

WOMEN OF WITNESS

TIPS TO BETTER YOURSELF



Stop Beating Yourself Up and Take Back Your Joy

By Valorie Burton

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10 (NIV)

There is a consistent, heavy sigh I hear when I mention the subject of guilt to women. It is often the sigh of what I call “false guilt”: the *feeling* of guilt even though you haven’t actually done something wrong.

Many of us spend a lot of emotional energy feeling guilty about our everyday lives. About the real and legitimate choices we have to make in our families and careers in the midst of this pandemic ... about taking time for ourselves ... about not living up to some societal standard of feminine perfection. All of that leads to false guilt. I’ve worked through my own struggles with guilt and coached many individuals through theirs.

Guilt shows up in many ways. Maybe some of these look familiar to you:

- Beating yourself up for past choices, mistakes or imperfections.
- Feeling as though you can never do enough.
- Paying more than you have to.
- Saying “yes” when the best answer is “no.”
- Letting others guilt-trip you.
- Allowing others to repeatedly overstep boundaries.
- Going along with dysfunctional behavior as though it’s normal.
- Not speaking up when you need and want to.
- Making decisions out of guilt and obligation.
- Feeling indebted indefinitely to someone who did you a favor.

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Whether it's the persistent voice of the enemy reminding you of expectations you haven't lived up to, the blessings you have that others don't, or the mistake you still haven't forgiven yourself for, false guilt can have you playing a broken record of self-sabotaging thoughts:

I am not enough. I am not getting it right. I should be doing something more. Something different. Something better. But I am not, so I am going to feel guilty. I'll rehash my shortcomings. And worst of all, I will hold my happiness hostage. I'll dampen it with this broken record of self-criticism.

It's tiring, and it's not God's way for you. It's the enemy's plan, according to Jesus: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

God wants you to live in His grace. He wants you to reset your expectations to let go of guilt. There is no false guilt without expectation. And so there is no faster way to undo your guilty feelings than to adjust your expectations of yourself and make sure they are aligned with God's expectations of you. Here are some examples of unhealthy expectations:

Vague Expectations. The vague expectation sets you up for guilt because you can't really measure the results. For example, *You should do more.* Well, how much is more? And what should you "do" exactly? Without specifics, you never know when you've done enough.

Outdated Expectations. Whether the life-change is a new job, a relationship change, a financial change, a health change, a move, or anything else that shifts how your life operates day to day, you'll set yourself up for guilt if you hold on to old expectations in a new season. So much has changed this year alone. Give yourself some grace.

Others' Expectations. Sometimes what others want isn't what you want, isn't what God wants for you or simply isn't doable. And yet fear can lead you to take on the burden of others' expectations as a way to avoid uncomfortable conversations or rejection.

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When it comes to expectations, it is soothing to remember these two truths:

- Until you accept and embrace the unique life God created you for, you'll feel guilty for not living the life you think others expect of you.
- You cannot accept and embrace God's unique life for you if you don't truly believe God created you for a purpose — a purpose that may look different from those around you.

Prayer: God, show me Your expectations of me in this season. And show me the ways in which the enemy plants seeds of doubt that lead me to false guilt. Help me to let go of guilt and embrace Your joy and grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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