

Grace is it bigger than my mistakes?

Article in the San Diego Union. The scene was the San Diego superior court. Two men were on trial for armed robbery. An eye witness took the stand and the prosecutor got up to begin his questioning. First he asked the eyewitness, "You were at the scene of the robbery?" Yes, answered the witness. "You saw a vehicle leave at a high rate of speed?" Yes. "Did you observe the occupants?" asked the prosecutor. Yes. The prosecutor in a booming prosecutor's voice said, "And are those two men in this courtroom today?" At this point the defendants sealed their fate. They both raised their hand.

We're going to be talking about guilt today. The truth is, All of us at some point in our lives have to honestly say "I did it." There are things we've all struggled with. We're all in the same boat.

Since we have all been guilty , we have all learned about guilt. However, we may not have learned the right things. We sometimes have different perspectives, evaluations and remedies for guilt than what God has

When it comes to the way **we** evaluate guilt, there are different degrees of guilt. Some people commit crime they deserve to have "this" happen to them.

But the way God evaluates guilt, whether it's one sin or many in our lives we've all slipped, we've all sinned and we're all in the same boat.

James 2:10 "The person who keeps every law of God but makes one little slip is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is."

If guilt is something God has created or allowed, if it is something that every one of us has to deal with, doesn't it make sense to see if we have the right perspective on it - and see what God's perspective is on guilt? Let's deal with this together and recognize that God has an answer..

WHAT IS GUILT?

We all know what it feels like. This verse in the Bible reminds us what it feels like...



Psalms 38:4 - My guilt has overwhelmed me. Like a heavy load, it is more than I can bear.

Everyone of us knows that overwhelmed, burdened feeling. That feeling of, "I hope nobody finds out." But is that all there is to guilt? Is that what God means it to be? Is it some kind of punishment that He sends into my life/your life when we've done something wrong? He says "OK, you did something wrong. Live with this for a while!" Does He mean for us to do that, for a while or the rest of our lives? **No.**



The purpose of guilt is not just to make you feel bad. **Guilt is actually a warning light.** It's a warning light that goes off that says, "Something's wrong. Something needs to be fixed."

It's like the warning light that goes off on the dashboard of your car which says something's wrong. Does it help to break the warning light when it's going off? No, it's saying something needs to be fixed.

Laura and I were driving down to Florida when she heard a sound in the engine. "Sounds like something's wrong, we should get that looked at", she said. She's got a pretty good ear. She's usually hearing that something actually is wrong. But I know if something's wrong, I'm going to have to fix it, so I "don't hear anything"! For me, the engine has to actually fall out before I admit that something is actually wrong.

She was right! We broke down in South Carolina, I-95, pouring rain and NOTHING around! It was a scary ordeal with TOO many stories to share all this morning.

That's the way we deal with guilt many times. **We try to ignore it or pretend it's not there.** We've got lots of different ways of dealing with this warning light that God sends into our life.

But the truth is, if something really is wrong, **the best thing to do is to get it fixed.** I could try to fix the car myself but I'm not very good at that. So I need to take it back to the manufacturer.

That's what we need to do with our lives. That's what the warning light is saying. It's saying, "You need some time with God. You need God to heal this."

Before we look at the difference of how we try to deal with that warning light and how God's able to deal with it, how we try to fix ourselves and how He's able to fix us, we've got to make a very important distinction.

There's two different kinds of guilt:

1. genuine guilt. The real deal. We've all dealt with that, the genuine guilt that comes from the fact that we've all done wrong things that have hurt ourselves, hurt others, and hurt the heart of God. That's the honest truth. Unless we're perfect (and none of us are) we've all had to deal with this real thing of guilt. This feeling of genuine guilt.

There's another brand of guilt that is very important to understand if you're going to get past this and find God's grace in the midst of it.

2. false guilt. If you're dealing with false guilt you're probably sending yourself a lot of mental e-mail. And they read something like this, "You think that's enough... You call that acceptable Look at all the things you haven't gotten finished. ... You have disappointed the people that are around you." That's the kinds of things you're hearing a lot if you're dealing with false guilt.

Where does it come from?

Someone else's actions.

We need to understand that often false guilt in our lives is the result of incidences that may not have been your fault. It may be a parent, a friend, a physical, mental or emotional abuse. But somehow, maybe even at an early age, you were caught up in the cycle of someone else's sin and you feel that you just can't get that out of your life.

Not getting past your past.

This is what I hear people say when they're feeling this way. "I've asked God a thousand times to forgive me and I just can't feel forgiven." That's when you can't get past your past.

Whatever kind of guilt we're dealing with -- true guilt/false guilt -- we've got ways of dealing with it and God's got ways of dealing with it.



OUR WAYS OF HANDING GUILT

Back to the light on the dashboard: What are you going to do when that light goes off?
How do you handle it?

It's amazing how we have common ways of handling these feelings. They go all the way back to the first man, the first woman, the first sin. The ways they dealt with that first sin are pretty common today. Probably all of us can relate to them.

Genesis 3:1-13 - The snake was more clever than all the wild animals the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must never eat the fruit of any tree in the garden'?" The woman answered the snake, "We're allowed to eat the fruit from any tree in the garden except the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, 'You must never eat it or touch it. If you do, you will die!'" "You certainly won't die!" the snake told the woman. "God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God, knowing good and evil."

The woman saw that the tree had fruit that was good to eat, nice to look at, and desirable for making someone wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then their eyes were opened, and they both realized that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made clothes for themselves. In the cool of the evening, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking around in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees in the garden.

The LORD God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

God asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?" The man answered, "That woman, the one you gave me, gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The snake deceived me, and I ate," the woman answered.

Genesis 3 the Bible tells us that they first sewed fig leaves together and made something to cover themselves. Then they hid from the Lord God. Then when challenged, Adam said, "I was afraid because I was naked. She gave me some fruit from the tree, so I ate it." Three ways that are indicated in the way they responded and the way we respond today too.



1. **Shame.** We feel bad about it. If you think you can feel bad enough about the wrong things you've done to make them ok, probably most of you have already discovered that doesn't work. I sure have. Shame doesn't work. They sewed fig leaves and tried to hide out.



2. **Hiding.** They hid in the bushes from God, as if God couldn't see them there. That's like trying to put your hand over the light on the dashboard that's going off, pretending that nothing is really wrong. It doesn't work. But they tried that one. They hid out.



3. **Blame.** This is a popular one.

It's sort of a tragic, humorous story what happens in Genesis. You've got Adam and Eve and the serpent standing there and God comes. God asks Adam, "Did you eat of that fruit of that tree?" Adam took it like a man and he blamed his wife. He points right at Eve, "She did it. It's her fault. She gave me the fruit." So Eve's standing here, blamed too. She points at the serpent, "The serpent did it." Of course the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on...

Isn't it easy to try to blame your way out of the wrong things that have happened? We all do this.



GOD'S WAY OF HANDLING GUILT: GRACE

Everyone who is a follower of Jesus ought to memorize this next verse:

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(read that verse again with me...)

Here's how we OUGHT TO deal with the guilt that makes us sick and splits us up and tears us apart... this is how God wants us to deal with our guilt...

1. Confess your sins. You say, "God, I did it. I confess my sin."

Definition of sin:

What does that word mean -- sin? The easiest way to understand it for me is to look at the middle letter in the word. Sin is all about "I". It's all about my way. It's all about me saying to God, "Excuse me, but I'm going to live my life my own way. I've got my own plans." Leaving God out.

When it comes to sin we do one of two things -- **cover up or face up**. We try to cover it up and pretend it's not there or we face up to it.

When you face up to it, the number one thing we need to do is to tell God that we're facing up to it. How do you confess your sin? You tell God. You might as well tell Him, He already knows. He already knows everything so why not tell Him.

Why not be honest about it?

Psalm 69:5 - O God, you know my stupidity, and the things of which I am guilty are not hidden from you.

There's nothing more difficult than trying to hide something that cannot be hidden. There is nothing more wearying, nothing more costly. Why try to hide it from God? Tell Him. Be honest with Him.

How do you tell God? You do it through **prayer**. You can talk to God. Even right now where you're seated just start to talk to Him about it. He'll listen. Talk to Him about the things you've done.

- **Tell God.** Just make a list of the things that come to mind and tell them to God.

Sit down with a piece of paper and write down the sins that come to mind whether you feel like they're true guilt or false guilt, just write them down. After you've written them down, do something very visual. Pray this verse -- 1 John 1:9 -- over each of those sins. Then burn it, or tear it up. It visually says to you, "God forgave that sin. He's willing to forgive that sin..." His grace covers my sins.

- **Tell a friend.** The Bible also encourages us to also tell a trusted friend. There's something healing about that.

James 5:16 - So admit your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that you will be healed...

You may have told God a hundred times but never told anyone else. Because of that you're still struggling with guilt that keeps coming up about that sin. There's something healing about telling a trusted friend. It's got to be the right person, but when you tell the right person it takes that sin and puts it in perspective.

NOTE: if you are that friend, help them see sin for what it is, don't sugar coat it...

- a) show them the damages of it
- b) pray with them for GOD to forgive and heal
- c) hold them accountable to avoid that sin

So tell God, tell a friend. That's part of God's way of handling the guilt that comes into our lives.

I know some of you are thinking, "I've done that. You don't know how many times I've confessed this sin. It may have happened 20- 25 years ago. I've talked to God about it again and again and I still don't feel forgiven."

The second part of 1 John 1:9 reminds us to really experience God's grace we not only have to confess our sins but we need to ...

2. Trust God's character. Many people confess their sins but really never get to know the God who is forgiving them. Because of that they never feel the forgiveness that He wants to give. "... He is faithful and just..." You can count on God. You can count on His faithfulness.

I know a lot of people who think they can't get close to God because they just don't feel forgiven. In a way that's a trap, because the truth is the closer you get to God, the more you'll feel forgiven. When you and I get close to the God who loves us, who gave His life for us in Christ, when we get close to Him, we really sense what His forgiveness is all about. So as long as you hold God at arm's length, you're not going to feel His forgiveness.

Hebrews 10:22 - "Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience."

Jesus makes us free from a guilty conscious. That's what the cross is all about. When you get close to God and understand His grace in a new way it frees you to become the person that He wants you to be.

3. Accept God's forgiveness. He will purify us from all unrighteousness.

Not, "most", not "some", not "the little ones"... **he will cleanse us from ALL.** What an important three letter word about grace!

Yet I know a lot of people who ask for God's forgiveness, recognize that Jesus is willing to forgive and yet they only feel cleansed from part of their sins rather than all. Look at God's promise. You just accept God's forgiveness.



Psalms 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west-- that is how far he has removed our rebellious acts from himself.

God has separated your sins from himself... but maybe you need to detach. If God can forgive us why is it that we cannot seem to forgive ourselves sometimes?

Does that mean you'll never fail again? Never make a mistake again? Of course not. But it does mean when you do, you confess your sin again, you recognize His willingness to forgive, you take the consequences and recognize that His grace can even help you with the consequences.

This thing of accepting God's forgiveness is somewhat like getting a medical bill in the mail. Maybe you've had a big bill at the hospital and all of a sudden the words, "Paid in Full" appear on that bill. If it says "Paid in Full" are you going to worry any longer about that bill? Only if you feel like, "I didn't really pay it." If you feel like, "Some computer somewhere made a mistake and someday they're going to catch up with me." I know a lot of people who feel that way about their sins. They feel like "I know the Bible says this thing about Paid in Full, but someday God's going to catch up with me." But what if, along with that hospital bill, that invoice, there was a letter inside from the director of the hospital that said, "We're deciding to pay this bill in full for you and if there is ever any

problem with the accounting department take this letter with my personal signature, my name on it. Take it in and show it to them and that will make sure that they know that this bill is paid in full." Would that make a difference? Would that give you more confidence?

God's given us a letter called the Bible. The Bible was written to us to clearly say He wants you to know that the sin debt in our lives is paid in full. Next time Satan from the accounting department calls, show him the letter.

I'm sure there's some of you who are still struggling with this. It's a big struggle to recognize how great God's grace is. You're thinking, "You don't know how big my sin is! You don't know what I did. You don't know the crime I committed." It may have been years ago and know one knows about it; I've been running from it. You don't know the abuse I created. You don't know the domestic violence that was a part of my life. You don't know how I hurt my kids, how I hurt my wife, how I hurt my parents. You have no idea. How could God forgive me?"

God not only wants to free you of your guilt, He wants to use you in a new way. That's the good news about grace.

Psalm 32:5 "I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, 'I will confess them to the Lord.' And You forgave me. All my guilt is gone."

Incredible! Some of you need the first half of that verse. "I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them..." You need to say, "God, I admit it! I need Your forgiveness. I'm tired of trying all my ways of making up for it."

Some of you need the second half of the verse. "... and You forgave me. All my guilt is gone." The sad thing is that for some people it's taken them 10, 15, 25 years to get from the first half of this verse to the second half of the verse. Don't let it be that way with you.

Recognize that He's the God of grace who wants to forgive and showers grace upon us. Why? Because we deserve it? No. Because He love us? Yes.

Prayer:

Take a moment to talk to God about what we've talked about today. Admit your sins to God. Talk to Him in your heart and say something like this, "Father, I confess my sins to You today. I agree with You. I've done wrong things. They've hurt me. They've hurt others. They've hurt You. I'm tired of trying to make up for them on my own. Would You forgive me? Thanks for sending Jesus to die on the cross so they could be forgiven. Thank You that He paid the penalty for my sins. I trust You. I trust Your character today. You're faithful. You will forgive me. Today, as best as I know how, I accept Your forgiveness into my life. Help me to begin to live out the life of grace."

Some of you, you may have prayed that prayer a long time ago. But you need to pray this morning, "Father, help me to live Your life by grace and not guilt. Help me to step into the fresh air of Your grace today. It's a little scary but today I'm making a commitment to take You at Your word and to trust You. All my guilt is gone." In Jesus' name, Amen.

[communication cards]



Grace is it bigger than my mistakes?

"The person who keeps every law of God but makes one little slip is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is." ~ James 2:10

WHAT IS GUILT, ANYWAY?

Psalms 38:4 - My guilt has overwhelmed me. Like a heavy load, it is more than I can bear.

There's two different kinds of guilt:

G _____. F _____.

Romans 3:24 "All of us need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift through Jesus Christ."

OUR WAYS OF HANDLING GUILT: [Genesis 3:1-13]

1. _____ .
2. _____ .
3. _____ .

GOD'S WAY OF HANDLING GUILT: GRACE

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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Psalms 69:5 - O God, you know my stupidity, and the things of which I am guilty are not hidden from you.

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Hebrews 10:22 - "Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience."

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