

How to
Let Go
of Your
Guilt

What's holding you back in life—in your relationships, in your work, in pursuing your dreams? We often want to blame external things, like the economy or other people. But what holds us back is usually something internal—often the weight of unconscious guilt from unconfessed sin.

When you hold on to regret, shame, and guilt, it weighs you down. And God didn't design you to carry around a weight of guilt. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us"* (NIV).

So how do you throw off the sins and guilt that weigh you down and freely run the race God has planned for you? Here are six steps on the path to a clear conscience.

1. Review every area of your life.

Spend some unhurried time asking God to reveal your sins. Pray this: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life"* (Psalm 139:23-24 NLT). As God points out sins to you, write them down. And when you think you're finished, ask him one more time, "God, is there anything else?"

2. Repent of every sin.

The Bible says, *"Let us turn back to the LORD. Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven and say, 'We have sinned and rebelled'"* (Lamentations 3:40-42 NLT). When you repent, you do three things. First, you take responsibility for your own sin, without blaming anyone else. Then you turn away from your sin, resolving with God's help not to do it anymore. And, last, you turn to God and his grace.

3. Resolve to make restitution.

When you realize that you have hurt someone, you need to make it right with them when you can. This is what the tax collector Zaccheus did when he repented of cheating people out of their money. He said, *"If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount"* (Luke 19:8 NIV).

4. Receive God's forgiveness.

You don't have to be hesitant about going to God for forgiveness. The Bible teaches, *"Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most"* (Hebrews 4:16 NLT). You can trust that when you go to God with your sin, you'll receive mercy (forgiveness for all you've done in the past) and receive grace (the power to change in the future).

5. Reveal your faults to a friend.

To be forgiven, you just need to confess to God. But God also designed us for relationship, and when you confess your sin to a trusted friend, it helps you heal emotionally. The Bible teaches, *"Help carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2 GNT).

6. Repeat these steps regularly.

Keep a short account with God and with other people. Imagine how your kitchen would smell if you just took out the garbage once a year. It's the same way with your sin—you need to address it regularly to keep a clean conscience. Don't carry today's garbage into tomorrow.

God wants to bless your life, and he wants to use you as a vessel to bless other people. He can use every kind of vessel—plain vessels, shy vessels, even broken vessels. He just needs those vessels to be clean. Be honest with God, with others, and with yourself today so you can have a clear conscience and a life that God will use.

There are all kinds of trips you'll go on in life. You might go on a business trip by airplane. You might take a summer road trip with your family. Those trips can be lots of fun—or at least productive. But there's one kind of trip that's never good for anyone: a guilt trip. Many of us carry guilt in our lives, which leads to all kinds of negative emotions. But Jesus came to pay for our guilt. In fact, on the cross he showed just how freely he forgives when he said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34 NIV).

As humans, our natural response to guilt is usually very different from how God wants us to handle it. Here are three things we typically do with our guilt, and three things Jesus wants us to do instead:

We bury our guilt.

"When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long" (Psalm 32:3 NLT). You can bury your sin by minimizing it or rationalizing it, but neither of these will help you release your guilt.

JESUS WANTS us to admit our guilt.

God wants you simply to own up to your sin. 1 John 1:8 says, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (NIV).

We blame others for our guilt.

This tactic is as old as the Garden of Eden. Instead of accepting responsibility for his own sin, Adam blamed Eve: *"It was the woman you gave me who brought me some, and I ate it"* (Genesis 3:12 TLB).

JESUS WANTS us to accept responsibility.

One of the best ways to accept responsibility for your sin is by confessing it to a trusted fellow believer: *"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed"* (James 5:16 NIV).

We beat ourselves up over our guilt.

Sometimes we subconsciously punish ourselves, trying to pay for our mistakes. King David experienced something like that: *"My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. . . . I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning"* (Psalm 38:4, 6 NIV).

JESUS WANTS us to ask for forgiveness.

God is ready and waiting to forgive you. He wants to forgive you. The Bible promises, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we've done wrong"* (1 John 1:9 CEB).

Are you ready to let go of the guilt you've been carrying around? Admit your sin, accept responsibility for what you've done, and ask God for forgiveness today!