

## **Shame: What can God do?** (Week 6: Handling Shame Messages)

Ten practical ways anyone, with God's grace, can begin to confront and heal from shame.

### **1. Bring shame into the light**

- Name it for what it is.
- Speak to it.

“If we cultivate enough awareness about shame to name it and speak to it, we've basically cut it off at the knees.”

- Tell another about it.

We diminish the shaming message when we acknowledge it and share our experiences with the trusted people in our lives, the ones who know we aren't perfect and love us anyway. Their empathy will allow us to keep our sense of shame in perspective, as well as help us come up with strategies for dealing with it.

By acknowledging shame, we refuse to let it fester or define us. Dr. Berne Brown suggests that when we bury the story, we forever solidify the story. If we own the story we get to narrate the ending.”

### **2. Untangle what you are feeling**

- Am I feeling productive shame or unhealthy shame?
- Should I actually be feeling 'guilt' instead?

The remorse and regret that can come with productive shame or guilt can motivate us to seek forgiveness, make reparations, and follow a new path (repentance). BUT...when we define ourselves as “bad,” we believe we are incapable of changing or doing better.

- Am I actually feeling humiliation or embarrassment?

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Neither of those feelings is comfortable, but they don't take aim at our self-worth in the way shame does. Humiliation can seem like shame, but it comes with the feeling that it was not deserved. If you are thinking, "I can't believe my boss dressed me down in front of the entire staff for missing that deadline," that's humiliation. If you are thinking, "I can't believe I missed that deadline. I'm such a loser," that's shame.

So take the time to analyze what you are feeling and compare it to what you really should be feeling. It can help dismantle your shame grid.

### **3. Disconnect what you do from who you are**

- We often build our identity around what we do.
- Activity-based identity creates shame when what we do is criticized.

We all want others to admire what we bring to the table, whether on the job, at home, in our communities, or in the world. But what happens if they don't like our contribution?

If our self-worth is attached to what we create or offer, the answer is that we may very well be devastated by a sense of shame that can cause us to retreat or lash out: "I'm an idiot. That's the last time I suggest an idea in a meeting" or "My idea may not be great, but yours is a lot worse!"

If we define ourselves by what we do, we have put the power of our happiness (joy) in the hands of others.

- Christ-based identity stays solid when what we do is criticized.

Separating what we do from our sense of self-worth comes with an important benefit. When your whole identity isn't on the line, you'll find yourself freer to create, take risks and be innovative. Yes, you may be *disappointed* if the world doesn't meet your efforts with applause, but it won't be soul-crushing in the way that shame can be. Instead, you can look at both praise and condemnation with the perspective they deserve, absorb any helpful critiques, and move on.

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### **4. Recognize Your Triggers** (Most susceptible)

- One of shame's sneakiest tricks is its ability to hit us where we are most vulnerable.  
A new mom who secretly feels out of her depth is more likely to feel shame when her parenting style is questioned. A husband who worries that he doesn't measure up as a provider may see his spouse's comment about the neighbor's new car as an attempt to shame him rather than an innocent observation.
- Our insecurities prime us to default to shame.

By being aware of what our shame triggers are, we can help nip this process in the bud. Feel shame settling over you? Try to identify the feeling behind it before it can amplify.

The primary shame trigger for women still remains physical appearance. For men, it's the fear of being perceived as weak.

### **5. Make Connections**

- Intentionally develop relationships that allow you to learn to accept yourself and other people just as you/they are.

Shame is, at its essence, a fear of disconnection. By reaching out to family and friends, to our communities, to society, to God, we can make the connections that allow us to learn grace.

- Through healthy relationships, people start to realize that everyone makes mistakes, fails, has limitations, sin, are broken, etc.

Other people do things that are as bad or even worse sometimes so you're not the worst person on the planet. You can begin to say to yourself, "This is human; I am human; others are human."

- A sense of connection boosts our compassion/love for ourselves.

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Thus we are more likely to handle our shame without resorting to measures such as masking the pain with drugs or alcohol, or lashing out at those around us, or giving in to shame's message that we are indeed bad.

- Being connected means you can be there for others when the need arises.

Simply expressing "I know how you feel" can work miracles for those in shame's painful hold.

### **6. Regulate How You Speak to Yourself**

- Do not Repeat shaming messages to yourself.

Instead: Think. Tell the truth. Are you actually that incompetent, inadequate so-and-so you think you are? If you look at shame messages with the objective eyes of a scientist, you'll be able to punch holes in it immediately.

- Stop self-shaming through negative self-talk.

Negative self-talk may have become a habit that needs your attention, and the more intelligent focus you give it, the more it will unravel. Commit to recognizing this voice and letting its reign over you diminish.

At times we can be our own worst enemy where inner self-talk is painfully harsh. And if you look at the root of what drives it, you'll find shame, that feeling that there's something terribly wrong—or worse—about you. Once you begin meeting the shame directly—this way of speaking to yourself starts to not even make sense anymore.

### **7. Find the strength in being vulnerable**

- Vulnerability is not a weakness.

Seeing vulnerability as a weakness creates double-standard: worrying that we will be viewed as weak, while at the same time seeing others as courageous when they show the same vulnerability.

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For example, imagine that a friend confides in you that they're facing an obstacle, such as health or relationship problems. In this situation, you're unlikely to think of your friend as weak—you're far more likely to think about how strong they are for trying to cope with this problem. In other words, we're often far harsher on ourselves than we would be toward other people, and it's important to remember that others are much less likely than we think to judge us for showing vulnerability. It can feel scary to show ourselves, but that this very act is what facilitates intimacy with others—the cornerstone to a grounded, meaningful, happy life.

- Whatever you feel is your present moment experience. Own it.

Owning your feelings sets you free. Resisting them creates endless suffering. This is the medicine for the secret of shame.

- Be who you are. (warts and all)

Don't force yourself to be something or someone you are not. Shift your attention away from these thoughts, and allow your current experience as it is. It's so relaxing because you don't have to hide or grasp. You can just be.

Vulnerability gets a bad rap these days. But what it actually offers you is the relief from having to hide from yourself, the simplicity of just being as you are without having to change anything.

### **8. Open Yourself to Sacred Honesty About Your Identity**

- When you live in shame, you are constantly lying to yourself.

You draw yourself into mindset that makes you believe you are inadequate, unworthy, and just plain wrong. It's just plain inaccurate.

- Healing from shame invites radical honesty.

Realize that who you are (true identity) is so much more than the false shame identity.

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- Meditate on who you really are in Christ.

Keep returning here. Become more and more transparent so the light of truth shines through.

**9. Engage the World with a Wide Open Heart**

- Shame is all about limitation, holding back, and keeping yourself separate and isolated.

Where is your heart when you hold to shame? Wounded, stuck, and closed. Begin to live with a heart wide open.

- Move your attention outside of your head to notice the beauty and tenderness around you.

It's been there all along, you just haven't noticed. Let yourself be touched by the simple experiences of daily life. Eventually, without even trying, you begin to notice beauty, love and appreciation. Where before you held back, now you engage.

**10. Focus on others.**

- When we feel ashamed, we tend to focus on ourselves—we worry about how others view us and fear being rejected.

This self-focus can cause us to be less empathetic because we are so focused on our own behavior. However, by taking some of the focus off of ourselves and extending empathy to others, we can work to overcome our own shame.

# Free at Last

*Breaking the bondages of guilt and shame*

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- \_\_\_\_\_ to it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ another about it.

By acknowledging shame, we refuse to let it fester or \_\_\_\_\_ us.

### **2. Untangle what you are \_\_\_\_\_.**

- Am I feeling \_\_\_\_\_ shame or \_\_\_\_\_ shame?
- Should I actually be feeling \_\_\_\_\_ instead?
- Am I actually feeling \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?

Take the time to \_\_\_\_\_ what you are feeling and compare it to what you really should be feeling.

### **3. Disconnect what you \_\_\_\_\_ from who you \_\_\_\_\_.**

- We often build our \_\_\_\_\_ around what we do.
- Activity-based identity creates shame when what we do is \_\_\_\_\_.

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- Christ-based identity stays \_\_\_\_\_ when what we do is criticized.

## 4. Recognize Your \_\_\_\_\_.

- One of shame's sneakiest tricks is its ability to hit us where we are most \_\_\_\_\_.
- Our \_\_\_\_\_ prime us to default to shame.

By being \_\_\_\_\_ of our shame triggers, we can help nip the shame process in the bud.

The primary shame trigger for women still remains \_\_\_\_\_.

For men, it's the fear of being perceived as \_\_\_\_\_.

## 5. Make \_\_\_\_\_.

- Intentionally develop \_\_\_\_\_ that allow you to learn to accept yourself and other people just as you/they are.
- Through healthy relationships, people start to realize that \_\_\_\_\_ makes mistakes, fails, has limitations, sin, are broken, etc.
- A sense of connection boosts our compassion/love for \_\_\_\_\_.
- Being connected means you can be there for \_\_\_\_\_ when the need arises.

## 6. \_\_\_\_\_ **How You Speak to Yourself.**

- Do not \_\_\_\_\_ shaming messages to yourself.



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- Stop self-shaming through \_\_\_\_\_ self-talk.

## 7. Find the strength in being \_\_\_\_\_.

- Vulnerability is not a \_\_\_\_\_.
- Whatever you feel is your \_\_\_\_\_ experience.
- Be who you \_\_\_\_\_.

What vulnerability offers you is \_\_\_\_\_ from having to hide from yourself, the simplicity of just being as you are without having to change anything.

## 8. Open Yourself to \_\_\_\_\_ About Your Identity.

- When you live in shame, you are constantly \_\_\_\_\_ to yourself.
- Healing from shame invites \_\_\_\_\_ honesty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ on who you really are in Christ.

## 9. Engage the World with a \_\_\_\_\_.

- Shame is all about \_\_\_\_\_, holding back, and keeping yourself separate and isolated.
- Move your attention outside of your head to notice the \_\_\_\_\_ and tenderness around you.

## 10. Focus on \_\_\_\_\_.

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