

I Feel Guilty of Causing My Son's Death due to COVID19

By Barrington H. Brennen, September 4, 2021

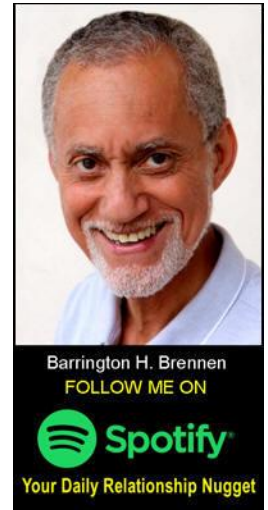
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Not long ago, a mother came to me in tears seeking help. Why? Because she believed she "caused" the death of her son who died the week before from the corona virus 2019. She was distraught and deeply depressed. She had not slept since the day he died. The pressure was great because the entire family got COVID19 and not only did her son die but his girlfriend, and her mother died of the virus a few days after her son's death.

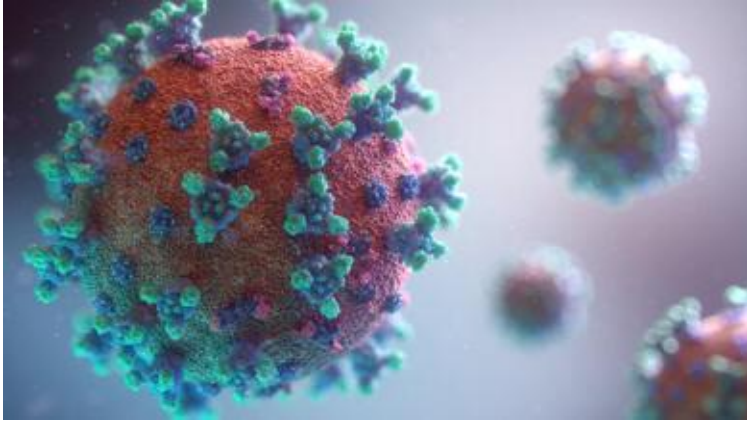
She was adamant that her son, and the rest of her family did not take the vaccine against the virus because she believed that her faith was stronger than any other drug and she had doubts about the effectiveness of the vaccine. Not only was she against the taking of the vaccine, but she was also against the use of face masks, physical distancing, and crowd control. She told me that she frequently attended large gatherings of people (social and religious) within close proximity of each other without any care in the world or caution, nor following the government's protocols.

She thought it will never happen to her because her faith was strong and she lives a decent life. What really perked up my ears was when she told me about the time she attended a church service in Nassau where the pastor insisted that people in the congregation, sitting closely together, takes off their masks. The preacher proclaimed that wearing of a mask and taking the vaccine is a lack of faith in God. Sadly, that pastor contracted COVID19 and became very ill but survived.

What she was hearing from the preacher really reinforced her beliefs and strengthened her determination that her family will not express doubt in God by wearing of masks and getting vaccinated. But it did not take too long before something did happen. One day her son came home not feeling well and he said his girlfriend was also sick. At first, this caring mother did not think it would be the virus until the day she felt unwell. After going to the doctor, she learned that she and her son, his girlfriend and her mother all tested positive with COVID19. Today, out of the four of them she is the only one alive. Now she feels guilty of causing the death of her son. She is now wearing a mask in public, physical distancing, and



washing her hands frequently. She has not yet decided if she will take the vaccine. However, she is now obeying the protocols to protect against the virus.



Understandably, this mother is in deep emotional pain. There are many stories like this in The Bahamas, and around the world. It is normal to feel guilty if we really did something wrong. In the 2014 article entitled “*Guilt and Grief: coping with the shoulda, woulda, couldas,*” by Litsa Williams, she writes: “Sometimes we

fail to do things we wish we had done or should have done. That may be as large as a grievous error in judgment or mistake that led to a death. It could be as small as something hurtful we said, or something meaningful we failed to say.” Sometimes we feel guilty because we only feel we did something wrong. Note that because you feel guilty doesn’t mean you are guilty. Litsa Williams states “Our irrational brain will find just about anything to feel guilty about. Despite being irrational, this guilt can be consuming.” What will be the result of guilt feelings in this mother’s life? Will it prevent her from moving forward, working, and serving others? Will it cause a long depression and painful emotions?

Here are a few tips by psychologist Litsa Williams for persons dealing with guilt.

1. Acknowledge that guilt is a normal grief emotion and don’t let others minimize the validity of your grief experience.
2. Consider what your guilt is all about. Is it rational? Is it irrational? Is it about control?
3. Talk it over with others. Though you don’t want people minimizing your feelings, talking about guilt can help you reflect on your grief. A good counselor or support group is a great environment to talk about feelings of guilt.
4. Examine your thoughts. Often our guilt thoughts, whether rational or irrational, start to consume us. They can drag us down into one of those bottomless black holes – the kind that are full of isolation, despair, and far too much wine and ben & jerry’s ice cream.
5. If your guilt feelings are irrational, admit it. This doesn’t mean dismissing your feelings of guilt. It means acknowledging that, though you feel guilty, you may not actually be guilty. Some common examples are acknowledging you did the best you could



with the information you had at the time, you couldn't predict the future, there were many other factors at play other than your behaviors, etc.

6. Forgive yourself. Easier said than done, right? Remember that forgiveness does not mean condoning or excusing. Forgiveness can mean accepting that we may have done something we regret, but finding new attitude and perspective toward ourselves in relation to that action. It doesn't mean we forget, but means we find a way to move forward." Do something with your guilt.
7. Whether rational or irrational, you can use your guilt to help others. What you do may come out of things you have learned.

I would encourage everyone to be wise during this most difficult time in our country and the world. Seriously consider taking the vaccine against COVID19 as your role of being a caring citizen and loving and kind to one another. If there is a medical reason you are afraid to and cannot take the vaccine, you can still be wise by wearing your mask, practicing physical distancing, sanitizing your hands and food, avoid attending large gatherings, especially those where people gather in close proximity.

Do not listen to so-called spiritual leaders who make a mockery of faith by stating it is a lack faith to wear masks or take the vaccine. Remember this truth. These same spiritual leaders will not allow their faith to prevent them from washing their hands of dirt before they eat a meal or leaving a bathroom. Faith dose not conflict with common sense.

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