THOSE

GUILTY

STAINS

A famous English play by William Shakespeare tells the story of an army general named Macbeth. Early in the story, Macbeth was told that he would one day become king. Hearing this, Macbeth's wife convinced him to murder the real king and accuse others of the crime. Macbeth did exactly that, and soon he was indeed made king.

However, in a dramatic scene right after committing that murder, Macbeth pondered what he had done. Staring in horror at his bloody hands, he asked himself: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No!" At that moment, Macbeth felt so guilty that he believed not even the sea itself could make him clean. He added that the blood on his hands would probably cause all the oceans of the world to turn red if he tried to wash in them.

Macbeth is a fictional character, of course, but his words ring true when it comes to our feelings of guilt and shame. Perhaps you have felt that way too. You know what you have done. Past wrongs keep coming back to your memory. Your conscience continually reminds you of your guilt.

We learn in the Bible that God calls those wrongdoings "sin." In fact, the Bible tells true stories of many real people throughout history who also committed sins – and they also felt that sense of guilt and shame. Some wanted to hide from God. Others tried to cover their sins and pretend nothing was wrong. Still others tried to pay for their wrongs by doing good things afterward. But in all cases, God knew their sins, and it seemed their guilt could never be erased.

However, the Bible does not stop at describing those guilty stains caused by our sins. No, the message of the Bible is about God's forgiveness! The great fact about this forgiveness is that God offers it to us freely. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the Savior who lived a perfect life, died to pay the penalty for our guilt, and rose to life again. Because of the work of Jesus, the Bible promises that "through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38 NKJV).

This is a tremendous statement. The God of heaven, who knows better than anyone else how terrible our sins are, is the very same God who invites us to receive His forgiveness through Jesus Christ. As the Bible also says, "In Him we have redemption through His

blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

If you try to balance out your sins by doing good works, you will never achieve it. And if you try to ignore your sins, you will eventually become hard-hearted toward God and others. The fictional story of Macbeth ends in that kind of tragedy, and many real-life stories have ended the same way.

But your story can be transformed from guilt, shame and sin to peace, joy and forgiveness! Trust in Jesus the Savior and claim God's wonderful promise: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). —*Stephen Campbell*