

KARL'S DARK SECRET

Reflection by Pastor Richard Fox

Karl was a top bloke. He'd do anything for anyone. If there was an event coming up in the community, Karl would be there to lend a hand. He'd often ask, "Is there anything I could help you with?" And we'd say "Sure". But nobody knew the dark secret that Karl was trying to bury.

Do you have a secret, something you don't want anybody to know about?

When I met Karl, he was well settled into the community. He had good friends, a job and always seemed to be happy. There wasn't much Karl couldn't do. He was strong and tall and people seemed to like being around him. He was a great role model. I thought Karl had life all worked out.

But soon after I met Karl, we had a conversation that shocked me. It turned out that Karl was on the run! He'd changed his name and thought that if he could just have a new start in a new community, with a new life, everything would be fine. Karl was trying to forget his past. He was trying to cover up past mistakes by trying to be the best person he could be. It was guilt that was driving him, and no one would've guessed it.

When Karl opened up to me about his past, I could see how the guilt was destroying him on the inside. No matter how much he ran. He couldn't escape the guilt from what he'd done in the past. No matter how good a person he tried to be, guilt would drag him back to his ugly past. Karl wanted to be free of the guilt. He wanted a new life. But it just wasn't working out.

Have you ever cringed or panicked when you see the police? Or when a police car drives past or comes up behind you in the distance with the sirens on? For some reason, police have a great way of making you feel like you've done something wrong, and you feel guilty whether you've done something wrong or not! Maybe the guilt comes from the times when you accidentally crept over the speed limit. Or the time when you were running late to a meeting or to pick someone up and you thought "it's ok, this is important, I can't be late." Those kind of reactions are guilty reactions. They're moments of reflection that make us remember times when we've stuffed up. They're times when we felt guilty.

I don't like feeling guilty. It's a lousy feeling especially when you have done something to be guilty about.

That's what it was like for Karl. The guilt just wouldn't let go of him and it was taking all the joy from his life. He tried to ignore it. He tried to run away and forget about it. He tried to cover it up by being the best person he could be and, in a way, make up for the bad thing he'd done. He tried to keep busy and think of others and how he could distract himself. And sadly, sometimes he even tried to punish himself in a way that he could balance the ledger of what he had done to someone else in the past. Sadly, none of these responses actually dealt with his feelings of guilt. In fact, it made him feel worse and even compounded the issue, making him feel even guiltier!

So how can we deal with guilt? And not just the mild cases, what about the deep cases? The times when people are hurt, relationships broken, and lives destroyed. The type of guilt that stops us from living free. The type that makes us feel that we're never good enough.

Karl had tried to cover up the feeling of guilt, but the guilt ate away at him. He was tired of running and he was exhausted from feeling guilty. At first Karl was scared to share his secret, but the more he spoke and the more I listened, the more relieved he felt.

Eventually he was able to share the cause of his guilt: When he was younger, he was arrested for assault and faced a 5 year prison sentence. Of course, simply sharing his story didn't bring the relief he was looking for. That relief came when he heard about what Jesus has done for him. Karl heard how Jesus has forgiven him. How Jesus dying on the cross paid the price for what Karl had done. Jesus took Karl's guilt onto himself when he died on the cross and now as a result, Jesus sets him free. Truly free.

It's the same for us, **the burden of guilt that we carry around or try to deal with on our own, can be taken from us by Jesus.** When you try and deal with guilt yourself, when you wonder what you can offer to make up for the guilt, you can offer up Jesus' death on the cross. Because of that sacrifice, our guilt has been paid for and dealt with. Our guilt has been washed away – completely. He has taken it away by dying on the cross. That's what Jesus did for Karl, did for me, and does for you too. That's how you can really deal with guilt. You can give it to God and ask him to take it because of what Jesus has done. That may sound impossible to believe, but that's the truth. **Jesus can take your guilt away and set you free.**

Of course, being forgiven by Jesus didn't take away the fact that Karl was still a wanted man. This still played on Karl's mind but the fact that he knew he was forgiven and free meant that he was prepared to make up for his assault charge. He was nervous, because he knew it would involve jail time, but Karl went back and handed himself in. Karl confessed his crime and said sorry to the victim. It was difficult but a great relief for Karl.

He was sentenced to jail. The judge couldn't let him off. But, as a result of going to jail, he could tell others about the forgiveness that Jesus offers them and many people were set free of their guilt because Karl shared what Jesus had done for them too.

Karl was released about 6 months into serving his sentence because they could see that he was a changed man. Jesus had changed him and he was now truly free.

So, if you're feeling guilty, ask Jesus to take it from you. Hearing and believing that you are forgiven by Jesus, can help you truly deal with whatever consequences are still around. You may not be comfortable with facing the cause of your guilt, but with Jesus, you can be set free.

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