



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

MOODS / Week 4

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## SERIES SUMMARY

A 4-week series about emotions.

WEEK 1: Emotions don't have to be the boss of you.

WEEK 2: Anger doesn't have to be the boss of you.

WEEK 3: Fear doesn't have to be the boss of you.

WEEK 4: Guilt doesn't have to be the boss of you.

## SCRIPTURE

*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death (Romans 8:1-2 NLT).*

## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

- If we're being honest with ourselves, there's probably a list of things we'd do if we knew we'd never have to face the consequences of our actions.
- Tell a personal story about a time when you got into trouble for doing something and had to face a consequence as a result.

### TENSION

- Guilt is a mood or feeling we experience when we've done something we know we shouldn't have done. It's shame, regret, or weight we feel when we've made a mistake.
- False guilt is when we feel guilty about something, but we're not actually guilty of anything.

- Real guilt is when we feel guilty because we are actually guilty.
- When we feel guilt, some of us . . .
  - Ignore it, deny it, or pretend it's not there.
  - Struggle because we don't really feel that bad about our actions.
  - Feel mad at ourselves for what we did.
- The feeling of guilt isn't bad, because it's a sign that something is off and needs to change inside us. That's a good thing!
- The problem with guilt comes when we let it control us and boss us around into believing something that isn't true about ourselves.

## TRUTH

- While Paul was an incredible leader who did a lot of amazing things to spread the message of Jesus and grow the early church, he wasn't always that person.
- Before Paul had an experience with Jesus that changed his life, Paul was known as Saul. And Saul did a lot of terrible things that would have given him plenty of reasons to feel guilty.
- In the book of Romans, however, Paul explained that if we believe in Jesus, there is no condemnation. Jesus took the weight of our mistakes with Him when He died on the cross, and He replaced our guilt with the power of His Spirit. (Romans 8:1-2)
- Because of Jesus, guilt doesn't have to be the boss of us.
- Guilt can control us, but Jesus gives us another option—a chance to start over—by giving us grace.

## APPLICATION

- We can find freedom from guilt when we follow Jesus by . . .
  - Not being so hard on ourselves and embracing the grace Jesus gives us to live guilt-free.
  - Not being so hard on others and extending grace and forgiveness to them.
  - Letting guilt remind us of what we've done, but not letting it define us.
  - Making it right with the people we've hurt by apologizing and trying to do better next time.

## LANDING

- What's one thing I usually do when I feel guilty about something?

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## THINK ABOUT THIS

Middle schoolers may not feel a lot of guilt about a lot of things. If they do, it's usually about things that seem minimal. Lying to their parents, fighting with a friend, cheating on an exam, being mean to a sibling—these are the things most middle schoolers experience guilt over in this phase. Even though those things may seem like less than a big deal to us, the weight of the guilt they feel over them is very real to them. Do your best to help them move from only focusing on what they did to feel guilty to thinking about how they can better respond to the guilt they feel. Also remember that for some students, guilt isn't a bad thing. They *need* to feel guilty. They need to understand that what they've done or said is wrong. While it's definitely not your job to make them feel guilty (please don't!), it doesn't have to be a bad thing if, this week, some of your students recognize or experience guilt for the first time.

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## INTERACTIVE 1: GUILT GIFS

### OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll show gifs of people who are feeling guilty to help illustrate how it feels to experience that emotion.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Two gifs depicting people who are experiencing guilt (These work best if they're funny and ridiculous!)
- A computer and screen large enough for everyone to view the gifs

## INTERACTIVE 2: THE WEIGHT OF GUILT

### OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll have a student come on stage and add books to their backpack to illustrate the weight of guilt we carry around.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A large backpack
- A bunch of hardcover books (You'll need enough books to completely fill the backpack.)
- Construction paper or butcher paper
- A bold, permanent marker

### PREP

- Wrap the books in paper.
  - With the permanent marker, label the books as follows:
    - Write the words, "real guilt," on a third of the books.
    - Write the words, "false guilt," on a third of the books.
    - Write the word, "guilt," on a third of the books.
  - Place the backpack and books within easy reach to be used during your talk.
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# TEACHING SCRIPT

MOODS / Week 4

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## BOTTOM LINE

GUILT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THE BOSS OF YOU.

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## INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

What would you do if you knew you could get away with it? If you knew there would be no punishment, no consequence, no regret?

Play video games all night long?

Spend all your parent's money on your very own sneaker collection?

Eat dessert for every meal?

Take one of everything from your favorite store?

Hack into your teacher's computer and give yourself all A's?

I'm sure we could all make a pretty long list of things we'd do if we were 100% sure we wouldn't experience consequences for them later. Because, as I'm sure you know, there's nothing worse than having to face the consequence of something you did wrong!

### TELL A PERSONAL STORY

*Tell a story from your own life that illustrates the following thoughts or ideas . . .*

- Talk about a time you got in trouble for something (preferably in middle school) and had to face a consequence or punishment as a result.
  - Be sure to keep your story light and even funny if you can.
  - The goal is to set up the idea that we often avoid doing certain things we know are wrong or against the rules because we don't want the experience or feeling that comes after it.
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# TENSION

8 MINUTES

## **INTERACTIVE: Guilt Gifs**

*This is where you'll show gifs of people who are feeling guilty to help illustrate how it feels to experience that emotion.*

You've been there, right? Maybe your punishment or consequence wasn't exactly like mine, but I'm sure you've experienced something similar when you've broken a rule or done something wrong. And it probably made you feel a bit like this person. *[Show a "guilt gif" and add some context/commentary.]* In fact, that experience or feeling is exactly why we don't do all those things we might wish we could do without regret or consequence. We want to avoid getting in trouble. We want to avoid feeling like this. *[Show a "guilt gif" and add some context/commentary.]* We want to avoid letting people down. We want to avoid the feeling of guilt.

**Guilt is one of those moods or feelings we experience when we've done something we know we shouldn't have done.** It's the shame, or regret, or weight we feel when we know we've made a mistake or a choice that's hurt us or someone else. And that feeling can stick with us for a long time.

## **INTERACTIVE: The Weight of Guilt**

*This is where you'll have a student come on stage and add books to their backpack to illustrate the weight of guilt we carry around.*

In my experience, I've learned there are two kinds of guilt. *[Bring a student on stage and ask them to put on the backpack.]*

First, there is **false guilt**. *[Hold up a book labeled "false guilt."]* This is when we feel guilty about something, but we're not *actually* guilty of anything. Sometimes we bring this false guilt on ourselves. *[Put a few books labeled "false guilt" into the backpack as you say the next few sentences.]* We're hard on ourselves. So when we get a lower grade on a test than we wanted, or forget to do our chores, or accidentally hurt a friend's feelings, or unintentionally leave a kid in our Small Group out, we get overwhelmed with guilt. And we carry that guilt around with us. We feel like we made a *huge* mistake, and we beat ourselves up about it because we feel guilty. In reality, we don't have to. We didn't do those things on purpose. We didn't bring those things on ourselves. But false guilt tells us otherwise. *[Put another book labeled "false guilt" into the backpack.]*

The second kind of guilt, is **real guilt**. *[Hold up the book labeled "real guilt."]* We feel guilty because we *are* guilty. *[Put a few books labeled "real guilt" into the backpack as you say the next couple sentences.]* We know we told that lie, or cheated on that test, or spread that rumor, or hurt that friend on purpose. We know the thing we did or said was wrong. We know we hurt somebody. And because of that, we feel guilty. *[Put another book labeled "real guilt" into the backpack.]* But the problem is, we're not really sure what to do with the guilt that we feel.

**Some of us try to ignore it.** We deny it. We act as if we did nothing wrong or have nothing to feel guilty about. We do our best to pretend the guilt just isn't there. But what I've learned from experience is that ignoring guilt only makes it more powerful. *[Add some books labeled "guilt" to the backpack as you say the next few sentences.]* It gives it more time and space to grow into something bigger. Something that has more power to motivate us to make more bad choices or tell more lies to cover up the guilt we're trying to avoid in the first place. And eventually the weight of the guilt becomes too much to carry. Just look at *[student carrying the backpack full of books.]* They're really struggling. They're carrying so much guilt that it's weighing them down and impacting them in some not-so-great ways! And the truth is, the more we try to run from guilt, the more it has the potential to control us. The more it has the power to take over and be the boss of us.

**Others of us struggle with guilt because honestly, we don't think we feel it.** We do something that we know is wrong and something we shouldn't do, and well, that's it. End of story. *[Ask the student to remove the backpack, put it on the floor/stage, and return to their seat.]* Maybe we get caught, get punished, experience a consequence. Or maybe we don't. Either way, we don't really feel guilty about what we've done. We don't carry that backpack full of guilt around with us. *[Motion to the backpack full of books on the floor/stage.]* Some of us maybe even wonder if we should feel bad about not feeling all that bad! I mean, shouldn't we feel a little guilt at some point?

**Sometimes we even let guilt turn into anger.** We get mad at ourselves for what we did. We get mad that we got caught. We get mad that we don't feel guilty enough. We get mad that we can't just do whatever we want without consequence. And eventually, that anger leads to making more choices that lead to more guilt. The cycle just goes on and on.

Here's what I want you to see about guilt. Just like any emotion, the feeling itself isn't bad. When we experience guilt, it's a sign to us that something is off. Something needs to change. Something needs to get right within us. That's a good thing, in my opinion! **If we didn't experience guilt, we wouldn't be able to recognize when we needed to take a step to change or make something right.**

It's not the guilt itself that I want you to run from; it's letting it control you, push you, boss you around into believing something that just isn't true about you. *[Motion to the backpack on the floor/stage.]* It's when the guilt becomes so great that it weighs you down and controls how you feel and how you act.

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## TRUTH

5 MINUTES

Now maybe you're sitting here thinking, *"Well of course you're talking about guilt at church! I mean, isn't that what church is supposed to do? Make you feel guilty?"*

Actually, no! In fact, Jesus actually came to save us from ever having to let our guilt control or boss us around. And I know that not just because the Bible says it, but because I've experienced it. I've experienced a freedom from guilt that I want you to experience, too.

To help us get there, we're going to look at a passage in the Bible written by a guy named **Paul**. Now, a little background on Paul. He wasn't always the incredible leader of faith that most people remember him to be. Sure, he did a lot of amazing things to spread the message of Jesus and grow the early church. But before that? He was a completely different person.

In fact, he even had a different name: **Saul**. And as Saul, well, he did a lot of really bad, really terrible things. Things he had plenty of reason to feel guilty about. Things like lying, and hate, and even murder. But then, Saul had an experience with Jesus, and everything changed. I mean, even his name changed! He literally went from being called Saul to being called **Paul**. But what didn't change was the past. The fact that Paul had done a lot of things that made him feel guilty was still there. A lot of things that might have made him believe he shouldn't even show up at church, let alone be a leader!

That's what I think makes what he wrote here all the more interesting. Let's take a look:

***So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death (Romans 8:1-2 NLT).***

So let's start with the first part of Paul's passage. The part where he talked about condemnation. One of the reasons we don't want to deal with our mistakes, or mess ups, or sins is because it

leaves us feeling condemned. That's probably not a word most of us know or would even use, but it really just means to be guilty. To have the kind of guilt that is so big, and so heavy, and so overwhelming that you can't get out of it. The kind of guilt that makes you believe you'll always be defined by or running from your mistakes. The kind of guilt that weighs you down and holds you back. Maybe you're carrying that kind of guilt. Maybe you feel condemned because of something you've done.

But immediately in this passage, Paul said that it doesn't have to be this way. Let's take a look one more time at what exactly he said: *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.* Paul said that if we believe in Jesus, there is no condemnation. There's no guilt too big to keep us from Him. **There is no guilt too heavy to weigh us down because Jesus set us free.**

And Paul finished with saying this: *"The power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power that leads to death."* When Jesus came to Earth and died on the cross, He took the weight of all our mistakes with Him. *[Hold up the backpack full of books from the "Weight of Guilt" Interactive.]* He took the power of those mistakes, which leads to the death of things like our relationships, our future, our reputation, and so much more. And instead, **Jesus gave us the power of His Spirit.** The power that brings us life. And that is a power stronger than guilt. *[Dump out the books that were in the backpack onto the stage/floor.]*

Because of what Jesus did for you, **guilt doesn't have to be the boss of you.** *[Motion to the books on the stage/floor.]*

Paul experienced this firsthand. Because of Jesus, Paul was able to step out of the guilt of all the things he'd done in the past. Now of course none of us are dealing with the weight of things like Paul was, like murder! But we're all probably dealing with guilt in some form or another. Maybe it's the thing you said to your mom, or the way you treated that girl. Or maybe it was the lie you told your teacher, or the way you talked to your siblings. Maybe it's that habit you know is wrong but you can't seem to stop doing. Maybe it's something you regret, something you wish you'd done differently, something that's left you with some guilt.

And if you're not careful, that guilt will tell you what to do. *[Motion to the books on the stage/floor.]* It will tell you to stay away from church. To hide what you've done and to cover up your mistakes. It will lead you to not ask forgiveness and to keep ignoring the guilt in hopes that it'll go away.

But Jesus gives us a different option. **He gives us a chance to start over.** He gives us grace. He gives us freedom. Is this a free pass to do whatever we want? Not at all! But it's a new way to look at the mistakes we make. A freedom to try again. A way to not be weighed down by our feelings of guilt. *[Hold up the empty backpack.]* A chance to get rid of our guilt, once and for all.

**Guilt doesn't have to be the boss of you.**

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## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

So because we find freedom from guilt when we follow Jesus, here's what I want you to know:

- 1) **You can stop being so hard on yourself.** Maybe you're someone who struggles with a lot of false guilt. Or maybe you're someone who struggles with the weight of guilt that others try to put on you. Or maybe you're someone who is dealing with very real guilt for some very real mistakes right now. No matter where you fall, the truth is that there's grace. And that means that Jesus isn't hard on you, so you can stop being so hard on yourself. You can stop beating yourself up for what you've done or what you feel. You can stop believing the lies that guilt or even other people tell you about who you are

because of what you've done. Instead, you can embrace the grace that Jesus gives you to live guilt-free.

- 2) **You can stop being so hard on others.** This one I know we all do sometimes. Because it's easy to look around and think about all the reasons we know other people should feel guilty for what they've said or done. It's easy to let that define who they are in our minds. But when we accept Jesus' grace for ourselves, we can, and should, also extend it to others. It doesn't mean that what they did or said wasn't wrong or hurtful. But it does mean that we can offer them forgiveness and a chance to start over. Just like Jesus offers us. Even if they don't ask for it, we can still extend grace and forgiveness.
- 3) **You can let guilt remind you, but not define you.** Remember how we said that guilt doesn't have to be a bad thing on its own? It can be a sign to us that something isn't right. That something needs to change. And because of Jesus, that's where it stops. Guilt can remind us of the path we've walked before. It can help us not go down that road or make those same mistakes again. But it doesn't get the final say in who we are. It doesn't get to define us.
- 4) **You can make it right.** This one is big! Sometimes we think when we do something wrong the most important thing for us to do is just pray and ask God for forgiveness. And while that's an important step, it's not the only step. Often, we need to be brave enough to make it right with the other person. Whatever it is that you're feeling guilty about doing or saying that may have hurt someone else, you need to work to make it right. To apologize. To ask for their forgiveness as well. To try and do better next time.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

It isn't always easy to keep guilt from defining who we are. I get it! That's why we have Small Groups to not only extend grace to you, but also help you extend grace to yourself. To help you move past the decisions you've made and things you've done, so that the guilt can remind you instead of define you.

Remember, **guilt doesn't have to be the boss of you.**

And as you head to your Small Group, I want you to think about this question: **What's one thing I usually do when I feel guilty about something?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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