



Church of God Ministries

Spanish Fort, Alabama

Guilty or Forgiven?

Jackie was overcome with guilt. Have you been there? Are you there now? Listen to her story and see what unfolds.

Jackie was lying on her bed. It was too much to get up to do anything else. She felt miserable. Everything reminded her of her recent past. She couldn't stop thinking about what she could've had, if not for the downward spiral she had experienced. It's been three months since that fateful night, and she still has trouble reentering her former right-path of life.

It had all started with a dare from a friend: sneak out of the house after her parents went to bed and wander around the neighborhood. It was harmless enough, but it didn't stop there. Soon it involved other friends, staying out later, not getting her homework done, cheating on tests, a borrowed car and some stolen liquor from a friend's house.

This was getting out of control. She would stop after Friday night—she knew she shouldn't be out on the Sabbath, but just one more time—that would be it! It was the last time too. But then her friend was pulled over by the police who took them to the police station and called her parents.

Repentance

She told the whole story to her parents. They were not happy with her deception, lying, disobedience, stealing and drinking. They were disappointed, but they were willing to forgive her and help her get back to where she should be.

Since then, Jackie had made the decision to return to living her life according to God's way. She repented before God, and she felt that He was helping her walk along the right path (1 John 1:9). On the outside, it appeared that all was fine, but Jackie didn't feel like her friends, her teachers, her minister or her parents really believed that she had changed.

Have you been in a situation similar to Jackie? Have you committed sins, repented, but feel like no one wants to forget about them? Do you feel guilty each time you see your teacher, minister, boss or whoever you've sinned against? Jackie's story is fictional, but I think everyone can relate to doing something you know is wrong. I have committed at least one of the sins that Jackie committed and suffered the guilt and resulting fallout.

Forgiveness

How do we move past a sin? How do we move on and live a better life? How do we build trust with those that keep reminding us of our past? Has anyone in the Bible faced these same circumstances? How did they move on?

The story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32 is a well-known Biblical story about a young man who left the way of life that he grew up in, and after quite a while he repented of his wrong living and returned home to his father. Would his father and the rest of his family accept him when he returned? Would the community accept him? Take some time to read (or re-read) the story and familiarize yourself with it.

You'll recall that the son spent his whole inheritance on wasteful and sinful living (Luke 15:13). What an embarrassment to his father! The son went to a citizen of the city—not of his own faith—and found work feeding pigs (verse 15). This was a degrading job for a Jew. He had sunk to about as low as he could go. He was famished enough that he considered eating the pig's food. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you'" (verse 17-18 NIV).

The son realized his mistake, repented before God and returned home. He asked forgiveness from his father. His father willingly forgave him and threw a party because his son had repented (Verse 24). The son was embarrassed to return, but with the strength of God, he was able to do it. His father showed the right Christian attitude and forgave him. The father was willing to move forward from this moment. This is how it should end, but that doesn't always happen.

Later in the story, the older son returned and found a party given for this delinquent brother. He was jealous that a party was given for his brother who had made so many mistakes. He wanted to bring up the old sins and not forgive his brother for the total disrespect for father, family and community. The father, however, chastised his older son for his attitude. He would treat both sons as dear and cherished (verse 32).

When you commit a sin, repent before God, and start going the right way, God wipes away that sin. He chooses to no longer bring it to mind (Isaiah 43:25). We as Christians should do the same thing. We shouldn't hold sins constantly over people's heads and keep bringing them up. But as humans, we struggle to truly forgive and forget. Are you guilty of doing this?

Having peace and building trust

What do we do when it's others who don't want to forget our sins? Yes, it is difficult when people can only remember us as that "punk kid who was always causing trouble." But, we cannot change other people. We can only change ourselves.

First, keep your mind focused on God, and not on other people. God promises that peace will come to those who focus on Him (Isaiah 26:3). In addition, pray to God and ask Him to give you peace; He promises to give us peace that is beyond what we can even comprehend (Philippians 4:6-7). When we are at one with God, we won't care as much about what others are saying or thinking.

Second, focus on what you can do to regain people's trust. Repentance makes us stronger. It helps us to strive harder to do the right thing. Don't let your sin separate you from God or your church family. Prove

that you have changed. Do activities and works of service that show you are focused on doing the right thing. David was a man like this.

David did not always do what was right. He committed adultery. He had Uriah killed. He was a weak father and allowed terrible sins in his family to go unpunished (2 Samuel 13:25), but David had a heart that wanted to do what was right (Acts 13:22). When confronted with his sin with Bathsheba, he repented (2 Samuel 12:13). At the end of his life, David talked about how he tried to rule as a king: “He who rules over men justly, ruling in the fear of God” (2 Samuel 23:3).

There is another biblical person that you have probably heard about—Rahab the harlot! Check out her story in Joshua 2. Even though there are many other positive qualities that Rahab exhibited after she was a harlot, this is how we often refer to her. How did Rahab handle this stigma? Rahab put her trust in God for deliverance (Joshua 2: 11-12). Her action of saving the spies showed that she had turned from her former life as a resident of Jericho (James 2:25).

Did Rahab’s past keep her from being a great person? Not at all! Rahab became part of the Israelite community, married and had children. Many years later, King David was born from her descendants (Matthew 1:5-6). Following this, Jesus Christ was born in the same family line. Obviously, God did not hold Rahab’s past over her head. Forgiven by God, she moved on.

Sin has consequences. Some of those consequences follow us longer than others do. We cannot undo the past, but we can move forward from where we are. Ask God to help you stay positively focused on the future and to help others see your true repentance by your actions. God hears the prayers of those who reach out to Him. (1 John 5:14-15).

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