

**Y**ou were younger. Back then, you might've been impulsive. Perhaps—like many people—you failed to picture possible consequences of your sin. Very likely, you were acting on emotions. But whatever reason, whatever the scenario, you yielded to a temptation even though you knew it was wrong.

Since that time, you might have knelt before God in prayerful confession. After all, His Word includes the wonderful promise in 1 John 1:9 that if we confess our sins, He will forgive them. Nevertheless, guilty feelings sometimes stick like Velcro.

Someone in your life might delight in mentioning your failure. Or the results of past wrongdoing might present daily reminders. And the Devil or his demons might attack by whispering accusations (Revelation 12:10). If lingering feelings of guilt resonate with you, perhaps the following testimonies from real-life Christians will help.

## PROBLEMS FROM PEOPLE

For Gail, guilt sprang from criticism when she was young:

“A sense of shame and general unworthiness instigated in my childhood persisted far into adulthood—what a tough cloud to dispel! I'd like to say my victories were instant, but that's a LOL to anyone who has struggled with this. . . . Yes, it has taken time and practice, but old, outdated childhood voices *can* be quieted! Looking back, I'm so grateful for progress, wobbly at times, but steady.

“I would never have made it without God's presence. Time and again, He led me to the right person or situation so I could learn what I needed to make another step toward healing.”

How sad that a little girl should be heaped with so much disapproval that she needed decades to shed the burden. But praise God for freeing her from that burden.

Shelli likewise suffered guilt instigated by someone who knew her secret:

“I'm forgiven. I knew that. But I would cry my heart out when my loved one reminded me of my past failure. Then, one day while reading God's Word, the Lord showed me that I had made an idol of my loved one and their opinion of me. I had to knock that idol down because the only opinion that should matter is God's.

“Next, I shared my failure with my close family so it was out there. That person couldn't use my secret to hurt me and reignite feelings of guilt in me anymore.”

Did you notice the key to Shelli's freedom? First, the Lord high-

lighted truth *as she read His Word*. If she had neglected God's Word, she would have missed its healing balm. Next, she hauled her secret out of the dark and exposed it to her family on her own terms.

## TOO MUCH RUMINATING

Vera blames her torturous guilt on overthinking:

"I'd been struggling for years with guilt over past sins, rehashing them over and over. I'd leave them at the Cross then pick them up again! It wasn't until I hit middle age that a young person said, 'Shame on you for thinking your sin is bigger than God's grace.' It was exactly what I needed to hear. I finally stopped ruminating over old transgressions."

Has anyone ever committed a sin so huge God's grace can't cover it? No. Israel had become a nation full of rebellious evildoers who forsook the Lord. Even so, God declared, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

## VICTORY OVER PORN

"Ron" gives credit to God for freeing him from pornography and guilt. "A local drugstore exposed me to pornographic magazines in my teen years. After I trusted Christ, I got busy with our youth group and avoided that store. But porn had left roots in my mind. . . .

"After college, I married a Christian girl and assumed a marital relationship would solve the problem of sinful thoughts. Then the internet came along. Curiosity led me to click a link. One click opened the floodgate to unlimited carnality. I covered my sin but went into a cycle of yielding, watching, hating myself for indulging the lust of the eyes, then repenting—only to repeat the cycle a few months later."

Visual adultery corrupted Ron's thinking. It caused friction with his wife. She eventually divorced him. Finally, he sought a Biblical counselor who led him through a series of conversations, books, and memory verses.

"It took a while, but my counselor skillfully applied God's Word to purify my brain and guide me back to clean thinking. Sadly, I'm still divorced. But now I sincerely feel the joy of my salvation. God has blotted out my sin and the guilt. I know He has forgiven me."

## A PRISON OF GUILT

Denise writes, "I married at 20 to my high school sweetheart. I should have known better, as the moment the engagement ring encircled my finger, his attitude toward me changed. He became

overly controlling and verbally abusive. However, I'd already sinned, so I felt I had to stay with him.

"Flash forward three years. . . . The verbal abuse has escalated. I'm baptized. He has not taken the plunge because he "isn't ready." A minister tells me I can leave the abuse, as my husband isn't a Christian. Guilt keeps me in the marriage.

"Flash forward. The abuse is turning physical. My husband's obvious alcoholism rages to a new level. He stops working and stays home drinking. I've left him five times, each time to return when he says he'll change.

"The last time I return, he's drunk when he tells me he understands it's his last chance. My best friend, another Christian who has supported me through all this mess, is angry at me for returning to him. Guilt keeps me in my prison.

"Through it all, [I assumed] the abuse is God's punishment. After all, I sinned when I was 19. I deserved what I got. At this point I'd prayed for 27 years for God to convert my husband—or to make me a better wife who deserved love.

"The final nudge God provided in his grace was my mother-in-law. Since my husband refused to work, we'd had to sell most of our large possessions. We moved in with his parents. One day he was cursing up a storm at me for some infraction. I went for a walk. My MIL came and found me. I'll never forget her words: 'We're so sorry. We had no idea what was going on until you moved in. Please go. Take care of yourself and be happy. We'll take care of him.'

"I moved 800 miles away, so he couldn't find me and so I wouldn't be tempted to let him back into my life. The lessons I've learned in the 10 years since that day have changed me. I've transformed for the better. God is good."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Acknowledgment of our guilt can be a wonderful influence. A well-working conscience prevents us from shrugging off sin. It can drive us to reconciliation with God and others. But God doesn't want us to wallow in disgrace forever. Understanding and believing His merciful forgiveness removes the burden and provides the spiritual soil necessary for the Lord to grow the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) in us. ■

*Rick Barry is a frequent contributor to Regular Baptist Press. His latest novel, The Next Fithian, is Christian science fiction for young adults.*

