



FORGIVE YOURSELF!

Does God want us to be mired in guilt and regrets, or does He provide a way out of them?

Our past deeds can sometimes weigh very heavily on us. Unfortunately, there is no way to travel back in time to undo things we have done in the past, though many of us wish we could.

Even the great apostle Paul looked at his past with deep regret. *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”* (1 Corinthians 15:9)

Paul wrote these words about 20 years after his fierce persecution of the early Christians, and

they indicate that he had by no means forgotten his shameful and destructive actions as a young man. However he left that life behind, he did not remain stuck in feelings of guilt and went on to lead a very constructive and productive life.

What can we do when guilt and regret about our past actions keep us from moving on with our lives as we should? How can we learn to leave those things behind and move forward? We can start by realizing that forgiving, whether it involves forgiving others or forgiving ourselves, is not about condoning wrong actions. It is not about a lack of accountability. It involves understanding that God forgives sinners who turn from their sins and turn to Him, and that He wants them to move forward.

Manasseh’s guilt: The Old Testament story of Manasseh, who was considered to be among the worst kings of Judah, is very instructive about how God views a repentant sinner.

Manasseh had rebuilt the sites of pagan worship that had been torn down by his father, seduced the people of Judah to do more evil than the pagan surrounding nations had done and had even sacrificed his own children in idol worship!

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, he was responsible for a great deal of bloodshed as he barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews. It is hard to imagine having a more guilt-ridden past than Manasseh!

In time, his nation was taken into captivity by the Assyrians and Manasseh was carried away in chains. Finally, in his prison, Manasseh took stock of his actions and repented of his sins. *“He implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before Him.”* (2 Chronicles 33:12)

What was God’s response, after the enormity of Manasseh’s sins and wickedness? He saw Manasseh’s change of heart and heard his sincere cries, and He restored him to the throne in Jerusalem. Manasseh demonstrated his genuine change of heart by destroying the places of idol worship and rebuilding the altar of God. Even the sins of Manasseh were not too great to be forgiven by God!

Forgiveness from God must come first! The common denominator among people being forgiven by God, no matter how deplorable their deeds might have been, is repentance (turning from their sins and turning to God).

Repentance involves sorrow for past deeds and turning from them to live life differently. God's opinion of us is what will ultimately matter, and He is willing to forgive if we repent. Understanding that should help us move on with our lives, regardless of what we may have done in the past.

When we have repented of our sins, God not only forgives them, He also removes them from us. Knowing this is the vital starting point for forgiving yourself.

Psalms 103:11-12 explains this wonderful truth about God's forgiveness: *"For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* Hebrews 10:16-17 adds, *"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more"*.

Even though guilt can be a healthy emotion to alert us to our wrongdoings and mistakes, if we hang on to feelings of guilt after repenting and making needed changes, it can become an unhealthy emotion.

Recognize your mistakes and failures, but don't do guilt. Don't live in your past wrongdoings, don't keep on going back and rehashing them. They should be dead, buried and forgotten. This is your past, not your future. *Receive the forgiveness from God, forgive yourself and move forward in your life with a clean slate!*