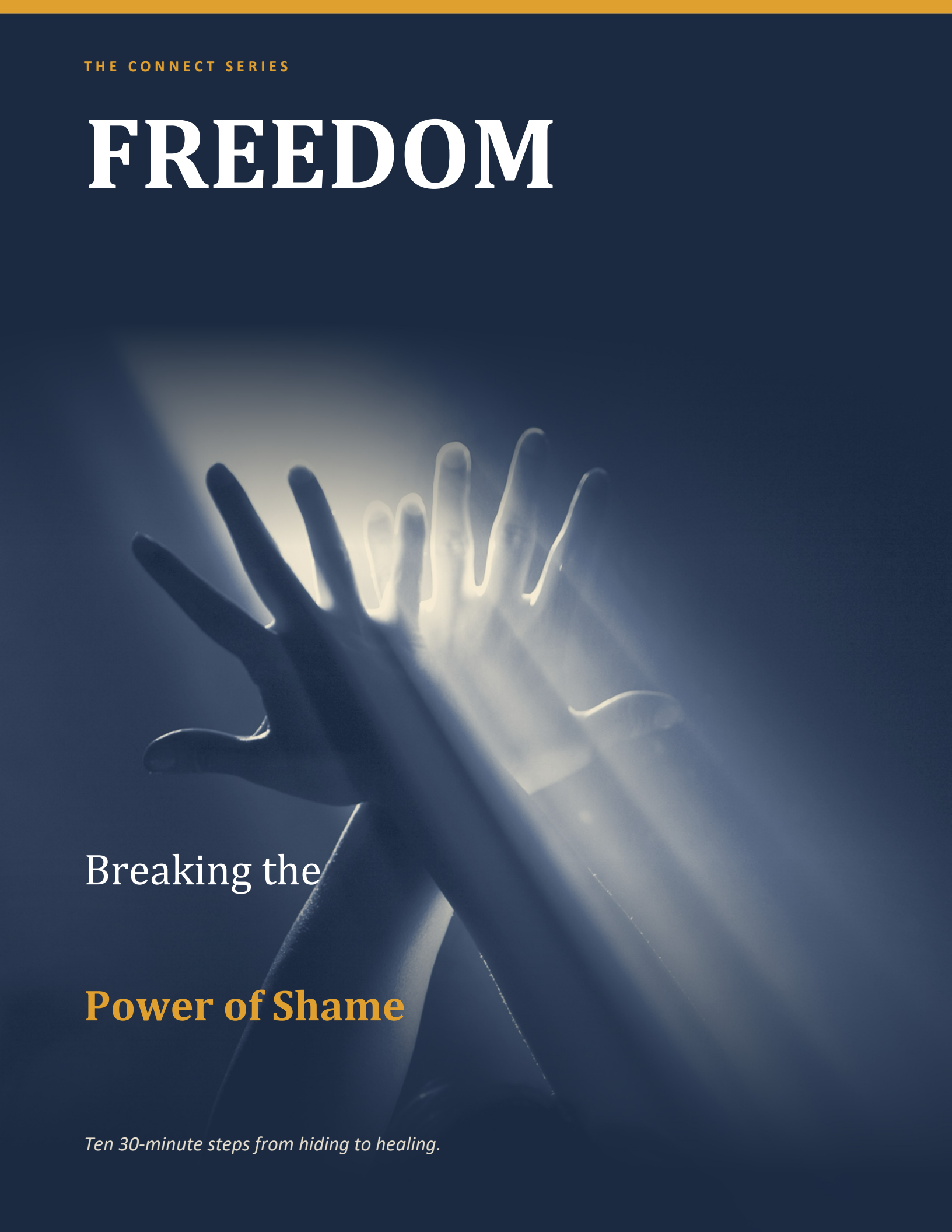
THE CONNECT SERIES

FREEDOM



Breaking the

Power of Shame

Ten 30-minute steps from hiding to healing.

A personal and small-group study of shame, mercy and freedom

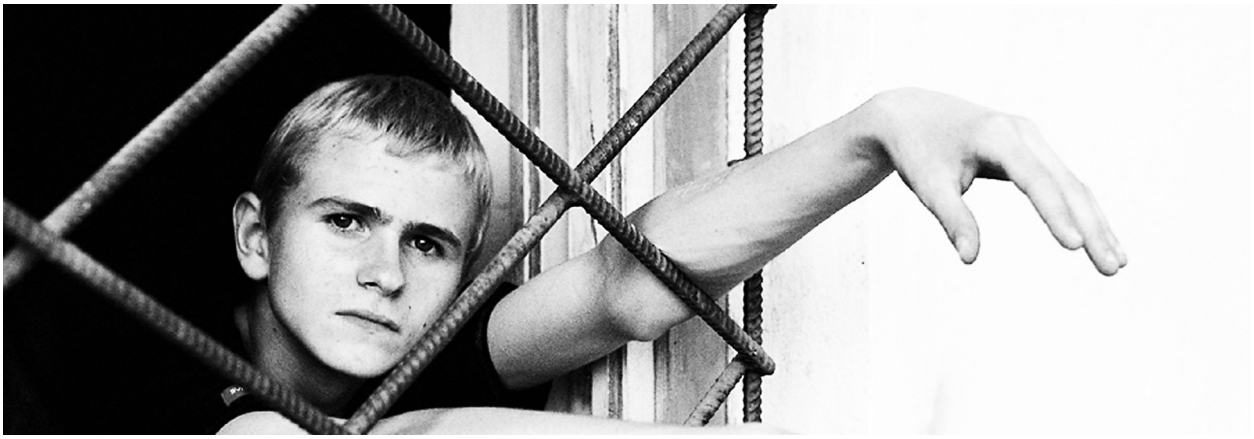
THE CONNECT SERIES

FREEDOM

Breaking the Power of Shame

Ten chapters, 30 minutes each

by Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle



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Content development team: Ralph Ennis, Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle. **Original layout and design:** Christine Weddle. **This edition:** adapted for younger readers, with shorter chapters, plain language, safety notes and new images.

Some of the stories in this book are true to life and used with permission. All other stories are composites or made up, and any resemblance to people living or dead is coincidental. The original study's royalty-free images came from Photos.com, iStock.com, stock.xchng, Dreamstime.com, Crestock and Bigstockphoto.com.

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INSIDE

Your ten steps

Each chapter starts with a question you may already be asking. Each one takes about 30 minutes.

UNDERSTAND SHAME			
1	**What Is Shame?** *What is this feeling?*	Learn the difference between guilt and shame, and see why God can use even shame for good.	1
2	**Walking Through Shame** *Which way will I run?*	Follow Peter's journey and learn the voices that condemn, and the One who offers mercy.	8
FACE YOUR SHAME			
3	**Hiding in Shame** *How do I cover up?*	See how Adam and Eve hid, spot your own hiding styles, and meet the God who comes looking.	15
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BRING IT TO GOD AND OTHERS			
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8	**Tasting God's Mercy** *What does Jesus say to me?*	Watch Jesus restore a woman covered in shame, and swap shaming words for blessing.	50
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WELCOME

Almost everyone has felt it

The burning face. The pit in your stomach. The urge to disappear. It might come from something small, like a bad haircut or a failed test, or from something heavy, like family secrets, a hard past, or a mistake you can't forget. Almost everyone has felt **shame**.

This study isn't going to pretend shame isn't real. It will help you name it, understand where it comes from, and meet the God who doesn't shame you. Instead He **covers**, **comforts** and **frees** you. That freedom is real, and it starts with mercy.

IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME?

- **Go at your own pace.** This study talks about guilt, shame and hard experiences. Skip anything that's too much.
- **Don't do it alone if you can help it.** It works best with a trusted friend, mentor or small group. If you're in a group, it's best after you've met together for a few months. Start with Chapter 1 together.
- **If you're in crisis,** talk to a counselor, pastor, parent or doctor first. A study can't replace professional help.

You can work through it on your own, with a friend, or in a group. If a question hits a sore spot, that's okay. Skip it, come back later, or talk it through with someone you trust.

HOW IT WORKS

Think of each chapter as a short trip

Every chapter follows the same path, so after the first one you will know what to expect. You stop four times along the way. A timer helps: the whole trip is about 30 minutes.

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

The story	A short story to get you thinking. Some are true to life, and others are made up from common experiences.
Pause 1 *Exploring what God says*	You look at what the Bible says, often through the life of a real person like Peter, David or Tamar. Most verses are printed for you.
Pause 2 *Exploring your reality*	You get honest about where you are right now, and how you got there. No one has to see your answers.
Pause 3 *Coming alive to God*	You respond to what you've read, with a few words, a prayer, or by memorizing a verse. This is where it moves from your head to your heart.
Pause 4 *Journeying forward*	You hear God's "voices of mercy," pick one small step for this week, and close in prayer.
Digging deeper *(optional)*	Extra questions and ideas if you want more. Skip it and you won't miss anything.

ABOUT "VOICES OF MERCY"

We can't beat shame's accusing voices alone. In Pause 4 of each chapter you'll read words of mercy from the Bible, out loud, with your name in them. If you're with a friend or group, read them to each other. It's one way God speaks His mercy through people.

THREE HABITS

Get the most out of every chapter

1

Read slowly

Read each verse like a message meant for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand it.

2

Be honest

Write or draw something for every question, even 4 or 5 words. Honest beats polished.

3

Pray as you go

Not only when a question says "pray." Tell God what you're thinking, even if it's "I'm scared of this."

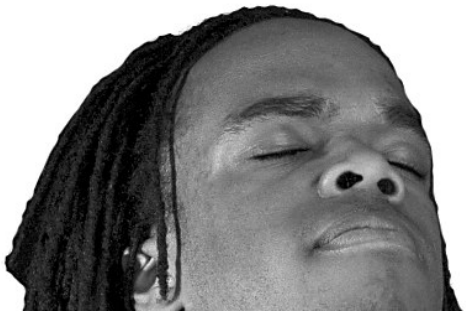
Finding your rhythm. Most people finish a chapter in one 30-minute sitting. If that's too much, try three 10-minute sessions, or one Pause a day. Pictures are part of the study. Look at them and picture yourself in the scene. If an image bothers you, ask yourself why.

If you're doing this in a group

A group works best when everyone feels safe. Read these agreements out loud together at your first meeting.

1. **What's said here stays here.** Don't repeat what you hear in the group to anyone outside it.
2. **Share only for yourself.** Use "I" statements. Talk about your own life, not "we" or "you."
3. **Listen, don't fix.** Skip the advice and the "me too" stories. Accept how others feel without trying to change it.
4. **Go at your own pace.** Nobody has to share. Nobody gets pushed. Silence is okay, and some questions can stay unanswered.
5. **All feelings are allowed.** Tears, anger and quiet are all welcome. Ask before you hug or touch.
6. **God does the changing.** The group's job is to make a safe place for His love. The Holy Spirit does the rest.
7. **Know the limits.** A group isn't therapy. If someone needs more help, encourage them to talk to a pastor, counselor or trusted adult. If someone is in danger or being hurt, tell a trusted adult right away.

> **TALK ABOUT IT TOGETHER**
>
> After you read these agreements, finish this sentence out loud: *"One thing I need from this group to feel safe is …"* Then pray together before you start.



THE STARTING LINE

Before you start

Take about five minutes. Be honest. You'll come back to this page after Chapter 10 to see what has changed.

1 Finish this sentence: *When I feel ashamed, I usually …*

---

2 How much does shame steer my choices right now? Circle a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

0 = not at all *10 = completely*

3 Where do I usually take my shame? (Hide it, numb it, perform harder, tell someone, take it to God, something else?)

---

4 What do I hope to get out of this study?

A PRAYER TO START

God, I'm tired of hiding. Help me be honest as I read. Show me Your mercy, and help me believe it. Amen.

IF THINGS FEEL HEAVY

Some chapters touch hard things like guilt, abuse, addiction and loss. If you're going through something painful, talk to a trusted friend, pastor, counselor or parent. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S.), or call **911** if you're in danger.

Ready? Turn the page to Chapter 1: What Is Shame?

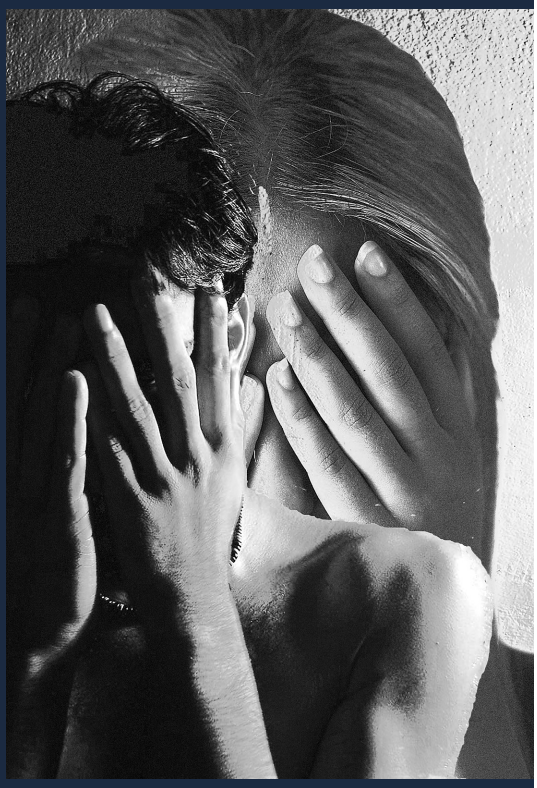
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 1

What Is Shame?

Shame at first glance

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Almost everyone struggles with shame. It can come from something small, like bad breath, or something painful, like abuse. Naming shame is the first step. This study points you to the One who meets us in it with mercy.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Tell** the difference between guilt and shame.
- **Notice** the family of feelings shame hides in.
- **See** how shame began in the Garden.
- **Say** Genesis 50:20 from memory.

KEY VERSE

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **Genesis 50:20 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“Can’t you do anything right?”

A true-to-life story, with details changed.



Illustrative photo

It’s the Fourth of July. Three families spread blankets by a church to watch fireworks. Nine-year-old Ryan is fidgety.

“Ryan, how many times do I have to tell you to sit down? Can’t you do anything right?” his mom snaps.

While they wait, his dad tells everyone about the family road trip and jokes about Ryan’s stomach problems. Everybody laughs. Ryan stares at his shoes, face burning.

Ryan pinches his little sister. Then his dad barks, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself!”

Q1 What do words like these do to Ryan’s heart?

Q2 Have you seen kids shamed by adults? Is there anything in Ryan’s story you can relate to?

BEFORE YOU GO ON

This study talks about shame honestly. If it stirs up painful memories, go at your own pace and skip anything that’s too much. It also works best with a trusted friend, small group or mentor. If shame ever feels overwhelming, talk to a counselor, pastor or parent. If you’re thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

How it all started

> **GENESIS 3:8–10 (NIV)**
> *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

Adam and Eve felt **guilt** ("we broke God's one rule"). They also felt **shame**: "the problem isn't just what I did. It's who I am." So they hid. Sin had its first casualties.

GUILT AND SHAME SOUND DIFFERENT

Guilt is about what you did. Shame is about who you think you are.

GUILT SAYS	SHAME SAYS
"I did something wrong."	"I am something wrong."
• You broke a rule.	• You're worthless.
• You hurt someone.	• You're unlovable.
• You can make it right.	• You'll never change.

Q3 Which voice do you hear more, guilt or shame? Give an example.

Q4 Is shame always bad? Could it ever be useful? Explain.

TWO KINDS OF SHAME

Sometimes shame shows up when we really did wrong. That kind can point us back to God's mercy. Other times shame is heaped on us for things we didn't choose or don't deserve. That kind just hurts. This study looks at both.

PAUSE 2

Exploring your reality

5 min

Why talk about shame?

Some people think, “That sounds depressing.” Others think, “I’d rather not stir that up.” Both make sense. Here’s why it’s worth it: **shame is universal,** and a lot of what we do, from hiding to showing off, comes from trying to avoid, cover, or deny it. When we face it honestly with God, we find Jesus already there.

THE SHAME FAMILY OF FEELINGS

Shame hides inside lots of other feelings. Which ones do you know?

Alienated · Belittled · Defeated · Embarrassed · Exposed · Flawed

Helpless · Humiliated · Inadequate · Inferior · Insecure · Invisible

Powerless · Rejected · Unlovable · Unworthy · Weak · Worthless

Q5 Circle three feelings that you connect with shame. Pick one and explain why.

Q6 Imagine God had not given us the ability to feel guilt and shame. How likely would we be to come back to Him? What would that be like?

TAKE A BREATH

If you notice your body tense up, pause. Put both feet on the floor and take three slow breaths. You can stop any time. Talk with someone you trust if this brings up something heavy.

PAUSE 3

Coming alive to God

8 min

God can redeem what hurts

Joseph's brothers treated him horribly, and years later he said something amazing:

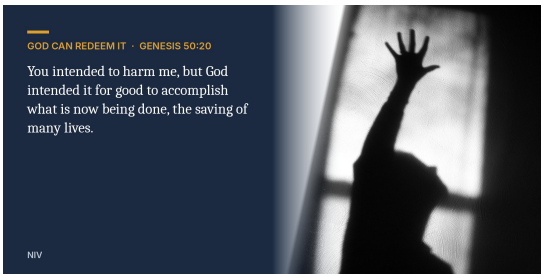
> **GENESIS 50:20 (NIV)**
> *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Example: Chuck Colson went to prison for crimes connected to Watergate. There he met Christ, and later started a ministry to prisoners. God used shame for good.

Q7 Can you think of a time God took something shameful in someone's life and brought good from it?

Q8 Pick one: What is shame? Is shame always your fault? Why doesn't it go away just by praying and confessing? Write your best answer. (There's no wrong answer yet.)

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “God can redeem it, Genesis 50:20. You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good”
2. Say the second half three times: “to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Journeying forward

4 min

Key thoughts

- Shame is complicated, but **hope and freedom are possible.**
- Shame is **universal.** It ranges from embarrassment over small things to deep pain.
- Shame comes with a **whole family of feelings** like flawed, exposed, and worthless.
- **God can redeem** shame and use it for good.

Take one step

1. **Be honest.** Tell God in one sentence what shame feels like for you.
2. **Listen.** Ask, “God, what do You want to say to me about this?” Wait quietly for a minute.
3. **Notice shame this week** in a news story, a show, or a conversation. It shows up everywhere.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A What is one thing I’ve been afraid to say out loud about shame?

B Who is a safe person I could talk to about this?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, I don't have this figured out. You know what I'm ashamed of, and You haven't walked away. Meet me in it. Give me hope and the courage to keep going. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



For the road ahead: In the Bible, Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2). Later chapters show how He meets us in our shame.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What are some things people your age are typically ashamed of?
2. How is shame different from guilt? Is the shame we feel always our own fault?
3. Why doesn't shame go away just by praying, confessing and reading Scripture?
4. Pick an image from this chapter that connects with shame for you. How does it speak to you?

SHAME WATCH

This week, notice shame in the news or online: someone who hides, blames, or lashes out. Jot down one example and bring it to your group or a friend.

IF YOU'RE LEADING A GROUP

This study works best after a group has met together for a few months and built trust. Give your first session to this chapter, keep confidentiality, and never push anyone to share. A study group isn't therapy, so point people to professional help when needed.

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FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 2

Walking Through Shame

Peter's journey toward mercy

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Shame can push you away from Jesus, or it can send you running toward Him. Peter's story shows both. When we face our shame in God's presence, we find mercy waiting.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Follow** Peter's walk through shame in three scenes.
- **Name** the voices of condemnation and where they come from.
- **Notice** the language of shaming and how it hurts.
- **Say** 1 John 3:20 from memory.

KEY VERSE

If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. **1 John 3:20 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

The night Sam can't take back

A story from the original study, shortened.



Illustrative photo

Sam has asked for forgiveness more times than he can count. One October evening when he was nineteen changed everything. He was driving a little over the speed limit, not drunk, not reckless. A deer ran in front of his car. He swerved, and his sister died in the crash.

His family told him it wasn't his fault. Accidents happen. They still loved him. But Sam is sure he doesn't deserve to be loved by anyone, including God. Shame whispers, "You deserve condemnation, not love." Nothing he does seems to erase what happened.

Q1 What was Sam ashamed of? What do you think shame is telling him about himself?

Q2 Can you identify with Sam in any way? How?

CARE NOTE

Sam's story involves a death. If it touches something painful for you, that's okay. Pause, breathe, or skip ahead. If you're carrying heavy grief or guilt, please talk with a counselor, pastor or trusted adult. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Peter's journey into shame

Peter was a wild man: passion, faith, failure, shame. Look at three moments in his life. If you have time, read the full passages in your own Bible: **Luke 5:1–11, Luke 22:54–62** and **John 21:3–14.**

PETER'S WALK THROUGH SHAME

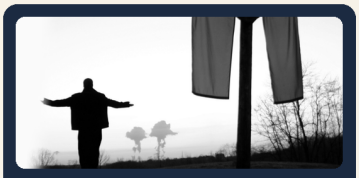
Three scenes. Notice which way Peter moves each time.



SCENE 1 · Luke 5:8

"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Peter pulls away.



SCENE 2 · Luke 22:61–62

The Lord looked straight at Peter. He went outside and wept bitterly.

Peter hides.



SCENE 3 · John 21:7

"It is the Lord!" Peter jumped into the water.

Peter swims toward Jesus.

Q3 Scene 1: Why do you think Peter wanted Jesus to go away? Does anything make you feel that way?

Q4 Scene 2: Peter denied Jesus three times, then Jesus looked right at him. What was going on inside Peter? Write a line from his journal.

Q5 Scene 3: What had changed? Why did Peter swim toward Jesus this time?

Q6 Imagine jumping into the water of your shame and swimming toward Jesus instead of hiding. What would that feel like?

PAUSE 2

Voices of condemnation

5 min

Who is behind the shame?

Peter was probably hearing shame from every side. Here is what Revelation says about one of those voices:

> **REVELATION 12:10–11 (NIV)**
>
> *For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*

WHO IS TALKING TO YOU?

Shame and condemnation can come from three places.

OTHER PEOPLE
Words and looks that make you feel small.

THE ACCUSER
Satan accuses us "day and night" (Rev. 12:10).

YOUR OWN HEART
The voice you use on yourself.

GOD IS GREATER THAN YOUR HEART
He knows everything about you, and He still offers mercy for your shame.

Q7 Have you thought about Satan's part in shaming you? How might he use shame to keep you away from God?

Q8 What messages does your heart send when you condemn yourself?

> **WHAT BEATS THE ACCUSER**
>
> Verse 11 names two things: **the blood of the Lamb** (Jesus' death and resurrection) and **the word of their testimony** (telling the truth about what God has done). Shame can't stand up to both.

PAUSE 3

The language of shaming

8 min

Words that wound



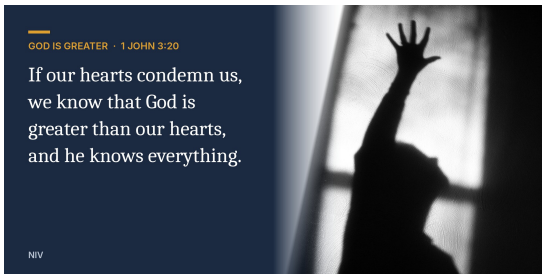
Shame has its own language: “idiot,” “you’re stupid,” “shame on you,” slurs and put-downs. Jesus took this seriously. He said that angry insults are in the same family as murder: “anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:22).

Q9 What shaming words have been thrown at you or someone you know? Write one or two.

Q10 Name-calling and killing: what might they have in common?

Note: feelings like fear and sadness are not shameful, even if someone told you they were.

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “God is greater, 1 John 3:20. If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts,”
2. Say the second half three times: “and he knows everything.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- Shame can push us **away from Jesus or pull us toward Him.**
- Condemnation can come from **other people, Satan and our own hearts.**
- Because of Jesus, we can **rest in God's presence** and hear His voice of mercy.

VOICES OF MERCY

Mercy is hard to hear alone. With a friend, read this aloud to each other with your names: **"[Name], there is now no condemnation for you, because you are in Christ Jesus."** (Romans 8:1, personalized). On your own? Read it aloud with your name.

Take one step

1. **Say it.** Read Romans 8:1 out loud with your name in it.
2. **Catch it.** This week, when you hear a shaming message in your head, say, "God is greater than my heart."
3. **Bless back.** When someone puts you down, answer with kindness, or at least stay quiet (1 Peter 3:9).

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which voice is loudest for me right now: others, Satan, or my own heart?

B What would it look like to swim toward Jesus, like Peter?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, You know the worst about me, and You still welcome me. When shame says to hide, help me swim toward You. Speak Your mercy louder than every other voice. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Why this matters: Peter failed Jesus on the worst night of his life. Yet Jesus came back to him on the beach. Your failure does not end your story with Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Peter was a fisherman and Jesus a carpenter. What might Peter have thought when Jesus gave him fishing advice (Luke 5)?
2. Is there a time you wanted to tell Jesus, “Go away from me, for I am a sinful person”?
3. Have you betrayed a friend or turned your back on someone? What did you do with the shame?
4. Do you think there are times we should feel ashamed of what we did? When does it help, and when does it hurt?
5. What do you think Peter learned about himself and about Jesus from these three scenes?

SHAMING MESSAGES THAT HIDE FEELINGS

Write three things people say that make others hide their feelings (for example, “Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about”). How have messages like these affected you?

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FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 3

Hiding in Shame

Why we cover up, and who comes looking

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

When shame hits, our first move is to hide. We have done it since the Garden. But God doesn't wait for us to clean ourselves up. He comes looking. This chapter helps you spot how you hide and take a step toward the light.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how Adam and Eve hid, and how God responded.
- **Tell** the difference between guilt that helps and shame that hurts.
- **Spot** the ways you hide your shame.
- **Say** 1 John 1:9 from memory.

KEY VERSE

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **1 John 1:9 (NIV)**

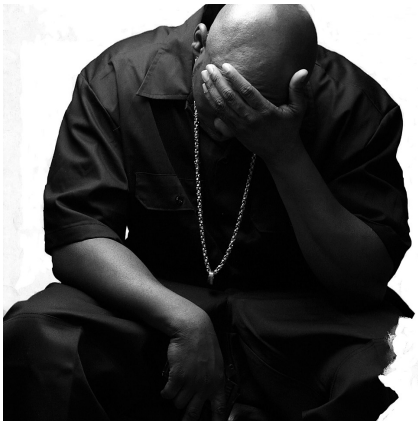
START HERE

A short story

4 min

The perfect Instagram

A made-up story based on the original study.



Illustrative photo

Jess is 20. She sings on her church's worship team, and her photos online look perfect. But last year she made a painful choice in a relationship, and she has never told anyone.

She hoped time would wash the guilt away. It didn't. Now there's shame and anger too. She wants to be close to God again, but she's sure she let Him down too badly. So she smiles, serves, and keeps her secret. Keeping it hidden gets harder every month.

Q1 What do you think Jess is ashamed of? How is she trying to manage or hide it?

Q2 Can you identify with her in any way? How?

CARE NOTE

Everyone has things they'd rather not say out loud. You don't have to share anything here. If you're carrying a secret that feels too heavy, talk with a counselor, pastor or trusted adult. If you're thinking about hurting yourself, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

The birth of guilt and shame

Where did shame come from? Back in the Garden, Adam and Eve broke God's only command. They knew they'd done wrong, so they hid. We still use the same old strategy. If you have time, read **Genesis 2:25–3:13, 21.**

> **GENESIS 2:25 (NIV)**
> *Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

Q3 What do you think it means to be "naked and unashamed"?



Q4 What do God's responses show about His heart for Adam and Eve?

Q5 What if God had never called out and just left them to fix their shame alone? What would have happened?

PAUSE 2

Guilt and shame: destructive or redemptive?

5 min

Can guilt and shame ever help?

Because of Adam and Eve's choice, we all feel guilt and shame, and we all feel some distance from God. **Guilt** says, "I broke a rule or my own standard." **Shame** says, "I'm a bad person." If we never deal with shame, it can become a root belief that colors everything, like dark sunglasses. Or we go the other way and stop caring at all.

> **JOHN 16:8 (NIV)**
> *When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.*

> **GUILT CAN BE A GIFT**
> The Holy Spirit uses guilt to point out what's wrong and lead us back to God. Shame, on the other hand, tells us who we are. God wants to heal that part too.

Q7 Would people be better off or worse off if we couldn't feel guilt or shame? Explain.

Q8 Have you ever damaged a relationship and been left alone in your shame? How did that feel? What connection do you see between hiding and loneliness?

> **A MOMENT WITH GOD**
> Read this slowly and let it shape your prayer: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight… Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:4, 10). Have you felt ashamed in the last few weeks? Don't write about it. Just take it to God for a minute.

PAUSE 3

Ways of hiding guilt and shame

8 min

How do you hide?

Shame is so powerful we'll do almost anything to cover it. Like Adam and Eve's fig leaves, our masks work for a while. But hiding just buries the shame alive.

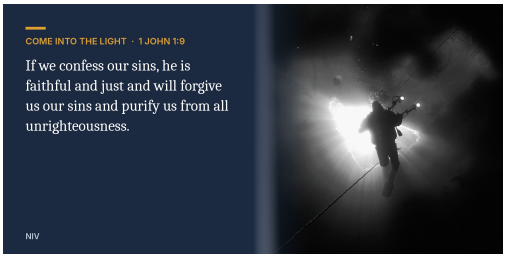
TEN WAYS WE HIDE SHAME

Mark or circle one or two that sound like you.

1 **Achievement** Overworking, always trying to be the best	2 **Anesthetizing** Numbing out with substances, screens, porn or food	3 **Approval** Pleasing people, can't say no	4 **Activity** Staying so busy you never feel it	5 **Another god** Trusting money, success or anything but God
6 **Adrenaline** Risky stunts, gambling, chasing a rush	7 **Attention** Acting out, drawing everyone's focus	8 **Attacking** Blaming or putting down yourself or others	9 **Anger** Rage, irritation, a sharp edge	10 **Apathy** "Who cares? Nothing matters."

Q6 Which one or two did you mark? How might shame be behind them?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Come into the light, 1 John 1:9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins"
2. Say the second half three times: "and purify us from all unrighteousness."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- Shame sends us **into hiding** so no one sees how flawed we are.
- Breaking shame means **admitting how we hide** and bringing it into the light with trusted people.
- When we feel like hiding, **God reaches out** and offers His mercy to cover us.

VOICES OF MERCY

Hear this from God, with your name in it (or read it to a friend with their name):

*"**[Name],** do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)*

Take one step

1. **Be kind to yourself.** Your hiding styles once protected you. You don't have to criticize them.
2. **Name one.** Tell God which hiding style is yours, and what you're afraid He'll see.
3. **Reach out.** Pick one safe person you could tell about your shame, and plan when.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A Which hiding style do I use most, and what is it protecting me from?

B What would it feel like to walk out of the dark into the light?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, You came looking for Adam and Eve, and You're looking for me. I'm tired of hiding. Help me trust You with what I'm ashamed of. Cover me with Your mercy. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: Your hiding styles aren't proof that you're broken beyond repair. They're signs of how much you've been hurting. As God heals you, you won't need them as much.

CHECK WHERE YOU ARE TODAY

Breaking the power of shame means admitting several things. Which are true for you right now?

☐ Shame has real power over me.

☐ I can't "fix" myself by trying harder.

☐ I have ways I hide or numb my shame.

☐ I'm ready to tell a friend about my struggles.

☐ I'm ready to tell God, even if I fear He's disappointed in me.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. How is walking out of darkness into the light like confessing your sin and shame to God and others (1 John 1:5–10)?
2. What is at the heart of a shared life with God and with other people?
3. Can most of us overcome shame by trying harder? Why or why not?
4. How do you think shame has shaped the ways you hide?
5. Have you ever had a relationship where you could be "soul-naked" (open, known, yourself) and not feel ashamed? Would you want one?
6. In Isaiah 41:8–14, which words describe how God's people felt? Which describe how God responded? What touches you about His heart?

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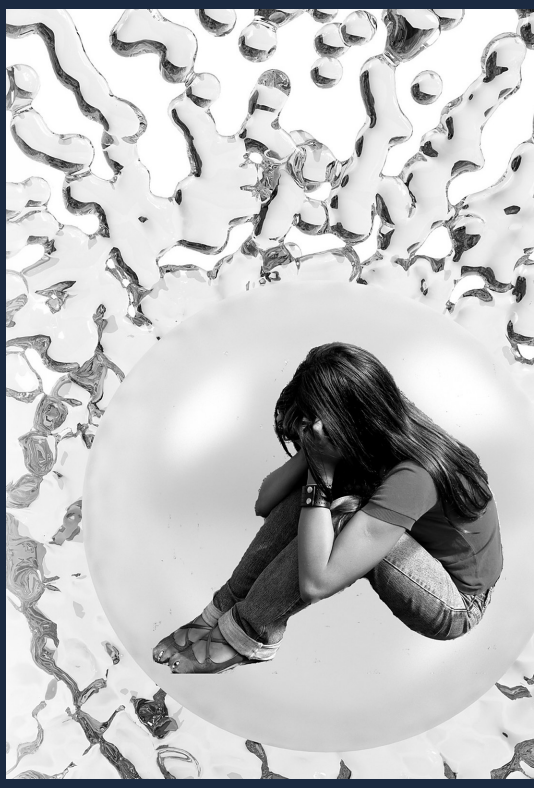
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 4

Shamed by Others

When someone else's wrong becomes your shame

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Sometimes we carry shame for things we never did. When someone hurts us, the shame can land on us instead of them. This chapter is about undeserved shame and the God who comforts us in it.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how shame can come from what was done to us.
- **Notice** what shamelessness looks like, and why God cares.
- **Hear** what God says to those carrying undeserved shame.
- **Say** Isaiah 54:4 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.
Isaiah 54:4 (NIV)

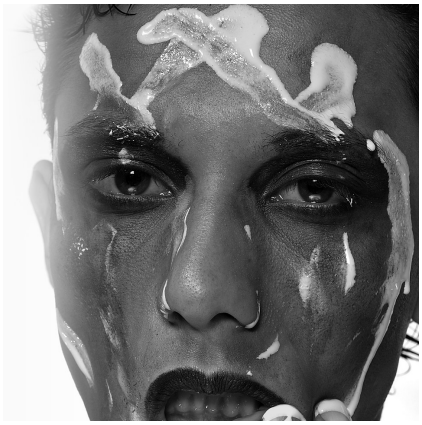
START HERE

A short story

4 min

“Maybe God is ashamed of me, too”

A story from the original study, told gently.



Illustrative photo

When Mateo was nine, an older teen from next door sexually abused him. Mateo’s dad, a pastor, told the family to ignore it “in the name of forgiveness.”

Ten years later, Mateo is still angry that his dad never stood up for him. His head knows it wasn’t his fault. But his heart feels dirty and ugly. And he wonders, “Is my other Father ashamed of me too?”

Q1 How is the shame affecting Mateo? Whose shame is it really?

Q2 Do you see anything in Mateo’s story that you or someone you know can relate to? (You don’t have to share anything.)

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

This chapter deals with sexual abuse. Go at your own pace, skip anything that’s too much, and stop whenever you need to. **What happened to you was not your fault.** If someone is hurting you now, tell a trusted adult today. Support is free and private: **National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-4673** (U.S.), or call or text **988** if you’re in crisis.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Tamar's story



One of the Bible's hardest stories happens to Tamar, King David's daughter. Her half-brother Amnon tricked her and sexually assaulted her. Then he threw her out. Tamar tore her robe, put ashes on her head and cried out. Her brother Absalom told her to keep quiet. Her father David was furious, but did nothing. Tamar lived on, "a desolate woman" (2 Samuel 13:20). The Bible says Tamar was wronged, but she is the one walking around in disgrace. (Read it in **2 Samuel 13:1–22** if you'd like.)

WHO SHOULD HAVE FELT ASHAMED?

Look at the four people in Tamar's story (2 Samuel 13).

AMNON	TAMAR	DAVID	ABSALOM
Did the wrong, then threw Tamar out.	Was wronged, yet carried the shame.	Was furious, but did nothing.	Told her, "Be quiet about it."

Q3 Write one feeling you think each person had: Amnon, Tamar, David, Absalom.

Q4 Tamar asked, "What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace?" (v. 13). Who should have felt ashamed? Who actually did?

Q5 Why do you think shame sticks to people who were hurt, even when it isn't their fault?

PAUSE 2

When shame disappears

5 min

Shameless: the other extreme

Amnon's friend Jonadab helped plan the wrong he did. When hiding no longer works, some people just give up and stop feeling shame at all. The prophet put it this way:

> **JEREMIAH 6:15 (NIV)**
> *Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.*

The Bible calls this a "seared" conscience, like skin burned by a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:2). It can't feel anything anymore. In Jeremiah 13, God even exposed His people's shame to wake them up.

Q6 What does it look like to be shameless? Think of an example from real life or the media.

Q7 How can friends or peers push us toward shameless behavior? Give an example.

Q8 Why do you think God let His people taste shame? Was He being mean or merciful, or something else?

> **NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE**
> Tamar felt too much shame for something that wasn't hers. Amnon felt too little for something that was. Healthy shame lands where it belongs: on the person who did wrong, and never on the victim.

PAUSE 3

Tamar's shame

8 min

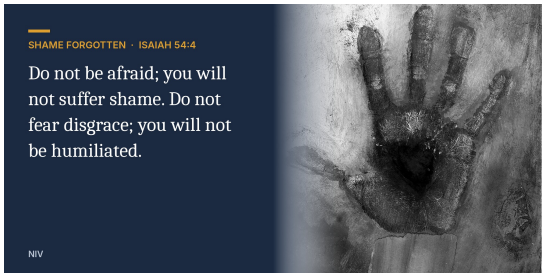
The raincoat of the soul

Some shame helps us come back to God. But "bad shame" crushes us. Author Andrew Comiskey calls it **the raincoat of the soul:** it repels the living water of God's love that we need most. It tells us we're unworthy and invites us to turn on ourselves instead of receiving mercy.

Q9 How do you think the silence of Tamar's father and brother affected her? How might the silence in Mateo's family have affected him?

Q10 Have you felt "desolate," or like there was nowhere to go with your shame, like Tamar? Or has someone's wrong left you carrying shame? Tell what you're comfortable with.

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Shame forgotten, Isaiah 54:4. Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame."
2. Say the second half three times: "Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- We can feel **ashamed even when we did nothing wrong,** because of what someone did to us.
- How people respond to our shame matters. **Comfort heals; silence and blame hurt.**
- God wants to **comfort us in our shame,** so we don't end up alone and desolate like Tamar.

VOICES OF MERCY

Hear these words of comfort (or read them to a friend with their name):

*"Do not be afraid, **[Name];** you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth. For the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer." (Isaiah 54:4–5)*

Take one step

1. **Say it.** Read Isaiah 54:4 aloud with your name in it. Let it be Jesus talking to you.
2. **Tell someone safe.** If someone's wrong still weighs on you, tell a trusted adult, counselor or pastor. Healing happens with others.
3. **Be a safe person.** If a friend shares something painful, listen, believe them, and don't blame. Stay with them.

JOURNAL (CHOOSE ONE)

A If I could sit with Jesus and tell Him what I carry, what would He say back?

B Who has been silent when I needed them? Who could be a safe voice for me now?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, You see what was done to me, and You are not ashamed of me. Take the shame that was never mine. Send people who will listen and help me heal. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: The shame of being hurt belongs to the one who did it, not to you. If you're still working through this, a counselor or pastor trained in trauma can help, and it doesn't make you weak.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Did Amnon ever love Tamar? How did he show contempt for her?
2. How did Jonadab help Amnon? How can friends shame us into shameless behavior?
3. What happens to a conscience that is "seared as with a hot iron"?
4. What do you think Tamar needed her father or brother to say? Write a few sentences.
5. In Isaiah 54:4–6, which words describe deep shame? Which words show God's comfort? How do you connect with "the shame of your youth"?

IMAGINE

Imagine Jesus spending time with Mateo and Tamar. What might He say to each of them?

THE REST OF THE STORY

Want to see what happened to Amnon, Absalom and David? Read 2 Samuel 14:28–29 and chapters 15, 16 and 18. Hidden shame in a family can do lasting damage.

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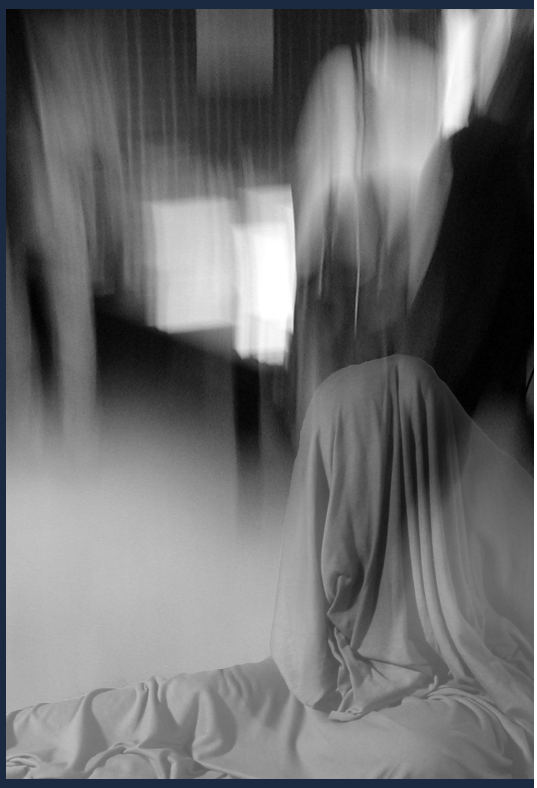
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 5

Types of Shame

Different sources, same pain

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Shame comes from different places: our own choices, what others do to us, and parts of life we never chose, like our bodies or our failures. Seeing the type helps us bring it to Jesus, who loves to turn shame into something beautiful.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Meet** a woman everyone avoided and see how Jesus treated her.
- **Name** five types of shame and spot yours.
- **See** how God trades beauty for ashes.
- **Say** Zephaniah 3:17 from memory.

KEY VERSE

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing. **Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

“I didn’t want anybody to know”

A made-up story inspired by real situations.



Illustrative photo

Leah is 19. Her boyfriend yells at her, checks her phone, and pressures her to do things she doesn’t want to do. She tells herself she must be the problem. She tells no one.

At church she smiles. At home she hides. “I was ashamed,” she thinks. “I didn’t want anyone to know.” The longer she waits, the worse things get.

Q1 What do you think Leah is ashamed of? What might she say if you asked why she hasn’t told anyone?

Q2 What might change if Leah came into the light and got help? Can you relate in any way?

IF THIS IS CLOSE TO HOME

If someone is controlling, hurting or pressuring you, that is not okay, and it is not your fault. Tell a trusted adult. The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** is free and private: **1-800-799-7233** (text START to 88788). In crisis, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

An invisible woman



In Jesus' day, a woman with long-term bleeding was considered "unclean." Anyone she touched became unclean too. For twelve years she had been sick, broke from doctors, and probably alone. Read her story in **Mark 5:24–34.**

MARK 5:28–29, 33–34 (NIV)

She thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped… Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Q3 List five things she probably lost because of her illness.

Q4 Why do you think Jesus insisted on finding out who touched Him? Was He shaming her again, or doing something else?

Q5 Jesus healed her body (v. 29), then called her "daughter" and said "be freed" (v. 34). What else did He heal that day? Can you relate to her?

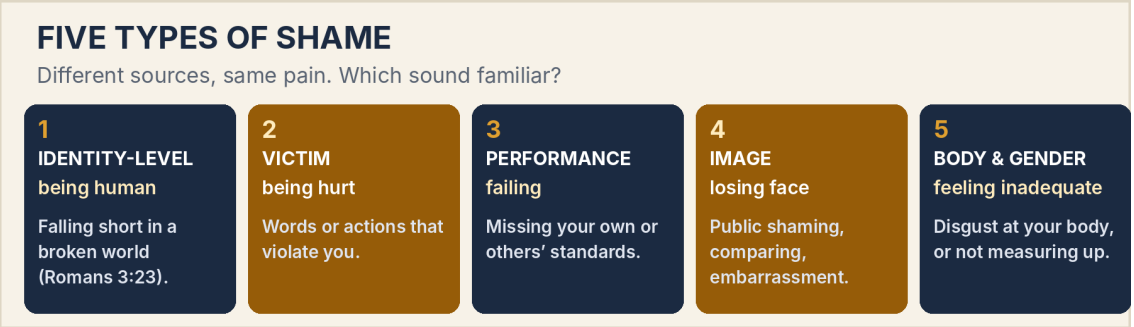
PAUSE 2

Five types of shame

5 min

What kind of shame is it?

Some shame comes from our own sin (Adam and Eve). Some comes from what others do (Tamar). Some comes from life circumstances: weaknesses, failures, looks and bodies.



Which type or types might be stirred up if…

_____ you failed a class because you didn't study

_____ you didn't make the team because of your body

_____ your dad screamed at the coach at your game

_____ a relative says, "No wonder you act like trash. You are trash!"

_____ people mock the way you speak

Q6 Which type(s) do you identify with most? Why? And which type did the invisible woman face?

Adapted from The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom, by Steve and Sally Breedlove and Ralph and Jennifer Ennis.

PAUSE 3

Shame redeemed

8 min

God trades

Shame is real, and we can't ignore the brokenness of the world or our own hearts. But God specializes in bringing good out of bad.

GOD SPECIALIZES IN TRADES

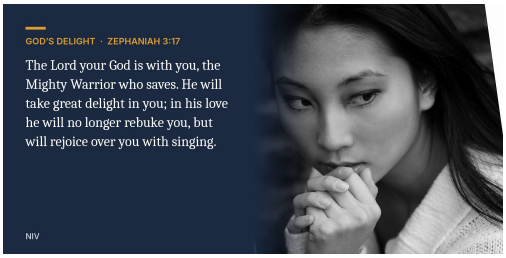
Isaiah 61:1–3: He trades our broken pieces for something beautiful.

Brokenhearted →	Bound up	Ashes →	Crown of beauty
Mourning →	Oil of joy	Despair →	Garment of praise

> **PSALM 34:5 (NIV)**
> *Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.*

Q7 From these verses, what can you do to protect yourself from being put to shame? What is one thing you want to do about your own?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "God's delight, Zephaniah 3:17. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves."
2. Say the second half three times: "He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- Shame can come from our **choices, other people, or circumstances** we never chose.
- Naming the **type** helps us bring it to Jesus. He can break its power.
- God loves to **bring good out of bad** and to redeem our shame.

VOICES OF MERCY

Hear this from God (or read it to a friend with their name):

*"Cheer up, **[Name]!** Don't be afraid. The Lord your God is with you. He will rejoice over you with singing. You will be disgraced no more." (from Zephaniah 3:16–19)*

A MOMENT WITH GOD

Talk with God about what this chapter stirred up. Picture bringing your shame to Jesus. What do you "see" Him doing with it? What do you "hear" Him say?

Take one step

1. **Name it.** Tell God which type of shame you carry and where it started.
2. **Affirm someone.** Text a friend one thing you admire about them.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, You didn't turn away from the woman everyone avoided, and You won't turn away from me. Trade my shame for Your beauty. Amen.

✓ **You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.**

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: Jesus didn't just heal the invisible woman's body. He called her "daughter" in front of everyone. When you come with your shame, He may give you more than you asked for.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. How would the crowd have felt being pressed against a woman considered unclean? (See John 9:1–3.)
2. How do you imagine her life changed after Jesus honored her in public?
3. When you bring shame to Jesus, do you expect blessing or something else? Why?
4. What can we affirm in each other as we try to break the power of shame? Text one person in your group a message of affirmation.
5. If you made a movie, song or painting about one type of shame, which would you choose, and why?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. How does it help you when shame says you're "wasting away"?

SHAME PROTECTION

Look up Psalm 25:20 and Psalm 119:80. Write what each verse says about how to avoid being put to shame.

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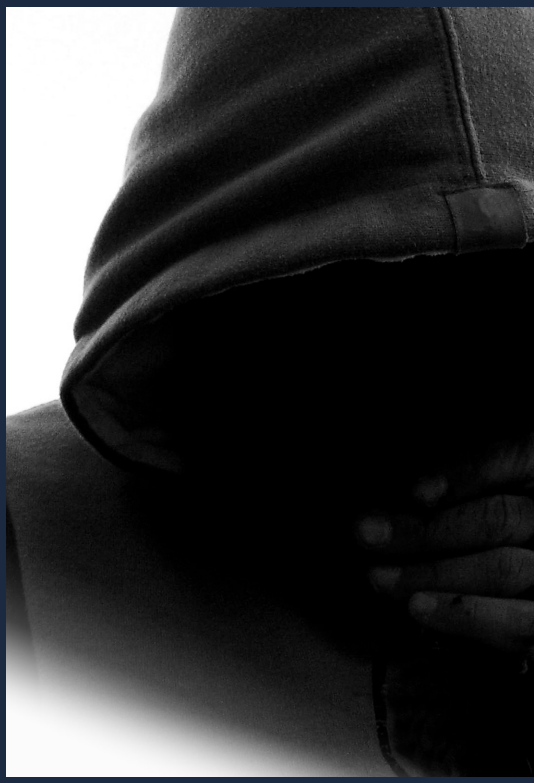
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 6

Overpowered by Shame

Where you take your shame matters

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Shame feels most powerful when we hold it alone. Where we take it matters. Some people hand it to those who have no mercy. Jesus is different, and so are the people who carry His love.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Compare** two people who took shame in opposite directions.
- **Name** five more types of shame and spot any that fit.
- **See** how God turns what the world despises into something that matters.
- **Say** Romans 8:38–39 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Romans 8:38–39 (NIV)**

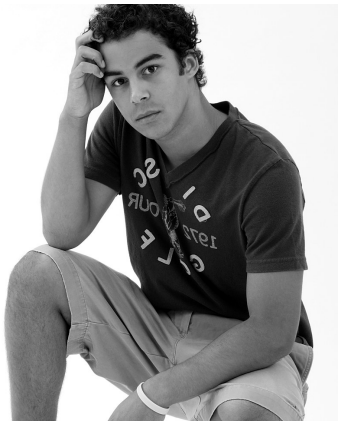
START HERE

A short story

4 min

The group chat

A made-up story based on common experiences.



Illustrative photo

Marcus, 17, finally told a close friend something he was deeply ashamed of. The next day it was a screenshot in the group chat. People laughed. Some stopped talking to him.

Now Marcus skips lunch, deletes his accounts and tells his parents he's "fine." He feels like he's drowning. He's sure no one could understand, and that nobody can be trusted with the real him.

Q1 How would you feel in Marcus's place? What do you wish had happened when he opened up?

Q2 Whom would you trust with something this heavy? What makes a person safe?

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

This chapter talks about hopelessness. Shame can make people feel trapped and alone, but it **can be survived and healed.** If you ever think about ending your life or hurting yourself, tell someone now. Call or text **988** (U.S.), or text HOME to **741741**. If you're in immediate danger, call 911. You matter, and you don't have to carry this by yourself.

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

Two people who failed Jesus

Judas betrayed Jesus. When he realized Jesus was condemned, he was filled with remorse. He took his confession to the religious leaders: "I have sinned… for I have betrayed innocent blood." They answered, "What is that to us? That's your responsibility!" (Matthew 27:4). With nowhere to go, Judas sank into despair and took his own life. Peter also failed Jesus, but he took his shame to Jesus.

TWO PEOPLE, TWO DIRECTIONS

Both failed Jesus. They took their shame to very different places.

JUDAS
took his shame to the religious leaders

- Matthew 27:4
- They said, "That's your responsibility."
- No mercy, so he felt hopeless.

PETER
took his shame to Jesus

- John 21
- Jesus met him on the beach.
- Mercy, so Peter was restored.

Q3 Who you tell makes a big difference. Have you ever shared shame with someone unsafe? What happened?

Q4 What's at risk if you keep your shame hidden? What's at risk if you bring it into the open?

Q5 Is there anyone you trust to see your shame and walk with you? What feelings come up when you think about telling them?

PAUL HAD PLENTY TO BE ASHAMED OF, TOO

Before he followed Jesus, Paul hunted down Christians. Yet his shame didn't overpower him, because he knew: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

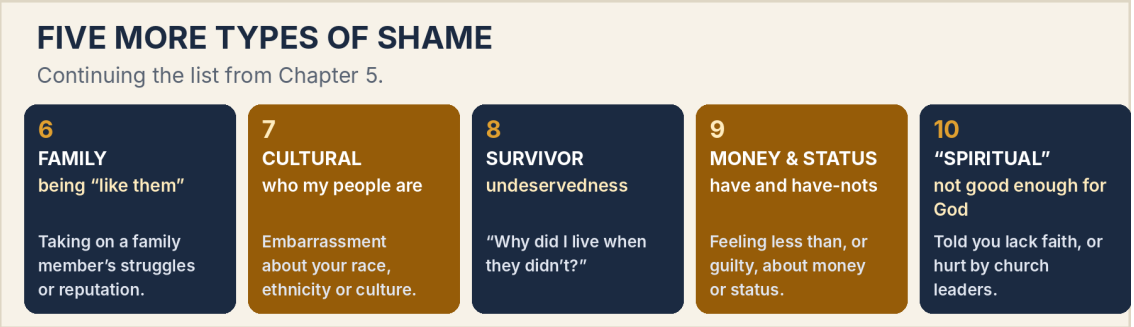
PAUSE 2

Five more types of shame

5 min

Does one of these sound like you?

In Chapter 5 you met five types of shame. Here are five more. Heaped-on shame can come from many places.



Which type or types might be stirred up if…

_____ your family is struggling with money and everyone at school can tell

_____ a parent is in jail or battling addiction, and people whisper about your family

_____ you survived a car crash that a friend didn't

_____ you're the only one from your background in your class and people tease you about it

_____ someone tells you that if you had more faith, you wouldn't be struggling

Q6 Which type can you connect with, personally or through someone you know? Explain.

Adapted from The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom, by Steve and Sally Breedlove and Ralph and Jennifer Ennis.

PAUSE 3

Shame beyond me

8 min

When shame belongs to a whole people

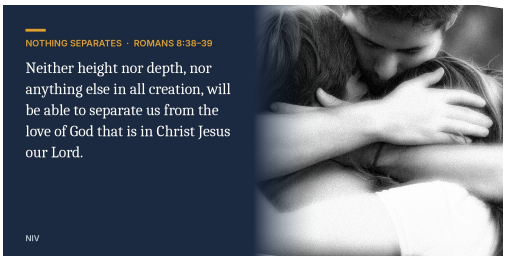
Shame can attach to families, cultures and nations, too. The prophet Ezra prayed about it honestly:

> **EZRA 9:6 (NIV)**
> *I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.*

> **1 CORINTHIANS 1:27 (NIV)**
> *God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

Q7 How is God's view of shame different from the world's? What encouragement does God offer to those who feel foolish, powerless or despised?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Nothing separates, Romans 8:38–39. Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,"
2. Say the second half three times: "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- Everyone feels exposed and wants to hide sometimes, but **life is still worth living.**
- Shame feels powerful, but **Jesus can free us** from its power when we invite Him in.
- **Nothing, including shame,** can separate us from God's love in Christ.

VOICES OF MERCY

Read this slowly out loud, alone or taking a line each with friends:

"If God is for us, who can be against us? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died… and was raised to life… is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:31, 33–34)

Take one step

1. **Name your safe person.** Write a name (or two) on the line, and plan when you'll talk: _____
2. **Say one sweet thing.** Name one good thing in life right now that makes you glad you're here.
3. **Save the number.** Put 988 in your phone, just in case.

JOURNAL

A Where have I been taking my shame, and what has that done to me?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, I don't want to carry this alone. Show me who is safe, give me the courage to speak, and remind me that nothing can separate me from Your love. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: Shame says, "Hide." Jesus says, "Come." Telling one safe person is often the first moment shame starts to lose its grip.

WHEN SHAME WEARS RELIGIOUS CLOTHES

Imagine a young woman whose family went through hard times. Every time she asked for help, she was told, "If you had more faith, this wouldn't be happening." Now she gets a knot in her stomach when she opens her Bible. (Based on a story in The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen.) Jesus was angry at religious leaders who burdened people: "You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23).

Q Have you seen people hurt by unsafe religious leaders or environments? How can you relate to this woman?

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Judas and Peter both failed Jesus. What made their endings so different?
2. What does it say about God's heart that He wants to meet us in our shame?
3. Which of the ten types of shame is hardest for you to talk about?
4. What is one thing about your family, culture or nation you feel ashamed of? Tell God about it, as Ezra did.
5. What is "sweet" in your life right now?
6. Read Romans 8:38–39 and fill in your own list: "Neither ____ nor ____, neither ____ nor ____ will separate me from God's love."

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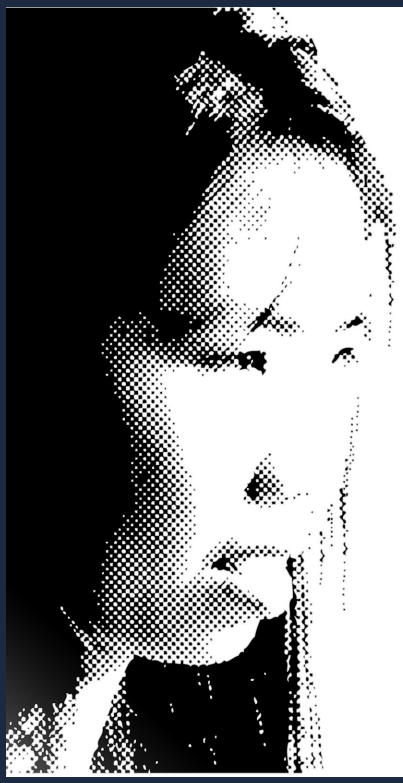
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 7

Offering Truth With Mercy

Hard words, said with love

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Mercy isn't ignoring what's wrong. It's telling the truth with love and not leaving the person alone. In this chapter you'll see how God used a friend to help David, and how you can be that kind of friend.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** how truth and mercy work together.
- **Learn** what mercy is, and what it isn't.
- **Think** about who might need mercy from you.
- **Say** John 8:32 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. **John 8:32 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

The visit

A story from the original study, shortened.



Illustrative photo

Sakura never thought she'd lose control. It started small: a candy bar, a pair of earrings. For a few minutes, stealing gave her a rush that quieted the feeling of being stained and unworthy. Then it got bigger, and she was arrested.

Telling her family was terrifying. The shame of embarrassing them felt worse than the stealing. She even refused her brother Kaito's calls. But he kept coming.

When she finally agreed to see him, he said through the glass: **"We love you, Sakura. We know what you did, but we're not ashamed of you. We can't wait for you to come home!"** For the first time, she wasn't alone in her shame.

Q1 What was Sakura ashamed of? What did Kaito do that helped?

Q2 Can you identify with her in any way? How?

A QUICK NOTE

If you're stuck in a habit you can't stop, such as stealing, porn, substances, or something else, you're not hopeless. Tell a trusted adult, counselor or pastor. If you're in crisis, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Exploring what God says

9 min

David and the friend who told the truth

King David abused his power. He took another man's wife, lied to cover it up, and had her husband killed (2 Samuel 11). For months he hid. Then God sent his friend Nathan. Read **2 Samuel 12:1–14** if you can.

TRUTH AND MERCY TOGETHER

Two people who spoke hard words with love.

	TRUTH	MERCY
NATHAN to David 2 Samuel 12:7, 13	"You are the man!"	"The Lord has taken away your sin."
JESUS to Peter Luke 22:31–32	"You will deny Me three times."	"I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail."

Q3 How did Nathan "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)? Why do you think he told a story first?

Q4 Has truth ever been both freeing and frightening for you? Describe a "crisis of truth" that led you to mercy. What does truth have to do with breaking shame?

Q5 Who has been a "Nathan" or like Jesus to you? How did they help?

PRAYER PAUSE

David's sins deserved judgment. So God did what David couldn't: He cleansed him. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ… cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14). Tell God anything that makes you feel damaged or dirty. Claim that promise.

PAUSE 2

Heaped-on shame and mercy

5 min

What mercy really is

David wasn't only ashamed because of his sin. Others mocked him and made him the town gossip (Psalm 69). He didn't turn bitter. He ran to God:

> **PSALM 69:16 (NIV)**
> *Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.*

WHAT MERCY IS (AND ISN'T)

Mercy is not the same as going easy on wrongs.

MERCY IS NOT	MERCY IS
× Ignoring wrongs	✓ Truth told with kindness
× Looking the other way	✓ Being cleaned, not left alone
× Pretending it didn't happen	✓ Love we haven't earned
× Letting people off the hook	✓ Someone pursuing you

Q6 In Psalm 69:7–12, what shaming things did people do to David? What did he do with it?

Q7 In your own words, what is mercy?

PAUSE 3

Being a messenger of mercy

8 min

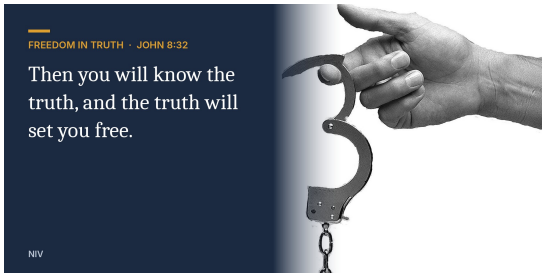
You can be someone's Nathan



Coming into the light isn't a do-it-yourself project. God says, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Q8 Who might be struggling with shame? Write their initials. Do they trust you enough to talk? One thing you could do to help:

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Freedom in truth, John 8:32. Then you will know the truth,"
2. Say the second half three times: "and the truth will set you free."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- Breaking shame is a **process,** not a one-time event.
- God often **sends a person** to bring us His truth and mercy.
- We can help others by **gently inviting** them to bring their shame out into the open, then taking it to God together.

VOICES OF MERCY

Read this as a prayer for your friend (or yourself), using their name:

*"Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to **[Name].** Rescue them from the mud; don't let them sink. Don't hide your face from your servant; answer quickly, for they are in trouble." (from Psalm 69:13–18)*

Take one step

1. **Pray.** Spend two minutes praying for the friend whose initials you wrote. Ask God what to say.
2. **Reach out.** Send a short, kind message today. No lecture. Just "I'm here."
3. **Receive.** If you're the one carrying shame, tell one safe person one true thing about it.

JOURNAL

A What is one hard truth I need to hear with mercy? Who could say it to me?

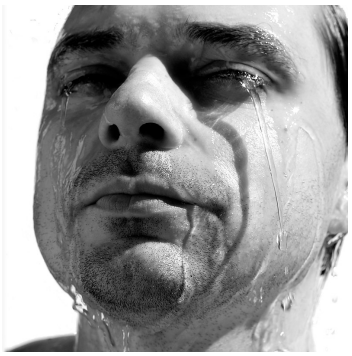
CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for sending people who tell me the truth and still stay. Make me that kind of friend for someone else. Cleanse me, and set me free. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: Truth without mercy crushes people. Mercy without truth leaves them stuck. God gives both, and He often uses ordinary friends to do it.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. How did David try to cover up his sin (2 Samuel 11)?
2. Has truth ever felt like something other than freedom? Talk to God about it.
3. Read Luke 22:31–34. What painful truth did Jesus tell Peter? What mercy did He offer?
4. Find at least eight ways people tried to heap shame on David in Psalm 69:4–12.
5. In Romans 2:4, what is it that leads us to turn from sin? Which verses (Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:25, 4:32, Romans 14:19, James 5:16) describe how a friend has met you in your shame?

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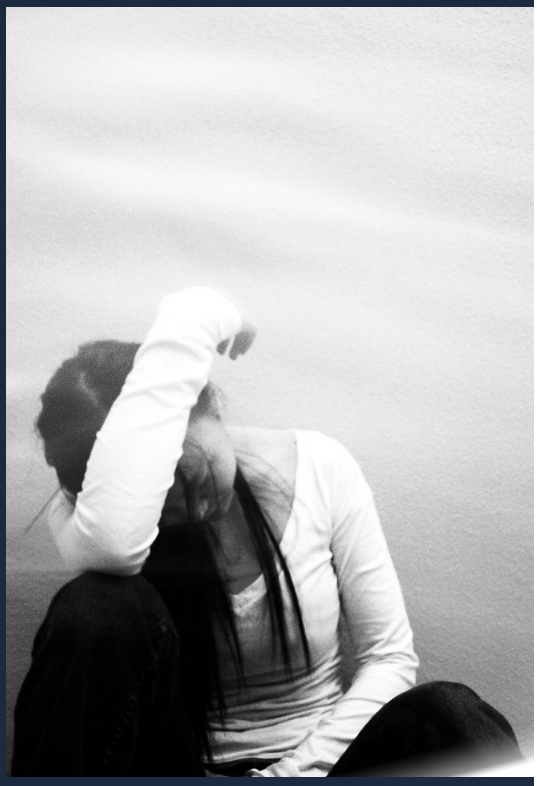
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 8

Tasting God's Mercy

He doesn't condemn. He restores.

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

Jesus doesn't condemn us. He restores us. In this chapter you'll meet a woman everyone wanted to stone and the One who stood between her and the crowd. You'll also learn to speak words that heal instead of wound.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Watch** Jesus restore a woman covered in shame.
- **Check** whether you feel God's love in your head and your heart.
- **Swap** shaming words for blessing words.
- **Say** Romans 8:1 from memory.

KEY VERSE

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. **Romans 8:1 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

The echo

A story from the original study, shortened.



Illustrative photo

Shame could have been Frances' middle name. Growing up, she was bullied about her family's money, her weight, and her teeth. At home things were worse: her dad's anger and abuse, and a family that kept it all secret to protect its "honor."

She numbed the pain with drinking, drugs and risky relationships. Many times she tried to break free. But her head echoed: "If you're trash, you may as well live like trash." So why even hope again?

Q1 Can you identify with Frances in any way? How is shame like an echo?

Q2 What messages of shame echo in your head?

CARE NOTE

Frances' story includes abuse and addiction. If any of it is close to home, go gently and talk with a counselor, pastor or trusted adult. You can also call or text **988** (U.S.) any time.

PAUSE 1

Restored by Jesus

9 min

The woman in the middle of the crowd

A crowd dragged a woman before Jesus, caught in adultery. By the law of the day, she could be stoned. Read **John 8:1–11** if you have time. Here is the heart of it:

> **JOHN 8:7, 10–11 (NIV)**
> *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." … Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

Q3 Where did this woman's shame come from? (a) her own choices (b) others' sin against her (c) her culture (d) all of the above

Q4 What do you think is the difference between being humiliated and being humbled? Which was she? How do we still "stone" people today?

Q5 Write what she might have written in her journal the day before she met Jesus, and the day after.

Q6 How does it feel to know Jesus doesn't condemn you? How have you tasted His mercy, or how would you like to?

PAUSE 2

Receiving God's love

5 min

Head knowledge, heart knowledge

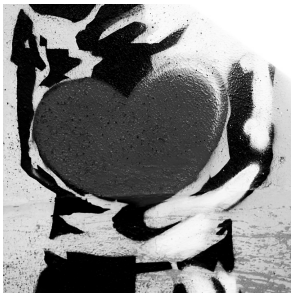
Circle Yes or No for each, then explain one of your answers:

Yes / No I usually like God.

Yes / No I usually feel secure in God's love.

Yes / No I usually feel worthy of God's love.

Yes / No I feel God's love with my head AND my heart.



God spoke to a people who had been shamed and mocked for years: "The Lord your God is with you… He will take great delight in you… I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame… I will bring you home" (Zephaniah 3:17, 19–20).

Q7 Do you know in your head that God delights in you? Is your heart as sure as your head? Explain.

Q8 Which of God's "I will" promises here would you most want Him to make to you? Why?

PAUSE 3

Unlearning shame, offering blessing

8 min

Switch your language

The opposite of shaming someone is blessing them. Breaking shame includes un-learning the language of shame and learning the language of blessing.

SHAMING WORDS OR BLESSING WORDS?

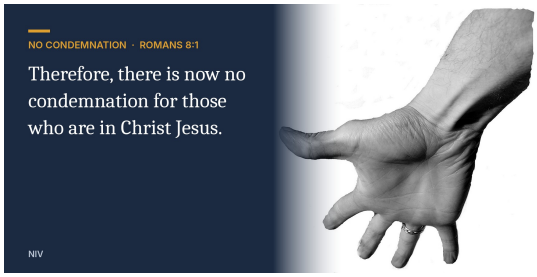
Words can wound, or they can heal.

SHAMING WORDS	BLESSING WORDS
– Put-downs and name-calling	+ Words that help and build up
– Cutting jokes and gossip	+ Gentle, kind, forgiving
– "What's wrong with you?"	+ "I'm glad you're here."
– Silent treatment and eye-rolls	+ "I'm with you. You matter."

> **EPHESIANS 4:29 (NIV)**
>
> *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.*

Q9 What is one hurtful word or phrase you've used on others (or behind their backs)? Ask God what He'd say about it.

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "No condemnation, Romans 8:1. Therefore, there is now no condemnation"
2. Say the second half three times: "for those who are in Christ Jesus."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- **Jesus never condemns us.** He isn't ashamed of us.
- God's plan to break shame's power was for **Jesus to carry it on the cross** (Hebrews 12:2).
- We respond to mercy by **walking with others** and **speaking blessing** instead of shame.

VOICES OF MERCY

Read this aloud with your name (or to a friend with theirs). Jesus stands up for you like a defense attorney:

*"Because the Sovereign Lord helps you, **[Name],** you will not be disgraced… He who vindicates you is near. Who then will bring charges against you? Who is he that will condemn you?" (from Isaiah 50:7–9)*

Take one step

1. **Shred the echo.** Write your shame echo from the story page on paper. Tear it up. Ask God to replace it with His blessing.
2. **Fix your eyes.** When shame returns, look to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) and think on what is good and beautiful (Philippians 4:8).
3. **Bless someone.** Think of the friend from Chapter 7. Ask God for a blessing for them, then say or text it today.

JOURNAL

A The new thing I want God to say over me instead of the old echo is:

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for standing between me and every accuser. Replace the old echo in my head with Your blessing. Help me speak mercy to others. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Try this: The priests blessed Israel with these words: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24–26). Say it over someone this week.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. What should the Pharisees have been ashamed of? How did Jesus expose their shame?
2. Imagine you're alone with Jesus, your shame out in the open. Sit in silence a few minutes. What do you think He says to you?
3. In Ephesians 4:29–32 and Colossians 3:12–14, which words help you guard your speech?
4. How can we "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21) by the words we choose?
5. What does God promise about blessing others (Numbers 6:27)?

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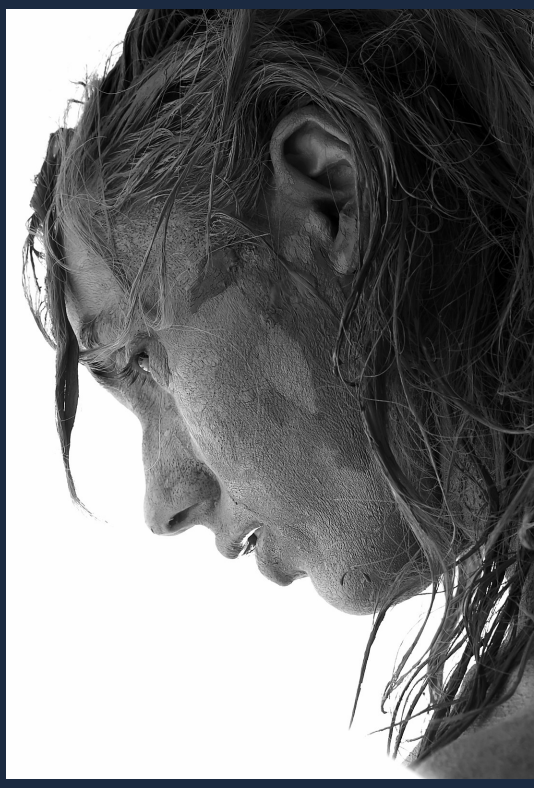
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 9

Shame Exchanged

Jesus took your shame and gave you His honor

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

God knows what shame feels like. Jesus carried ours to the cross. This final chapter shows the great exchange: He takes our shame, and we receive His honor, His welcome and His family.

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **See** that God has felt the sting of rejection.
- **Understand** what Jesus did with your shame on the cross.
- **Name** what mercy frees you from and for.
- **Say** Hebrews 12:2 from memory.

KEY VERSE

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)**

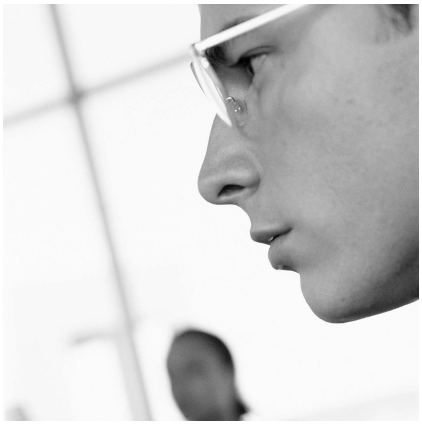
START HERE

A short story

4 min

The wrong person feels the shame

A story from the original study, shortened.



Illustrative photo

Jason was stunned when his wife left him and their two small kids for another man. It happened publicly, in front of their church. She rejected every friend and relative who tried to help.

Everyone told Jason it wasn't his fault. Five years later, his ex-wife seems untroubled. But Jason still struggles to walk into church and is only now opening up to old friends. The person who did wrong feels no shame. The one who was wronged still does.

Q1 Why do you think Jason is the one who still feels ashamed?

Q2 What would Jesus say to Jason? To his ex-wife? Can you identify with Jason?

BEFORE YOU GO ON

This is the last chapter, and the heart of the whole study. If shame still feels heavy, that doesn't mean you've failed. Healing takes time and other people. If you're struggling, talk with a counselor, pastor or trusted adult. In crisis, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

God tastes shame

9 min

Has God ever felt shame?

Have you ever been dumped by someone you cared about deeply? Along with hurt and anger, there's often shame. God compares Himself to a rescuer whose love was rejected and made public. In Ezekiel 16 (read verses 1–14 if you can), He tells how He found an abandoned baby, said "Live!", raised her, and covered her. Then she turned away.

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE (EZEKIEL 16)

God compares Himself to a rescuer who was rejected.

WHAT GOD DID

- Rescued an abandoned child
- Said "Live!" over her
- Covered her and made a promise
- Gave her beautiful gifts

WHAT ISRAEL DID

- Thought she could do without Him
- Trusted her own beauty and fame
- Gave her love to other things
- Left God humiliated

Q3 What emotions might God have felt as He gave and as Israel turned away? Why do you think God tells us this?

But the story doesn't end in shame. God promises: "They will forget their shame" (Ezekiel 39:26).

JESUS FACED SHAME, TOO

"…fixing our eyes on Jesus… For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

Q4 Why do you think Jesus was willing to die a shameful death? What (or who) was "the joy set before Him"?

Q5 Do you believe Jesus can relate to you in your shame (Hebrews 4:15)? What might it mean to "scorn" the shame in your own life?

PAUSE 2

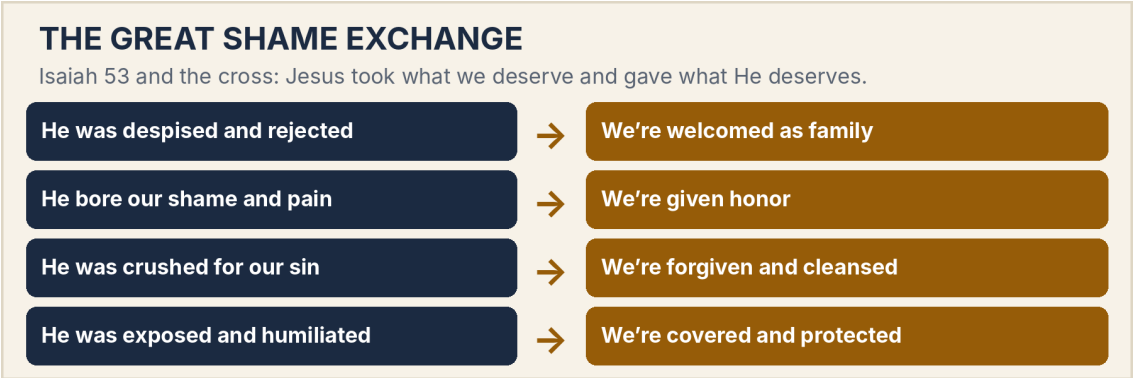
God's solution for our shame

5 min

The great exchange

Hundreds of years before Jesus, Isaiah described what the Savior would do:

> **ISAIAH 53:3–5 (NIV)**
>
> *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain… Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering… But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*



Q6 If a friend asked, "What is God's solution for guilt and shame?" what would you say? How does that give you hope?

Q7 After this whole study, where is your heart in trusting Jesus, really trusting Him?

PAUSE 3

Jesus carries our shame

8 min

Not ashamed of you

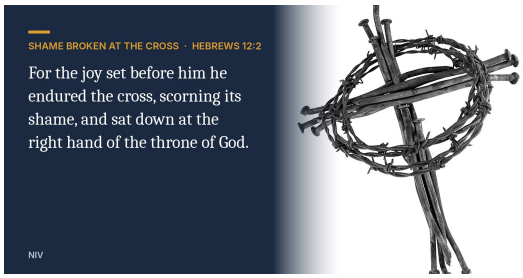


"Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11). "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Q8 What can God's mercy through Christ free you from? What can it free you to do or experience?

Q9 If you were Jason's friend, what would you tell him about Jesus and shame?

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: "Shame broken at the cross, Hebrews 12:2. For the joy set before him he endured the cross,"
2. Say the second half three times: "scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

PRAYER PAUSE (1 MINUTE)

Quiet your mind. Picture walking up to Jesus. Picture the Father gently placing a hand under your chin and lifting your head until you meet His eyes: "But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high" (Psalm 3:3). How does your heart respond?

Key thoughts

- God understands shame. **Jesus took mine** on the cross and tasted its pain.
- **Neither God nor Jesus is ashamed of me.** He calls me family and protects me from my accusers.

VOICES OF MERCY

Say it with your name, or to a friend with theirs:

*"**[Name],** Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother or sister. Approach the throne of grace with confidence, so you may receive mercy and find grace to help you. God is not ashamed to be called your God." (Hebrews 2:11; 4:16; 11:16)*

Take one step

1. **Receive it.** Tell Jesus: "I give You my shame. I take Your honor."
2. **Remember it.** Put Hebrews 12:2 where you'll see it every day.
3. **Keep walking.** Choose one habit from this study to keep: telling the truth, finding safe people, or speaking blessing.

JOURNAL OR DRAW

A What does it feel like to have my head lifted by God?

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for carrying my shame and calling me family. I give You what I've been hiding. Lift my head. Help me live in Your freedom and share it with others. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



You made it through the whole study. Shame doesn't disappear overnight, but you've learned to name it, bring it into the light, receive mercy, and offer it to others. Keep going. You're not alone.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU OR YOUR GROUP

1. Have you ever been dumped or rejected? What shame came with it?
2. Read Ezekiel 39:25–29. What does God promise to do so the memory of shame fades?
3. Read Isaiah 53:2–11 slowly. Which phrases stand out? What gives you hope?
4. What do you think it means to "despise" the shame in your life, as Jesus did?
5. Of all nine chapters, which truth do you most want to hold onto? Who will you tell?

IF YOU'RE FINISHING WITH A GROUP

Plan a celebration. Share one way God has met you in shame, thank each person for something specific, and pray for one another.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Jason's story is adapted from the original study. Isaiah 53, Ezekiel and Hebrews are quoted or summarized in NIV from memory and should be checked against your Bible.

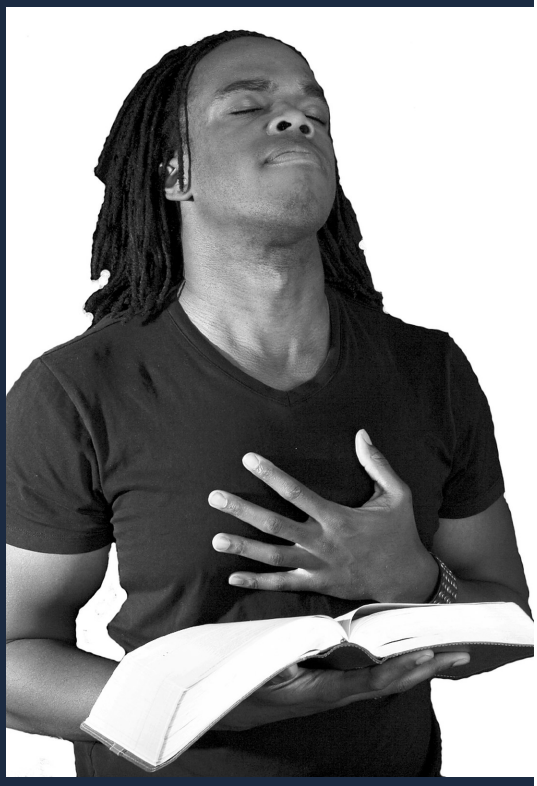
FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

CHAPTER 10

Celebrating Your Group

Look back, look ahead, give thanks

About 30 minutes



THE BIG IDEA

You made it through a hard study. That deserves a celebration. In this last chapter you look back at your journey, make the great exchange of your shame for Jesus' mercy, and thank God (and the people who walked with you).

YOUR 30 MINUTES

4 min	9 min	5 min	8 min	4 min
THE STORY	PAUSE 1 · Explore	PAUSE 2 · Be honest	PAUSE 3 · Respond	PAUSE 4 · Move

Grab a pen (or open a notes app) and set a timer. Short on time? Answer the questions that matter most to you and skip the rest. Honest beats fast.

BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL

- **Look back** at what you've learned about shame and mercy.
- **Make the exchange:** lay down shame, receive Jesus' mercy.
- **Celebrate** and thank the people who walked with you.
- **Say** Isaiah 61:3 from memory.

KEY VERSE

To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. **Isaiah 61:3 (NIV)**

START HERE

A short story

4 min

The last night

A made-up story to start the celebration.



Illustrative photo

It's the last night of the study. Dani and Maya started it as strangers in a small group. Nine weeks ago, Dani couldn't say the word "shame" out loud.

Tonight, with pizza on the table, she says, "I thought if anyone saw the real me, they'd leave. You stayed." Maya answers, "And you stayed with me." Nobody's shame is gone. But nobody is hiding anymore.

Q1 What is one thing you'd like to thank this study (or someone in it) for?

Q2 What has changed most for you? Even a small change counts.

A NOTE

If this study stirred up things that are still heavy, that's okay. Keep talking with someone you trust: a counselor, pastor or friend. Healing takes time. If you're in crisis, call or text **988** (U.S.).

PAUSE 1

Facing shame and finding mercy

9 min

Look back

Here's the road you've walked. Circle the two steps that mattered most to you.



> **GEORGE MACDONALD**
>
> *"To be humbly ashamed is to be plunged in the cleansing bath of truth."*

FACING SHAME

Q3 What kinds of shame have you spotted in your life, whether self-caused or heaped on you? What have you learned about hiding and opening up?

FINDING MERCY

Q4 How have Jesus and other people met you in your shame?

Q5 What do you still need to trust God with about your past? About your future? How has your closeness with Him grown?

PAUSE 2

Exchanging our shame

5 min

The great exchange

At the cross, Jesus took the most shameful things a person can face: public exposure, rejection, mockery, being abandoned by friends. The Father didn't plan that for no reason. He wanted a family. The authors of The Shame Exchange put it this way:

> **THE SHAME EXCHANGE · Breedlove & Ennis**
>
> *"Jesus was exchanging all that he is for all that we are: our sin, our guilt, our debt, our curse and our shame."*



Q6 What do you need to face and lay down? Write it as a short prayer and leave it at Jesus' feet.

Q7 What do you want and need to receive from Jesus in exchange?

> **YOUR RESPONSE**
>
> The exchange includes being welcomed into God's family. "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). If you've never said yes, or want to say it again, tell Jesus now in your own words. Then tell a friend or leader.

PAUSE 3

Celebrating your group

8 min

Look ahead, and say thanks

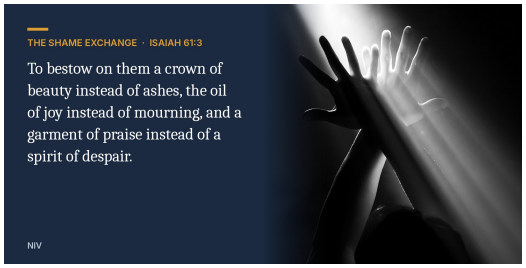


Take a few minutes (alone or with your group) to think about the road ahead. **What do you need next** in your journey with God? **Where** could you get it? **Who** will you stay connected with? **Who else** could use this study, or could you help start a new group?

Q8 Pick one: what is your next step with God? Or who could you invite to go through this study?

Q9 Who in your group has impacted your life? Write a short thank-you you could say or send.

Hold on to one verse (3 min)



Phone tip: Save the card as your lock screen.

1. Say the topic and reference out loud, then the first half three times: “The shame exchange, Isaiah 61:3. A crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning,”
2. Say the second half three times: “and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”
3. Put both halves together. Then cover the verse and write it from memory below.

Write the verse from memory:

PAUSE 4

Breaking the power of shame

4 min

Key thoughts

- You've **faced shame** and met a God who is not ashamed of you.
- Jesus offers an **exchange:** your shame for His acceptance, beauty and joy.
- Keep going **with people.** Healing happens in community.

VOICES OF MERCY: READ IT OUT LOUD TOGETHER

Take turns reading, one verse each, or read as a group:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me… to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives… to comfort all who mourn… and to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes… Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance; and so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours." (from Isaiah 61:1–7)

Take one step

1. **Celebrate.** Plan a small celebration: a meal, a walk, a call. Say thanks out loud.
2. **Stay connected.** Choose one person to keep checking in with, and set a date.
3. **Pass it on.** Pray about who you could invite into this study next.

JOURNAL

A What am I most grateful for from this journey?

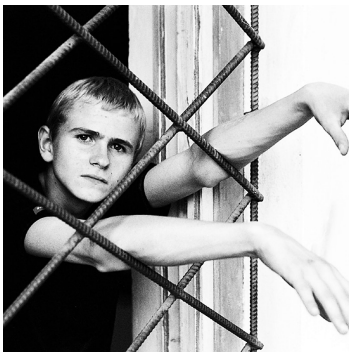
CLOSE IN PRAYER

God, thank You for walking with me through shame. Thank You for the people who stayed. Give me beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, praise for despair. Help me share what I've received. Amen.

✓ You made it. That's 30 minutes well spent.

OPTIONAL · NOT PART OF YOUR 30 MINUTES

Digging deeper



Remember: Isaiah promised freedom for captives and release for prisoners. Jesus read these words in His hometown and said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). That freedom is for you.

PLAN YOUR CELEBRATION (45–60 MINUTES)

1. Reflect back: How have you benefited from this group? How has your walk with God changed? How has your daily life changed? What emotions come up as you look back?
2. Look ahead: What do you need in the next season? What continuing relationships will this group have, from casual friendship to deeper involvement?
3. Who else could go through this study or another Connect book? Should one or more of you team up to start a new group?
4. Say thanks: Go around the circle and tell each person one specific thing you appreciate.
5. Pray together: thank God, praise Him for who He is, and don’t hurry.

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YOUR RESPONSE

Make the exchange

At the cross, Jesus traded places with you.

Throughout this study you've seen that some shame is simply part of being human, and some is heaped on us by others. Both can be brought to Jesus. The authors of The Shame Exchange put it this way:

THE SHAME EXCHANGE · Breedlove & Ennis

"Jesus was exchanging all that he is for all that we are: our sin, our guilt, our debt, our curse and our shame."

WHAT I'M LAYING DOWN

Write what you need to face and give to Jesus. Then write it as a prayer and leave it at His feet.

WHA

Write

An invitation

Part of the exchange is being welcomed into God's family. "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). God has always planned to adopt you through Jesus, and it gives Him great pleasure (Ephesians 1:5–6). When you say yes, He promises to make you new from the inside out (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Maybe you're ready to say yes for the first time, or to say it again. Here is a simple prayer. Use your own words if you like:

A PRAYER

Jesus, I'm tired of carrying shame. Thank You for taking it on the cross. I give You my sin and my shame. I receive Your forgiveness and Your welcome. Make me Your child, and make me new. Amen.

TELL SOMEONE

If you prayed that prayer today, tell a friend, group leader or pastor. You don't have to walk this out alone.

KEEP IT WITH YOU

When shame says… God says…

When you feel it, remember what's true.

Quiet-time idea. Each day, pick one row. Tell God honestly how you feel (left column). Then read the verses and ask Him to help you believe the truth (middle column).

SHAME SAYS…	GOD SAYS…	LOOK IT UP
ashamed	**Jesus is not ashamed of me.**	Hebrews 2:11; 12:2
condemned	**There is no condemnation for me.**	Romans 8:1; 1 John 3:20
like hiding	**God comes looking for me, and covers me.**	Genesis 3:9, 21; 1 John 1:9
dirty or stained	**I am cleansed by Jesus' blood.**	Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 1:7
unlovable	**God delights in me and sings over me.**	Zephaniah 3:17
alone	**God is with me and helps me.**	Isaiah 41:10
desolate	**I will forget the shame of my past.**	Isaiah 54:4; Psalm 3:3
rejected	**I am welcomed into God's family.**	John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5–6
mocked by others	**God will give me honor for my shame.**	Zephaniah 3:19; Isaiah 61:7
accused	**Jesus stands up for me like a defender.**	Isaiah 50:7–9; Romans 8:33–34
like my past ruined everything	**God can redeem what hurts.**	Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28
afraid to be known	**The truth sets me free.**	John 8:32; Psalm 34:5
separated from God	**Nothing can separate me from His love.**	Romans 8:38–39
covered in ashes	**God gives me beauty for ashes.**	Isaiah 61:3

Check the verses in your own Bible.

KEEP IT WITH YOU

Why memorize Scripture?

Words hidden in your heart are there when you need them.

You won't find the word "memorize" in the Bible, but the idea is everywhere. God's people are told to **treasure** His words, **store them up,** and **write them on their hearts.** Here's what that looks like, and what it does for you.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS TO DO

- **Treasure** God's words and guard them like your most precious possession (Proverbs 7:1–3).
- **Write them deep within your heart,** like a necklace you always wear (Proverbs 3:3).
- **Let them sink in,** and pay close attention (Proverbs 4:20–22).
- **Think about them** day and night (Joshua 1:8).

WHAT IT DOES FOR YOU

- **Helps you resist sin:** "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).
- **Brings life and health** (Proverbs 4:22).
- **Builds your trust in the Lord** (Proverbs 22:18–19).
- **Brings joy:** "Your words were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16).

TWO PEOPLE WHO KNEW IT BY HEART

Jesus. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Him. Jesus answered each time with a verse of Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11). He knew God's words well enough to use them in the moment.

Peter. On the day of Pentecost, a huge crowd gathered. He had no time to look anything up, yet he spoke from the Old Testament, including the Psalms and the prophet Joel (Acts 2). About 3,000 people believed that day.

HOW TO START (PICK TWO)

- ☐ **Put it on your phone.** Lock screen, notes app, or a daily reminder.
- ☐ **Say it out loud.** Walking or driving works great.
- ☐ **Write it out** until you can get every word right.
- ☐ **Pray it back to God,** line by line.
- ☐ **Text it to a friend** with one sentence on why it matters.
- ☐ **Review before you sleep.** Fall asleep thinking about it.

CARRY THESE WITH YOU

Verses to know by heart

One from each chapter, plus a bonus. Check the box when you can say it.

1 SHAME REDEEMED

Genesis 50:20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

☐ I can say it

2 GOD IS GREATER

1 John 3:20

If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

☐ I can say it

3 INTO THE LIGHT

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

☐ I can say it

4 SHAME FORGOTTEN

Isaiah 54:4

Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.

☐ I can say it

5 GOD'S DELIGHT

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.

☐ I can say it

6 NOTHING SEPARATES

Romans 8:38–39

Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

☐ I can say it

7 FREEDOM IN TRUTH

John 8:32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

☐ I can say it

8 NO CONDEMNATION

Romans 8:1

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

☐ I can say it

9 SHAME BROKEN AT THE CROSS

Hebrews 12:2

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

☐ I can say it

★ BONUS: THE EXCHANGE

Isaiah 61:3

To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

☐ I can say it

Scripture quotations are from the NIV (2011), written from memory. Check any verse against your own Bible.

IF YOU WANT MORE

Dig deeper

What the Bible says about shame, and books to read next.

What the Bible means by "shame"

Shame (and related words like disgrace and humiliation) shows up about 190 times in the Old Testament and 46 times in the New. It usually means being the object of **contempt, mockery or humiliation.** Less often it means feeling shy or bashful, as Adam and Eve did before the fall (Genesis 2:25), or feeling awe and respect (Ezra 9:6). Sometimes it describes physical exposure or nakedness.

The Bible treats shame in several ways:

- **A result of sin.** Shame follows when God's ways are ignored (Hosea 4:6–7), and it is removed on the day of restoration (Isaiah 61:7).
- **A warning.** At times shame is a loving expression of God's grace that can lead to good action (Ezekiel 43:10; Judges 3:25).
- **Something false.** Being loyal to Christ is never something to be ashamed of (Mark 8:38).
- **Something Jesus carried.** He "endured the cross, scorning its shame" (Hebrews 12:2), so we don't have to carry ours alone.

Books for further reading

Many of these are written for adults. Choose a few with a mentor or counselor you trust.

Steve & Sally Breedlove and Ralph & Jennifer Ennis, *The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom* (NavPress)

Ralph & Jennifer Ennis and Pam Rinehart, *The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ* (NavPress, 2004)

Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness* (InterVarsity Press, 2003)

Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (HarperCollins)

Curtis Neal, *Dancing in the Arms of God* (Zondervan, 1995)

Jan Frost, *Experiencing Father's Embrace* (Destiny Image, 2006)

Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *How People Grow* (Zondervan, 2001)

John Townsend, *Hiding from Love* (Zondervan, 1991)

Sandra Wilson, *Released From Shame* (InterVarsity Press, revised 2002)

Christopher Humbert, *Deceived by Shame, Desired by God* (NavPress, 2001)

Brennan Manning, *A Stranger to Self-Hatred* (Dimension Books, 1982)

Alan Wright, *Shame Off You* (Multnomah, 2005)

Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol & John Lynch, *TrueFaced* (NavPress, 2003)

WHAT'S NEXT

The Connect series

Keep going. There's more to discover.

Connect is a series of personal and group studies built to help you know God's truth, rest in His love, and live in His hope. They're made for small groups, where friends can encourage, trust, and support each other on the journey. Jesus said what life is all about:

> **MATTHEW 22:37–39 (NIV)**
> *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Growing in love for God, for others, and for yourself, and living in ways that honor Him: that's a real spiritual journey. Here's the whole road.

1 GOD	**Connecting with His Outrageous Love** Receive God's love, and love Him back.
2 IDENTITY	**Becoming Who God Says I Am** Discover who God says you are, and learn to live out of that true identity.
3 SOUL	**Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions** See how loving God, others, and yourself helps you handle your inner life in ways that honor Him.
4 RELATIONSHIPS	**Bringing Jesus to My Community** Learn to love people, all kinds of people. If you're loving God and yourself, loving others follows.
5 LIFE	**Thriving in a Complex World** Explore time, money, decisions, and commitment, and how they fit into living well with Jesus.
6 FREEDOM	**Breaking the Power of Shame** YOU ARE HERE Face shame, whatever its source, and experience God's mercy, healing, and freedom. This is the study you just finished.

> **OUR PRAYER FOR YOU**
> *That you will grow in deeper closeness with God, from a heart of worship, as you humbly follow Jesus' way, His truth, and His life.*

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THIS STUDY

About the authors

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Ralph and his wife, Jennifer, have served with The Navigators since 1975, from military bases in Norfolk to Princeton University, Richmond, and The CoMission in Moscow. Ralph has a master's degree in Intercultural Relations and co-wrote *The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ.* They live in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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This edition

Adapted for a younger audience

Chapters, stories and images in this edition were rewritten and redesigned for a younger reading level and a 30-minute rhythm, with safety notes added.

Author information is from the original 2008 edition.

Notes and sources

Chapters 5–6. The ten types of shame in Chapters 5 and 6 are adapted from Steve & Sally Breedlove and Ralph & Jennifer Ennis, *The Shame Exchange* (NavPress, 2008).

Chapter 4. The "raincoat of the soul" idea is from Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), paraphrased.

Chapter 6. The "spiritual" shame example is inspired by David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Bethany House, 1991).

About the stories. Stories are adapted from the original study or made up for this edition. Names and details are changed. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 use new stories in place of the original news-based and mature ones.

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