

Is This Lie From the Enemy Stealing Your Joy?

Are you bugged by a guilty conscience, carrying around baggage from a certain mistake or decision that produces feelings of regret or even self-loathing?

We've all said or done things that we wish we could take back. And while it's completely natural to grieve over a bad decision or mistake you have made, it is not God's plan for you to live with guilt and condemnation. Jesus came to set you free from that kind of life (see John 3:16-17; Rom. 8:1).

As believers in Christ, God forgives our sins completely. Psalm 103:12 (ESV) says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

That's how amazing God's love is! And when you trust God's promise of forgiveness, any burden of guilt that you have will be lifted from your shoulders.

Breaking the Habit of Guilt

I had a terrible problem with guilt for many years of my life. I grew up in an angry, unstable, abusive atmosphere, which caused me to become a negative, angry, judgmental adult who didn't like myself—or anybody else for that matter. As a result, I often behaved in ways I later regretted, especially in my relationships.

Through the years, guilt became so ingrained in me that I just didn't feel right if I didn't feel wrong. And I carried those negative feelings with me right into the early years of my ministry.

For example, whenever I went to God in prayer, I would automatically focus on two things—my problems and my mistakes.

I'll never forget the morning God spoke to my heart and said, "Joyce, are you going to spend time with Me today or are you going to keep focusing on your sins?" At that moment, I realized God wasn't mad at me; He loved me. And He was encouraging me to drop the dead weight of my guilt.

God Does Not Expect Perfection

Many people struggle with guilt because they think God expects more of them than what they can deliver. Some people even think He expects perfection, but that couldn't be further from the truth.

God's Word says in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Bible also says that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). This verse isn't saying you should live a sloppy life and sin as much as you want; it means when you fall short of perfection in any area of your life, you will always have another chance to get back up, brush yourself off and try again with God's help.

What Does God Expect from Us?

The apostle Paul explains what God requires of us in Philippians 3:12-14, which says, "Not that I have already obtained [righteousness] or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

God simply expects us to *grow*, and we can't do that if we're stuck in guilt. In Christ, we can forget about what lies behind us—the things we cannot change—and *press on*, doing our best in the present moment.

One thing that has helped me get over my guilt trips (which I

used to take on a daily basis) is realizing they are totally, completely useless, and they didn't help me behave any better. Actually, all they did was make me act worse.

The truth is the only way to make progress is to let go of what lies behind.

Race at Your Own Pace

We will never be perfect in this life, and God knows that. He is full of mercy, and He doesn't want you to get up each day and worry about what you did yesterday or what you might do wrong today. God wants you to trust His love for you and receive His forgiveness so you can move forward, completely guilt-free.

Jesus said, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full " (John 16:24b).

When you ask God for His forgiveness, don't just stop there. Take a moment and receive His forgiveness. Say out loud, "God, I receive Your forgiveness. Thank You for giving me a fresh start. Because of what You have done for me, I am filled with joy."

You don't have to waste any more time focusing on your mistakes and weaknesses. Spend time with God and learn from His Word. And remember, God loves you, and He is always cheering you on to victory. {eoa}

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