Bob: Are there issues in your life that no one knows anything about—that you'd be embarrassed or ashamed if someone knew about them? Dr. Erwin Lutzer says it’s time to come clean.

Dr. Lutzer: Light heals. Light heals because when something is exposed to the light, the darkness has to dissipate. And there are many Christians who are walking in darkness. 1 John chapter 1 proves that Christians can walk in darkness. What they need to do, is to come to the light.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, June 20th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll talk today about the power of a clear conscience and how to clear yours. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us.

I don’t know that I’ve ever really stopped to think about our consciences as a muscle but, as we’ve been talking about it this week, I’m thinking “We really can train our consciences to either be an ally—to help us live rightly—or we can let our consciences go and then we lose that ally as we seek to live our lives in this world.

Dennis: We can and I think it’s a privilege that we get a chance to talk with former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago, Dr. Erwin Lutzer. Erwin welcome back to the broadcast.

Dr. Lutzer: Great to be with you.

Dennis: He has written a book that was actually a series of sermons called The Power of a Clear Conscience: Let God Free You from Your Past. Dr. Lutzer was pastor at Moody Church for over 37 years.

Bob: And you continue as Pastor Emeritus today, right?

Dr. Lutzer: I get an opportunity to speak in various parts of the country and my desire is to invest my life—the rest of it—in the next generation.
**Bob:** I know the church is happy to be sharing you with the broader population of Christians not only in this country but all around the world.

**Dennis:** He has described his wife, Rebecca, as one who has the voice of God. [Laughter] When she speaks—he has to listen. He’s been listening for 46 years. They have three married children—eight grandchildren. I think this is an important book for our day—I really do—because I think in our country, if anything, our consciences are seared.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** They’re numbed by what we face each day—don’t you think?

**Dr. Lutzer:** You know, that’s really true. Let me say this—a study was done as to why people don’t witness to the faith. Why is it that many people don’t share their faith at work and so forth? We can say, “Well, you know they weren’t trained well” or “They don’t know how to do it.” You know what the study found? It’s because of troubled consciences. See, if you are still processing your own guilt—because of an addiction or whatever it is you’re going through—how can you share Christ with somebody if He’s not really working for you?

There was a movement in Canada in the 1970’s that was really like a revival. What it also revived was a tremendous amount of witnessing because people were finally dealing with issues that had been festering in their hearts for years. I mean here is a woman for example—she had been lying about their wedding date for virtually all of her married life. She was lying because she wanted people to not know that she was pregnant when she married. So now, in the back of her mind, how does she witness to others when it’s always there?

Finally, when she was able to admit to this and tell her friends, “Look, I’ve been hanging onto something. This secret is just plaquing me.” It freed her to be able to witness. In the very same way, what I’m finding is as people deal with it—

Now, I also tell the story of a man, who committed murder and finally admitted to it and is in jail, who said these words, “I am freer in jail than I was out of jail.”

**Bob:** When we sin—when we do something wrong, that data gets stored in our heart—in our mind—in our conscience. If we leave that undealt with—the Bible talks about Satan as the accuser of the brethren—he’s got something he can always point to if there is unconfessed, undealt with sin and say, “See, you’re not the person you claim to be. It’s there—right there.”

**Dr. Lutzer:** I’m so glad you said that. Last program we were talking about Romans 8:1. “There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” We have to distinguish the fact that there is no condemnation before God because these people are forgiven their
sin—but that’s only half the story. One of the reasons I wrote the book is because Paul said, “I want a conscience free of offense before God and before man.”

When you confess your sin to God, in that sense, it’s easier---though admitting we’re wrong is always hard---because that’s a private matter. But what we want people to be able to do is to have a process whereby they’re willing to face their sin—and admit it and relationally have a free conscience.

As a pastor, I’ve dealt with husbands who committed infidelity. They’d prefer that just be confessed to God; but at some point, with the guidance---hopefully with a counselor present---that needs to come out because it will always affect their marriage unless they deal with it. There’s certain circumstances, maybe, in which they cannot deal with it—but the point is, a conscience has to be freed—not only before God, but before others.

**Dennis:** You’ve been making the point that the lack of a clear conscience can keep us from sharing our faith in Jesus Christ with others. You made a comment earlier that our lack of a clear conscience can also keep us from growing spiritually. I want you to unpack that a bit more because I think that’s really important.

**Dr. Lutzer:** Well, what happens is if your conscience isn’t clear—there is a barrier there. It’s something like taking a basketball and pushing it into the ocean and saying, “Oh it’s gone,” and then it pops up somewhere else. What happens is people try to push this out of their minds. They tell themselves, “God has forgiven me,” which indeed may be true. But if they are not relationally in touch—if there are issues—then of course they can’t because the conscience is such that it is constantly reminding them. It’s saying, “Ha Ha, you have sinned.” And you know right well that you’re lying about this or there’s this issue in the past you haven’t dealt with. So, in that sense it always holds people back.

That’s why the apostle Paul said the goal of our instruction is love. That love issues from, of course, eventually a good conscience which I interpret to be a clear conscience. Paul says that one of the reasons he was able to preach the way he could preach is because of a clear conscience. You know, there are pastors today who can’t speak about certain issues because they themselves have matters in their life that they’ve not dealt with, therefore, the conscience is incredibly important.

**Dennis:** You gave a lot of messages in your 37 years of tenure at the church. Did you ever stand up and preach and have something taking place between you and God where God goes, “Hey Erwin, deal with it.”

**Dr. Lutzer:** Generally, I dealt with that before I preached but there have been times—absolutely. I tried—as best I could—to make sure that I was fully right with God and to the extent that I could—with others—before I preached. Did I always do that? Probably not, but that was my goal. Let me say this also—that there are times when we cannot reconcile, by the way—and that idea frees people.
Listen there's some people you cannot reconcile with because they will demand things of you that are untrue. You're going through this difficulty. They make it all your fault and so forth. Often times when I explain that to people, they admitted this was very freeing.

**Dennis:** I'm glad you mentioned that it was a clear conscience—not only with God, but with people—human beings. The passage you're speaking of, about being at peace with all men as much as it depends upon you, is Romans chapter 12. There are some people—you can't satisfy all their demands, as you said. And there are some people who aren't going to be at peace with you, no matter what you do.

**Dr. Lutzer:** The message that I preached at Moody Church, that gained the most attention and probably we received the most requests for, was entitled *How to Become an Impossible Person.*

Because I was preaching on the conscience, what I was looking at is those passages where the apostle Paul talked about people who had a hardened conscience—a seared conscience. He talked about those who had a defiled conscience. So, I looked at that and said, “What kind of a person is that?” Then I came across the apostle Paul’s description of people in the last days and number one is that people are going to be lovers of their own selves, so that led me to speak about narcissism.

A narcissist processes all information through two questions: “How does this make me look?” and “How does this make me feel?” Everything is about them. If somebody walks into a room, the narcissist has to be the center of attention—and if somebody else walks in, he sees them as competition because it always has to be about him. A narcissist has his own reality.

People—for a narcissist—exist as ego supply. “You exist to supply my ego. As a result of that, I am willing to criticize you and I’ll destroy you if you ever come up against me. I feel my hurts very keenly but I don’t feel yours.” Now, when you’re dealing with a narcissist like this, you have to understand that we are dealing with somebody who is hard wired in narcissism. So, there’s some suggestions in my book as to how to live with a narcissist because we’re talking to people who probably do. And all of us are narcissists to some extent, but one out of ten is certifiably narcissistic.

**Bob:** And what is the hope for that one in ten? How does a certifiable narcissist become broken and repentant?

**Dr. Lutzer:** [Laughter] Oh boy. Two questions here. First of all, living with a narcissist, number one—I hate to say this but I will—don’t expect radical change. Narcissism is part of the hard wiring of a person and it’s very difficult for a narcissist to see reality—they see only themselves. Secondly, what you have to do is to realize—become a whole person apart from the narcissist. You have to have other kinds of friendships that keep you alive—that keep you.
The other thing is—listen to them because remember, every narcissist has a story—there’s a reason why they are the way they are. So, rather than just quickly judging, listen to their story—feel their pain. For the narcissist—oh, there’s a Psalm written exactly for the narcissist and that’s Psalm 139. It’s the Psalm where David says, “Look, God, you know me entirely. You see me when I get up in the morning. You see me at night. You know my thoughts before I think them.”

What narcissists need to do is to realize, “I don’t have to keep up this appearance all the time—I don’t have to be number one—I don’t have to be exalting myself because God sees me entirely and completely. If He continues to love me and I am willing to give up my preoccupation with myself and allow God into my life and open my life to what God is able to do, I don’t have to be the person that I really am.” God does bring about change, but narcissists need to see that—as all of us do.

Bob: We are talking with Dr. Erwin Lutzer, as anybody who’s ever heard him speak before would recognize because of the voice is a recognizable voice. We’re talking about The Power of a Clear Conscience—which is the title of a book that you’ve written Dr. Lutzer.

I had lunch with a friend of mine and he said to me, “There are some things in my past that no one will ever know.”

He said, “I will take them to my grave.” Well, in the providence of God over the last five years, some of those issues have spilled out and, as we were having lunch, he had to acknowledge that the spilling out of those issues had been less painful and more healing than he had thought they would be.

I bring this up, because one of the things you talk about in this book is the power of bringing things from darkness to light. When our shame—our sin—our guilt is exposed and brought to light, some of the power that it holds over us is drained just by being out in the open, isn’t it?

Dr. Lutzer: Oh exactly! Because then the voice of conscience no longer has to accuse you because accusations take place in the privacy of our minds and hearts—when we are trying to keep things from people. There are some things that all of us will take to our grave—not everything has to be spilled out. In my chapter on reconciliation, I point out that there are many private thoughts and so forth, that don’t have to be confessed, thankfully. But at the same time, light heals.

Light heals because when something is exposed to the light the darkness has to dissipate. And there are many Christians who are walking in darkness. 1 John chapter 1 proves that Christians can walk in darkness. What they need to do is to come to the light—not only the light of God’s presence, but also the light of other people’s presence—if indeed their sin and their issue is relevant to them.
**Bob:** So, let me ask you the question that we get asked all the time by people who are contemplating engagement or who are engaged and they’re saying, “I’ve had this relationship in my past that I’ve not told my intended about. Do I have to tell that in order for us to be husband and wife?”

**Dr. Lutzer:** You know what my view is—and you folks are the expert counselors here in family matters so if I disagree with you, let’s have the audience go with you folks—[Laughter] I think it has to. I think that every couple needs to talk about their past—and I’ll tell you why. If these things eventually come up in marriage, they’re absolutely destructive. Get all these things taken care of and, if your boyfriend can’t forgive you, know that up front—and then throw that fish back into the lake! [Laughter]

Because these things are going to plague you—and they will come up—and that secret will affect your intimacy—it will affect all kinds of things. So, lay it all on the table if you’re going to be together and you’re going to intimate. You know one of the things about marriage that is so critical is—it’s not just the joining of two bodies—it’s the joining of two souls. You cannot have soul to soul connection with all these issues in our background that have never been dealt with.

**Dennis:** And you can’t have the fear that somethings going to come up—

**Dr. Lutzer:** Exactly.

**Dennis:** —twelve months—twelve years—thirty years into the marriage and have your spouse feel like they were betrayed and deceived.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dr. Lutzer:** Well, I’m thinking of the man that I told you about last time, who fathered a child in college and his wife doesn’t know it. Well he’s scared someday the boy is going to show up on his door step and say, “Hi Dad.”

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dr. Lutzer:** Think of the situation that he has then to explain to his wife and family.

**Bob:** Just so you know, we’re on the same page—

**Dr. Lutzer:** I’m glad.

**Bob:** —and we give the same counsel. Because, how can two become one if we’re not being open about the things that are in our past?

**Dennis:** I can’t underscore enough the wise counsel you just gave when you said, “If that person is not going to be able to forgive you, that’s not going to be a relationship
you want to spend the rest of your life in—to be punished over and over and over again.” You want another Christ follower who has been the recipient of forgiveness and, therefore, can forgive. That’s what Ephesians chapter 4 verse 32 talks about. “Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ forgave you.” You don’t want to be in a relationship for a lifetime where two people can’t be real and forgive one another.

**Bob:** Let me ask you this question, “Is there a fundamental difference between guilt and conviction of sin? And how can we tell whether we’re being convicted by the Holy Spirit or being accused by the enemy?

**Dr. Lutzer:** Here’s the difference: Satan accuses us of sins that have been forgiven. I met with a woman one time who said she was immoral in her past. She said I’ve confessed my sins a thousand times. Is she free? No! And the reason she isn’t free is, first of all, she’s not believing 1 John 1:9 where it says, “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us.” She’s been forgiven but she hasn’t been cleansed. The cleansing is subjective. Satan loves to accuse us of sins that are forgiven.

Does the Holy Spirit of God convict us? Absolutely! He convicts us of sins that we need to deal with that lead us to God. And remember—oh listen—guilt is not something that you should run away from. Guilt is not God pushing you away. It is God trying to put His arms around you saying, “Come to me with your guilt. The reason for guilt is so you will be driven to Me and you will be forgiven.” That’s the role of the Spirit—but once we have confessed our sins, the Holy Spirit ends His conviction—and Satan begins his accusations. It’s happening all the time and people are listening to the wrong voice.

**Dennis:** What they need to realize that’s one of the names of the devil. He is the accuser of the brethren. He delights in throwing up our past, throwing up our failures, throwing up our weaknesses and condemning us.

**Bob:** And somebody has said, “When Satan reminds you of your past, you remind him of his future.” I think that is a good word. People at our church know—they’ve heard me say this many times. There is a second verse in an old hymn that just comes to me often. It’s the verse that says,

“When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free,
For God, the Just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.”

*(Before the Throne of God Above by C.L. Bancroft)*
Dr. Lutzer: Couldn't be any more beautiful than that.

Bob: Isn't it great?

Dr. Lutzer: I think of the words of Martin Luther. Satan comes to him and says, “Look at all your sins” and Luther says, “Hey, you forgot some. Why don't you remember these?” [Laughter] And Luther adds to his sin and then he says, “Oh, and by the way, devil, are you righteous? Are you the one that should be making this accusation?” And then, of course, underneath he writes, “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.”

So, if you’re listening today and you’re being accused by Satan say, “Bring it on but I’m going to bring against you the finished work of Jesus”—and the song that you just quoted.

Dennis: And quote to him 1 John chapter 1 verse 9. You mentioned this earlier. “If we confess our sins”—and the word confessed there means to agree with God about your sin, “—He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If you don’t believe that, the bottom line is—you’re calling God a liar. He really hadn’t done this and the work on the cross really isn’t finished. There is something left to be done by you and that’s really not the case. You are declared “not guilty” because Jesus Christ died on the cross and paid the penalty for all your sin.

Bob: There is great power in what Christ has accomplished and there is great power that comes from a clear conscience. I think a lot of people are going to experience that, Dr. Lutzer, as they get a copy of your book which is called The Power of a Clear Conscience: Let God Free You from Your Past. We’ve got copies of the book at our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order online at FamilyLifeToday.com or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to order. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. Look for information about the book, The Power of a Clear Conscience. Or call to order at 1-800-358-6329. That’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word “TODAY.”

We ran out of time on today’s program. I know Dennis had a question that he wanted to ask you Dr. Lutzer. It’s one of his favorite questions to ask about, “What’s the most courageous thing you’ve ever done?” So, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to post online at FamilyLifeToday.com that question and that answer from Dr. Lutzer.

If you’d like to go online and hear how Dr. Lutzer answers the question or—if you want to pull it up on our FamilyLife Today app, you can do that as well. If you don’t have the app, you can download it from your app store for either Android or iOS phones. Just type in FamilyLife as one word and the app will be right there. It’s a free download and that way you can take FamilyLife Today with you wherever you go. Or you can go to
FamilyLifeToday.com and the audio file is there and you can listen as Dr. Lutzer answers Dennis’ question about courage.

Let me just say a quick word of thanks to those of you who helped make all of this possible—those of you who contribute monthly to FamilyLife as Legacy Partners—and those of you who will from time to time go online or write or call to make a donation. What you’re investing in when you do that, is the marriages and the families of people in your community and people all around the world because we take the funds that you send and we use those funds to expand the outreach of FamilyLife Today—to create apps and to have an online presence—and of course this daily radio program heard on more than 1100 radio stations and outlets all across the country.

Thank you for helping to make all of that happen and thank you on behalf of the couples and the families who are being helped by this ministry. It’s great to partner with you. If you’ve never made a donation, today would be a great day for us to hear from you. You can donate online at FamilyLifeToday.com. You can call to donate at 1-800-FL-TODAY. Or you can mail a donation to FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to introduce you to Becky Thompson. She’s a wife and a mom who lives in western Oklahoma. She’s going to tell you about a 21-day journey she took to rediscover her marriage in the midst of raising her babies. I hope you can tune in to hear about that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.


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