

MAKING FRIENDS WITH GUILT

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Psalms 32:1-5

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the LORD
imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;

I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD',

and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Selah

Romans 3:22-24

²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage(s) slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. Why might the Psalmist feel like they are “wasting away” by hiding their “iniquity” (ie, poor behavior) from God? What might the re-energizing forgiveness of God lead to in the Psalmist, and in us?
3. Brene Brown and other shame researchers offer a helpful distinction between shame and guilt. Shame is about identity: “I am bad”. Guilt is about action: “What I did was wrong.” Why do you think this distinction matters? Why might shame make

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someone “stuck,” while guilt might lead to change?

4. Have you ever had the experience of being stuck in shame or caught in a shame cycle? What (or who) helped you get unstuck?
5. When you feel guilty about something you’ve done (or not done), what might that be telling you?
 - a. What is your process, if any, for addressing the guilt you may feel?
 - b. Is there someone who helps you work through your mistakes to feel better and then figure out how to make things right?
 - c. How does God, church, or a spiritual practice factor into your experience of shame, guilt, forgiveness, or change?
6. Romans 3 is famous for its grand leveling: no person is sinless before God, and no people-group is better than any other.

Importantly, this does not mean that no one is worthy of God’s love. Rather, everyone is equally worthy of the love God freely and fully gives, and in Christ we see the healing light of that all-inclusive love.

Why might this be an important

difference in understanding this passage?

SHAME VS. GUILT

Based on my research and the research of other shame researchers, I believe that there is a profound difference between shame and guilt. I believe that guilt is adaptive and helpful—it’s holding something we’ve done or failed to do up against our values and feeling psychological discomfort.

I define shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging—something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.

I don’t believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure. I think the fear of disconnection can make us dangerous.

- Brene Brown, Shame vs. Guilt

<https://brenebrown.com/articles/2013/01/15/shame-v-guilt/>

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