

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Spirituality: What to Do with Guilt

iFOLLOW

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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What to do with Guilt

Learning Objectives

1. Learn to break the cycle of alienation and brokenness caused by unresolved guilt
2. Find a sense of peace in a world of conflict
3. Discover ways to deal with remorse for personal failures
4. Explore ways of giving and receiving forgiveness

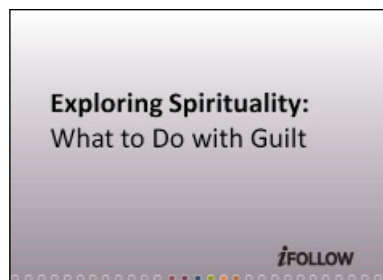
Content Outline

- A. A strategy for guilt
- B. A strategy for peace
- C. The results of a peace-making strategy

Background Material for the Presenter

The news media reported that a 78 year old man entered a casino in Reno, Nevada, pulled out a gun and shot and wounded five people. Everyone was in shock, especially as to why an elderly man would do such a violent thing. A spokesman for the casino said that apparently the man was jealous that his wife or girlfriend was at the casino with another man. Interesting way to settle a relationship problem. Fortunately for the authorities, their senior shooter wasn't difficult to apprehend. According to the news story, they caught him as he tried to shuffle out of the casino with his walker.

We live in a world that is filled with conflict and alienation, a world of fragmented and broken relationships, a world of lost dreams and personal failures. People are hurting for all kinds of reasons and often choose to resolve their pain in ways that instead bring greater pain to themselves and others. It's so often the case that when we have unresolved guilt and pain inside, we lash out either at ourselves or at others. And the result is a "lose-lose" life.



Is it possible to stop this inherently painful and destructive cycle of alienation and brokenness? Is it possible to live life with a sense of peace in a world of conflict? What can be done with our personal guilt from our own failures? Just live with it? What do we do with those areas of life where we need to either receive forgiveness or give it?

A Strategy for Guilt

There's a very simple but profound saying of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

What does it mean to be a "peacemaker?" The word Jesus used for "peace" is the Hebrew "shalom." Shalom doesn't simply mean the absence of trouble. It means everything which makes for a person's highest good. It's referring to wholeness and completeness in a person's relationship with himself or herself, with others, with the natural world and with the spiritual world, an intentionally established and maintained harmony and unity with God and all else. Consequently, "shalom" results in a sense of well-being and contentedness that comes from experiencing right relationships. That is "peace" in this saying of Jesus.

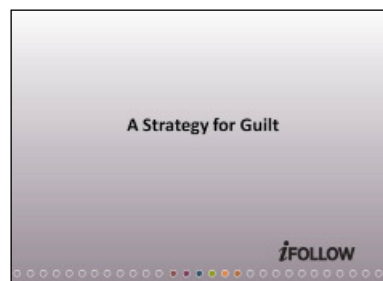
In fact, that Hebrew word is often used to describe the biblical concept of "salvation." Salvation is the entire process of coming to wholeness and completeness as initiated by God and cooperated with by humanity. Shalom is that state of existence brought about by salvation from God which results in complete harmony, unity and peace between God and humanity and between people and each other.

With this saying, Jesus takes this to the next level. Jesus is talking not just about the experience of peace or those who are peaceful or peace-loving or peace-wanting. He is calling for people who are peace-making, working for peace. Big difference.

Very likely Jesus is quoting from the scriptures of His day: "Stop doing evil and do good. Look for peace and work for it." (Psalm 34:14). That's a very profound description.

Abraham Lincoln once said that the peacemaker doesn't just pull up weeds, he also plants flowers. In other words, peacemaking isn't just about not doing evil. It's especially about intentionally doing good, looking for peace and working proactively to bring it about. The peacemaker refuses to remain passive and simply accept things because that's just the way it is or because trouble might come from doing something about it. Peacemakers demand the active facing of issues, deal with them, and conquer them for the sake of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle. "Look for peace and work for it."

Remember the Mai Lai massacre during the Vietnam war? U.S. soldiers brutally gunned



down some 500 Vietnamese civilians, men, women and children. It stands as one of the darkest moments in American military history. But there is a sliver of light that emanates from that terrible tragedy.

Twenty-four-year-old Hugh Thompson was a helicopter pilot whose mission was to swoop down over the village and draw fire so helicopters behind him could destroy the enemy with machine gun and rocket fire. But he never drew any enemy fire. Instead, he saw in horror American officers and soldiers on the ground killing villagers. He and his two-man crew saw the bodies of Vietnamese children, women and old men piled in an irrigation ditch. He could see that some were still alive.

So Thompson landed his chopper and got out. He pleaded with the soldiers, "Help the wounded!" Instead, troopers fired into the bodies. Thompson later said, "We wanted to find something that would point the blame on the enemy, but it just didn't work. It all added up to something we just didn't want to believe." He was finally moved to action when he spotted villagers crowded in a hut, an old woman standing in the doorway, a baby in her arms, a child clutching her leg. American soldiers were approaching.

"These people were looking at me for help," Thompson remembered. "And there was no way I could turn my back on them." So he made a choice, a very dangerous choice. He got back in his chopper and placed it down in front of the advancing Americans and gave his gunner a simple, direct order: "Train your M-60 on the GIs. If they attempt to harm the villagers, open up on them." Thompson radioed the two gun ships behind him, and they began to airlift the villagers to safety. The standoff lasted for 15 minutes.

On March 6, 1998, the Army finally awarded Thompson and his two crewmen the prestigious Soldier's Medal. In the citation, they are honored for "heroic performance in saving the lives of Vietnamese civilians during the unlawful massacre of noncombatants by American forces." After the ceremony, Thompson and his buddy traveled to My Lai and met the people they rescued that day. Imagine what that reunion was like for them.

Blessed are the peacemakers—not just peace-lovers or peace-wanters or peace-hopers but peace-**makers**—for they shall be called children of God.

A Strategy for Peace

So what makes it possible to be a real peace-maker in any situation where God's peace is needed? How can we bring "shalom", the wholeness and completeness of God, into our relationships and into the brokenness of this world? How can we mediate this peace to our own selves?

First, peacemaking begins with an acceptance of God's peace in our own hearts. We cannot give what's not real to us. We can only be peace-makers when we've placed



ourselves in a position to experience God's gracious peace in our hearts. "Therefore, since we have been made right and reconciled through faith, we have peace with God through our lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1)

But there's a challenge to this whole peace process. Most of us find it difficult to initiate peace with others because we're not at peace with the person who lives in our own skin. Often we're harder on ourselves than on anyone else. We find it difficult to forgive ourselves, even after we've heard and accepted the forgiveness of God.

What are the things that keep you from being at peace with yourself? Is it unresolved guilt? Unconfessed sin? Is it blockage in the spiritual plumbing caused by some pain or hurt in the past that you've never dealt with or let go? Is it a picture of God that portrays God as one who keeps track of your failures and holds them against you, one who likes you only when you do well, one who's impossible to please?

If it's any of these things, than you and I need to ask God to help us love ourselves as unreservedly as he loves us. That is the power of confession and acknowledgement of sin and failure. We confess it and acknowledge it in order to let it go. We give it to God and God wipes the guilt away. God refuses to hold our sins and failures against us. That's called grace. He gives us love unreservedly with no conditions or strings attached. When we take that step, we experience a powerful internal liberation and deliverance.

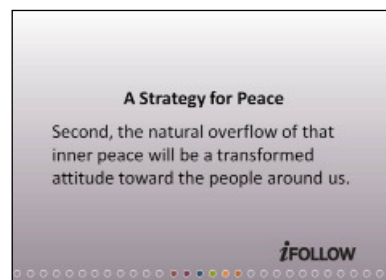
Sometimes, in order to be able to take these significant steps, we may need to visit with a trusted person who can help us resolve whatever hurts or pains are still there, someone who can help free us from our self-condemnation. Being in a small caring group where we're loved and accepted for who we are, not for what we should be, can mediate God's peace to our hearts. And in that context, little by little we can find ourselves feeling the "shalom" that comes from being at peace with God and with ourselves. A caring and compassionate counselor can be of inestimable help, too, in many situations.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... And the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." (Romans 8:1, 6) So first, accept God's peace for yourself.

Second, the natural overflow of that inner peace will be a transformed attitude toward the people around us.

Here's how this works: because God's peace is active in our hearts, we no longer see people as competitors or enemies or threats. We are more readily able to identify ourselves with others, recognizing our common humanity.

The word "sympathy" is a Greek compound word **synpaschein**. "Syn" means together with. "Paschein" means to experience or suffer. When joined, the words that comprise "sympathy" are, "suffering together." Sympathy is an identification with the suffering of another by the willingness to enter into the other's pain.



Joseph Damien was a missionary in the 19th century who ministered to people with leprosy on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. Those suffering lepers grew to love him and revered the sacrificial life he lived out before them day in and day out.

But no matter how much he loved them, they still knew he was fundamentally different. He could go to bed every night feeling whole and complete, and wake up totally intact. He could love them but he really couldn't identify with them.

Then one morning before he was to lead out in their daily worship, he was pouring some hot water into a cup when the water swirled out and fell onto his bare feet. It took him a moment to realize that he hadn't felt any sensation. Gripped by sudden fear of what this could mean, he poured more boiling water on the same spot. No feeling whatsoever.

Damien immediately knew what had happened. As he stood up to tearfully deliver his sermon, everyone instantly noticed the difference in his opening line. He normally began every sermon with "My fellow believers." But this time he began with "My fellow lepers." For the first time, he was able to truly sympathize with these lepers because he was now suffering with them as one of them.

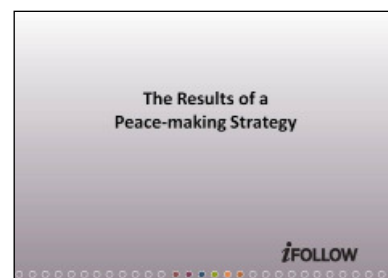
This is why the story of Jesus is so significant to the whole experience of peace. The Bible presents Jesus as the God who became one with humanity by taking on the entirety of human life, by becoming completely human with all the pain and suffering of being human. Jesus showed a God who could truly sympathize in every way with humanity because he became one with us and felt everything we feel.

When we see our common humanity with all others, when we experience God's peace through Jesus and come to peace with ourselves (sympathizing with our own selves), we are more empowered to be peacemakers, people willing to initiate reconciliation and wholeness wherever it's needed, people with the courage to take the first steps because our hearts are feeling the common pain and suffering of others.

So take an inventory right now; think of the relationships in your life. Are there any that are broken? Are you at odds with any one? Are you continuing to hold grudges or memories of hurts that you need to resolve? Who have you harmed or distressed whose forgiveness you need to seek? Is there any situation you're aware of, whether you're specifically involved or not, to which you can bring God's peace, wholeness and reconciliation? What is one action step you can take to mediate peace?

The Results of a Peace-making Strategy

Back to the saying of Jesus: If you and I are willing to be active peacemakers, what is the promise? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."



That phrase “children of God” in the original language describes an adjective which in this case literally means “Godlike.” The theologian John Broadus put it this way: “There is no more Godlike work to be done in this world than peace-making.”

In other words, we are never more like God than when we are joining him in initiating and mediating his peace to the brokenness in our world. And how did God do that? By identifying himself completely and totally with the people he was trying to bring peace to – humanity. By becoming one with broken and alienated and conflicted people, God was able to bring reconciliation and wholeness. That’s the story of Jesus.

When you and I recognize and acknowledge our common humanity with each other—that we are all in the same boat, no one better than another, each one in need equally of shalom, peace, wholeness, completeness, love and grace—we are empowered to love and accept each other more unconditionally than before. Accepting the truth that we are all children of God (making us all brothers and sisters in the same human family) strengthens our resolve and ability and desire to be peace-makers like Jesus and the God of Jesus.

This activity, says Jesus, is the evidence that we are indeed children of God. Jesus promises that the God of peace will join us in this divine work. The peacemaker never makes peace alone. God is always there empowering this divine action. And those who are willing to engage in this Godly behavior will be “blessed”—which literally means that “joy” will be the experience for them—a powerful and sometimes mysterious transcending of pain and suffering as evil is redeemed for good.

There was an article in the newspaper several years ago titled, “Ordinary Folks Find Peace in Extraordinary Act.” It told several stories of people who were able to find it within themselves to forgive those who had hurt them in painful ways. One of the stories was of Walter Everett, a United Methodist pastor in Hartford, Connecticut.

Walter’s shock at the murder of his 24-year-old son Scott turned to rage when the killer plea-bargained his way to a five-year sentence. When the killer, a drug addict named Michael Carlucci, was sentenced, he looked over at the Everetts and said, “Although they must sound like empty words to you, I am sorry for what I’ve done.”

Everett’s friends dismissed the remorse as a ploy for leniency, but Walter Everett was moved. On the anniversary of his son’s death, Walter decided to write a letter to Carlucci. He talked about his family’s suffering and said, “The pain is almost unbearable. And I cannot accept one person having so little regard for another.”

But then he wrote, “Although words seem so trivial in some ways (yet they are all that we have now), I do accept your apology, and as hard as these words are to write, I add: I forgive you.”

Those words, Walter said, became a turning point for him. “I felt a terrible, heavy burden lifted from my shoulders. It was the beginning of healing for me.”

But it wasn't the end. His wife divorced him because she just couldn't understand his forgiveness. And then anger and resentment returned to him when he discovered, a few months later, that Carlucci had been transferred from a maximum- to a medium-security prison.

But Walter decided to go visit Carlucci anyway. They were engaged in small talk when Carlucci suddenly reached over and embraced Walter. Through tears, Carlucci said, "I've never been forgiven by anyone before." Walter wept, too.

Through Walter's courageous and gracious initiative, a relationship began. In 1994, Pastor Everett officiated at Carlucci's wedding. Here's what Everett says now: "When I look at Mike, I don't see a man who murdered my son. I see a man who is forever changed by God and who is a part of my family. And I celebrate that."

No one can tell Walter Everett that it's easy being a peacemaker. But no one can tell him it's not worth it, either. It takes guts. It takes grace. It takes God's love. But for God's children, peace is always worth the price. After all, there is no personal liberation and deliverance or relational "shalom" without it.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant's Notes



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Additional Resources

- Nouwen, Henri J.M. (1992). *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Provonsha, Jack (1982). *You Can Go Home Again*. Washington, DC: Review & Herald Publishing Association.
- Sandford, John, Paula Sandford and Lee Bowman (1996). *Choosing Forgiveness*. Greene, NY: Clear Stream Inc. Publishing.
- Smedes, Lewis B. (1996). *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*. New York, NY: HarperOne.
- Smedes, Lewis B. (1997). *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Podcast

- “Getting Revenge and Forgiveness (2008).” Speaking of Faith, with Krista Tippett, American Public Media. Can be downloaded on the Web at: http://speakingof-faith.publicradio.org/programs/2008/revenge_forgiveness/

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Discussion Questions

1. What is it that makes us think striking back will help us feel better? Has this ever worked for you?
2. What are some of the ways you have used in the past to deal with guilt? (Productively or unproductively.)
3. What was the greatest moment of receiving forgiveness in your life?
4. What was the greatest moment (for you) of giving forgiveness?
5. In what ways are you a peacemaker?
6. In what ways, if any, does it help to think of Jesus as “becoming a leper like us”?

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Discussion
Questions

**Exploring
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Group Activities

Purpose: To make real our willingness to let go of old guilt.

Preparation: If you can, get a recording of a song called “Let Go of the Stone,” by John Anderson. This old country song is intended in a romantic context, but is very meaningful if listened to from the point of view of the “old lover who hurt us” being the self-destructive habits or actions we have indulged in, the voice of the singer as God, and the stone as guilt. These are the words of the chorus:

“Let go of the stone, if you don’t want to drown
In the sea of heartache that’s dragging you down.
It’s pulling you under, but you keep hanging on.
If I’m ever going to save you, let go of the stone!”

Obtain enough stones, fairly heavy ones, but able to be picked up and thrown, for each participant. If you can, do this activity outside, preferably beside a lake, pond, or stream, or even the ocean. There doesn’t have to be water—it could be just a vacant lot or parking lot. If you must do it inside, bring in a garbage can.

Assignment: Say: “We are going to attempt to realize—that is, to make real—an understanding that we truly can let go of old guilt, and God can help us. I’d like each of you to come and choose a stone that represents old guilt and remorse, especially if there is something in your life that you haven’t been able to let go of.” Allow a few moments for each to get a stone. Then say: “We’re going to listen to an old country song [or I’ll read it, or whatever] that is intended to be about a lost romance. But we’re going to think of the old lover who hurt us as our own self-destructive habits or actions, the stone as our guilt, and the voice of the singer as God. Imagine God is singing this song directly to you.” Play the song, or read it, or at least read the chorus, provided above. If you do that, read it through slowly a couple of times, with a pause for reflection between. Now ask for a few moments of silence, during which each can say what they wish to God and to themselves. When they are ready to let go of the stones, have them throw them as hard and far as they can into the water or lot, if that’s safe; otherwise, pitch them into the lot, or drop them in the garbage can. Make a big deal of taking the garbage out to be hauled away, never to be seen again. Ask for a few more minutes of silence.

Debrief: Allow those who wish to share to do so.

Time: Allow a few minutes for the intro and getting the stone, a few minutes for listening to the song and thinking about it, at least two minutes for each of the silences, and 10 or so for sharing: a total of perhaps 20-25 minutes.

Handout 1

What Do I Do With My Guilt?

A STRATEGY FOR GUILT

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

“peace” = “shalom”

1. everything which makes for a person’s highest good
2. wholeness and completeness in a person’s relationship with themselves, with others, and with God
3. an intentionally established and maintained harmony and unity for God’s sake
4. results in a sense of well-being and contentedness that comes from experiencing right relationships.

“salvation”

1. the entire process of coming to wholeness and completeness as initiated by God and cooperated with by humanity
2. Shalom is that state of existence brought about by salvation from God which results in complete harmony, unity and peace between God and humanity and between people and each other

“Stop doing evil and do good. Look for peace and work for it.” (Psalm 34:14).

“The peacemaker doesn’t just pull up weeds, he also plants flowers.” Abraham Lincoln

A STRATEGY FOR PEACE – How To Do It

1. _____

“Therefore, since we have been made right and reconciled through faith, we have peace with God through our lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

FOR REFLECTION:

What are the things that keep you from being at peace with yourself? Is it unresolved guilt? Unconfessed sin? Is it blockage in the spiritual plumbing caused by some pain or hurt in the past that you've never dealt with or let go? Is it a picture of God that portrays God as one who keeps track of your failures and holds them against you, one who likes you only when you do well, one who's impossible to please?

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... And the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." (Romans 8:1,6)

2. _____

"sympathy" = "synpaschein" (greek)

"Syn" means "together with"

"Paschein" means "to experience or suffer"

"sympathy" = "suffering together"; identification with the suffering of another by the willingness to enter into the other's pain

HANDOUT

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FOR REFLECTION

So take an inventory right now – think of the relationships in your life. Are there any that are broken? Are you at odds with any one? Are you continuing to hold grudges or memories of hurts that you need to resolve? Who have you harmed or distressed whose forgiveness you need to seek? Is there any situation you’re aware of, whether you’re specifically involved or not, to which you can bring God’s peace, wholeness and reconciliation? What is one action step you can take to mediate peace?

THE RESULTS OF A PEACE-MAKING STRATEGY

“Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.”
(Matthew 5:9)

THE PROMISE:

“children of God” = the Greek way of describing an adjective which in this case literally means “Godlike.”

“There is no more Godlike work to be done in this world than peace-making.”
(John Broadus)

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