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THE GUILT PRISON

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You might never have been inside the walls of a prison either as a warden, visitor or a prison inmate, but you might have been confined to a tiny, locked cell that hemmed you in. It's the cell called guilt. You see, guilt can be a prison. It can cause you to put up emotional, mental, or spiritual walls between yourself and others or between yourself and God. Sometimes those walls create a fortress from which you shoot angry arrows at others or bomb your self-image to pieces.

At times it can seem as if you're like a criminal on trial and guilt plays the role of prosecuting attorney, judge, and jury. Guilt accuses, convicts and condemns you to live behind prison walls. And so your prison of guilt is secure.

Guilt not only restricts what you do from the outside, it also condemns you from within. Like poison flowing through your body, it affects every part of you. It attacks your mind, causing you to see yourself as inferior, worthless, or even evil. It can make you think that others are looking down on you or judging you even if they don't know your situation. Your mind tells you to react defensively in conversations with people who may know nothing of your guilt.

Guilt also attacks your heart. You may be so paranoid that you think everyone around you knows you feel guilty and is talking behind your back.

The poison of guilt also attacks your body, It can cause sleeplessness, nervous tension, or an upset stomach. Guilt is truly a sickening poison.

I want to tell you about a man by the name of Dave. He had good reason to be completely overwhelmed by guilt.

Dave had an affair with a married woman and she became pregnant with his child. When he heard the news, Dave hoped that the woman's husband would think it was his own child. But the timing was no good because her husband had been out of town and couldn't have fathered the child.

When Dave realised this, he made plans to have the husband murdered. Everything went according to plan. The husband was disposed of, the woman moved in with Dave, and the child was born. At first everything seemed fine and dandy. But eventually his guilt caught up with him and locked him up in prison. It wasn't a prison with physical walls. It was a prison of guilt, the deadly toxin that ran through his veins was not the usual venom that kills a man on death row, but the poison of guilt.

That same man later wrote, *"I know about what I have done wrong. Before I confessed, my bones felt limp, and I groaned all day long. Night and day God's hand weighed heavily on me, and my strength was gone as in the summer heat."*

The man who wrote those words and who had the affair and planned the husband's death is better known as David, not Dave. He started out as a shepherd and ended up as one of the greatest kings of all time. He was a writer and a singer. He was father to Solomon, the wisest man the world has ever known.

There are several ways you can deal with guilt. Sometimes you can do everything you can to avoid admitting your guilt. It sounds like that's how David started. You can avoid taking responsibility by justifying or rationalising your behaviour. Maybe you blame someone else, or just come up with a "good reason" for doing what you did.

You can also try to bury the guilt. Stuff that guilt down deep inside and try to forget it. Move on. Don't deal with it. Out of sight, out of mind.

The poison won't lay dormant forever. It may even attack you physically, affecting your nervous system, contributing to high blood pressure, or causing other physical difficulties.

Another way you can try to deal with guilt is to bargain or work the guilt away, Do enough good works to counter the wrong actions and the guilt should eventually be erased, right? No, wrong. It doesn't work that way.

Recently I read about a man who tried to deal with tremendous guilt exactly like that. When he was a child, he accidentally shot and killed his best friend. So twenty years later, he became a rescuer with the United States Coast Guard and saved many people's lives. He described how he tried to make up for that childhood mistake by making his life useful—but he *still feels guilty for causing his friends death*. He can't save enough people or do enough good things to make up for that one tragedy over which he feels so much guilt.

King David found the prison's key, the poison's antidote: He **confessed** (admitted) his mistakes, **expressed remorse for** (was truly sorry for) what he had done wrong.

The same key can unlock your prison. The same antidote will neutralise your poison. Confess your mistakes, be truly sorry for them, and God will have mercy and forgive you.

How can you be sure that God will forgive you just as he forgave David?

Let me introduce you to the One who made this all possible and who brings you the certainty of forgiveness. He already knows all about you and loves you like no one else can love you, His name is Jesus Christ and He's the one who crafted the day to release you from the prison of guilt and found the antidote for its poison.

You see, we're all in the same situation: we do things we don't want to do, and the good things we want to do we often don't do. God knew our hopeless situation. He knew we needed someone to save us from our repeated failures. So He sent His Son, Jesus, to the world to live a perfect life, to die in order to pay for our sins, and to rise from the dead so we could be forgiven and have eternal life.

The fact that Jesus came to earth and did this on your behalf is your assurance that He will be merciful to you. He has already paid the penalty for everything you have done wrong. By believing in Him, you can be certain that God has forgiven all the wrong things that you have thought or done and that God has taken away the guilt that accompanies them. Not only does he give you the key to unlock the prison gates but he personally escorts you out of the prison, past the thick walls you built, and heals you of the guilt that has poisoned you. He then walks with you and promises never to leave you.

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