

Parents in Pain

Coping with the heartache of having loved ones turn from the Christian faith

SESSION 3

Wrestling with guilt (LETTING GO)



story

This is used to capture the essence of the topic. It may take the form of a testimony or a reflection. This allows participants to begin thinking about the main topic of discussion.

If your children turn away from the Church it is possible you feel that you have failed in your most important responsibility as a Christian parent - passing the faith on to your own children. If this is the case, it's not surprising that you may feel guilty.

Nearly every parent feels guilty about some aspect of his or her parenting. It comes with the territory. Being a parent is the hardest job on the planet. No one gets it absolutely right. And it is crucial that you allow God's forgiveness to be spoken over your shortcomings as a parent. God doesn't love and accept you because you are a perfect parent. He loves and accepts you because *he* is the perfect parent!

And while talking about God as the perfect parent, let's reflect on this profound truth: Even the best parents can have wayward kids. (God did.) What this means is that just because your children blame you or resent how you tried to bring them up, doesn't necessarily mean in actual fact that you have failed as a parent. And even though your grief and disappointment over your child leaving the Church makes you feel such a failure and so very guilty, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are actually guilty. It may well be just your grief and fear talking.

Sometimes we feel guilty when we aren't. And sometimes we don't feel guilty, even though we are. Feelings are not always a reliable guide. We also need to remember that our conscience is a *fallen* conscience. When you feel guilty about your child's choices, that is inappropriate guilt. YOU are NOT responsible for your child's choices! Where you have genuinely failed, that is where you need to confess to God and ask his

forgiveness. But, where your child has made a choice to reject God, you do not need to confess that sin to God nor ask his forgiveness (*they* might need to but you don't.) Instead, you should pray for your child and ask God to be merciful on him/her. The reality is you can't carry their load of sin, however much you might like to. Reflect on St Paul's agony over Israel in **Romans 9:1-3**. Jesus is the only one who is able to bear the sins of others. Turn this pain over to Christ and his mercy.

reflect

Choose from the selection of questions provided to allow participants to get to know one another and share their thoughts.

1. What burden of guilt are you carrying?
2. Is your guilt legitimate guilt or inappropriate guilt?
3. Does your level of guilt match the fault?
4. What do you need to do about it?

context

Provides a more in-depth understanding of the topic.

We can have a problem because we feel guilty or because we don't feel guilty. If you are guilty but you don't recognise it or admit it, you have a major problem. This will probably be a major cause of offence to your kids because they know your guilt, even if you don't. We need to ask God to help us see and admit our faults



and ask his forgiveness. From the safety of the Gospel we can admit our guilt.

Read **1 John 1:8-9**.

On the other hand, you may feel guilty even though you in fact aren't guilty. This may also be a problem because you feeling guilty may antagonise your kids and create another barrier to them being open to change (they might shake their heads at mum and dad "being on a guilt trip.") Remember that God is greater than our feelings!

Read **1 John 3:20**.

read

Provides the Biblical foundation.

Meditate on **Psalm 51**. This psalm is a prayer for forgiveness. Note the following features of this psalm, which are extremely relevant for the issues that we are facing here:

1. This psalm is very real/honest about our sin and failure.
2. It is also absolutely confident that God is the source of forgiveness and healing.
3. Verse 13 suggests that our experience of being forgiven (living in forgiveness under God's grace) can act as a bridge to reaching out to others to encourage them to turn back to God too.
4. The psalm concludes in verse 18 with a cry for God to have mercy on his people (including us and our children/grandchildren), that he would help us, and rebuild our faith community.

notes

talk

Questions and conversation starters to discuss and dig into the topic and the Bible readings.

God's solution to the problem of guilt is forgiveness. If you feel guilty about failing as a parent then you need to accept God's forgiveness. You may also need to forgive your child. You may need to forgive the Church for its failures (If you genuinely want your child to reconnect to the Church, then any resentment you have against the Church will hinder that reconnection.) You need to show the way by living under God's forgiveness. Guilt feelings are warning lights. Don't ignore them. Seek out forgiveness as soon as possible.

pray

In the Pray and Bless sections we provide some starter prayers or prayer points for you. We provide a blessing you can bless each other with as you depart.

Heavenly Father, we have failed you and our loved ones in all sorts of ways. Please forgive us and bring healing and renewal to us and to our children. Help us to courageously live by your Gospel. Comfort our hearts and give us your peace. Amen.

bless

Bless each other with this glorious and reassuring promise of comfort and freedom from guilt.

"There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) God has been gracious to us. Let us go in peace.

