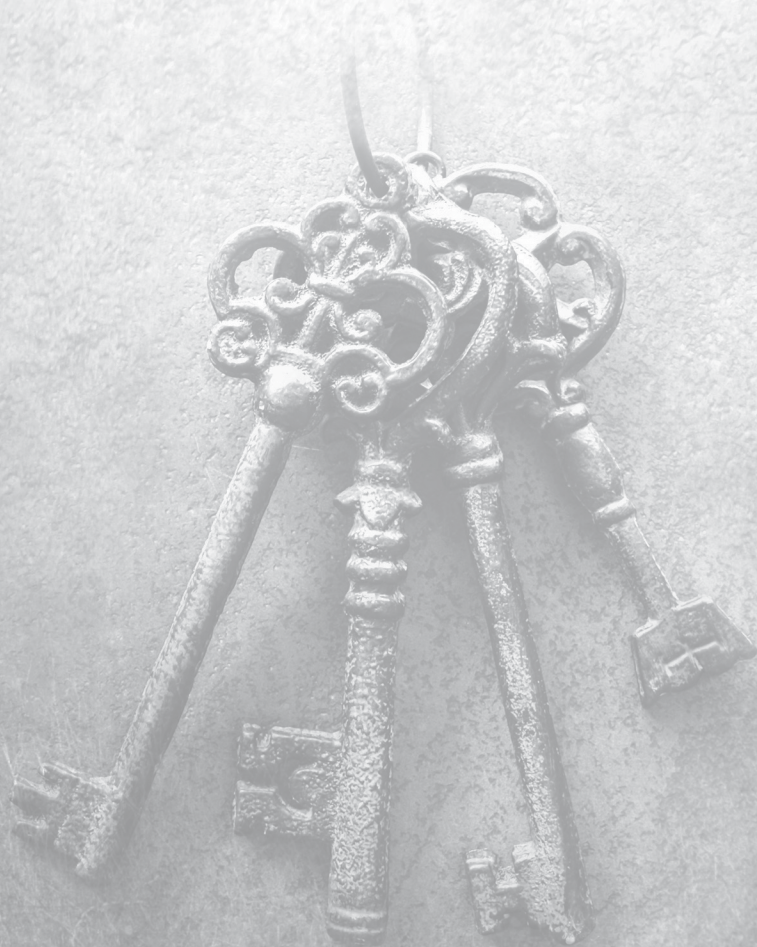
When the charge is sin—whether by doing wrong or not doing right—every single person stands condemned “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23).

Our only hope of reprieve is having an advocate on our side. The righteous Son of God volunteers to vacate the verdict and pay the penalty demanded by our sin. God's holy justice is served when Jesus stands in our stead. Thus, the sentence is set aside, and freedom is found in God's mercy and grace through Christ the Lord.

*“We have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.
He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,
and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

(1 JOHN 1:1–2)

DEFINITIONS



*“God’s grace is greater
than our guilt.”*



In 1881, the US Federal Government set up what is called the “conscience fund” after receiving an anonymous “guilty conscience” gift of \$5. Other guilt-ridden donors over the years also wanted to clear their consciences. One woman sent \$0.44 for reusing two postage stamps, a man who wanted to settle up with “the IRS and with God” sent in \$2,000, and another citizen sent \$20 to recompense for \$5 worth of copies “because the Bible says to repay fourfold.” Members of the clergy sent in funds they received when hearing deathbed confessions. An often circulated story includes this gem: “Dear IRS, I have not been able to sleep at night because I cheated on last year’s income tax. Enclosed please find a cashier’s check for \$1,000. If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send you the balance.” In the fund’s first 175 years, citizens sent almost \$6 million.¹

Clearly, God uses guilt to get our attention, but He never intended for guilt to distress us forever. Guilt can be good when it convicts us of our wrong and convinces us to do right. When we repent of our sin, God offers the gift of forgiveness through Jesus to remove our guilt and abolish our shame.

“If we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away.”

(1 JOHN 1:9 CEV)

What Is True Guilt?

The foundation of guilt as a concept is three-fold: 1) an acknowledged wrong has occurred; 2) a negative state or sense of responsibility for a failure is felt; and 3) some sort of penalty or punishment is required to offset the pain of the wrong and its consequences.

In Leviticus, chapter 4, the Lord commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that when anyone “*sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands*” (v. 1)—be it a priest, the community as a whole, an individual, or a leader—“*when they realize their guilt*” (vv. 13, 22, 27) a prescribed sin offering must be made. Thus atonement would be accomplished and the sinner(s) would be forgiven.

Later in the book of Leviticus, the Lord details what constitutes a guilt offering, which can include restitution for specific wrongdoing:

“When anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned.”

(LEVITICUS 5:5)

When you know you’ve done something wrong, or intentionally avoided doing something right, you will (and should) experience a sense of *true guilt*.

True guilt is the fact of being at fault or committing an offense.²

True guilt is the result of any attitude or action contrary to the Word of God.

“**True guilt**” in Hebrew is *asham*, which paints a three-dimensional picture: doing wrong, deserving punishment, and demanding a penalty so that fellowship with God can be restored.³

*“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

(PSALM 32:5)

Lack of Appropriate Guilt

Question: “I don’t feel guilty, even when I do what I know is wrong. What should I do?”

Answer: First, acknowledging the truth that you have ongoing sin is a significant step. Now turn that truth into a prayer. . . .

—“Lord, may I see my sin as You see it. May I hate my sin as You hate it.”

- “Help me see when my heart has been hardened.”
- “Help me feel the guilt I need in order to turn from my sin.”
- “Help me face the wounds in my past to receive Your healing.”
- “Thank You for removing the guilt of my sin as I confess it.”
- “Empower me to walk in victory over this sin through your supernatural strength.”

Realize, if you are doing what is right, you are where you need to be. . . .

*“If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?
But if you do not do what is right,
sin is crouching at your door;
it desires to have you,
but you must rule over it.”*

(GENESIS 4:7)

Responding to True Guilt

QUESTION: “What should I do when I know I’m guilty?”

Answer: You experience true guilt when you recognize the fact that you have sinned.

Upon gaining that knowledge, the Bible says you are to “confess” to God (“agree” with God) that you have sinned and have fallen short of being right in God’s sight (see Leviticus 5:5, 26:40–42; Numbers 5:7; Matthew 3:6; James 5:16). When you enter into a personal, saving relationship with God through the death of Jesus Christ as payment for your sins and receive Him as your Savior and Lord, then you can rightfully claim the forgiveness of Christ. Like David, approach God with a humble and contrite heart . . . a heart broken over your sin.

“My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. . . . LORD, do not forsake me; do not be far from me, my God. Come quickly to help me, my Lord and my Savior” (Psalm 38:4, 21–22).

Remember: God is faithful. He will always do what He promises. Just as He extended forgiveness to David, His response is the same to you.

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

(HEBREWS 4:16)

What Is False Guilt?

From time to time, we’ve all fallen prey to *false guilt*—especially if someone in our lives is skilled at *guilt-manipulation*—a powerful method of *control*. God designed guilt to convict us of our sin, to convince us to change, to cause us to accept Christ—for Him to cleanse us and develop His character in us. However, guilt-manipulators use *false guilt* to manipulate us in such a way that we develop *people-pleasing* characteristics.

- God uses “good” or true guilt so we will gain freedom from sin’s power in our lives.
- Guilt-manipulators use false guilt so we will stay fearful, and they gain power *over* our lives.

Simply stated, guilt-manipulators want control—they need *people pleasers* who are desperate for their approval. Notice how the apostle Paul refused to fall into this trap:

“We speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.”

(1 THESSALONIANS 2:4)

False guilt is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or those of someone else.⁴

False guilt arises when you blame yourself, even though you've committed no wrong or, after having done something wrong, you've confessed and turned from your sin.

False guilt keeps you in bondage to three destructive masters . . . *shame, fear, and anger.*

False guilt, ironically, is not resolved by confession . . . because there is nothing to confess. Confession won't be effective because false guilt is not based on truth but rather a lie.

Realize, if you continually feel guilty or condemned without cause, the source could be a spiritual attack. Revelation 12:10 warns that Satan is the *"accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night."* He loves to disseminate lies . . . to burden true believers with false guilt and feelings of eternal condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies include: bringing up the past (even if you've already confessed the sin), reminding you of your failures (even when you've turned from doing wrong, and are focused on doing right), and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God (a blatant lie contradicting the truth that God loves us and has made full forgiveness and acceptance available through Christ). Jesus explains one of the core tactics of the enemy. . . .

*"He was a murderer from the beginning,
not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.
When he lies, he speaks his native language,
for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

(JOHN 8:44)

Responding to False Guilt

Question: “I struggle with *false guilt*. What can I do when I can’t stop thinking about sins I’ve confessed and no longer do?”

Answer: The next time your mind begins to replay your repented sins—sins you have confessed that have been forgiven and you are no longer committing—realize this taunting trick comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- “What am I hearing?” (False accusation.)
- “What am I feeling?” (False guilt.)
- “What are the facts?” (I am no longer guilty because I have confessed and been fully forgiven of this sin.)

Use Scripture as your standard to distinguish between true guilt and false guilt. If Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, He took away your sins when He died on the cross. Rather than focusing on false accusations and false guilt, choose to stand on God’s truth.

Turn Romans 8:1 into a prayer: “Thank You, Father, that You don’t condemn me and don’t want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because Jesus is my Lord and Savior and I have been forgiven.”

*“There is now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

(ROMANS 8:1)

False Guilt: The Will Chapman Story

It's merely another day in May, yet it's about to become the most memorable of days in the worst way for singer and songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman and his family.

Two sisters, Stevey Joy and Maria, just graduated preschool and their age 18 brother, Caleb who is practicing his guitar, is about to graduate high school in just a few days. Sister Emily at age 21 is still at work and brother Will, age 17, is auditioning for a school play.

Their mom and dad are in the kitchen, working on the multitude of lists for Emily's upcoming wedding. Daughter Shaoy arrives home from school and joins her younger sisters outside to play.

As dad gets a call, he steps outside watching Will slowly pull into the driveway and continue toward the back.

The girls in the backyard see Will approaching. Five-year-old Maria runs toward the garage calling his name.

Shaoy shouts, "Maria! Stop!"⁵ But Maria doesn't. She keeps running toward the car.

Steven hears screams from the back of the house—desperate screams as the scene unfolds. Mother Mary Beth hears them too as they both race toward the sounds.

By the time they reach the driveway, they see Will carrying Maria. He's desperately sobbing, "Maria, wake up!"⁶ When Will sees his mom, he cries out, "I hit her with the car!"⁷ Blood on both Maria and Will and a circle of blood on the driveway paint the picture of this family's pain.

Mary Beth takes Maria from Will, laying her on the grass to perform CPR. Running toward them, Steven drops his phone and takes over rescue breathing while Mary Beth calls 911. None of this makes any sense. Everyone is in shock as a paramedic who lives nearby pulls into the driveway. He's heard the dispatch and rushed over to render aid.

Soon, a hospital helicopter lands to take Maria to the hospital.

Steven's brother Herbie finds 6-year-old Stevey Joy hiding under her bed—terrified at what she has seen.

In panic, 17-year-old Will runs away from the calamity. Little Shaoey chases him, begging him to come back, but she can't catch up. His 18-year-old brother dashes after Will, tackling him in the grass near the front of the house. Will struggles to break free, but Caleb holds him tightly.

Will pleads, "I can't stay here!"⁸

Caleb holds on, "Where would you go? We love you, Will!"⁹

When Steven's road manager David reaches the scene, he knows exactly how Will feels. Years ago—when he too was just 17—David had been unable to stop his vehicle when a child ran into the street. That child did not survive.

David takes over for Caleb, holding Will as he cries inconsolably. Stroking his hair, he reminds Will that Maria is in God's hands now.

When another neighbor arrives to drive Steven and Mary Beth to the hospital, Steven asks him to stop just long enough to call out to his heartbroken son: "Will Franklin, I love you! Your father loves you!"¹⁰

The ride to the hospital seems to take forever.

In the emergency room, Steven prays. After all efforts have failed, Mary Beth gently touches his arm and softly says, "Sweetheart, she's already gone. She's with Jesus, so it's okay to let her go."¹¹

Steven knows it's true, but he also knows this is a sacred moment. He speaks to those in the room, telling them his little girl has entered heaven and reminding them that someday everyone

will stand at that same door to eternity. He pleads with them to think about their own eternal destiny. He asks that they honor his little girl's life by considering Christ because this moment matters. They can see little Maria again and they can meet Jesus face to face if only they will believe.

Days later, Steven recognizes that Will Franklin is in a battle to survive. Steven's lost one child and he cannot bear to lose another to overwhelming grief and guilt. What role does guilt play in such a tragic accident?

Walking through this dark valley, no one blames Will—no one except the enemy of God who constantly accuses the children of God. At Maria's memorial, Caleb speaks about what many are thinking and feeling. "We prayed for healing for Maria, but God healed her in a way we didn't like. But God is going to heal my brother in a way I think we're all going to like."¹² The assembled crowd rise to their feet remembering Maria, supporting Will, and honoring God.

After Maria's memorial service, the Chapmans huddle together, staying close to each other and especially Will, continuously reminding him of their love and God's love for him. A team of counselors walk with them all through the tough days that follow.

One day after the Chapmans return home, trying to decide if they should or even could stay in their home where the tragedy occurred, a sudden storm erupts. Waves of rain pour down. Then, just as quickly, the rain stops and the sun bursts into brilliance—as if God were telling them, "I'm weeping with you, but I will also clear the clouds away."

*"Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning."*

(PSALM 30:5 NKJV)

What Is Shame?

Most people assume that *guilt* and *shame* are essentially the same. However, guilt focuses on *what we've done* while shame casts a shadow on *who we are*.

Although we usually feel some sense of shame when we are exposed as being guilty of doing wrong, the goal of good (true) guilt is to convict us of having committed a wrongful act so we will confess it, be forgiven for it, then change. Once guilt has been forgiven, it is relegated to the past. The outcome is intended to be positive, making us more Christlike in our attitudes and actions.

However, the fundamental goal of shame is to convince us that something is intrinsically wrong with us that cannot be fixed . . . a fatal flaw for which there is no forgiveness. The end result is negative, robbing us of hope and filling us with despair. In his pain and sorrow, Job laments the weight of his shame in affliction.

*“If I am guilty—woe to me!
Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head,
for I am full of shame and drowned in my affliction.”*
(JOB 10:15)

Shame is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of guilt (either false guilt or true guilt which has been forgiven).

Shame can be as relatively harmless as being temporarily embarrassed or as destructive as being severely abused over an extended period of time (known as toxic shame).

Shame is experienced when guilt moves from knowing we did something bad to feeling that we ourselves are bad. Shame impacts our very identity.

Shame focuses not on *what we've done*, but on being ashamed of *who we are*.

Shame can shift from being a felt emotion signaling limits to becoming internalized as a core identity.

Shame can cause us to feel like a failure—essentially flawed and irredeemably defective—which causes a deep sense of unworthiness and a constant fear of rejection. Without emotional healing, these scars can last a lifetime.

In contrast, when we respond to trials correctly, God gives us hope in place of shame.

*“We know that suffering produces perseverance;
perseverance, character; and character, hope.
And hope does not put us to shame,
because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*
(ROMANS 5:3–5)

What Is God’s Heart on Guilt?

God’s grace is greater than our guilt—one of the most central and remarkable truths of the Bible. For *every* sin and for *all* our sin—God has grace for us. The Bible says, “*he gives us more grace*” (James 4:6).

Everyone experiences guilt. We’ve all said or done things we shouldn’t have, and we’ve all failed to do things we know we should have done.

Guilt can lead to two very different responses. On one hand, guilt can drive us *away* from God when we cover up our sin, try to ignore it, or we attempt to “earn” God’s approval through our “good works” of trying harder or punishing ourselves. This usually leads to feeling more guilt, shame, and frustration.

On the other hand, guilt can drive us *to* God. Guilt can serve as a signal that we’ve done something wrong, and we need to turn back to God to receive His grace and forgiveness.

Realize, no matter what you’ve said or done, no matter how many times you’ve failed, no matter how great your sin—you’re never outside the reach of God’s love and mercy. The Lord extends forgiveness to you and calls you to walk in the freedom of His grace.

*“Because of his great love for us, God,
who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ
even when we were dead in transgressions—
it is by grace you have been saved.”*

(EPHESIANS 2:4–5)

God is gracious and forgiving, yet He does not overlook or excuse the guilty.

“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty” (EXODUS 34:6–7 NLT).

God declares that all people are guilty of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).

God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.

“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (ISAIAH 53:5).

God does not condemn those who are in Christ—who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

“The result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins” (ROMANS 5:16 NLT).

God will judge those who reject Christ and His free gift of salvation.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (JOHN 3:36).

God doesn’t want you to hide your sin and guilt, but to confess it and receive His grace.

“People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (PROVERBS 28:13 NLT).

God wants you to repent with godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.

“The kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There’s no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death” (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT).

God completely forgives and cleanses you of all sin.

“If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness” (1 JOHN 1:9 NLT).

God calls you by His grace to leave sin behind you.

“Neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’” (JOHN 8:11).

God wants you to forgive others who are guilty of wronging you.

“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

What Is God’s Heart on Shame?

After God created Adam and Eve, we read in Genesis 2:25, *“Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”* They had no shame because at that point in time, they had done no wrong.

It wasn’t until after they sinned that they became aware of being exposed and vulnerable. They attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves—trying (unsuccessfully) to hide their guilt and its resulting shame from God.

Knowing we are on display—our sins fully exposed to God who sees all—makes us uncomfortable and afraid. We feel guilt and shame and are unable to remedy the situation ourselves. God would provide for Adam and Eve by making the first blood sacrifice—coverings of animal skins. He would also promise them that one day He would provide a Savior (Jesus) to cover all of humanity’s sin, guilt, and shame.

*“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross,
so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;
‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”*

(1 PETER 2:24)

God wants you to remember He does not subject His children to shame.

“In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (PSALM 22:4–5).

God wants you to know that no one who hopes in Him will ever be put to shame.

“I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame” (PSALM 25:2–3).

God wants you to reflect His light with a face never covered with shame.

“Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame” (PSALM 34:5).

God wants you to find refuge from shame in Him.

“In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame” (PSALM 71:1).

God wants you to display God’s goodness as proof of His help and comfort.

“Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me” (PSALM 86:17).

God wants you to worship Him rather than worthless idols.

“All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols—worship him, all you gods!” (PSALM 97:7).

God wants you to be wise.

“The wise inherit honor, but fools get only shame” (PROVERBS 3:35).

God wants the righteous to reject what is false and remain free from shame.

“The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked make themselves a stench and bring shame on themselves” (PROVERBS 13:5).

God wants us to accept discipline and correction.

“Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored” (PROVERBS 13:18).

God wants us to remember hope does not put us to shame.

“Hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (ROMANS 5:5).

God wants us to remember Jesus disregarded the shame of the cross for us.

“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne” (HEBREWS 12:2 NLT).

Blame Shifting

Question: “How can I overcome the guilt and shame I feel as a result of being blamed for abuse perpetrated against me?”

Answer: Victimizers are notoriously skilled at blaming their abusive ways on those whom they abuse. Sadly, many wounded victims—due to their intense shame and vulnerability—fall prey to highly convincing perpetrators. However, no accusing words could be further from the truth.

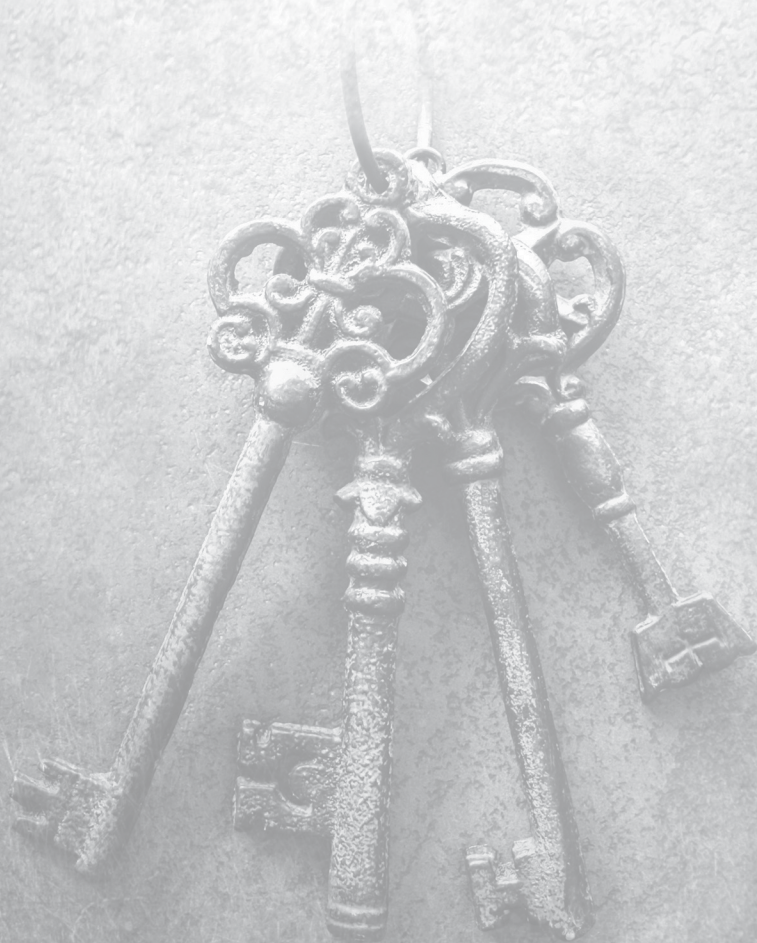
—“Blame shifting” is a tactic used by abusers to shift the appropriate blame from themselves (the guilty) to their victims (the innocent) in order to control others by using false guilt to break down resistance.

- No one makes another person sin. In fact, you don't have the power to make another person sin. Your abuser alone is responsible for any sin against you.
- No one deserves abuse; therefore, you are not to blame for what was done to you. Any guilt and its resulting shame belong to the abuser alone, not to you.

Psalm 25:3 says, “. . . *shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.*”



CHARACTERISTICS



“In a nutshell, true guilt shows us where we have erred and where we need to change.

By contrast, false guilt reminds us of our shortcomings and undermines our spiritual growth.”



A woman shares her story by saying, “My journey has been defined by guilt.”¹³ As a young mother to three children under five years of age, her husband is arrested when their baby is 10 months old. A year and a half later, he is found guilty and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Living in denial about her husband’s full culpability, the sentence shocks her, yet in full support, she stands behind him as an appeal is filed.

Not knowing the full extent of her husband’s involvement in the crime, she learns more in the months leading up to his trial and appeal. She admonishes herself, “How could I not have known? . . . I thought I knew who he was when I married him.”¹⁴ This dark confusing time brings guilt and shame on her.

In the beginning, she takes the children to see their father every single week, and they speak by phone daily. Keeping the kids connected to their dad makes it easier for him to ignore his guilt and for her to tuck away her own feelings of guilt and shame.

She’s essentially a single parent. He ignores when the kids misbehave during visits. She’s the parent who’s always in charge and responsible, so she’s the mean mom disciplining the kids. This guilt is another burden she bears alone.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hits, all visits stop and their only contact is through calls.

The guilt of putting her kids through such a chaotic upbringing finally surpasses her guilt of separating from him. He struggles with her decision to end their relationship, and the guilt of moving on overwhelms her. But she’s letting go of isolation, finding support from others in similar circumstances, and learning to forgive the past so she can face the future. Truly, the God of the Bible is just and righteous.

*“Judge the case, punish the guilty,
but declare that the innocent person is not guilty.”
(1 KINGS 8:32 NCV)*

What Is the Difference between True and False Guilt?

True guilt arises out of our God-given conscience of having sinned and is forthrightly addressed by confession and repentance, which leads to forgiveness and restored fellowship with God.

In contrast, false guilt usually surfaces when values and expectations are artificially imposed on individuals by their parents, society, and even themselves.

In a spiritual sense, both forms of guilt become weapons used by the enemy of our souls—Satan. In examining true and false guilt, C. S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of the 20th century, offers excellent insight as to what to do with true guilt (for which we are rightly held responsible) and false guilt provoked in defiance of God.¹⁵

1) Remember what St. John says, “If our heart condemn us, God is stronger than our heart.” The feeling of being, or not being, forgiven and loved, is not what matters. One must come down to brass tacks. If there is a particular sin on your conscience, repent and confess it. If there isn’t, tell the despondent devil not to be silly. You can’t help hearing his voice (the odious inner radio) but you must treat it merely like a buzzing in your ears or any other irrational nuisance.

2) Remember the story in the *Imitation*, how the Christ on the crucifix suddenly spoke to the monk who was so anxious about his salvation and said, “If you knew that all was well, what would you, today, do, or stop doing?” When you have found the answer, do it or stop doing it. You see, one must always get back to the practical and definite. What the devil loves is that vague cloud of unspecified guilt feeling or unspecified virtue by which he lures us into despair or presumption. “Details, please?” is the answer.

The Contrast

Consider these two kinds of guilt: One is a friend who speaks truth, gently leading you to repentance and forgiveness. The other is a secret conspirator who taunts and condemns, bringing dishonor and inner shame.¹⁶ The Bible gives this warning . . .

*“Be alert and of sober mind.
Your enemy the devil prowls around
like a roaring lion
looking for someone to devour.”*
(1 PETER 5:8)

True Guilt

*“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes,
he will guide you into all truth.”*
(JOHN 16:13)

Based on fact

“I realize I was wrong to take office supplies home for my personal use. I admit this is actually stealing.”

False Guilt

*“For the accuser of our
brothers and sisters
[Satan], who accuses them
before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.”*
(REVELATION 12:10)

Based on feelings

“I feel horrible. I’m horrible for wanting something that isn’t mine.”

*“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought
to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.”*
(JAMES 4:17)

True Guilt

Results in a godly sorrow over sin

“My failure to be honest makes me aware of how much I don’t reflect the character of Christ. I’m truly sorry and sincerely want to change. That’s my commitment.”

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.”

(2 CORINTHIANS 7:10–11)

False Guilt

Results in a worldly sorrow over consequences

“I have confessed that I was dishonest, but I feel so condemned. If only I’d done more, I might not be in danger of losing my job. How am I going to pay my bills?”

Brings conviction

“I now see that holding on to my anger isn’t a solution. I need to confront the situation and admit where I’ve been wrong.”

“There is a time for everything . . . a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”

(ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 8)

Brings condemnation

“I have confessed my sin regarding anger. I know God hates the evil that was done. I feel like He hates me for my feelings.”

True Guilt

Results in repentance

“I truly want to be a person of integrity. I promise I’ll make restitution and pray for the Lord’s strength to change this bad habit. I’m genuinely sorry I was dishonest.”

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you
to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*

(EZEKIEL 36:26–27)

False Guilt

Results in retreating

“I have made restitution and prayed that God would forgive me, but I feel hopeless. I’m no good, and nothing will change that.”

Accepts forgiveness

“I am thankful that my heavenly Father will always forgive me, no matter what I have done.”

*“All the prophets testify about him
that everyone who believes in him receives
forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

(ACTS 10:43)

Attempts to earn forgiveness

“I’ve asked God to forgive me, but I can’t do enough to feel forgiven.”

True Guilt

Focuses on Christ's works

“Only by relying on Jesus Christ to meet my needs and on His redeeming work within me will I be able to be the person I was created to be. Because of His gift of grace, it's my joy to do whatever God has for me.”

*“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this is not from yourselves,
it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

(EPHESIANS 2:8–9)

Brings reconciliation with God and others

“I know God loves me unconditionally, which motivates me to be more loving and forgiving of others.”

*“I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”*

(JEREMIAH 31:3)

False Guilt

Focuses on personal good works

“The more good works I do, the better I feel. I'm driven to do everything well so the good will outweigh the bad. I'm afraid if I don't do enough, I'll be rejected.”

Brings rejection from God and others

“God could never love me. If others get close enough to see what I am really like, they'll reject me too.”

In a nutshell, *true guilt* shows us where we have erred and where we need to change. It is the appropriate response and what we should feel when we have truly sinned. It motivates, pushes, and prods us to be all that God created us to be. It is healthy and helpful.

By contrast, *false guilt* reminds us of our shortcomings and undermines our spiritual growth. It leads to disappointment, discouragement, depression, and despair. It immobilizes us when we should be moving forward. It hinders our development, stunts our growth, and restricts our freedom. It weighs us down and keeps us from becoming the people God wants us to be.

Knowing the difference between true guilt and false guilt is critical for those who want to walk in freedom. . . .

*“Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.”*

(JOHN 8:32)

What Is the Difference between Guilt and Shame?

In his book *Feeling Guilty, Finding Grace: If I’m Forgiven, Why Do I Still Feel So Bad?* Larry Weeden relates an incident with his young son who stayed up past his bedtime.¹⁷ Frustrated after multiple failed attempts to convince the 6-year-old boy to go to (and stay in) bed, Larry recalls how he lost his temper and proceeded to scream and shout at his young son. Throughout the ordeal, Larry’s son, Matt, stood shaking and sobbing in paralyzed fear.

After stomping off to let his wife calm their son, Larry felt both guilt and shame for berating Matt so harshly. His true *guilt* was for doing something wrong—screaming and yelling at his young son. His shame arose when his feelings of guilt remained even after he confessed the sin of his actions and apologized to Matt. Shame entered the scene, accusing him of being a bad father, regardless of the fact he was a good father who simply behaved in a sinful matter. Even after confessing his mistake to God and seeking to change how he deals with his frustration, Larry felt residual guilt, resulting in shame that lingered far too long.

Larry’s guilt prompted him to promise to never again raise his voice to his son in anger. (His son didn’t even recall the incident.) As a Christian who confessed to God, Larry knows God has forgiven him. But shame wrongly held him captive for even failing in the first place.

*“How terrible it will be for me if I am guilty!
Even if I am right, I cannot lift my head.
I am full of shame and experience only pain.”*

(JOB 10:15 NCV)

Differences Between Guilt and Shame¹⁸

Guilt

The Holy Spirit uses guilt to *constructively* convict us of sin so we can repent.

Pain that comes with feeling guilty is God's way of bringing attention to a sin problem that needs to be addressed.

Some people are plagued by feeling guilty even when they have not done anything wrong, or even after they have confessed a real sin. This is false guilt.

Some people feel little or no guilt (despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary). This is often a sign of a seared conscience.

Guilt guards our conscience. When it works as it should, wrong behavior is addressed.

True guilt can be resolved by confession and repentance. Once God forgives us, guilt has served its purpose and belongs in the past.

Shame

Satan accuses to provoke shame that *destructively* keeps us captive.

Pain that results from shameful emotions is one tool the enemy uses to make us think we are trapped and powerless to escape.

Some people experience shame that has been "put upon" them by others. Thus, they wrongly think they *should* feel shame, but they've done nothing to bring on shame.

Embarrassment can be seen as so-called "good shame," however, it should only be a fleeting or temporary feeling.

Shame judges behavior as wrong, inadequate, or worthless. Toxic shame becomes an identity.

Shame is resolved by the power of the Holy Spirit as He removes the shroud of shame through inner transformation.

If we deny true guilt, we fool only ourselves. If we confess our sins, God forgives us. If we doubt we have been truly forgiven by God, we are choosing to trust our fallible feelings rather than our faithful God.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us
our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

(1 JOHN 1:8–9)

What Buried Beliefs Conceal True Guilt?

Enemies rarely allow themselves to be seen for who they really are until truth begins to unveil their suspicious traits and tendencies. Because guilt masquerades, it can sometimes survive unnoticed for a lifetime. Therefore few people suspect guilt as the real culprit that sabotages relationships and destroys intimacy.

Though we may not be aware of it, in the deepest part of our being, we can function on the basis of buried, negative beliefs about ourselves. These beliefs become the basis for our behaviors and the dictator of our decisions.

Based on these unique roles, consider the following buried beliefs that can sometimes be clues to unresolved feelings of guilt . . . even within ourselves.

The Loner—“If you really knew me, you’d reject me and then—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Critic—“I focus on the faults of others because if I looked at my own—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Perfectionist—“To be accepted, I can’t make mistakes or—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Benefactor—“I continually have to give gifts to others because if I don’t—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Penny Pincher—“I mustn’t spend money on clothes, gifts, or a nice place to eat because if I do—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Martyr—“I can’t accept compliments or people will think I’m prideful and then—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Worrier—“I obsess over ways to solve others’ problems in order to prove that I care, but I won’t focus on my failures or—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Iceberg—“Because sex is ‘dirty,’ I can’t respond to my spouse. If I did—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Apologizer—“I always apologize so that people won’t get angry, because if they become angry with me—*I’d feel guilty!*”

The Defendant—“My strongest defense is to protect myself, and without a good offense—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Confessor—“If I admit guilt for everything, I subtly deny guilt for anything specific, otherwise—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Legalist—“I have to do everything exactly by the book because if I fail in any area—*I’d feel guilty.*”

The Melancholic—“If I remain depressed, I have an excuse for not facing my past. If I were to face my past—*I’d feel guilty.*”

Most of us have a hard time recognizing our blind spots and seeing ourselves in one of these “personalities.” If you sincerely desire to know the truth about yourself, confront your inner enemies and be set free. Consider asking trusted friends if they recognize any of these characteristics in you. Bridle defensiveness and listen for God to speak truth to you. His voice will be loving and gentle, communicating forgiveness, hope, and encouragement. . . .

*“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, his Son,
purifies us from all sin.”*

(1 JOHN 1:7)

Deeply Buried Sins

Question: “If I’m blind to the truth about myself, how can I know if I have deeply buried sins?”

Answer: Trust God—He knows the hidden places of your heart. . . .

— Rely on God to reveal the buried sins you are not aware of by praying, “Lord, reveal anything hidden within me that I need to deal with.”

- Realize, God is more interested in your walking in truth than you are. He died so you could be set free from the power of sin in your life!
- Rest assured He will reveal truth to anyone who seeks it.

The Word of God reminds us that nothing in our hearts is hidden from God. . . .

*“If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?”*

(PSALM 44:20–21).

What Is the Spectrum of Shame?

Most often, shame is seen as a negative feeling, especially when someone struggles with a shame-based identity. Virtually any emotion can be internalized to such a degree that it molds and shapes identity. People who are angry or fearful can internalize those emotions, and that can certainly influence how others see us, but shame especially distorts how we see ourselves. Indeed, the elusiveness of shame “is a key element of its power.”¹⁹

The truth is that shame can be measured on a spectrum—from no shame whatsoever (shamelessness) to such an overwhelming amount of shame, it is truly toxic. Some experts consider an “appropriate” amount of shame (somewhere in the middle of the spectrum) to be beneficial. When we’ve done something wrong, so-called “good” shame is felt when we’ve been caught. We are in fact guilty, and we feel bad about it. In such a case, shame serves a temporary purpose. When we feel bad about what we’ve done, we can admit our guilt, try to set things right, seek forgiveness, and move on.

But when shame is no longer a fleeting emotion that helps us with limits, and it becomes a permanent fixture to our identity, it is toxic and false. We begin to erroneously think, “I am flawed and defective as a human being.”²⁰ This type of shame anticipates abandonment or rejection.²¹

The apostle Paul lamented his susceptibility to sin, but rejoiced in his redemption through Jesus.

*“What a wretched man I am!
Who will rescue me from this body
that is subject to death?
Thanks be to God, who delivers me
through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
(ROMANS 7:24–25)*

Statements of Shame

Shaming labels become stamped on hearts and minds. Shame-based statements include:

- “I’m faking everything.”
- “If people knew the ‘real’ me . . .”
- “I feel inferior. I’m damaged goods.”
- “I can’t measure up. I will never be acceptable.”
- “I can’t do anything right. I’m a loser.”

Shame and guilt overlap, but are also distinct.

- “I feel guilty (for telling a lie).”
- “I feel ashamed (for being a person who lies).”

Shame internalized is a breeding ground for codependency. “I’m just grateful to be needed since I really have nothing of value to offer.”

Shame is a factor in addiction (either personally, or within relationships). “I can’t invite anyone to my home, because I’m afraid my spouse/parent/child might be drunk or high.”

Shame is a core element of compulsive and addictive behaviors. “I must be stupid. Every night I have to triple check that I’ve locked all the doors.”

Shame can lead to feeling shame about shame. “I’m worthless, and I’m ashamed of being worthless.”

The prophet Isaiah quotes the Lord talking about worthlessness, but not referring to His beloved people. Only worthless idols warrant such condemnation. . . .

*“You are less than nothing
and your works are utterly worthless;
whoever chooses you is detestable.”*

(ISAIAH 41:24)

Feeling Happy When Sinning

Question: “If I am supposed to feel guilty when I sin, why do I sometimes feel happy when I am sinning?”

Answer: Scripture does not say that sin is unpleasant. Quite the contrary! Temptation and sin would not be a problem if it was completely unpleasant and held no appeal. The lure to sin is based on the fact that it feels good to our flesh and results in feelings of happiness because some of our fleshly desires have been satisfied—temporarily. But the Bible warns that sinful pleasure is brief—a pleasure that lasts but a moment when compared to eternity.

*“No temptation has overtaken you
except what is common to mankind.
And God is faithful; he will not let you
be tempted beyond what you can bear.
But when you are tempted, he will also provide
a way out so that you can endure it.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 10:13)

What Characterizes False Guilt and Toxic Shame?

A man fathers a child in college. The mother moves to another city with their son. When the man later marries and becomes a Christian, he fails to tell his wife about the child. He has asked the Lord to forgive him, but he is too afraid to admit the truth to his wife. Despite knowing that some day his secret son may come knocking on his door, he holds on to his guilty conscience and remains trapped by toxic shame.²²

How much different would his life be if he could live in the truth of this scripture:

*“Blessed is the one whose transgressions
are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

*Blessed is the one whose sin
the LORD does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*

(PSALM 32:1–2)

False Guilt and Toxic Shame Checklist

To determine whether you are suffering with low self-worth as a result of false guilt or toxic shame, place a check mark (✓) by the statements below that are true about you.

Inner Insecurities

- I am self-critical and have feelings of self-loathing.
- I am fearful of failure and avoid taking risks.
- I am overly impacted by the opinions of others and strive to meet their standards.
- I am undeserving of and yet desperate for the approval of others.
- I am unhappy with my personal appearance and/or personal achievements.

- I am negligent of my responsibilities.
- I am unable to set boundaries.
- I am ashamed of my background, and I often struggle with depression.
- I am controlled by a victim mentality.
- I am inferior and have feelings of incompetence when compared to others.

If you struggle with insecurity, take to heart these words of encouragement from the Word of God . . .

*“Be strong and courageous.
Do not be afraid . . . for the LORD your God goes with you;
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

(DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

Relational Roadblocks

- I am overly sensitive to any criticism from others.
- I am demanding and unforgiving of myself.
- I am defensive when confronted.
- I am argumentative and resistant to authority.
- I am undeserving of and unable to accept compliments.
- I am afraid to get close to people and be vulnerable.
- I am a peace-at-all-costs people pleaser.
- I am reluctant to express my true feelings.
- I am quick to accept responsibility for any wrongs.
- I am often afraid to defend myself.

If you struggle with establishing healthy relationships, know that . . .

*“Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.”*

(PROVERBS 29:25)

What Are Physical Ramifications of Unresolved Guilt?

Both true guilt and false guilt need to be appropriately addressed and resolved. If we have difficulty detecting our own underlying guilt, we should look at physical symptoms that can be triggered by unresolved guilt.

While many physical ailments are unrelated to guilt, some can be the direct result of guilt, as stated by the prophet Jeremiah. . . .

*“Why do you cry out over your wound,
your pain that has no cure?
Because of your great guilt and many sins
I have done these things to you.”*
(JEREMIAH 30:15)

Possible Symptoms of Unresolved Guilt

- Anxiety
- Body shakes
- Cold sores
- Depression
- Easily fatigued
- Headaches
- Heart attack susceptibility
- High blood pressure
- Inability to relax
- Muscle tension
- Overweight
- Phobias
- Sexual impotency
- Sleeplessness
- Ulcers
- Weakened immune system

What Are Common Guilt-Ridden Reactions to Criticism?

Everyone receives criticism, and everyone chooses a response. Life consists of a myriad of choices, and how we choose to deal with criticism is vital to our character. We can view criticism as a powerful enemy or as a potential friend to help us grow.

We can make something useful of it, or we can make something destructive of it. We can make a mountain of it, or make nothing of it. The choice is ours—likewise, the consequences are ours, too. Invite the Lord to examine your heart and mind.

“Test me, LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind.”

(PSALM 26:2)

Guilt-Ridden Reactions to Criticism

Discount it totally

- Consider its source to be unknowledgeable and ignorant
- Consider it to be unworthy of the slightest consideration

Deny its validity

- Declare it to be fabricated and completely unfounded
- Declare it to be an act of jealousy, a feeble attempt to ruin your reputation

Mount a counterattack

- View it as a personal, malicious attack that cannot go unchallenged
- View it as a declaration of “war,” which you will win at any cost

Have an emotional meltdown

- Experience overwhelming feelings of anger, humiliation, rejection, embarrassment

- Experience uncontrolled crying, deep discouragement, resignation, depression

Accept it blindly as being absolutely true

- Receive it as verification that criticism you received as a child was justified
- Receive it as proof of your unworthiness and unacceptability

Instead of being deceived regarding the impact of unjust criticism, the Bible says . . .

*“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,
but the folly of fools is deception.”*

(PROVERBS 14:8)

If You Only Knew: The Jamie Ivey Story

She grows up in a Christian home, attends Sunday School, walks the aisle, and gets baptized at age 10. She joins youth group, signs a purity pledge, and follows all the rules. Moving from a small town to a big city, a larger school fuels her desire to be known . . . and to be loved. Not just by her loving parents and church family, but from her peers—especially boys.

By the time Jamie Ivey is a junior in high school, she becomes sexually active and drinks alcohol for the first time. She mostly keeps up her grades and the charade that she's a "good girl." After all, she isn't smoking or doing drugs; she isn't skipping school or church. She's not "sleeping around," (just having sex with her boyfriend). She calls herself a Christian, but there is a disconnect between who she thinks herself to be and how she's living her life.

On some level, she recognizes she's not living "right." She knows the difference between right and wrong, but has no idea how to change her life. By her sophomore year in college, she is pregnant.

Knowing her dad will extend more grace than her mom, Jamie breaks the news to him first. When Jamie tells her mom, she's upset because Jamie plans to marry the baby's non-Christian father out of a sense of obligation to make things "right."

Jamie ignores her mother's warnings that two wrongs won't make the situation right. Jamie and her boyfriend continue to play house, preparing to be married parents at the age of 20.

But the happily-ever-after illusion falls apart. The baby who had become the glue holding them together is lost in a miscarriage. Just days before, Jamie had a man and a baby to fill the lonely places in her heart, and suddenly both are gone.

Without the baby and no real love holding them together, the couple part ways. Jamie grieves the loss of the child she already loved. At the same time, she feels a sense of relief—she can finish school without the burden of a baby. Then, almost instantly, a rush of guilt pours into her. How can she feel relieved after losing a child? The waves of emotions flow: grief, sorrow, relief, guilt. Jamie packs her physical and emotional baggage and returns home.

Moving home and going back to church ushers shame into Jamie's life. She convinces herself she deserves to be ashamed. Jamie doesn't understand the true message of the mercy, forgiveness, and grace of Christ. She thinks everyone is either "good" or "bad," and God loves only the good. Her past must remain hidden and that keeps her isolated. She acts aloof, but in reality, she's afraid—afraid of judgment, a lack of love, and confirmation that she is unlovable. So caught up in her own pain, Jamie only wants to remain hidden.

Living with a secret hanging over her head, she wonders what life will be like as she plans to attend a school close to home. She resolves to make better choices, to be a better person. No more drinking or sex. She will start reading her Bible. *Won't that make her feel better about herself? Won't that make her a good person? Won't that make God love her?* Sadly, she doesn't understand the love God already has for her—the love He has *always* had for her. She tries to follow her new game plan—for about two weeks.

Joining a sorority draws her into old habits of drinking and having sex. She has no idea how to date without sex and staying drunk. To her wounded heart, sex equals love.

Her first serious boyfriend after the miscarriage isn't a Christian and she convinces herself all will be well. But God has been pursuing her and He has no intention of letting her go. As she starts hanging out with a different crowd, things she avoided thinking about before keep her up at night.

She signs up for a Christian conference (with the church people she thinks are judging her). She remembers two things: a guy named Aaron whom she finds to be hilarious, and a connection to God she has never felt before. God tugs at her heart as the speaker says words Jamie desperately needs to hear. The Holy Spirit pierces Jamie's hardened heart and brings unexpected, unexplainable joy.

Jamie feels truly broken for her sin and sees that Jesus loves her—not for her attempts to follow rules and meet expectations—the real Jesus loves her. He died for her. She's known His story since she was a child, but finally, she embraces the truth of what He did on the cross *for her*. God has chased her and now starts changing her.

A few months later, Jamie signs up for a church ski trip. She sits next to Aaron, the same guy who entertained her at the conference. He's the same hilarious guy—singing during worship services, her brother's youth pastor. Aaron asks her out on a date and she declines. They are “just friends” in Jamie's mind. (When Aaron recounts the story, he recalls them falling in love.) But when the trip is over, Jamie's boyfriend picks her up from the church parking lot.

Even in her new path of following God, the rest of her life fails to match up. She's having a heart change toward God, but is still in a relationship with a non-Christian who becomes her fiancé. She feels better when he starts attending church, but he's not a believer. And although having sex has been “normal” in past relationships, she feels convicted. Godly guilt leads her to repentance and a desire to stop having sex until they marry. She summons the courage to tell her fiancé. She expects him to be disappointed, but remains confident he loves her enough to wait until after the wedding.

But, no. He explodes and dumps shame on her, turning the tables by bringing up her past pregnancy. How dare she make such a ridiculous demand for him to change!

She takes a step back and gathers her thoughts. She has the dress, the church, and the caterer. Yes, she loves him on some level, but she longs to spend her life with someone who will love her for who she is and what she believes. Deep down, she knows she cannot marry this man. They both cry as she returns his ring.

Jamie shifts her focus to following Jesus and getting a job. She's no longer drinking, not having sex anymore, wasn't even thinking about dating. She decides she and her ex-fiancé can be "just" friends. So when Jamie goes on an all-expenses-paid business trip, she thinks she's mature enough to ask her former fiancé to join her so she won't be alone on a long road trip and they will stay in separate rooms, of course. Except one room remains vacant. Jamie falls into the same pit that has trapped her before.

This time, she is devastated by her fall back into sin. Her attempt to live right—to "be good"—is sincere. But now, all the guilt she felt before multiplies in light of her recent fall. Yet, even in the darkness of despair as she constantly beats herself up for another failure, God meets her in the grip of her guilt with an even greater awareness of His loving forgiveness.

Turning to God's Word helps prepare her for the coming consequences—again, she is pregnant.

She tells her parents and reveals her genuine sorrow. She doesn't feel the same worldly sorrow she felt when she'd gotten pregnant before. This time, she is broken before God. Unlike before, Jamie has no illusions about marrying the baby's father. They have no future. She knows he is not a believer in Christ, and she will hold on to her dream of someday finding a man who loves both her and Jesus.

A few weeks after learning she's pregnant, extreme pain sends Jamie to the emergency room. Tragically, Jamie miscarries another child. Few people knew about the pregnancy, and Jamie struggles with her guilt and grief, her shame and sorrow yet again.

When Aaron asks her out again months later, she thinks he wouldn't want a girl "like her." She says yes to a date, but she knows he's a forever or not-at-all kind of guy. She's certain when he sees the "real" Jamie, he will run away. She thinks he deserves to know who she is and what she's done.

On their first date, she tells him she has a "few things" to share with him. But she's not prepared to do that right away. She will let him know when she's ready. He simply says, "Okay." No questions, no recriminations. The conversation moves on. The longer they date, the more she knows she is falling in love with him—this man who wants to serve God, who's never kissed a girl before. At some point, she needs to come clean and confess her past to him.

While walking alongside this youth pastor, she's learning as much as the kids he leads. She feels so out of place, so inadequate, like such a fraud. Here's where shame cranks up the condemnation. *What if all these people she hangs around with learn about her past? What would they think of her? Of Aaron?*

She tries to stuff memories and feelings deeper inside, so she can be seen as a good Christian girl. But she's warned Aaron she has something to tell him and she can't hide her secret any longer.

On a beach trip with some students, Jamie realizes the time has come. Worshiping on the beach and sharing communion ushers in the presence of the Lord. When everyone else returns to their rooms, Jamie stays behind, hidden in the darkness. She senses the Spirit of God and she prays and cries and pleads for the strength to reveal her secrets to Aaron.

He finds her seated in the sand, and faces her with his back to the ocean. As the waves crash in the distance, Jamie holds nothing back. She has no idea how long she talks, but Aaron never looks surprised or upset. Only love shines through his eyes.

Jamie has no idea what will come next. If he chooses to walk away, she will understand. She's not only trusting the man she loves, she's trusting God enough to share her story with someone else. As Jamie talks, tears fall from his eyes. Not tears of anger, disgust, or regret. Real tears of compassion and love and sorrow as he cries with her.

At last, his words set in motion her healing from shame. "You have nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed of, Jamie, because that's not even the girl I know. You aren't defined by your past. I love you."²³

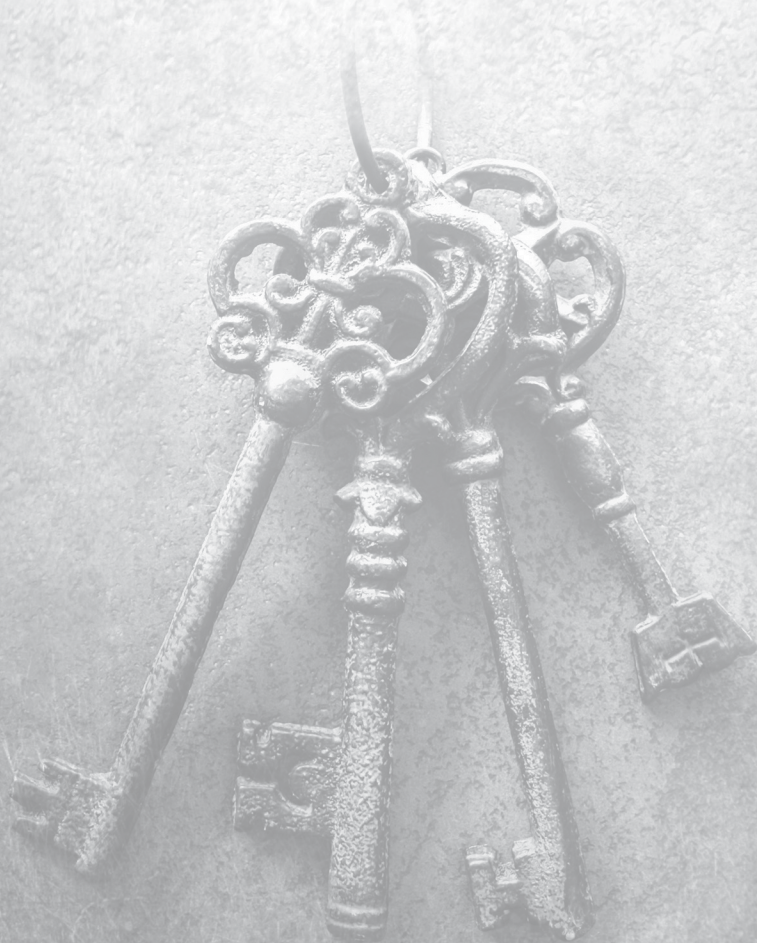
This moment—the "most Christlike encounter" she has ever experienced with another person—changes Jamie.

Even though she feels loved and accepted in that moment, she must still work through the fear of what others might think of her and how she might be perceived. So much of the pain would remain buried. But Jamie would eventually come to know: "When we hide the mess we've been through, we also hide the redemption that God has lavishly poured on us. We can't proclaim His grace until we expose our mess."²⁴

Thirteen months after their beachfront moment, Jamie and Aaron marry. She would have to wrestle with her idea of trying to be a "good" pastor's wife. The Lord would gently lead her step-by-step as she lets go of her own faulty expectations, her past pain, and all the guilt and shame she carried for so long. As a new creation in Christ, Jamie shares her story to help others find the same freedom from guilt and shame she now enjoys.

*"Freedom is what we have—
Christ has set us free!
Stand, then, as free people,
and do not allow yourselves
to become slaves again."
(GALATIANS 5:1 GNT)*

CAUSES



*“Through our life-changing
relationship with the Lord,
He says our sins
are forgiven forever.”*



Guilt and shame can sometimes grab your heart, squeezing it like a vice. Unfortunately, when we're in this tight grip, we can *feel guilty* or *ashamed* even when we shouldn't. Therefore, when we have a flawed feeling of *false guilt* or *toxic shame*, that doesn't mean we have disobeyed God, have defied His moral laws, or are hopelessly worthless in His eyes. We are most assuredly not!

Instead, we need to recognize the lies of shame and feel only *true guilt* by seeing ourselves as God sees us. We must face our real sins, even our hidden faults for which we are accountable. David, who tried hard to hide his sin, had this change of heart . . .

*“Who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.”*
(PSALM 19:12–13)

Why Do We Feel True Guilt?

Essentially, we feel true guilt because the truth is: *We are guilty!*

The Bible reveals the truth that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23) and “*no one is good—except God alone*” (Luke 18:19). Because we have a sinful nature, passed down to us by Adam through all generations, we sin. As Christians, we will not be completely sinless this side of heaven, but as we mature, we can hope to sin less and less.

Regardless, when we are guilty of sin, true guilt prompts us to confess, repent, and receive forgiveness. While we may still bear earthly consequences for our sin, God has removed the heavenly penalty for our sin through the death and resurrection of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

The apostle Peter shared these words:

*“Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God,
and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins.*

Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

(ACTS 2:38 NLT)

Sins Outlined in Scripture

In Exodus 20, God spoke these words to Moses so God’s chosen people would follow the Ten Commandments:

1. *“You shall have no other gods before me”* (v. 3).
2. *“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . .”* (v. 4–5).
3. *“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name”* (v. 7).
4. *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”* (v. 8).
5. *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you”* (v. 12).
6. *“You shall not murder”* (v. 13).
7. *“You shall not commit adultery”* (v. 14).
8. *“You shall not steal”* (v. 15).
9. *“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor”* (v. 16).
10. *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house . . . wife . . . servant . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor”* (v. 17).

Breaking any of these commandments constitutes sin, which needs to be confessed and forgiven.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus broadened the scope of the Ten Commandments by proclaiming sinful anger to be as dangerous as murder and lust to be committing adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:22, 28).

In the New Testament, Jesus categorizes the Ten Commandments into two overarching commandments:

*“Love the LORD your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*

³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*

³⁹ *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

(MATTHEW 22:37–40).

The Holy Spirit gives this testimony about God’s laws and His provision of Jesus—the one perfect sacrifice for sin:

*“For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever
those who are being made holy.*

*. . . ‘I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.’”*

(HEBREWS 10:14, 16)

Why Do Some People Struggle with Shame?

At the core of shame lies negative self-talk: “I am not enough. There is something wrong with me. I am bad. I just don’t matter.”²⁵ The essence of shame is felt internally. Shame is first formed in emotions, but those feelings lead to thoughts that strengthen the stranglehold of shame. Even telling ourselves we “shouldn’t” feel ashamed only reinforces and increases shameful feelings.

A familiar adage in 12-step recovery programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous, states, “We are only as sick as our secrets.” And shame is “committed to keeping us sick.”²⁶

Shame tends to be self-reinforcing. Whereas guilt draws our attention to how our actions affect others, shame isolates and impacts us directly. Shame triggers a deep sense of self-consciousness. We look away, turning our gaze down to not see others looking at us. Turning away only reinforces whatever shame we attempt to avoid. Isolation and disconnection are natural consequences of hiding in shame.²⁷ One question to ponder: “Are people ashamed because they do bad things or do people do bad things because they are ashamed?”²⁸

Psalm 44 describes the heavy burden of shame . . .

*“I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame.”*

(PSALM 44:15)

Struggles with Shame

Shame is viral by nature. It creates a deep fear of vulnerability. More often, we struggle with shame not for being “too bad,” but instead for feeling not “good enough.”²⁹

Shame often attaches to victims of abuse when they wrongly assume they are somehow to blame for the abuse instead of the perpetrators.

Shame begets shame. Shamed people will shame other people.³⁰

Shame becomes even more deeply entrenched when our response is to retreat and hide, trying harder to appear invincible.³¹

Shame can arise out of compulsive comparisons.³² This is especially true in the modern age of social media and popular influencers, where everyone puts forth their best images and others feel pressure to “measure up.”

Shame exaggerates our faults, which may arise from false perceptions of who we “ought” to be: Some of these shame producers include:³³

- Unaccepting parents who impose a complicated ideal. Being perceived positively results in approval. But those who perceive themselves negatively—or believe that others do—feel like failures, which produces shame.
- The secular world which says we must look good, feel good, make good. If not, we feel shame.
- Graceless religion that demands we live up to traditions and shun taboos. When we don’t/can’t do what is expected and we fail, we are rejected, abandoned, and feel ashamed.

Shame drags other negative perceptions (and corresponding negative feelings) to the forefront. We feel judged, condemned, abandoned, and rejected—even when those perceptions are not based in reality. But the grace of God brings hope.

*“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 4:8–9)

Body Shame

Question: “I struggle with a particular form of shame—I am ashamed of my body. What can I do to rid myself of these negative feelings?”

Answer: Being ashamed of one’s own body is more common than typically spoken out loud. Too short, too tall . . . too skinny, too fat . . . too pale, too dark . . . too old, too young . . . depending on the form of comparison and the trends of the day, everyone can find something about their body to complain about or agonize over.

But what is seen on the outside is nowhere near as important as what—or who—is on the inside. Jesus gave this warning to the teachers of the law and Pharisees: *“You hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. . . . First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean”* (Matthew 23:25–26).

For the Christian, our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell within us at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). God gave our bodies to us, and in the Garden of Eden, He called His workmanship *“very good.”*³⁴ We should take care of our bodies so we are as healthy as possible, but we also need to remember our bodies are a temporary tent for our time on earth.

*“We know that our body—
the tent we live in here on earth—
will be destroyed.
But when that happens, God will have a house for us.
It will not be a house made by human hands;
instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:1 NCV)

What Runs Your Life— Rules or Relationship?

An elderly woman approaches a pastor with a heavy heart. She says, “I’m afraid God hasn’t forgiven me.”³⁵ When he gently asks what God has not forgiven, she eventually tells him she had premarital sex as a young woman. Later, she married a Christian man and they have shared a life in service to the church, each other, their children and grandchildren, and their community.

The pastor probes, “Have you told God how sorry you are for what you’ve done?” She responds, “Thousands of times. For more than 50 years I’ve begged Him to forgive me.” The pastor verifies she is indeed a Christian, and asks if she feels guilt because her husband doesn’t know. “I told him. And he told me that he wasn’t a virgin when we married either. I forgave him and he forgave me. I believe God has forgiven my husband. It’s me who isn’t forgiven.”³⁶

Sadly, for most of her life, she has adopted a false theology of condemnation. In her mind, no “good” could ever erase her sin, and she would remain forever guilty before God and man. She needed to know and believe that Jesus paid for her every sin, and the freedom of God’s forgiveness was hers for the taking. Indeed, God declares that He remembers no sins covered by Christ’s sacrifice:

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

(HEBREWS 10:17)

Do you walk around with a master list of forbidden things in your mind? What does your list include? Many people have a distorted perception of God and see Him as a God of wrath, waiting to punish us when we step out of line or break the rules. If we see God as the “Great Punisher,” our relationship with Him becomes one of fear and guilt rather than one of love and trust.

If our faith *increases guilt* rather than *decreases guilt*, we have a legalistic, rules-based relationship with God. However, the more we know the true character of God, the less guilt we will experience. The reason is this: The more we recognize God’s undeserved forgiveness for our wrong choices—for our self-willed, self-centered choices—the more we will seek to please God by making choices that are right in His sight.

In light of our guilt, we feel all the more humbled when we focus on His love, unconditional grace and mercy—and yes, His full forgiveness. Through our life-changing relationship with the Lord, He says our sins are forgiven forever. . . .

*“Blessed are those whose transgressions
are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”*

(ROMANS 4:7)

Rules-Related False Guilt

I feel guilty when . . .

I struggle with overcoming a bad habit—even when I know I’m dealing with it.

I think sexual thoughts—even when the thought is fleeting.

I spend money for things—even when I buy necessities.

I get angry—even when the anger is appropriate (“righteous indignation”).

I can’t help everyone who asks—even when I’m not able to help.

I take time off from work—even when I need to take the time.

I say *No* to a spiritual leader—even when I’m not led by the Lord to say *Yes*.

I am tempted to sin—even when I choose not to sin.

I fail to witness all the time—even when it’s not the appropriate time.

The man Job, whom God called blameless, had friends who continued to blame him for all the tragedy in his life—none of which was his own doing. Nevertheless, Job was so beaten down with accusations that he responded . . .

*“If I am guilty, too bad for me;
and even if I’m innocent, I can’t hold my head high,
because I am filled with shame and misery.”*

(JOB 10:15 NLT)

Stop Feeling Guilty

Question: “I saw a friend steal something, and I reported it. Now I feel guilty for betraying my friend. Is my guilt justified?”

Answer: If you failed to privately confront your friend before you reported the theft, then you might be guilty of not providing your friend the opportunity to do the right thing and return the stolen item. In that case, your guilt is not that you reported the theft but that you did not first confront your friend.

However, if you did confront and the wrong was not righted, you were right to report the theft. Then, if you still feel guilty, you are feeling *false guilt*.

Consider this:

- *Who is the one guilty of stealing?* Your “friend,” who should feel true guilt.
- Anyone who is weak can keep silent after witnessing a wrong, but it takes someone who is strong—a real friend of conscience—to speak up.
- Although you may not see it now, if your friend experiences a painful repercussion, you may have saved your friend from a lifestyle of stealing. The Bible says, “A *truthful witness saves lives*” (Proverbs 14:25).

Even so, you have acted wisely in seeking to know whether you have committed any sins so that you might correct any wrongs you may have done. Consider the words of righteous Job. . . .

*“How many wrongs and sins have I committed?
Show me my offense and my sin.”*

(JOB 13:23)

What Are the Two Sources of “Good Guilt”?

Where does guilt come from? What is its source?

When God created humanity, He gave each of us a conscience, which means “with knowledge.”³⁷ This innate gauge helps measure our morality when we feel guilt, regret, and an inner recognition of right and wrong. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the conscience was awakened in them. However, a conscience is not an infallible resource; it can be conditioned to be either a positive or a negative force.

After Pentecost, the benefits of conscience would be reinforced and strengthened by the powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit.

*“This is how we know that we belong to the truth
and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:*

*²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know
that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*

*²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have confidence before God.”*

(1 JOHN 3:19–21)

SOURCE #1—The Conscience from God **The God-given conscience provides us** **with the sense of right and wrong.**

*“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—
his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen,
being understood from what has been made,
so that people are without excuse.”*

(ROMANS 1:20)

Categories of the Conscience

Cognitive Conscience

An *insightful conscience* based on reasoning that knows the will of God

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (ROMANS 12:2).

Convicting Conscience

An *ethical conscience* that approves the good and condemns the bad

“They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them” (ROMANS 2:15).

Cleansed Conscience

A *purified conscience* that has been renewed from whatever would defile it

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (HEBREWS 9:14).

Clear Conscience

A *confident conscience* that can withstand assaults from false accusations

“Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 PETER 3:16).

Corrupt Conscience

An *impure conscience* that has not been trained properly or is altered by the dictates of social opinions

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted” (TITUS 1:15).

Calloused Conscience

A *seared conscience* that has become insensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit by persistent involvement in sin

“Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 TIMOTHY 4:2).

A Seared Conscience

Question: “What is a seared conscience?”

Answer: A conscience that is seared as a result of willful and repeated violations of God’s will is considered “deadened” and insensitive to the caring conviction and productive prodding of the Holy Spirit.

*“They claim to know God,
but by their actions they deny him.
They are detestable, disobedient
and unfit for doing anything good.”*

(TITUS 1:16)

SOURCE #2—The Spirit of God **The Holy Spirit provides conviction** **when we are wrong . . . to do what is right.**

*“When he [the Holy Spirit] comes,
he will prove the world to be in the wrong
about sin and righteousness and judgment.”*

(JOHN 16:8)

The Holy Spirit is a gift from God.

“You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (ACTS 2:38).

The Holy Spirit makes His home in your heart upon salvation.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19).

The Holy Spirit communicates God’s love for you.

“God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (ROMANS 5:5).

The Holy Spirit writes God's laws on your heart.

"The Holy Spirit also speaks of this by telling us that the Lord said, ¹⁶ 'When the time comes, I will make an agreement with them. I will write my laws on their minds and hearts. ¹⁷ Then I will forget about their sins and no longer remember their evil deeds'" (HEBREWS 10:15-17 CEV).

The Holy Spirit helps you understand the thoughts of God.

"As it is written: 'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived'—the things God has prepared for those who love him—¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-11).

The Holy Spirit teaches and reminds you of all things you have read and heard pertaining to God.

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (JOHN 14:26).

The Holy Spirit confirms the truth within your conscience.

"My conscience confirms it [the truth] through the Holy Spirit" (ROMANS 9:1).

The Holy Spirit brings conviction to your heart.

"Because our gospel came to you . . . with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction" (1 THESSALONIANS 1:5).

The Holy Spirit fills you with joy and peace and causes your life to overflow with hope.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (ROMANS 15:13).

The Holy Spirit gives you the power to obey God and fulfill His purposes for you.

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (ACTS 1:8).

What Is the Source of False Guilt and Unhealthy Shame?

For true Christians—believers in Jesus Christ—our sins are forgiven, and God identifies us as *saints*, not sinners . . . as *sons* and *daughters*, not slaves.

Although Christians still sin, our primary identity is not based on *what we do*, but instead on *who we are*—adopted members of the family of God. In the Bible, David is known for committing adultery and murder, but his primary identity before God is not “adulterer” or “murderer.” He is a dearly loved child of God and a man after God’s own heart.

For all who have been saved by Christ, sin does not destroy our *relationship* with the Lord, but it does disrupt our *fellowship* with Him . . . until we confess our sins and repent. When we do, sin no longer separates us, our relationship is restored, and God chooses to remember our sin no more. False guilt and unhealthy shame can surface when we don’t apply the promises of Scripture. Sadly, many Christians still feel guilty and ashamed for sins that, in truth, God has long since forgiven and forgotten. Keep this promise in your heart. . . .

*“For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”*

(PSALM 103:11–12)

The beginnings of *false guilt* and *unhealthy shame* often go back to early childhood. One man named Robert thought his feelings of shame were a result of him being seen as inadequate in his parents’ eyes. However, the reality was that shame caused his feelings of inadequacy.³⁸

If you heard repeated messages saying, “you’re bad” or “you’re worthless,” your heart began to whisper, *Shame on me!* This guilt moves from knowing you have done something bad to feeling that *you are bad*. Shame leads you to focus not on *what* you’ve done, but on being ashamed of *who you are*. These feelings then lead you to believe lies:

- “Love is based on my performance.”
- “My performance does not live up to the expectations of others.”
- “I will always be rejected and abandoned because I will never be good enough!”

Growing up hearing an inner voice saying *Shame on me!* causes many of us to establish or accept negative attitudes about ourselves. We develop unhealthy patterns of relating to others that can last throughout adulthood. As these patterns develop, true guilt over an action that hurts another (real sorrow over our sin) gets shifted to false guilt (fear of rejection from others).

“I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”

(JEREMIAH 31:19)

Reasons We Hold On to Guilt

In spite of all the negatives that go along with guilt, some people manage to find reasons to hold on to it as a way to use it to their advantage. Instead, these reasons work against those who need to benefit from guilt the way God designed it to be used—to be a blessing to us.

Some people hold on to guilt . . .

To draw others to them—Learning social skills in order to develop relationships is harder than connecting with people who have the same negative habits.

To avoid change—Having to adjust to new ways of thinking and responding to truth is difficult.

To escape the scrutiny of others—Acknowledging personal guilt often keeps others from feeling the need to confront, avoiding the pain of hearing their disapproval.

To divert attention from real problems—Talking in general about guilt is less threatening than talking about the core issues surrounding the guilt.

To get attention—By sharing feelings of guilt, respect can be gained from those who admire a sensitive conscience, and who want to offer help.

To manipulate and control others—Appearing to be overwhelmed with guilt serves to lower the expectations of others and reduces the possibility of being criticized or rejected.

To receive pity—Sharing personal woes is a quick way to gain pity and sympathy from others, minimizing the probability of being confronted or challenged.

Those who seek to use guilt rather than depend on God to meet their needs would do well to heed the warning of the prophet Ezekiel. . . .

*“I the LORD have spoken.
The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back;
I will not have pity, nor will I relent.
You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions,
declares the Sovereign LORD.”*
(EZEKIEL 24:14)

What Is the Root Cause?

In the psalms, David reminds us that we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” by God. He created us as complicated human beings with complex physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual systems to live life, learn and grow, and be in relationships with Him and other people.

One safeguard He gives us is the rather odd “gift” of physical pain. No one particularly *wants* this gift, but by allowing us to experience physical pain, we are alerted to damage or disease. This compels us to avoid additional injury and seek treatment.

By the same token, the capacity to feel the pain of true guilt and healthy shame is necessary to our spiritual health. If we did not experience such pain, would we seek out God for forgiveness by our repentance?

Indeed, God does use true guilt to bring about change in our lives. While God does not want us to be paralyzed by the pain of guilt and shame, He does have a purpose for so-called “good” guilt and “healthy” shame. It disciplines and motivates us to act and be changed—to seek healing and find growth and maturity.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

(HEBREWS 12:11)

3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.³⁹

Love—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (JOHN 15:12).

Significance—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

“I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me”
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

Security—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge” (PROVERBS 14:26).

The Ultimate Need-Meeter

What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

Love—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

Significance—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

Security—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

Development of Self-Effort

All of us emerge from childhood with inadequacies and failures, but when the heart is unmercifully controlled by false guilt and toxic shame, God-given inner needs are persistently met by self-effort.

The need for **love** is met by pleasing others.

The need for **significance** is met by perfect performance.

The need for **security** is met by emotional dependencies.

*“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?
Or am I trying to please people?
If I were still trying to please people,
I would not be a servant of Christ.”
(GALATIANS 1:10)*

Development of Wrong Beliefs

The root cause of *false guilt* and *toxic shame* is based on inaccurate feelings that have taken control of our thought process. These thinking patterns ultimately distort our beliefs, damage our concept of God, and camouflage our need for a Savior.

*“But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it,
and if the power of sin within me keeps
sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help!
I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it.
I decide to do good, but I don't really do it;
I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway.
My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions.
Something has gone wrong deep within me
and gets the better of me every time.”
(ROMANS 7:17–20 MSG)*

Wrong Belief: “The only way I’ll be happy is to meet my own needs in my own way. I refuse to focus on guilt and shame.”

Right Belief: “The only way I will overcome my guilt and shame is to admit my unmet inner needs and to allow the Lord to meet my deepest needs for love, significance, and security. He is the one who forgives my guilt and removes my shame.”

*“I will cleanse them from all the sin
they have committed against me
and will forgive all their sins
of rebellion against me.”*

(JEREMIAH 33:8)

What Can You Do to Get Rid of Guilt and Shame—Forever?

God created us with an innate need to have a loving relationship with Him. However, we’ve all been wrong. We’ve all been guilty. We’ve all violated the will of God.

And when we go against His will, a wall is erected between us and God—a spiritual separation. This wall called sin means choosing to go our own way instead of God’s way, which results in growing, nagging guilt and unrelenting shame.

*“Here we are before you [God] in our guilt,
though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.”*

(EZRA 9:15)

Why the Sacrificial Lamb of God?

As *sinful* people, we need a *sinless* Savior . . . not only to die as the payment for our sins but also to become the strength to overcome our sins. Jesus is the only acceptable payment for our true guilt. Jesus is the only sufficient power source to overcome shame and find victorious living.

The perfect sacrifice required in the Old Testament as a “guilt offering” for sin was a sacrificial lamb—a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God. Just as the lamb’s blood was poured on the temple altar to secure the forgiveness of God, the shed blood of Christ on the cross covers personal sins. When you receive Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are not only reconciled to God, but also made a child of God!

*“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves,
so that you live in fear again;
rather, the Spirit you received brought about
your adoption to sonship.
And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ . . .
Because you are his sons, God sent
the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”*
(ROMANS 8:15; GALATIANS 4:6)

Two questions beg to be asked of you . . .

Have you seen your sin as God sees it?

Have you accepted Christ’s sacrifice on your behalf . . . trusting Him to be your personal guilt offering?

*“All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . .
⁷like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. . . .*

¹⁰ *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”*

(ISAIAH 53:6–7, 10 ESV)

4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).

- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

3. God’s Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way
instead of your way.
Please forgive me for my sins.
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross
to pay the penalty for my sins.
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.
Change me from the inside out and make me the person
you created me to be.
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, “*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .*” (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me
has eternal life and will not be judged
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)

Shame Givers and Shame Lifters: The Marilyn Hontz Story

Fear is a fierce foe for Marilyn. Tears come freely and frequently, but they fail to wash away her worries and fear.

“Quit being a crybaby,” her father scolds.⁴⁰ “Crybaby” becomes a shame-filled nickname. She is the baby of the family, with a sister 20 years older, and a brother eight years older. She longs for love, but her constant crying only pushes her father farther away.

Deep down, Marilyn thinks her father must love her—after all, don’t all fathers love their children? She never doubts her sweet mother’s love, but she fears her father rather than feels his love. He’s often gone, and Marilyn longs for his approval—to be treated like a princess. But her father is consumed by stress and strain. After all, he is a *pastor*!

When Marilyn is five, the family takes a car trip from California to Michigan. Marilyn begs to ride in the front seat with her parents. Her father repeatedly says *No*. She continues to cry and plead until the car suddenly stops on the side of the road. Her father orders, “Get out!”⁴¹

She steps out of the car onto the deserted road. Her father grabs her small suitcase and sets it beside her. Then he gets back in the car, slams the door, and drives away!

She watches in horror as the car disappears from view. She wails uncontrollably. She doesn’t know how long she is left—but she’s certain she will never see her family again. Although her father comes back, her emotional self is left shattered on the side of that desert road.

Once she starts school, she’s fearful her father will forget to pick her up. (Her mother didn’t drive.) Only Marilyn’s mother offers any comfort. But shame enters Marilyn’s world, adding to her fear and torrents of tears. A deep secret is locked away and shame tells young Marilyn it must stay hidden.

Marilyn's mother loves the Lord and dotes on her daughter. She packs sweet notes in Marilyn's lunches and demonstrates loving compassion to those around her. Marilyn loves her so much, she wants to be a pastor's wife like her mom.

As a young teen, Marilyn sadly loses her beloved mother to cancer. Marilyn needs her father more than ever. But instead of embracing his bereaved daughter, he firmly pushes her away and tells her, "You just have to go on." She rushes to her room and pours out her heart in tears. Soon, her father knocks on her door and says, "Marilyn, there is no use staying at home and crying all day; there isn't anything you can do. I think you should go to school today."⁴²

In shock, Marilyn obediently goes to school, only to sit silently through her first two classes. When called upon during the third hour of school, she seems unprepared and her teacher asks, "Why aren't you ready?" Marilyn answers in tears, "My mother just died."⁴³ Her teacher immediately sends her to the office to call for a ride home.

A relative picks her up, and Marilyn seeks solace in the Lord. After the funeral, everyone returns to their own lives—Marilyn's married sister to her own family, her brother to his military duties, and her father takes a month-long leave of absence, leaving Marilyn behind with an aunt.

Marilyn misses praying with her mother every morning, misses her notes, misses her laughter, misses her love.

In the midst of her grief, Marilyn feels shame for secretly crying. She wonders what people will think if they know she still cries. Shame demands she hide her feelings and pretend everything is fine.

As the days pass, Marilyn dreads her upcoming birthday. Her mother always made birthdays special, and her fifteenth birthday will be her first without her mother. Marilyn waits for her father to pick her up from school—he's forgotten her more than once and she's filled with apprehension each time it happens.

She calls the church repeatedly, with no answer. Finally, the school secretary reaches her dad, and he apologizes. "Marilyn, I will be right there! I was doing a funeral and just finished the grave side service."⁴⁴ Once he arrives, he explains they've been invited to a dinner for those who were at the funeral. She protests, but he guilties her into compliance, so she spends her fifteenth birthday at a funeral supper.

Her relationship with her father continues on unsteady ground. He doesn't want her to "wear out her welcome" when she is a guest in someone's home. This makes her worry about being a burden to her father.

His dismissive rejection of her brings back all the messages tied to her shame: "You don't measure up. You're not a leader. You're lazy. You're not responsible. Don't be a burden to anyone. You cry too much. You're not confident."⁴⁵ His negative words play over and over in her head.

He may not have intended to put shame on her, but because of things in his past, he passes shame onto his daughter.

She identifies her father as a "shame giver" with his thoughtless and negative words that discourage and demean. "Should" is a favorite word of those who want to impose their own opinions on others. Shame can be spoken with condescending words, and communicated with dismissive looks or rolling eyes. These signals say, "go away," or someone simply walks by as if you are invisible. Shame givers also deflect responsibility by saying, "I was only joking" when called to account for something they say or do.

Shortly before the one-year anniversary of her mother's death, Marilyn's father remarries, and most traces of her mother's presence are removed. By the time Marilyn is a senior in high school, her father is ousted from his church, and they must move. Marilyn begs for a delay—she only has three months left until graduation. But no. If she wants to stay, she will have to find a family willing to take her in. Thankfully, she does. But after promising to send money to cover Marilyn's expenses, her father sends only one check for one month.

Marilyn would be on her own when it came to college as well. First, her father is too busy to help her move to college. Then, she is not welcome home during the summer because they have no room for her. Marilyn continues to put her hope and trust in God, but her feelings of guilt for not earning her father's love gradually shift to shame. She wrongly believes if only she were good enough, her father would let her come home. Being unable to please her dad makes her think there is something very unlovable in her.

Marilyn meets a godly man at college and soon they are engaged to marry. It should come as no surprise that when she shares the news with her father, he not only has no words of congratulations, he has no money to contribute to the wedding.

But God takes care of Marilyn over and over. She learns she has social security funds owed to her since her mother died when she was a minor. A generous couple pays for a college trip to Israel—and they seriously consider adopting Marilyn. They know the financial struggles Marilyn has faced and they plan on covering the entire wedding and providing a honeymoon trip as well!

Marilyn continues to have a strained relationship with her father. Once she and Paul marry, they settle in Michigan and start serving in a church. As their family grows, they travel back to California occasionally to visit Paul's parents and her own.

On one such trip, Marilyn recognizes a road sign. Instantly, the memory of being left at the side of the road as a 5-year-old child resurfaces. She feels anger for the first time. What kind of parent would leave a kid on the side of the road—even for a minute? Marilyn wonders, *Where were you, God?*

The couple makes several trips back to California, but Marilyn's father and stepmother don't visit them. At least until Marilyn's uncle dies, and her father asks to stay at their home.

Marilyn works through some of the anger she's experienced and truly forgives her father for his inability to show her the love she longs for and deserves. When he returns to California, he calls to thank her for their hospitality. Although he was the same impatient man, Marilyn has set aside all thoughts of bitterness and resentment along with any expectations. When he says it was the best time they've ever spent together and tells her he loves her, she's stunned and moved. She's able to tell him she loves him, too.

Sometime later her father's health is declining and he's facing his final days. She returns to California to say her goodbyes. He encourages her to make time for family. He feels remorse for losing his family, and her heart melts in compassion.

He asks if she remembers that his father died when he was nine years old. She does. "Did I tell you that when my aunt came to pick me up from school to tell me of my father's death I started to cry? . . . When my aunt heard me crying, she slapped me across the face and said, 'Be quiet; don't cry!'"⁴⁶

Marilyn's heart sinks because suddenly she understands. No wonder he considered crying a weakness. He was shamed for it too.

He goes on to tell her one more thing. He shares a painful, shameful secret: his brother physically abused him when they were young. "He hurt me in my 'private place.'"⁴⁷ Here was her 82-year-old father sharing his pain. This intensifies her compassion and endears him to her even more.

Looking back, Marilyn recalls that conversation a short time before his death as the best conversation they ever had. He was able to be vulnerable and transparent and his past pain revealed his own brokenness.

Once Marilyn begins to process her feelings of shame, she's ready to face a deeply buried wound of her own. At the tender age of five years old, a guest in their home sexually abused Marilyn. At such a young age, she had no understanding of what was happening, but she knew in her heart it was wrong. She was afraid. Her assailant threatened, "Don't tell. You'll be in trouble." She wrongly felt responsible for what took place. Shockingly, another person was in the room, and she cried out for help, but none was offered. Marilyn felt bad—that she had made a mistake. No, even worse, that she was a mistake. And her hurt and shame became buried deep inside.⁴⁸

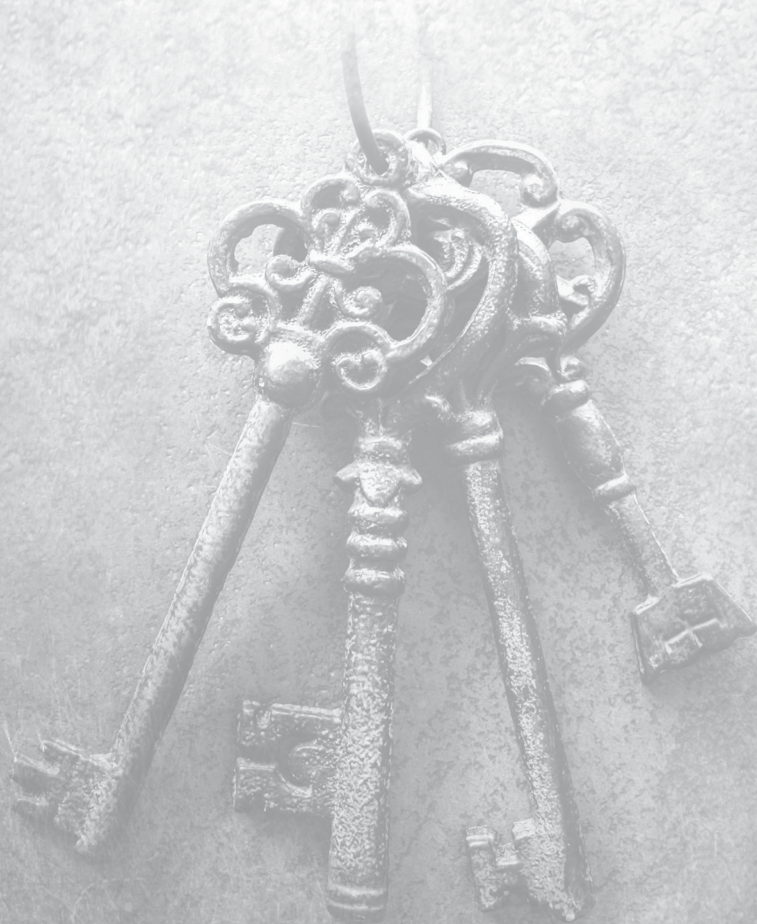
It took 47 years for Marilyn to hear the Lord asking her to open that closed door in her heart. Gently, He helped her examine the event. She felt powerless—her arms held down. She remembered Jesus also experienced powerlessness as His arms were bound to the cross and the nails driven into His flesh. But because of His last words "*Into your hands I commit my spirit,*" Marilyn understood she was no longer powerless. She had His resurrection power to rise above the abuse in her past. Even her memory of being left on the side of the road is transformed as she recognizes she wasn't really alone. Jesus was with her all along.

In time, Marilyn exchanges the shaming self-talk of her past and replaces it with God's truth. Indeed, God used her past to shape her dependence on Him, the Shame-Lifter of her heart.

*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth."*

(PSALM 121:1)

STEPS TO SOLUTION



*“Nothing compares
with the absolute assurance
that our sins have been
atoned for—fully forgiven
and removed from us
as far as the east
is from the west.”*



Spiritual brokenness does not *destroy* value—it *increases* value. An ancient art form uses precious metals—gold, silver, or a lacquer dusted with powdered gold—to repair broken pottery. Fragments are held together by ribbons of metal, and each broken jar becomes a new creation.

We are broken jars of clay—broken by our sin in desperate need of repair. But Jesus can make us whole again, even more beautiful than before.

Likewise, a wild horse whose will is not broken, who has not yet submitted to its rider, has no useful value to its owner. But a broken horse becomes more and more valuable as it surrenders to being trained to respond to course corrections made by the rider’s slightest tug on the reins.

God delights in a heart broken over sin and a will that is broken and yielded to the Savior.

*“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart you,
God, will not despise.”*

(PSALM 51:17)

Key Verse to Memorize

Psalm 32:5, written by David, indicates his acknowledgment and confession of sin and the forgiveness granted by God.

*“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

(PSALM 32:5)

Key Passage to Read

Christ freely gives the “guilt offering” to pay the price for our sins—His precious blood alone cleanses us from unrighteousness. And the power of that shed blood to make atonement is effective for all who believe by faith. Jesus, as our guilt offering, covers all the sins of those who accept His gift.

The Old Testament Guilt Offering Hebrews 10:1-23

Old Testament sacrifices were a picture of the perfect sacrifice (Christ) that was to come.v. 1

- Old Testament sacrifices were never able to make people perfect.v. 1

Old Testament sacrifices never cleansed people once for all or removed their feelings of guilt. v. 2

- Old Testament sacrifices were only reminders of sins, not the remedy for sin. v. 3

It is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins. v. 4

- The body of Christ is the only true sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. vv. 5-7

Old Testament priests performed their rituals day after day. v. 11

- Again and again, such sacrifices could never take away sin. v. 11

The New Testament Sacrificial Savior

But God’s Son offered a one-time sacrifice for all.	v. 12
— He sat down at the right hand of the Father.	v. 12
Since that time, He waits for His enemies to be humbled.	v. 13
— For by one sacrifice, He made perfect those who are becoming holy.	v. 14
The Holy Spirit testifies to us all about what He has said.	v. 15
— <i>“I will put my laws on their hearts and their minds.”</i>	v. 16
<i>“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”</i>	v. 17
— And where these are forgiven, no longer is sacrifice necessary.	v. 18

Epilogue

We now have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.	v. 19
By the new way of God’s grace, the curtain (His body) is opened for us.	v. 20
With full assurance through faith, we can draw near to God, having our guilt washed away.	v. 22
So let us cling to the hope that is ours, for He who has promised is faithful.	v. 23

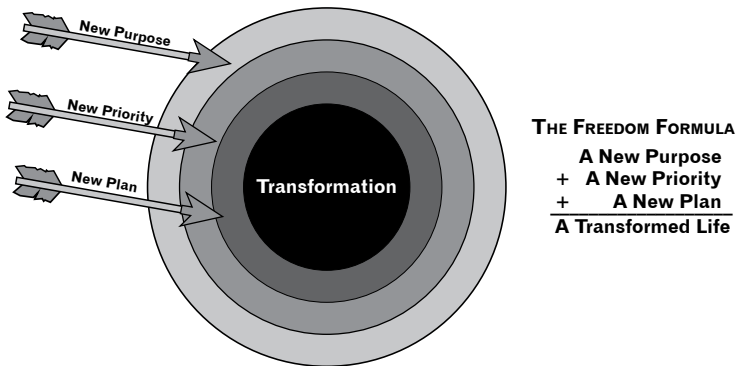
How to Reach the Target

Nothing compares with the absolute assurance that our sins have been atoned for—fully forgiven and removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Knowing this truth brings joy. No longer must we carry the burden of our sin. We can now set our sights on a new target, focus on a new plan, and begin a deeper walk with God . . . a walk unencumbered by unresolved guilt and shame, with a conscience clear before God.

*“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart
and with the full assurance that faith brings,
having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience
and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*

(HEBREWS 10:22)

Reaching the Target: Transformation!



Target #1—A New Purpose

God’s purpose for me is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).

—“I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

Target #2—A New Priority

God’s priority for me is to change my thinking.

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).

—“I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

Target #3—A New Plan

God’s plan for me is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).

—“I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

My Personalized Plan

In the strength of Christ, I will continually seek to walk before God with a clear conscience, confronting true guilt, false guilt, and shame on a daily basis.

“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”

(ACTS 24:16)

I will acknowledge . . . the existence and prevalence of guilt and/or shame in my life.

- Identify specific areas in which I am prone to experience guilt or shame
- Clarify how often and the degree to which I feel guilt or shame

“Troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me” (PSALM 40:12).

I will ascertain . . . the sources of my guilt and/or shame.

- Discern if my feelings of guilt or shame are related to rules and regulations from childhood, church, or culture
- Determine if my guilt and/or shame is the result of failing to meet God's, someone else's, or my own expectations of me

"Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you" (PSALM 143:2).

I will admit . . . the ineffective ways I sometimes address my guilt and/or shame.

- Honestly evaluate if I constantly deny, analyze, ignore, mask, suppress, cover, disguise, or surrender to my feelings of guilt or shame
- Realistically assess if I deal with guilt or shame by justifying it, pretending it doesn't exist, getting angry, avoiding people and places, blaming others, becoming legalistic, or doing good deeds in an attempt to atone for my sins

"The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out" (PROVERBS 18:15).

I will differentiate . . . between true guilt, false guilt, and shame.

- Read, study, memorize, and meditate on God's Word so I might know Him well enough to recognize when I have sinned against Him and then experience true guilt
- Examine possible wrong beliefs I have that might produce false feelings of guilt or shame

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (PSALM 119:11).

I will reject . . . shame.

- Replace wrong beliefs leading to shame with new beliefs based on biblical truth
- Ask God to keep me alert to feelings of shame operating in me and to point out areas where I am vulnerable to accepting misplaced blame

"See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (PSALM 139:24).

I will respond . . . to true guilt.

- Identify the sin leading to guilt feelings, respond to the Holy Spirit’s conviction, repent and renounce my sin, acknowledge and confess my sin to God and relevant others, seek forgiveness from God and others
- Make restitution when possible, seek reconciliation when appropriate, commit to make needed changes in attitude and/or behavior, accept forgiveness, and make a God-directed plan to establish a new behavior pattern

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you” (PSALM 32:8).

How to Distinguish True Guilt from False Accusation

Although the Holy Spirit *convicts* us of wrong behavior, God is not the author of the condemning and unworthy feelings associated with guilt or shame. *God’s conviction* is a prompting in our hearts to change inappropriate behavior for a more Christlike response. If you know you are forgiven and you have confessed your sin to clear your conscience and restore fellowship with God, then see the Holy Spirit’s conviction as His call for action to change. Understand that He extends the grace of *total forgiveness* toward you. The Bible gives you this assurance:

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.”

(COLOSSIANS 2:13)

As you seek to distinguish true guilt from false accusation, remember . . .

True Guilt speaks with conviction, reminding us we are all guilty of sin.

False Accusation: “I feel like a failure and not as worthy as others.”

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:23).

True Guilt is concerned about developing your inner character.

False Accusation: “I worry about how I look in the eyes of others.”

“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 SAMUEL 16:7).

True Guilt communicates God’s love, concern, and encouragement to you.

False Accusation: “I feel humiliated when I do something wrong.”

“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23).

True Guilt does not make excuses for itself.

False Accusation: “I feel I can’t be healed—I’m a victim of my past.”

“Have mercy on me, LORD; heal me, for I have sinned against you” (PSALM 41:4).

True Guilt allows for failure.

False Accusation: “I feel like I’ll never measure up because of my repeated failures.”

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (LUKE 22:31–32).

True Guilt encourages your real feelings to surface.

False Accusation: “I feel I must never become angry.”

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (EPHESIANS 4:26 ESV).

True Guilt is accompanied by a desire for you to change.

False Accusation: “I feel like there is no hope for me to change.”

“I desire to do your will, my God. . . . My hope is in you” (PSALM 40:8; 39:7).

True Guilt expressed to God in prayer lifts your spirit.

False Accusation: “I feel down and depressed—God doesn’t hear my prayers.”

“I . . . will praise your name for your unfailing love and your faithfulness. . . . When I called, you answered me; you gently emboldened me” (PSALM 138:2–3).

True Guilt leads to optimism about the future.

False Accusation: “I feel that something bad is sure to happen to me in the future.”

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (JEREMIAH 29:11).

How to Resolve to Forgive Yourself

When we think of guilt and especially shame, we usually imagine images of our own personal experiences. But how can we erase those painful portraits and replace them with a symbol of hope?

Consider the cross and the hope we have in forgiveness. Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would be *“despised and rejected . . . a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”*

Jesus was crucified like a common criminal without ever having committed a single sin. Stripped naked, beaten, and exposed in a public display of disrepute, He scorned the shame of the cross to bear the burden of humanity’s guilt and shame. His death paid the price for our guilt, and shame loses its power at the foot of the cross. Today, this symbol of traumatic torture brings glory to God and hope to millions of believers.

*“For the joy set before him he [Jesus] endured the cross,
scorning its shame and sat down
at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

(HEBREWS 12:2)

Make the choice now to accept this truth: The penalty for your sins was long ago settled by Jesus’ death on the cross. Consider your answers to these questions:

How many of your sins did Jesus die for before you were born?

How many of your sins were in the future when Jesus died on the cross?

How many of your sins did God know you would commit?

How many of your sins did Christ know you would commit after becoming a Christian?

How many of your sins did Jesus pay for on the cross?

The answer to each of these questions is *all!*

Although some sins bring greater consequences than others, God's viewpoint is that sin is sin. When we confess and repent based on our faith in Christ, His forgiveness covers all of our sins—and that includes *every sin!* Yet some of us place ourselves above God and become unwilling to forgive ourselves. If you choose to have a self-focused, unforgiving heart, you may likely struggle with:

Uncertainty about where you stand before God

Unspiritual false humility

Undeserved self-deprivation

Unawareness of God's priorities for you

Undervalued sense of your usefulness to God

*"This is how we know that we belong to the truth
and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:*

*²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know
that God is greater than our hearts,
and he knows everything.*

*²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have confidence before God*

*²² and receive from him anything we ask,
because we keep his commands
and do what pleases him."*

(1 JOHN 3:19–22)

How to Resolve True Guilt When You Don't Feel Forgiveness

When we realize we have sinned, we feel a sense of conviction and guilt is a natural consequence for most people. But how do we find forgiveness when we don't *feel* forgiven?

Truly, forgiveness is not a feeling, but a fact—a spiritual state where the penalty for our sin has been satisfied or set aside. In God's loving heart, He grants us mercy (not punishing us as our sins deserve) and gives us grace (bestowing unmerited favor upon us). Forgiveness is not an *emotion*, but is rather an act of the *will*, a *choice*.

God chooses to forgive us (He promises to do so when we confess and repent), so why would we dare refuse to accept such an incredible gift? We owed a debt we could not pay, and Jesus paid a debt He did not owe. Our debt of sin can be dismissed because it's been paid for by the precious blood of Christ.

*"I confessed all my sins to you
and stopped trying to hide my guilt.
I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.'
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."
(PSALM 32:5 NLT)*

Resolving True Guilt When You Don't Feel Forgiveness

True guilt requires acknowledging that we have sinned—we have fallen short of God's perfect standard.

- When we confess our sin, we are agreeing with God that we have indeed sinned.
- When we repent, God faithfully forgives our sin and removes our guilt, but we must also let it go instead of holding on to what God has released.

Forgiveness is dismissing, canceling, or setting someone free from the consequence of falling short of God's standard.

- The holy standard of God is perfection, and we all have sinned. The penalty for our sins is spiritual death (separation from God).
- The penalty for our sins (our debt) was paid by Jesus through His sacrificial death on the cross. Therefore, instead of being separated from God, we can have our debt dismissed by God and experience abundant life here on earth (John 10:10) and eternal life in heaven (John 17:3).

Refusing to accept God's forgiveness means you consider yourself a higher judge than God Himself, in essence saying:

- "God, you are wrong in forgiving me because I don't deserve to be forgiven." (No one *deserves* forgiveness. It is a gift of God's mercy and grace.)
- "Christ's sacrifice on the cross must not be sufficient to cleanse me of my sins." (This goes against clear teaching in Acts 13:38 and other Bible passages telling us that Jesus' death on the cross is the only means of God's forgiveness in satisfying our sin debt.)

Satan would like nothing more than to keep us trapped in our sin. He is an "*accuser*" of Christians (Revelation 12:10), and when you continue to blame yourself, you align yourself with the enemy. His goal is to keep you feeling defeated, trapped in a prison of sin, guilt, and shame.

Instead, reject Satan's lies and thank God for granting you undeserved mercy. Thank Him for giving you undeserved grace and live in the freedom of His forgiveness.

*"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done,
but because of his mercy. He saved us through
the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."*

(TITUS 3:5)

My Inner Voice

Question: “How can I know if the inner voice I’m hearing is God’s loving conviction of sin or Satan’s false accusations?”

Answer: Be willing to search out both the behavior and your motives for the behavior that produced your guilt. Ask God to give you insight and to help you recognize what is truly from the Holy Spirit. God has given you His Word to reveal His thoughts and ways to you. The more you study His Word, the more likely you will correctly identify His voice when He speaks to you.

*“Whether you turn to the right or to the left,
your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying,
‘This is the way; walk in it.’”*

(ISAIAH 30:21)

How to Rightly Respond to Criticism

When we have a clear understanding of who God created us to be—when we have a strong sense of His good intentions for us—we can take a step back when we are criticized and objectively examine if there is any basis of fact in the criticism.

God tells us over and over that He loves us, and when we allow His mercy to remove our guilt and seek His grace to replace our shame, we realize He sees us as more worthy than we could ever imagine.

*“Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.”*

(PSALM 40:11)

Productive Reactions to Criticism

Objectively evaluate it.

- Examine your mind, heart, and actions to find if there is any truthfulness in it.
- Examine yourself through the eyes of a close confidant and friend to determine whether it is based on truth or error.

Go to God with it.

- Seek the truth by turning to God, asking Him to reveal truth to you.
- Seek the truth by turning to God’s Word, evaluating yourself by the standard of God’s Word.

Learn from it.

- Determine to find a way to correct any attitude or action that needs to be improved.
- Determine to find a way to protect yourself from accepting any cruel, false criticism in the future.

Discard it.

- Refuse to dwell on it or give it another thought—put it totally out of your mind.
- Refuse to give it any more credence, emotionally letting it go—consider it over and done.

Forgive it.

- Release the critical words to God and forgive the pain they caused.
- Release the criticizer to God and forgive the offense.

Take to heart the fact that . . .

*“A person may think their own ways are right,
but the LORD weighs the heart.”*

(PROVERBS 21:2)

How to Know You Are Forgiven

Do you remember falling down and scraping your knee as a child? Did you run to your mother for her to pick you up and kiss the hurt away? Miraculously, it always seemed to work. You felt good again and ran back out to play. The same is true when we take our bruised and broken lives to God: He forgives and forgets. When we trust Him, He takes away all the guilt!

*“When Jesus saw their faith, he said,
‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”*

(LUKE 5:20)

God gives us this faithful promise:

*“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions,
for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”*

(ISAIAH 43:25)

FORGIVEN

(an acrostic for the word FORGIVEN)

F—Find the source of your guilt.

- Examine why you are feeling guilty.
- Determine if your guilt is true or false.
- Use Scripture as the only standard for determining true guilt.

“You desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place” (PSALM 51:6).

O—Own responsibility for your sin.

- Ask God to reveal your sin.
- Agree with God that you are guilty of sinning.
- Make restitution to those you have sinned against.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (PSALM 51:1–4).

R—Realize that God means what He says.

- Thank God for the gift of His Son, who paid the price for your forgiveness.
- Thank God for His unending forgiveness, even if you don’t feel forgiven.
- Choose to believe what God says.

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us” (EPHESIANS 1:7–8).

G—Give up dwelling on the past.

- Give up holding on to past pain.
- Give up self-condemnation.
- Give up refusing to forgive others.

“The LORD says, ‘Forget what happened before, and do not think about the past’” (ISAIAH 43:18 NCV).

I—Invest time in renewing your mind.

- Memorize Scripture that reinforces God’s forgiveness.
- Remember that *“in Christ you are a new creation”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Learn to see yourself as a valuable child of God.

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds” (EPHESIANS 4:22–23).

V—Verify truth when Satan accuses.

- Learn to discern the difference between the Holy Spirit’s voice and Satan’s.

- Answer Satan’s accusations with truth from Scripture.
- Remind yourself of God’s forgiveness.

“No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,” declares the LORD” (ISAIAH 54:17).

E—Exchange your life for the life of Christ.

- Understand that you cannot live the Christian life in your own strength.
- Allow Christ to transform you and live out His character through you.
- Continue to yield to the Holy Spirit’s direction through personal prayer and Bible study.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (GALATIANS 2:20).

N—Notice that God brings your feelings in line with the facts when you obey Him.

- Know God as the God of second chances!
- Know your feelings might not change immediately.
- Know that feelings can either influence or follow thinking. Focus on the truth and your feelings will follow.

“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised” (HEBREWS 10:36).

How to Replace Shame with Grace

Once it’s taken root, shame can be difficult to eradicate on our own. Ultimately, healing from shame comes about through the work of the Holy Spirit, replacing the lies of shame with the truth of God’s grace.

Sharing the struggles of shame with a caring biblical counselor or trusted Christian friend can help realign wrong thinking to replace shame with an understanding of God's loving grace toward each and every one of His beloved children. Truly, His grace is sufficient to overcome any perceived weakness tainted by shame. His power enables us to live a godly life.

*“He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness.’
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses,
so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:9)

Replacing Shame with Grace

Toxic shame makes people expect to encounter criticism, judgment, and condemnation. But they desperately need to be known and accepted.

- Those who seek to help them process the pain of shame should be active listeners who can encourage with kindness and compassion. Remember, it takes great courage to share something shameful. Gentle strength will help them feel less anxious, isolated, and alone.⁴⁹

Toxic shame strugglers need to confess where they see weakness in themselves—as difficult as that may be. Avoiding uncomfortable feelings, such as fearing abandonment or rejection, only delays healing.

- Bringing shame into the light rather than allowing it to remain hidden in the shadows begins the healing process.

Toxic shame and its pain needs to be brought to the forefront and examined.

- Is the cause of the pain of shame based in reality or have criticisms and slights been magnified through a faulty perception?

Toxic shame related to true guilt can be resolved when the guilt has been confessed and forgiven.

- After true guilt is confessed, any lingering shame no longer applies to what has been forgiven. It belongs in the past. Leave it there.

Toxic shame based on false guilt (or even no guilt) causes pain without purpose.

- Acknowledge pain due to false guilt, then surface and surrender shame to the Lord.

*“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.”*

(JEREMIAH 17:14)

Stained by Sin and Shame: The Nick Stumbo Story

As a kid growing up, Nick Stumbo has a vague idea that married people have sex, but the subject remains a mystery and taboo subject. When visiting a friend's house, he notices posters on his friend's older brother's walls—most of scantily clad girls on cars. At another friend's house, when the adults think they are asleep, the boys sneak a peek at the rated-R movie playing downstairs. On one occasion, a friend talks a very young Nick into exploring their bodies. On some level, Nick knows this is wrong—it's sinful. Yet the experience stirs conflicting feelings of excitement and pleasure as well as waves of guilt and shame.

By the time Nick is 12 and puberty nears, newspaper and magazine ads are replaced with a “dirty” magazine Nick nabs at an outdoor flea market. In his young mind, the act of theft seems a lesser infraction than admitting he wants to look at pornography. (This is before the internet is in every home and on “smart” phones.)

Whenever Nick is bored and restless or anxious and on edge, lust and fantasy give him a sense of satisfaction and pleasure. He finds relief for a short period of time, hiding his actions. But Nick becomes two people: one loved and seemingly known by everyone, and the “other” Nick no one knows—the Nick he himself despises.

As a teenager, Nick hides his behaviors and separates his soul—living a double life. When remorse rises to the surface, guilt-ridden secrets spill through confession. His youth leaders listen, thank him for sharing, encourage him, and pray with Nick. But with no follow-up and no plan for change, Nick's behavior worsens. And he can't stop.

Thus begins a painful addiction cycle of acting out, hiding the behavior, and living with the self-inflicted shame until he can bear it no more. Then comes another confession before he finds himself once again acting out and the spiraling cycle of sin repeats.

Nick knows sin has a cost. His dad is a pastor and Nick is a Christian. He knows Jesus paid the price for his sin and Nick confesses and repents again and again only to return to the same addictive patterns. Nick's brain has been rewired by the addictive behavior of lust and pornography. Yet Nick knows God created sex for procreation and pleasure—within the sacred confines of marital intimacy between one man and one woman. He did not intend for His good gift to be distorted and defiled by lust.

In college, Nick decides to “come clean” to his girlfriend. Prior to being engaged, Nick confesses his addiction to his future bride, Michelle. It's a painful process and she wants him to just promise he won't do it again. Naively, she doesn't understand how deeply entrenched Nick is in his addiction. Nick wants to assure her, but all he can promise is to try harder. And for a while after the wedding, Nick has no desire for pornography. But, like any addict, Nick turns back to the demanding monster of lust. Just as Esau exchanged his birthright for a bowl of stew, Nick trades true intimacy for a false fantasy.

Nick rides the roller-coaster of his porn addiction in an endless cycle of binge, purge, confess, and repeat. Now a pastor himself, Nick is sinning less, and confessing more. But each cumulative confession heaps more hurt on his wife's heart. Nick is aware of her pain, but thinks if only she understood his struggle, she wouldn't hurt so badly. Nick ignores the truth that it is his problem straining the marriage. He knows Michelle loves him, but finally he realizes she might leave him—not because she hates him, but because at some point, her pain would be too much for her to bear.

Nick increases his efforts to try harder and to strengthen and elevate boundaries. It's a good step, but not good enough to effect lasting change. While away on a trip for a class, Nick enters his danger zone: he's tired, stressed, drained, and alone in a room with a computer. And he does what has come naturally to him since he was 15 years old.

Yet in that moment of weakness, God gives Nick two gifts. First, he sees himself as he truly is. He knows the danger, knows his wife might leave, and yet he still acts out. Before, he only thought of his own pain and struggle. Never before has he really contemplated the fresh pain he will inflict on his wife, knowing he has to tell her.

This realization breaks through his sense of pride and self-sufficiency. That night he writes, “I cannot trust myself. I am dangerous when I am alone, and the pain is unbelievably deep. Why can’t I remember how this feels? . . . I need to make serious change.”⁵⁰

So Nick creates even tougher boundaries, but he is “white-knuckling” through, trying to rely on his own willpower alone to resist temptation. He eliminates familiar traps, but his addiction still rules.

The second gift God gives Nick is hearing Dr. Ted Roberts speak about the Pure Desire program where pastors can get help for pornography struggles, keep their jobs, and still receive a paycheck. For his wife’s sake, Nick agrees to meet with Ted and his wife, Diane. After taking an online assessment test, Dr. Roberts flat-out declares, “Nick, you are an addict.”⁵¹

Being called an addict insults Nick. As a pastor, he knows something about addiction, and he doesn’t see himself in that category. Addiction is a behavior in a person’s life so invasive it’s no longer controllable. Instead, it controls the addict. And the addict is powerless to stop it on their own. The truth is, Nick is an addict.

Nick knows he needs to live out Colossians 3:5 (NLT) . . . “*Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you.*” And the sinful, earthly thing lurking in Nick is his addiction to pornography.

Signing up for the Pure Desire program includes taking a polygraph test. Nick “passes” the test of being truthful, but feels terrible in bluntly admitting his sin. All of it and his shame lay out in the open. But in that raw vulnerability, Nick catches a glimpse of the depth of God’s love and forgiveness for him.

As Nick and Michelle work through the comprehensive Pure Desire program, things begin to change. They talk more, share their feelings, make deeper connections, and their sex life improves because the focus of their intimacy is now only on each other.

Michelle’s favorite day arrives when Nick confesses his struggle to his congregation. Finally, she is free to share Nick’s struggle and her own. The reaction of others is surprising. Rather than pulling away from Nick and Michelle, those who love them run toward them with the grace and mercy of God (who also runs toward the broken).

Nick admits his weakness—he is powerless over his addiction. He simply can’t pull himself out of the pit made by his brokenness. He must rely on God, whose power is unlimited. The same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead is needed for Nick to be set free.

Physically, the methods Nick uses help change the neurological pathways in his brain. But this process can take from two to five years to change the brain. Spiritually, the Lord is working in and through Nick to bring hope and help to him and many others.

In his book *Setting Us Free: An Unexpected Journey of Grace*, Nick reveals, “I continually craved this prison where I would feel both a rush of significance and a debilitating blow of guilt and shame.”⁵² He learns that he and others in the same struggle must own their own mistakes and endure the pain of the consequences.

Ultimately, Nick discovers the freedom he has craved in Christ. “No matter what your situation, the Heavenly Father loves you with an intense, inescapable love. . . . You need to find that place where who you are—your identity—is settled in Christ.”⁵³

Since completing the program and sharing his journey, Nick’s mission and ministry has changed. After launching a Pure Desire ministry at his church, Nick has joined Pure Desire and partnered with the Lord in growing through healing and recovery—for himself and others. Nick is now a new creation in Christ, set free from the stain of guilt and shame.

*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ,
set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. . . .
For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”*
(COLOSSIANS 3:1, 3)

How to Live Free of Guilt and Shame

Have you ever discovered a stain on a carpet or some other fabric? Stains can soil what should be fresh and clean. What if the stain is made with some type of permanent ink? Is there any hope of removing the stain?

Sin is similar to a stain in this way—it sullies our spirit and soul. Thankfully, solutions exist that can remove “permanent” stains. A chemical stain remover can even eliminate ink stains as if they were never there! Likewise, our loving Savior can permanently remove the stain of sin in our lives.

Consider this poem about our spiritual “Stain Remover.”

The Original Stain Remover

When we make a mistake with permanent ink,
Smearing our clothes with a stain,
We need a solution, a “stain remover,”
Which we go to a store to obtain.

But the strongest of all removers of stain,
Was the Lamb of God long ago.
Jesus died on the cross for all of our sin.
So we can be “whiter than snow.”

The Lord says,

*“Come . . . no matter how deep the stain of your sins,
I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.
Even if you are stained as red as crimson,
I can make you white as wool!”*

(ISAIAH 1:18 TLB)

God’s Spirit Can Succeed Where You Have Failed

If even after Jesus has removed the stain of your sin self-condemnation is your burden, memorize the following passages of Scriptures:

“God has forgiven me.”

“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (PROVERBS 28:13).

“God has purified me.”

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 JOHN 1:7).

“God will not remember my sin.”

“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”
(HEBREWS 8:12).

“God will not bring a charge against me.”

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (ROMANS 8:33–34).

“God has given me a personal guarantee.”

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (ISAIAH 1:18).

“God has freed me from my past.”

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (ISAIAH 43:18–19).

“God does not condemn me.”

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned” (JOHN 3:18).

“God gives me peace.”

“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (ROMANS 5:1).

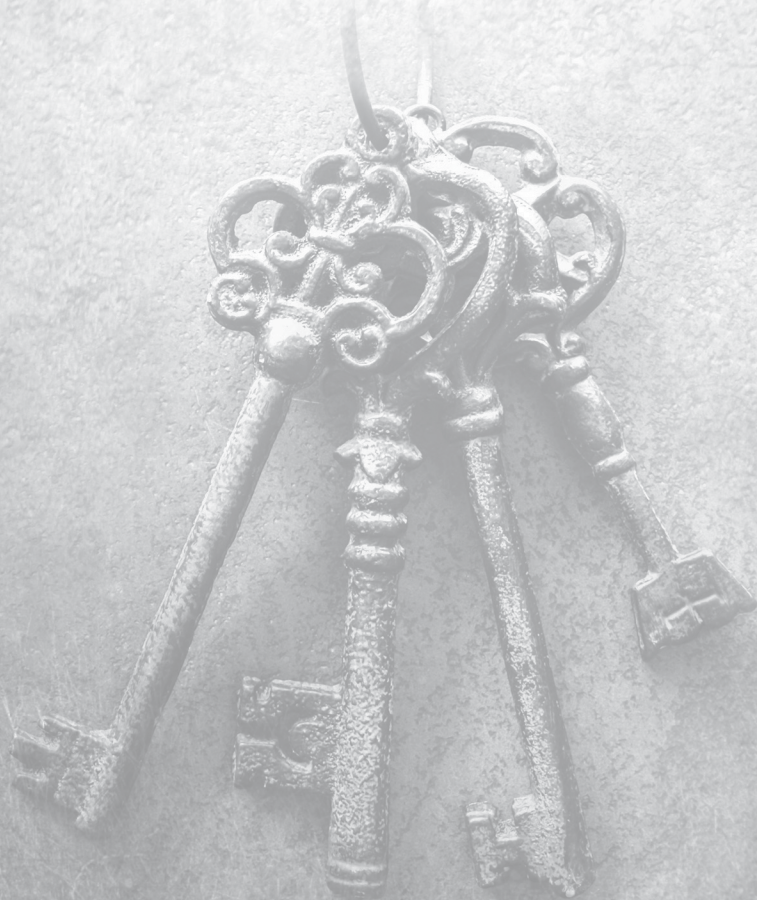
Personal Prayer

“Dear Heavenly Father,
You know the heaviness I’ve carried in my heart
because of my guilt and shame.
I admit that many times I’ve had
wrong attitudes and wrong actions.
I know I’ve been self-willed and I haven’t
lived according to Your will.
Thank You for using “good guilt” to let me know
I was going the wrong way
and to convince me that I needed
to go the right way.
I realize that You paid the penalty I should
have paid for the guilt of my sin.
Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me . . .
thank You for Your mercy toward me . . .
thank You for dying on the cross for me.
May I see my sin as You see it—
may I hate my sin as You hate it.
Please guide me to know when I’m feeling
false guilt instead of true guilt.
Help me lay aside all my feelings of
false guilt, shame, and self-condemnation.
Keep my heart focused on following Your Holy Spirit.
Thank You that I’m forgiven and set free.
In Jesus’ holy name I pray, Amen”

**False guilt and shame are self-imposed prisons
when we allow them to reside within us.
Jesus came to set captives free . . .
and sometimes I've found that the prisoner was me.
—June Hunt**



SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



*“First seek the counsel
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

In whom can we find **refuge** and **never be put to shame**?

*"In you, LORD, I have taken **refuge**;
let me **never be put to shame**."*

(PSALM 71:1)

How **does hope not put us to shame**?

*"**Hope does not put us to shame**, because God's love
has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

(ROMANS 5:5)

Since God knows each time we have **turned to our own way**,
what provision has He made for our sins?

*"We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has **turned to our own way**;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all."*

(ISAIAH 53:6)

Will I face **condemnation** for the sins I've
committed after becoming a Christian?

*"There is now no **condemnation**
for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

(ROMANS 8:1)

What is the consequence for the one who **conceals their sins** as opposed to the one who **confesses them**?

*“Whoever **conceals their sins** does not prosper,
but the one who **confesses**
and renounces **them** finds mercy.”*
(PROVERBS 28:13)

How can I have the confidence of knowing that **the Lord forgave the guilt of my sin**?

*“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said,
‘I will confess my transgressions to **the Lord.**’
And you **forgave the guilt of my sin.**”*
(PSALM 32:5)

Although I know I’ve been forgiven, can I have confidence that God will **remember my sins no more**?

*“Their **sins** and lawless acts I will **remember no more.**’ And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.”*
(HEBREWS 10:17–18)

What is the difference between **godly sorrow** and being sorry that I got caught?

*“**Godly sorrow** brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”*
(2 CORINTHIANS 7:10)

What should I do if I confess my sin,
but still have a **guilty conscience**?

*“Let us draw near to God with a sincere
heart and with the full assurance
that faith brings, having our hearts
sprinkled to cleanse us from a **guilty conscience**
and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*

(HEBREWS 10:22)

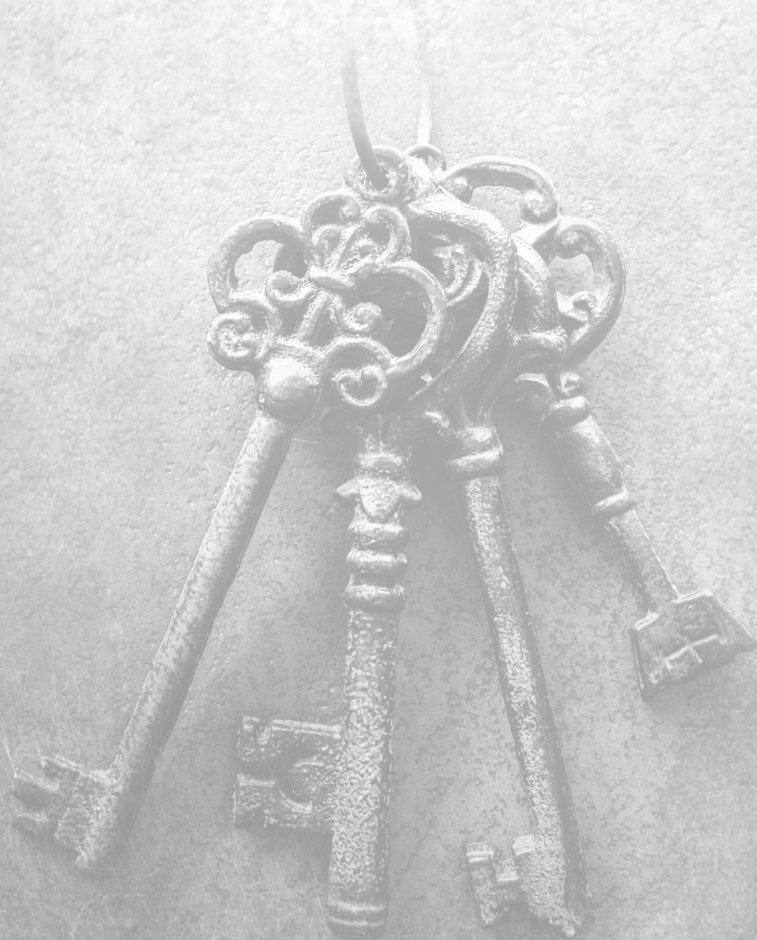
What can I do to **keep my conscience clear**?

*“I strive always to **keep my conscience**
clear before God and man.”*

(ACTS 24:16)



ENDNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY



ENDNOTES

1. "Guilt: Settling with Uncle Sam," *Time Magazine*, March 30, 1987, www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0%2C9171%2C963866%2C00.html, accessed August 2, 2023.
2. Bruce Narramore and Bill Counts, *Freedom from Guilt* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1974), 34–37.
3. Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, Bruce K Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), s.v. TWOT# 180.
4. Brent Curtis, *Guilt*, Institute for Biblical Counseling Discussion Guide, ed. Tom Varney (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 14–15, 17, 19, 24.
5. Steven Curtis Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World: My Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2017), 327.
6. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 328.
7. Ibid.
8. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 336.
9. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 330.
10. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 331.
11. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 334.
12. Chapman, *Between Heaven and the Real World*, 349.
13. Anonymous, *A Parent's Story 5: Guilt, Children Heard and Seen Family Blog*, (Cumnor, England: np, nd), <https://childrenheardandseen.co.uk/2021/10/21/a-parents-story-5-guilt>, accessed August 31, 2023, 1.
14. Ibid.
15. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967, 1971, 1998), 77.
16. Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Book & Workbook*, 2nd ed. (Houston, TX: Rapha Publishing, 1990), 168–170.
17. Larry K. Weeden, *Feeling Guilty, Finding Freedom: If I'm Forgiven, Why Do I Feel So Bad?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1998), 13–15.
18. R. C. Sproul, *What Can I Do with My Guilt*, electronic ed. (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2011), n.p.
19. Curt Thompson, MD, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 23.
20. John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame That Binds You*, expanded and updated ed. (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1988, 2005), 29.
21. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 72.
22. Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Power of a Clear Conscience: Let God Free You From Your Past* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2016), 12.

23. Jamie Ivey, *If You Only Knew: My Unlikely, Unavoidable Story of Becoming Free* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 133.
24. Ibid.
25. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 24.
26. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 31–32.
27. Ibid.
28. Lewis B. Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers/Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 91.
29. Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 116.
30. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 29.
31. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 183–184.
32. Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 21.
33. Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 38–39.
34. Jess Connolly, *Breaking Free from Body Shame: Dare to Reclaim What God Has Named Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Books, 2021), 7.
35. Joe Beam, *Getting Past Guilt: Embracing God's Forgiveness* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2003), 15.
36. Beam, *Getting Past Guilt*, 16.
37. Lutzer, *The Power of a Clear Conscience*, 8.
38. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 83.
39. For more on the three inner needs (or longings), see Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 17–18, 124–127; Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God's Eyes*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 6–11, 21–24.
40. Marilyn Hontz, *Shame Lifter: Replacing Your Fears and Tears with Forgiveness, Truth, and Hope* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 1.
41. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 3.
42. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 30.
43. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 31.
44. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 44.
45. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 45–48.
46. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 98.
47. Hontz, *Shame Lifter*, 99.
48. Marilyn Hontz, “Overcoming the Shame of the Past, Part 2,” Dr. James Dobson’s *Family Talk*, October 20, 2017, www.drjamesdobson.org/broadcasts/overcoming-the-shame-of-the-past-part-2, accessed July 17, 2023.

49. Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 133, 137, 170.
50. Nick J. Stumbo, *Setting Us Free: An Unexpected Journey of Grace* (Gresham, OR: Pure Desire Ministries International, 2015), 119–120.
51. Stumbo, *Setting Us Free*, 121.
52. Stumbo, *Setting Us Free*, 187.
53. Stumbo, *Setting Us Free*, 221–222

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beam, Joe. *Getting Past Guilt: Embracing God's Forgiveness*. West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 2003.
- Bradshaw, John. *Healing the Same That Binds You*. Expanded and updated ed. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1988, 2005.
- Crabb, Lawrence J., Jr. *Understanding People: Why We Long for Relationship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
- Curtis, Brent. *Guilt*. Institute for Biblical Counseling Discussion Guide, ed. Tom Varney. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992.
- Hontz, Marilyn. *Shame Lifter: Replacing Your Fears and Tears with Forgiveness, Truth, and Hope*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009.
- Hunt, June. *Seeing Yourself Through God's Eyes*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- . *Counseling Through Your Bible Handbook*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- . *How to Forgive . . . When You Don't Feel Like It*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007.
- . *How to Handle Your Emotions*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008.
- Idleman, Kyle. *Grace Is Greater: God's Plan to Overcome Your Past, Redeem Your Pain, and Rewrite Your Story*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017.
- Lutzer, Erwin W. *The Power of a Clear Conscience*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2016.
- McGee, Robert S. *The Search for Significance: Book & Workbook*. rev. ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- Narramore, Bruce, and Bill Counts. *Freedom from Guilt*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1974.
- Smedes, Lewis B. *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers/Zondervan Publishing House, 1993.
- Sproul, R. C. *What Can I Do with My Guilt*, electronic ed. Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2011.
- Stumbo, Nick J. *Setting Us Free: An Unexpected Journey of Grace*. Gresham, OR: Pure Desire Ministries International, 2015.
- Thompson, Curt. *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Weeden, Larry K. *Feeling Guilty, Finding Freedom: If I'm Forgiven, Why Do I Feel So Bad?* Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1998.





Hope for the Heart

... presenting God's Truth for Today's Problems

Anchored to a Solid Foundation

God's Word is our sure and steady anchor, the foundation of our ministry and all our resources. We are grateful to God for His 35+ years of guidance and enabling us to impact the world with His truth that sets people free.

Resources for the Continuum of Care and Ministry

We present biblical hope and practical help through our print and digital resources (over two million books sold), radio broadcasts, and podcasts. Likewise, our counseling services and seminars, the International Christian Coaching Institute (ICCI), the Lifeline to Hope caregiver training program, credentialing and certifications, and a global outreach that touches over 60 countries in 36 languages and on 6 continents—are all designed to help people have a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.’”
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

June Hunt, M.A., is the Founder and Chief Servant Officer of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide counseling and caregiving ministry that offers biblical hope and practical help in more than 60 countries and 36 languages. The *Keys for Living Library* provides the foundation for the ministry's award-winning, live, call-in counseling radio program, *Hope in the Night*. Her passion to help others through biblical counsel is fueled by her joy in seeing a life changed through Christ. As an accomplished author, speaker, and musician, June provides God's truth for today's problems. See more at: www.junehunt.org

To learn more about Hope for the Heart, our ministry, resources, and initiatives, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit hopefortheheart.org.

www.hopefortheheart.org

Other Topics in the *Keys for Living* Library

Addiction and Recovery

Alcohol & Drug Abuse
Anorexia & Bulimia
Codependency
Gambling
Habits & Addictions
Overeating
Sexual Addiction
Workaholism

Thoughts and Emotions

Anger
Anxiety
Depression
Envy & Jealousy
Fear
Forgiveness
Grief
Guilt & Shame
Hope
Identity & Self-Image
Loneliness
Rejection & Abandonment
Self-Worth
Stress
Temptation
Worry

Attitude and Character

Critical Spirit
Ethics & Integrity
Lying vs. Truthfulness
Manipulation
Perfectionism
Prejudice
Pride & Humility
Rebellion
Sexual Integrity
Stealing

Faith and Apologetics

Assurance of Salvation
Atheism & Agnosticism
The Bible: Is It Reliable?
Child Evangelism
Cults
Death & Heaven
Euthanasia
Evil & Suffering ... Why
God: Who Is He?
The Holy Spirit
Homosexuality & SSA
Islam
Jehovah's Witnesses
Jesus: Is He God?
Jewish Evangelism
Mormonism
New Age Spirituality
The Occult
Prosperity Theology
Salvation
Satan, Demons, and Satanism
Spiritual Warfare

Crisis and Trauma

The Abortion Dilemma
Abuse Recovery
Bullying
Childhood Sexual Abuse
Domestic Abuse
Midlife Crisis
Pregnancy ... Unplanned
Sex and Human Trafficking
Sexual Assault & Rape Recovery
Spiritual Abuse
Suicide Prevention
Terminal Illness
Trials
Verbal & Emotional Abuse
Violence

Marriage and Family

Adoption
Adultery
The Blended Family
Considering Marriage
Dating
Divorce
The Dysfunctional Family
Infertility
Marriage
Parenting
Single Parenting
Singleness
Teenagers
The Unbelieving Mate
Widowhood

Counseling and Coaching

Aging Well
Alzheimer's & Dementia
Boundaries
Caregiving
Chronic Illness & Disabilities
Communication
Conflict Resolution
Confrontation
Counseling
Decision Making
Employment
Financial Freedom
Friendship
Intimacy
Leadership
Mentoring, Coaching, and Discipling
Procrastination
Purpose in Life
Reconciliation
Success through Failure
Time Management

To order additional *Keys for Living* topics or to learn more about the resources of Hope for the Heart, call 1-800-488-HOPE (4673) or visit HopeForTheHeart.org.

GUILT & SHAME

Living Guilt-Free through Grace

If you live with a long list of legalistic “Dos and Don’ts” and carry the heavy burdens of guilt and shame, know this: God never intended His people to experience prolonged pain. He uses “good” guilt to get our attention so we will confess our sins and be forgiven. But what if you struggle to feel forgiven? When false guilt and toxic shame reside in a person’s heart, the truth of God’s forgiveness through Christ is what sets captives free. Learn more about how God’s tender mercy and loving grace offer strugglers freedom from unrelenting guilt and shame.

KEYS FOR LIVING LIBRARY



“First seek the counsel of the LORD.”

(1 Kings 22:5)

Life is full of challenges, but there is hope. The *Keys for Living Library* provides biblical truth and practical help for more than 100 topics to help you overcome difficulties, grow in maturity, and move forward in life. In each of the 100+ Keys, you’ll discover God’s wisdom and guidance in a simple format:

- *Definitions* help you understand the topic from God’s perspective.
- *Characteristics* give insight into the different aspects of the topic.
- *Causes* shed light on the underlying issues related to the topic.
- *Steps to Solution* show you how to be transformed and walk in freedom.

Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). Our prayer is that God will use these *Keys for Living* to encourage, equip, and empower you with His life-changing truth.



hopefortheheart.org

ISBN: 979-8-88595-274-3



9 798885 952743