

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

47. How to Say Goodbye to Guilt for Good

You are listening to episode 47 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, How to Say Goodbye to Guilt for Good. Welcome back today! Guilt. It's an interesting emotion, isn't it? And it's never a pleasant one. Yet, we've all experienced it and know the weight it carries. It can stand in the way of our relationship with God, His love, and His grace. It can be so strong, so intense, we may begin to question God's love for us. *How could God love someone like me, with what I've done and the guilt I carry?* We're discussing this in today's episode, and in it we'll find some help and hope in how to say goodbye to guilt and live in God's grace. This is a good one, so let's get to it.

Joyce Meyer once said, "We are not built for guilt. It damages our souls and personalities, even our health." Isn't that so true? Yet, many of us have carried guilt for so long, it's become a part of us.

So, what is guilt?

Guilt (dictionary.com):

- the fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law
- a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined

Take a moment now to think about guilt. I know it's not pleasant to set our thoughts on it, but in order for us to say goodbye to guilt, we must first recognize it. Because no one likes to talk about it. But when we do, the darkness of guilt loses its power, and we find freedom. Some of us may be carrying around the weight of guilt all the time and it's no wonder we're worn out from it. For some of us, guilt has just become a part of us.

What have you felt guilty about recently?

Mental health professionals say a variety of kinds of guilt exist. Today we're lumping them into two... healthy guilt and unhealthy guilt. Allow me to explain.

- When I was a little girl and picked our elderly neighbor's tulips (share).
- When I talked negatively about a situation to someone and two hours later, I felt awful about it (share).
- When my sin weighed heavy upon me (share).

Guilt in these instances is from something I did. I was guilty. This kind of guilt can be useful and productive. Feeling bad after messing up or doing something wrong or committing a sin can actually be a good thing. No, it may not feel good, but in the big scheme of life, it can be good. It can lead to change, such as an apology or a decision to make different choices in the future. It can correct our thinking

which enables us to correct our actions. And it can turn us from wrong paths with wrong choices and wrong thinking and set us back on the right path, making right choices with right thinking.

God used my mistakes above—which caused guilt within me—to correct me and my actions and to turn me away from my sin.

This kind of guilt corrects.

This kind of guilt says I'm still a good person even though I did something bad.

The other kind of guilt, the unhealthy kind, says I'm a bad person because I did something bad. You see? There's a difference. One says, "I did something wrong." The other says "I am wrong." This is where guilt becomes unhealthy and can turn to shame.

Some unhealthy guilt statements may sound like:

- I feel guilty for going back to work after having my baby.
- I should have spent more time with my parents.
- I feel awful for enjoying time off when others don't get to.
- I am an awful person for what I've done and the mistakes I've made.

This kind of guilt is not good for us.

It's depleting, it's degrading, and it's damaging.

Whereas God uses the good kind of guilt for our good and growth, the enemy of our souls uses this unhealthy kind against us. To point fingers at, to condemn, to blame. He wants us to question our worth. He wants to do all he can to stop us from being the person God wants us to be. If our enemy can accuse us with guilt, he can make us ineffective in life. And when that happens, we lose our purpose and our sense of worth. We ride a downward spiral to a very dark place, to a prison of guilt and shame. And, many spend the rest of their lives there.

How do I know? Because I've been there.

One particular situation has led me to feel the weight of guilt for years, and it wasn't connected to a sin, it was just something I wish I would have done differently. The December morning in 2006 when my mom passed away in the hospital, I wasn't there. Her doctor called me that morning and told me her time was short. I chose to finish something at home before heading to the hospital that morning. Mom passed as I was in route to the hospital. The guilt of not being there when she died has weighed heavy upon me over the years. I wish I would have been there. I wish I could have held her hand as she exited this life and as Jesus took her other hand into the next.

I'll never get the chance to do that moment over. Never. This unhealthy kind of guilt often lingers and weighs us down in situations we can't do anything about now. We can't change it. So, our enemy makes us feel terrible about it. Maybe that's why this guilt has weighed upon me for years. Maybe that's why the enemy of my soul continues to whisper reminders of how that morning played out and how I should have done things differently. He doesn't just whisper "you messed up." He also whispers, "You're a mess-up."

Unhealthy guilt based on a sin can also be just as damaging. I know what it feels like to be trapped in the prison of guilt and shame. Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is ourselves. I understand how one can slide into a very dark place, even after confessing sin to God and receiving His forgiveness. Sometimes we can't crawl out of the darkness on our own. We might need help.

If you find yourself in this place today or sometime down the road, I encourage you to welcome the assistance of a trained Christian counselor or therapist. It's not a bad thing to receive the help we need. Thankfully, I've been able to let go of some of the unhealthy guilt I've carried around for years with the help of my own therapist. God wants to lift us out of the muck of life and set us free on solid ground, and sometimes He uses professionals to do that.

Psalm 40:2 VOICE He reached down and drew me from the deep, dark hole where I was stranded, mired in the muck and clay. With a gentle hand, He pulled me out to set me down safely on a warm rock; He held me until I was steady enough to continue the journey again.

God doesn't leave us in the deep, dark hole of guilt and shame when we're stuck there. He bends down to lift us out gently, sets us down on a warm rock and holds us until we're steady enough to continue onward.

6 steps to say goodbye to guilt:

1) Recognize the guilt. Ask ourselves, "Why are we feeling this guilt? Healthy guilt to correct or unhealthy guilt to condemn? If it's to correct, we'll talk about that in a minute. If it's to condemn, we have a choice. To choose God's grace instead of the guilt, or guilt instead of God's grace. What's God's best for us? Think about the guilt you thought of earlier. Is it healthy guilt to correct, or unhealthy guilt that condemns?"

2) Confess sin when necessary. If you feel weight of a wrong action or word and God leads you to the point of correction, ask Him to forgive you for it.

1 John 1:9 VOICE But if we own up to our sins, God shows that He is faithful and just by forgiving us of our sins and purifying us from the pollution of all the bad things we have done.

He'll not only forgive you for it, but He completely removes it. You no longer stand wrong in His sight. You are made right again.

Psalm 103:12 VOICE You see, God takes all our crimes—our seemingly inexhaustible sins—and removes them. As far as east is from the west, He removes them from us.

Confessing our sins to God frees us from them.

3) Ask God to help us forgive ourselves. If we struggle with forgiving ourselves and letting go of our mistakes, we can go to God and ask Him to help us forgive ourselves. We can ask Him to help us love ourselves, to see ourselves in ways He sees us. Accept the truth that we each are a work in progress and God is working in us.

Philippians 1:6 NIV: being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

4) Apologize when needed. If we've wronged someone, apologize. Ask him/her for forgiveness. Say we're sorry for what we've done. Do what we can to make the wrong, right. How the person responds is between him/her and God.

5) Make corrections in life for protection and growth. If our mess-up was in gossiping about someone, then let's not hang out with those who pull us down into that behavior. If we hurt someone by our actions, let's remove ourselves from situations that may tempt us to act in a similar way in the future. Refuse to give the enemy of our souls a foothold in any part of our lives.

James 4:7-8 MSG So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him scamper. Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field.

6) Live in freedom, knowing we are not perfect. We say wrong words and do uncharacteristic things.

Apostle Paul laid it out plainly in Romans chapter 7 that the power of sin kept sabotaging his best intentions. He wanted to do good, but bad kept getting the better of him. If Paul, who is attributed for 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament, couldn't do right all the time, I certainly can't.

But it's not about doing right. For much of my life I tried to live a perfect life, or at least look like I was. But I couldn't. I'm a sinful person. We all are. Paul stated in Romans 3:23 "we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So, we can't be perfect. Let's just rest in that right now. It's okay to not be perfect.

Why? Because God gave us a Savior who is. And because He is, He took our sins, our past, present, and future sins, to the cross with Him. He died and rose again with new life. For those who believe in this truth, that same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us. So, eternity lives in us now and one day we will also rise from death. We can live in this freedom now. Today. We don't have to wait until we get to heaven to live free.

Paul also said in Romans 5:1 (VOICE) Since we have been acquitted and made right through faith, we are able to experience true and lasting peace with God through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, the Liberating King.

Friends, that's grace. God's grace tells us Jesus has covered our mistakes. His grace affirms we are loved and accepted and worthy, despite our actions. God's grace reminds us to live in the freedom Jesus offers us today.

That's grace instead of guilt. That's love instead of shame. And that's freedom instead of bondage. And that's God's best for us.

Friend, we're moving our discussion over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook, and I invite you to join us over there. The link is in the show notes.

And if you've found encouragement in this episode, would you share it with a friend? Rate it and/or review it and subscribe to the podcast. Another might be freed from the shackles of guilt because of you. Thank you.

Today and every day from here on out, let's lay those shackles down. Let's live in God's grace and say goodbye to guilt. Freedom in God's grace awaits us. Amen? Amen. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre