

# Am I a good person?

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**Q: I am writing because I keep coming back to the same question, “Am I a good person?” I am taking care of my husband who suffers from Alzheimer’s, as well as my parents who need a lot of attention. I can’t always find the time to pray the rosary every day (like St. John Paul II or St. Mother Teresa did), and I just can’t escape the Catholic guilt that I feel all of the time.**

**A:** Thank you for such a heartfelt question. I want to get to a clear and helpful answer to your primary question of “Am I a good person?” But before that, it might be helpful to note three things.

First, when it comes to “Catholic guilt,” it might be helpful to cut through this right away. I’m sure that all of us have heard of “Catholic guilt.” But is that really a thing? My mom used to say, “There is nothing ‘Catholic’ about guilt ... it’s just guilt. If I’ve done something wrong, then I ought to feel guilty; there is nothing specifically ‘Catholic’ about it!” That always made sense to me.

Think about it: Guilt is a good and necessary thing. Try to imagine a person who never felt guilty. This would not be a healthy or emotionally balanced person. They might experience what psychologists would call antisocial personality disorder. A sociopath is someone who doesn't feel remorse when having done something wrong or when they choose to not do the right thing. I have the sense that we would not want that.

Guilt is good. Guilt is a sign that our conscience is working.

At the same time, there is "false guilt." False guilt is when I feel guilty for no real reason. This is not a virtue, and it is not at all helpful. It does not honor God, nor does it benefit anybody in the least. Therefore, one of the challenges of maturing in our emotional and spiritual development is discerning between true guilt and false guilt. What is God asking of me, and what is he not asking of me? Just because one person is called to pray a certain way or to live a certain way does not mean that God is asking that same thing of you. Mother Teresa was called to run a religious community of sisters who cared for the poorest of the poor; you are called to care for the people in your own family. One practice that might help a person in figuring out the difference between false guilt and real guilt might be to give yourself an honest assessment of what you are able to do and what you are not able to do. God does not expect us to do something we are incapable of.

Second, I wonder if a more accurate phrasing of your question is not "Am I a good person?" but rather "Am I good enough?" As a being made in God's image, it is good that you exist. Your very existence is a blessing. Beyond that, we hopefully all can recognize that there is both good and evil in us. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn stated, "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." If we give ourselves even a cursory examination of conscience, I think that we will all quickly discover that we choose both good and evil regularly.

Because of this, I think that the question we all want answered is, "Am I good enough?" I already know that I'm not as good as I could be. Even more, I already know that I am not as good as the Lord himself. So all I am left with is the hope, "Is there enough good in me that I can go to heaven?"

The answer is yes and no. Yes, you are made in God's image. If you are baptized, you are also an adopted child of God. Because of this, you are good. You also choose many good things: you serve, you pray, you love, you forgive. Therefore, you could be described as a good person. And yet, none of us is good enough. I could serve better, I could pray more, I could love more truly, I could forgive more fully. We are not "good enough." And we never will be.

Now, I know that some people will read this and condemn themselves. Some will read this and throw up their hands and say, "Then what's the point?" And that discouragement and despair would be valid, except for one significant reality: Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus

Christ (the only truly good person who ever walked the earth), we always have hope. Even when we are not good enough, even when we do not love enough, even when we fail to be the people God has created us to be, we still have hope. Our problem is that we think that our hope lies in our goodness. It does not! Our hope is in Jesus and in what Jesus has done for us.

Because the Second Person of the Trinity took on our human nature and lived, suffered, died, and rose from the dead in our human nature, we have the possibility of experiencing new life. Because of what he has done, we can have eternal life. Because the good God has met us in our misery, we do not have to worry about being “good enough.”

And this leads us to the third thing to remember: you are loved.

Your call is not to be good enough. Your call is to allow God to love you, and to respond to that love with love.

This might sound too “fluffy” or too basic. This might sound too easy! But I have discovered something in almost 20 years of being a priest and of trying to remind people about God’s love for them. Most people I meet have heard that God loves them. But most people do not believe that God loves them, they believe that God tolerates them.

Most people have never given God permission to do the one thing that the entire Bible is building towards: to allow God to love you as you are.

When we allow God to love us as we are, we no longer ask the question “Am I good enough?” because we know that we are not. We simply keep coming back to the better question (truly, it is the only question): “Does God have my permission to love me as I am right now?” Because if he does, then everything changes. When we are succeeding, we do not become prideful because God is the one who loves us. When we are failing, we do not despair because God is the one who loves us. When we sin, we come back to him because God is the one who loves us. And when we are not good enough, we cast all of our weaknesses on him because God is the one who loves us.