

Discussion Starter #1: What do you think it means to “forgive yourself”?

Key Passage: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Bible never directly addresses the idea of “forgiving yourself.” The Bible teaches that at salvation, God forgives our guilt and frees us from sin. Guilty feelings can be good because they drive us to seek forgiveness. The moment a person turns from sin to Jesus Christ in faith, his sin is forgiven. We are set free from the penalty of sin (Romans 6:23), the power of sin (Romans 6-8), and one day we’ll be free from the very presence of sin (Revelation 21:4; 22:3).

However, freedom from sin does not always mean freedom from guilty feelings. Even when our sins are forgiven, we still remember them. Some Christians are prone to wallowing in memories of their former sinful lives. This is pointless and runs counter to the victorious Christian life God wants for us. So, what can we do as Christians when we experience feelings of guilt?

1. Let God examine your heart.

Ask the Lord to reveal any other sin that may need confessing – be completely open and honest before Him.

Discuss: Read Psalm 139:23-24. Why does it take courage and humility to pray David’s prayer in this passage?

Discuss: Why are many people reluctant to pray such a prayer?

2. Confess all known sins.

Confess all known, previously unconfessed sin. In some cases, guilt feelings are appropriate because confession is needed. We may feel guilty because we are guilty!

Discuss: Read Psalm 32:3-5. How did David describe guilt and its solution?

3. Make restitution, where possible, of the sins committed against others.

We may feel guilty at times because we have not done all that we could to make restitution with someone we sinned against.

Discuss: Read Luke 19:8 about Zacchaeus' restitution as part of his repenting of his sin, promised the Lord. In what sense does making restitution when possible bring our repentance to closure and eradicate guilt feelings?

4. Trust God's promise that He will forgive sin and remove guilt, based on the blood of Christ.

A lady walked into her pastor's office and said, "Pastor, I'm so discouraged. I've confessed my sins to God a hundred times, but I still feel guilty. What should I do?" The pastor wisely replied, "You should confess your sins to God one time and then thank Him ninety-nine times for His forgiveness!" When we linger in guilt over sins that have been forgiven, we are showing that we don't really trust God to keep His promise to forgive us when we confess our sins! God's forgiveness is always freely given – He is not reluctant to pardon! God's forgiveness is always complete – He does not hold grudges!

Discuss: Read 1 John 1:8-10. What are some keys to receiving God's forgiveness and the removal of guilt, according to these verses?

Discuss: Why do you think many people struggle with believing that God has truly forgiven them?

5. Meditate on God's promise to forgive us.

On occasions when guilty feelings arise over sins that have already been confessed and forgiven, meditate on Psalm 103:10-12: "*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*"

The phrase "*as far as the east is from the west*" (v.12) is intended to communicate infinite space. You can travel north as far as the geographic north pole before being forced to travel south; thus, north and south meet at the poles. But east and west never meet – no matter how far you travel east, you will never reach a point at which your next step must be westward. The farther east you go the more distant you are from west. The idea is that, when God forgives, He *really* forgives. Our sins have been removed from us as far as is possible to imagine. It is a statement of complete and utter forgiveness. Our sins will never come back to haunt us.

Discuss: What part of Psalm 103:8-12 most meaningful to you? Why?

6. Move forward.

If sin has been confessed and forgiven, it is time to move on. Remember that we who have come to Christ have been made new creatures in Him. "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Part of the "old" which has gone is the remembrance of past sins and the guilt they produced.

Discuss: Of the six things listed above to do when you experience feelings of guilt as a Christian, which two are the most meaningful to you today and why?