

GUILT

Living Guilt Free



June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

GUILT

Living Guilt Free

JUNE HUNT



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Dear friend,

“The thrill of victory—the agony of defeat.”

In North America, this saying dominated the sports world for many years. Yet on a personal level, I know what it’s like to experience both extremes.

Never will I forget the crisp, fall evening when a dear friend and I attended a Dallas Cowboys football game. Coach Tom Landry executed the game plan perfectly. Quarterback Roger Staubach was never better. This night truly epitomized the thrill of victory.

Instead of scurrying away with all the fans and fighting the traffic, Barbara and I decided to stay in our seats and simply talk. As we watched Texas Stadium empty, we saw 65,000-plus vacant blue stadium seats in bright contrast to the brilliant green AstroTurf. But as Barbara and I continued to talk, instead of maintaining that thrill of victory, I began to feel the agony of defeat. My mind became crowded with guilt because of my own wrong choices in the past.

I remember saying to Barbara, “I don’t deserve to have you as my grace friend.” (She always gave me grace when I didn’t deserve it.) And then I began a litany of wrong choices that I had made over the years. Tears filled my eyes as I thought about certain people whom I had hurt—people including Barbara.

“How could I have done that?” I lamented. “How could I have thought that way!”

After I had poured out my heart, Barbara took my hand and said something that stunned me. “June, I don’t think you really understand what grace is all about.”

What? I thought. *I understand grace. I’ve even taught others about grace.*

Then Barbara reiterated, “I don’t think you understand the grace of God for you.”

Could this be true? Could I know grace in my head, but not in my heart?

Barbara continued, “June, you apply grace to others, but not to yourself.” To be candid, I had no clue that this was true.

Ultimately, she shared truth that I knew was accurate, but truth that I wasn’t appropriating in my heart. She reminded me:

“We’ve all been guilty of breaking God’s law. June, you are no different” (Romans 3:23).

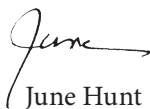
“Since you confessed your sins and have given your life to Christ, God was faithful to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “You’ve already received God’s gift of grace—giving you the forgiveness you didn’t deserve” (Ephesians 2:8–9). “Jesus forgave all your sins—past, present, and future—so that you could be saved and live guilt-free” (Hebrews 10:10).

I knew Barbara had spoken the truth, and there’s nothing like truth to set us all free. What relief. What a load off my shoulders!

Unquestionably, Barbara was right. I hadn't applied grace to my own life. I needed God's grace like a blanket over my heart so that I wouldn't live with the coldness of false guilt.

If that's your need, may I encourage you to embrace God's heart on living guilt free. Being free of guilt has everything to do with grace. There's a very good reason why grace is called "amazing."

Yours in the Lord's hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "June". The signature is written in black ink and has a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the word.

June Hunt

GUILT

Living Guilt Free

Two men experience an immense amount of guilt and their lives are changed forever. One man's guilt leads to repentance, allowing him to live guilt free the rest of his life. The other man's guilt leads to gut-wrenching grief, compelling him to take his own life.

Though tethered together by bad decisions, the two couldn't be more different. One we call David—but God calls him, “*a man after my own heart ...*” (Acts 13:22). The other we call Judas—but Jesus knew him as the one “*who would betray him*” (John 6:64).

Obviously, God uses guilt to get our attention, but He never designed guilt to distress us forever. God created guilt to prick a calloused conscience, to move us to repent, to convict us of our wrong, and to convince us to do right.

The Bible gives this assurance: When we “*confess our sins*” with complete humility, God purifies our heart and forgives our every sin.

“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)



DEFINITIONS

“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48).

The question should send shock waves through his conscience, stopping him dead in his tracks, challenging him to change his diabolical plan. Betraying a friend is two-faced, but to do so with a kiss is nothing less than cruel.

Meanwhile, the jealous religious leaders can't wait to rid themselves of Jesus. After all, the crowds keep coming to Him—the One with purest motives—but His truth-filled teachings keep shining a spotlight on their own spiritual darkness.

So for 30 pieces of silver, Judas agrees to deliver Jesus into the leaders' murderous hands. Perceptively, Jesus speaks boldly about His betrayer and the guilt that will beset him.

**“Woe to that man who betrays
the Son of Man! It would be better
for him if he had not been born.”
(Matthew 26:24)**

WHAT IS True Guilt?

One day, true guilt grabs hold of Judas. Yet his consuming sense of regret becomes a roadblock to repentance and life change. That's not God's game plan for guilt.

As a member of Jesus' inner circle of 12 original disciples, being a betrayer seems inconceivable. After all, Judas was there when Jesus calmed the storm and walked on water. Judas was there when Jesus multiplied a few fish and bites of bread to feed over 5,000. Judas was there when Jesus drove out demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead.

How could he not believe! And yet, Jesus directs the following statement straight at Judas, "*There are some of you who do not believe*" (John 6:64).

Talk of heaven and eternity and total forgiveness of sins—these intangibles are far too trivial. And with Jesus now talking about His impending death, disillusioned Judas focuses on the material world—and resorts to monetary gain for his devious betrayal. So just how do the religious leaders perceive this mercenary plot? "*They were delighted and agreed to give him money*" (Luke 22:5).

- ▶ **True guilt** is the fact of being at fault or committing an offense.¹
- ▶ **True guilt** is the result of any wrong attitude or action that is contrary to the perfect will of God.

- **“True guilt”** in Hebrew is *asham*, which paints a three-dimensional picture: doing wrong, deserving punishment, and demanding a penalty so that fellowship with God can be restored.²

After David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he confessed and repented, and from a contrite heart cried out to God:

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” (Psalm 51:4)

David realized that any and all sinful actions are first and foremost against God, for it is God who declared adultery to be against His moral law and in opposition to His character: *“You shall not commit adultery”* (Exodus 20:14).

Responding to True Guilt

QUESTION: “What should I do when I know I’m guilty and hate feeling guilty?”

ANSWER: You experience true guilt when you recognize the fact that you have sinned.

Upon gaining that knowledge, the Bible says you are to *“confess”* to God (“agree” with God) that you have sinned and have fallen short of being right in God’s sight. If you have entered into a personal, saving relationship with God through accepting the death of Jesus Christ as payment for your sins and receiving Him into your life as your Savior and Lord, then you are a child of God and can rightfully claim the forgiveness of Christ. But like David, you must approach God with a humble and contrite heart, a heart broken over your sin against God.

- ▶ **Note the honesty of David:** *“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity”* (Psalm 32:5).
- ▶ **Reflect on God’s response to David:** *“And you forgave the guilt of my sin”* (Psalm 32:5).
- ▶ **Know what God says about you:** *“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”* (Jeremiah 31:34).

God is faithful. He will always do what He says He will do. Just as He extended forgiveness to David, His response is the same to you. Not only has God forgiven you, He has also removed your sins from you.

WHAT IS False Guilt?

Does Simon Iscariot know about his son’s deception and duplicity? Does the earthly father of the world’s most infamous traitor experience false guilt from Judas’ being a false friend—the conspiring “friend” of Christ?

As Simon watches Judas as a young boy skip along dusty paths, does he—as most dads—muse about what kind of man his son might become? Does he try to groom Judas to be a model citizen who contributes much to his community? Now—if he’s aware of Judas’ unconscionable conspiracy—is he wracked with false guilt, somehow blaming himself for his son’s failure, writhing in shame over a son who sells out his close friend?

Since personal responsibility is a frequent theme in the Bible and since Judas is an adult, his father bears no blame for the betrayal of the Savior. Ezekiel 18:20 clearly makes this point:

“The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child.”

From time to time, we’ve all fallen prey to false guilt—especially if someone in our lives is skilled at *guilt-manipulation*—a powerful method of control. God designed guilt to convict us of our sin, to convince us to change, to cause us to accept Christ—for Him to cleanse us and develop His character in us. However, guilt-manipulators use false guilt to try to direct us in such a way that we develop *people-pleasing* characteristics.

- ▶ God uses “good” or true guilt so that we will gain freedom from sin’s power in our lives.
- ▶ Guilt-manipulators use false guilt so that we will stay fearful, and they will gain power over our lives.

Simply put, guilt-manipulators want to control us—they need people pleasers who are desperate for their approval. Notice how the apostle Paul refused to fall into this trap:

“ ... we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:4)

- ▶ **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or those of someone else.³
- ▶ **False guilt** arises when you blame yourself even though you've committed no wrong or after having done something wrong, you've confessed and turned from your sin.
- ▶ **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three destructive masters: shame, fear, and anger.
- ▶ **False guilt**, ironically, is not resolved by confession because, as a factual matter, there is nothing to confess. Confession won't be effective because false guilt is not based on truth but rather a lie.

Realize, if you continually feel guilty or condemned, the source could be Satan. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the “*accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night.*” He loves to disseminate lies, to burden true believers with false guilt and feelings of eternal condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies include: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven by God and unaccepted by God. Jesus explains one of the core tactics of the enemy:

**“He was a murderer from the beginning,
not holding to the truth,
for there is no truth in him.
When he lies, he speaks his native language,
for he is a liar and the father of lies.”
(John 8:44)**