

When Guilt Won't Go Away

Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

One of the reasons people struggle in addiction is their problem with guilt. They get tired of being on the run and they sober up or clean up and then memories force themselves to the top of their minds. The pain, the shame, and the guilt seem too much to face. There seem to be too many people and too many problems in the past to ever be able to deal with what's happened. It all feels overwhelming. So, they run back and hide for a while longer in their addiction until they are worn out and think about trying again.

God has a solution for this cycle of painful memories in our life if we are willing to believe and receive something new.

The first liberating truth is that God knows all of our sin; He is not surprised by it nor does He turn away. Neither does He tolerate it. God has a will and a plan for us to deal honestly and radically with the sinful activity that infests our lives. Part of God's plan for sin is that we confess it and repent. God is longing to heal us, not condemn us and throw the past in our face. He wants to remove the sin and heal us from the consequences, if we will let him.

Then 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)

Too many of us live a long time listening to the voice of the devil that keeps us self-centered on either our own needs, or in this case, our own failures. God knows we've failed. We know we've failed. God now wants to help us move towards the solution instead of letting guilt over past mistakes force us into making even more mistakes in the future by trying to run and hide from our guilt and shame.

So, how do we actually go about this? Remember that Jesus loves and forgives sinners.

Jesus understands temptation. God's grace is greater than our worst sin. Our past sin is washed away when we bring it to Jesus.

If there is unconfessed sin in our life that is feeding the guilt and shame we carry, we need to confess our activity as sin to God, making no excuses, offering no rationalization for our behavior. We need to then ask the Lord for a heart that truly turns away from the sin in repentance and the spiritual strength and physical discipline to obey His will.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

We need to confess our sin to others if they have been or continue to be hurt by it. It's wise to ask a pastor or counselor or sponsor to guide us in this decision. We need to pray for discernment to do what is right, not just for ourself, but for the others involved.

We also need to confide in a mature, trustworthy person who will listen to us, pray with us, and help us follow through on a recommitment to control unholy desires and to keep us accountable to walk within the boundaries of holiness.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

God's heart breaks over sin and its results. God longs to draw us out of sin to a place of blessing and holiness. We need not try to hide our sin from God—as if we could! Turning to Him in honest confession is the smartest thing we can do when sin holds us in its grip.

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