Jeremiah had several opportunities to work his way through crises of faith brought on by stressors he endured. Think about the crises of faith you have lived through. What do you believe has helped you most as you endured such crises?

**Stress can strengthen who you are as a child of God.**

We have only to look to Paul’s letter to the Romans 5:1–5 to see how this happens. What does Paul say in these verses about Christ, faith, and grace?

Christ is our peace in the midst of every stressor because He has already overcome our greatest stressors of sin and death and given us as a free gift, His salvation, which the stress of this world cannot overcome. Even as Christ reminds His followers in John 16:33 (ESV): “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world,” we are reassured that His promise holds true in our lives today.

It is through enduring and resolving of stressors that we can come to rejoice in our sufferings as redeemed, beloved children of the heavenly Father … realizing that perseverance has made us stronger in faith through the working of the Holy Spirit.

**Closing:** Paul gives us a powerful blueprint in Ephesians 3:14–21. Read these verses as a closing prayer: For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge … that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

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**Guilt and Grace: A Gospel Fresh Start**

*By Jane Reinheimer*

**Opening:** Oh Lord, I know that You are everywhere in the universe. There are times when I feel Your presence around me in a comforting embrace. This is especially needed when feelings of guilt plague me and make me feel so unworthy of Your love and forgiveness. Like David in Psalm 51:1–3, I echo his thoughts: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. David later says in Psalm 130:4: But with you there is forgiveness. Let Your Holy Spirit guide this study of Your Word, revealing to us our guilt and Your Gospel promise of forgiveness.

**Guilt and grace are tied together.**

Guilt silently points a finger at our peace of mind. Some say all this finger-pointing is conviction. Some say it’s our conscience that gets annoyed when we don’t behave according to the rules. No matter what you call it … no matter how you describe it … guilt is haunting. Its origin: the breaking of God’s Law. The Law convicts us in our sin.

It separates us from God. We would drown in the waters of guilt if the heavenly Father did not reach out with His grace and love-made-flesh in the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. (Galatians 4:4–7)

**Guilt is a mixture of fear and shame.**

Fear and shame collide and drag us into guilt. Read Genesis 2:25. Prior to the fall into sin, how did Adam and Eve
respond to each other’s nakedness? In Genesis 3:7, what happened that made them make clothing for themselves?

In Isaiah 28:18-19, what does God say about the covenant with death? And the agreement with the grave? What is it about this message in verse 19 that causes fear so great that it is terrifying? What instruction did Adam and Eve break? (See Genesis 3:3.) The instruction they broke was only not to eat from the fruit of the tree. Eve’s adding that they were not to touch was actually adding to the Word of the Lord, which is also sinful.

In Genesis 3:10, how does Adam describe what he is feeling? Read Genesis 3:14–23. What were the consequences? How did the Lord still provide care and compassion to Adam and Eve in the midst of consequences?

Read Hebrews 10:29. What do we learn about deserved punishment with regard to how God treats the Son of God? What does this verse say about the blood of the covenant? And about the Spirit of grace? How does verse 31 recall the experience of Adam and Eve?

What do we learn about God’s treatment of the guilty? Read Jeremiah 50:20 and Psalm 103:11–12. How does this match your treatment of persons who have wronged you? Recall a time when you demonstrated grace to others in your life.

**The fresh start begins now.**

According to John 1:10–13, what is needed to do to become a child of God? Is there an end to the blessings of God’s grace? (See John 1:16.) How much grace is God willing to shower upon you, a sinner? (See Romans 5:20.) What do you need to do to claim God’s grace? [Trick question!] Do you ever fall into the trap of thinking that you need to do something?

When you confess your shameful moments of sin, do you need to fear God? According to 2 Thessalonians 3:16, how often does the Apostle Paul say peace is available to us and in what way?

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, I thank You that because of what Jesus did for me on the cross, You wash my guilt away, lift the burden of fear and shame from me, and give me a fresh start. In grace, I receive Your forgiveness of all my sins. I rejoice in my blood-bought inheritance as Your child. I pray that You would keep me focused on Your Word and reassured that where You walk with me, I am safe. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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