

Ministering to Those Struggling with Shame

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Welcome & Prayer ~ Pastor Adam Jackson

Understanding True Guilt and Proper Shame ~ Lesley Swanson

Intro

- We can't talk about shame without talking about guilt. Why? Because they are close companions, though they are not identical.
- Shame is more commonly found in Scripture (nakedness, dishonor, disgrace, defilement) and broader of the two. You will find shame about 10 times more often than you'll find guilt in Scripture.

A. What is True Guilt and Proper Shame?

1. True **guilt** is first, the result of sin, the sin a person commits.
2. **Proper** shame is "a painful feeling (from the guilt) due to the consciousness of having done or experienced something disgraceful ... the feeling of being caught doing something bad or ... being seen while sinning."
3. Ed Welch describes shame as "being exposed, vulnerable, and in desperate need of covering or protection. Under the gaze of the holy God and other people."
 - "**Guilt** lives in the courtroom where I stand alone before the Judge and am legally answerable/responsible for the wrong I've done."
 - "**Shame** lives in the community, though it feels like a courtroom. The shamed person feels worthless and expects rejection."
4. "Guilt and shame can be two dimensions of one event - I've **done** something wrong **and** there are **witnesses**. Whether from the same event or not, guilt suggests that I have sinned, while shame suggest that there is something about me that, if seen by others, would be unacceptable." (Groves & Smith, *Untangling Emotions*, p. 198)

B. What is God's design for True Guilt and Proper Shame?

1. Guilt and shame can be very valuable when they are telling the truth.
2. When I have sinned, both guilt and shame **help me to see what I have to do**.
3. When guilt and shame accurately identify problems (wrongdoings/sins), wrongs can be righted and relationships restored.
4. The guilty person expects punishment but needs forgiveness.
5. The shamed person expects rejection but needs cleansing, fellowship, love, and acceptance.
6. When guilt is true and shame is proper, they are meant to promote **healing and growth**.
7. Biblically our goals are always relational. Jesus taught that the whole law is summarized in two commandments: **love God and love others**.

8. Groves and Smith say, “Guilt provides guardrails to help us know when we’re acting against God and neighbor. Guilt, in itself, doesn’t tell us that we are fundamentally unable to love; it tells us when we’ve failed to do so.” (Groves & Smith, *Untangled Emotions*, p. 200)
9. Shame reveals a break in relationship. Shame’s focus is more on how others see me and how I see myself. Shame is what warns us of the condemnation of sin.
10. Shame (in particular) should drive us to God.
 - Shame is actually merciful because of its design to drive us to God so that we can receive His free pardon in Christ. It is intended so that we will confess, repent, and be reconciled and restored in our relationship with God and neighbor.

C. When Guilt and Shame do not accomplish God’s Purpose.

1. “Guilt, and, in particular, shame can become reasons for isolation rather than reconciliation.” (Groves & Smith, *Untangled Emotions*, p. 200)
2. Shame comes to the foreground when guilt hasn’t gotten the job done.
 - For example, when we’ve indulged in sin and we are caught or we fear being caught, shame leads us to be more committed to hiding than repairing the broken relationship.
3. It can be hard to hear the good intentions of guilt and shame.
 - When this is true, we try to shut them up in various ways.
 - Some examples are:
 - We deny or make excuses or justify.
 - We escape through overeating, intense pleasure-seeking, shopping, overworking, or we pursue relief through self-injury, fantasizing, alcohol, drugs, etc.
 - We reject God, doubt God’s love or existence and/or question God - especially His goodness and/or sovereignty.
 - Most common responses to guilt are:
 - Cover
 - Hide
 - Shift blame “one of the basic reflexes of sin is to deflect guilt and shame another.” (Groves & , *Untangling Emotions*, p. 202)
4. When guilt and shame have not accomplished God’s intended purposes it can sound like: *What I did was because they _____; No one cares about me; I’m afraid to expose myself to others (I just heard this one this week from a young gal I started counseling); I hide until they ‘know’ me; I hate myself; or I can’t forgive myself.*

D. What is God’s remedy?

1. Sending Jesus to take our place ~ **John 3:16-17**
2. Receiving Christ ~ **Romans 10:9-11**
3. Confession ~ **1 John 1:9**
4. Repentance ~ **2 Corinthians 7:8-11** (Godly sorrow, and what it produces)
5. Humble self before Him and trust He’s forgiven and restored you. ~ **1 Peter 5:6; 1 John 1:9**
6. We need to help the shame-filled person ‘think Biblically’.

E. How to Help Someone Overcome Proper Shame

1. Where sin, guilt, and shame began ~ Genesis 2:1-17; 3:1-21
 - Specifically be sure they compare 2:16-17 and 3:2-3 and how they cover their shame and hide from God; and how God responds to them and the significance of God's adequate covering.
 - Gospel ~ taking them through John and/or the 'Romans Road.'
 - Could assign the *Gospel Primer*
 - Randy Patten's teaching on "Evangelize or Disciple?" It was about "Knowledge of the Minimums to be Born-Again."
 - God is holy
 - We are sinful
 - There is a penalty for sin
 - God became man and His name is Jesus Christ
 - Jesus paid the penalty for all your sins
 - If they are a believer and they are struggling with shame, consider walking through a teaching on PRIDE.
 - "Jesus endured the shame of the cross so that we could be free from sin. (Hebrews 12:2) If we continue to be ashamed of repented sin, we are saying that Jesus' death wasn't sufficient for us. For a born-again Christian, prolonged shame can merely be the sin of pride in disguise, because you are really more concerned about your reputation than the cause of Christ." (Sue Liljenberg, *The Hem of His Garment*, p. 29 old version)
2. David & Nathan
 - 2 Samuel 11-12
 - David's Psalm 51
 - Psalm 32
 - "Sometimes we need guilt and shame to show us just how seriously we've sinned." (Groves & Smith, *Untangling Emotions*, p. 201)
3. Sometimes it's hard to identify guilt and shame because they can hid under many distractions or other emotional responses.
 - Ask more questions ~ both intensive and extensive ones.
 - Suggest that they list the things they have done wrong or think they've done wrong. Then Biblically back them. Is it truly a sin or a break of their own standard?
 - A few good diagnostic questions to ask as you help:
 - Ask yourself: *Is this moving them away from God and others or towards them?*
 - Ask the shame-filled person: *Has your shame been removed to the point where you could be obedient to the Lord and share your story with another individual?* (Sue Liljenberg, *The Hem of His Garment*, p. 29 old version)

Resources Used

Shame Interrupted by Ed Welch

Untangling Emotions by J. Alasdair Groves & Winston T. Smith

Help! I Feel Ashamed by Sue Nicewander-Delany

Understanding False Guilt and Improper Shame ~ Cathy Mulvey

A. What is False Guilt and Improper Shame?

1. **FALSE GUILT:** This is when a person feels guilty or responsible for something that they have no control over. When guilt becomes warped like this, it argues that no forgiveness is possible.
2. **IMPROPER SHAME** (Sometimes called warped shame, misplaced shame, unhealthy shame.): Improper shame “will always tell a lie and it condemns a person for being bad even though the cause of shame is out of their control. When these lies are believed, it can do terrible damage causing hopelessness because he/she can’t fix (or prevent) the cause of shame. Most people who believe these lies cannot distinguish or discern the truth from lies, especially when they’re suffering.” (Rick Thomas Blog) In other words, they can’t distinguish true guilt from false guilt, and proper shame from improper shame. Our job is to help them distinguish the difference.

B. Common Examples of False Guilt and Improper Shame

1. **FALSE GUILT:**
 - A child might feel responsible for their parents’ divorce.
 - The same child feels guilt because his mom/dad is sad when dropping him off for the weekend.
 - People pleasers are often plagued with guilt when someone is disappointed or upset with them.
 - False guilt happens when they think they’ve broken a law that isn’t God’s. This is going to be found in cultural norms. Example: body shaming, mask shaming, or shame from others in the decision if one should or shouldn’t have holiday events.
 - The feeling of guilt over the death of a loved one.
 - For those who are sinned against, they often feel guilt as though it’s their fault. This is false guilt.
2. **IMPROPER SHAME:**
 - Self-loathing, self-image, self-worth - what it sounds like:
 - I want to be invisible
 - I hate myself
 - I fail to measure up, win approval, or achieve such and such
 - I’m worthless, disgusting, damaged goods, filthy, repulsive
 - I can’t do anything right
 - I don’t want to be exposed
 - My family would be better off if I wasn’t their mom or dad, etc.

These words and phrases almost always show up when there’s been trauma and suffering, but they can also be found in a person without an attached trauma. They carry false guilt and improper shame for their *human limitations and they measure their self-worth outside of a biblical context.*

What is God's Remedy?

Scripture character as an example: Jesus = Christ was rejected and despised, but one author points out that, "He rejected rejection and accepted His identity as defined by His Father." (Philippians 2:9-11) (Sue Nicewander-Delany, *Help! I Feel Ashamed*, p. 37)

- HUMAN LIMITATIONS DO NOT CONDEMN US IN THE SIGHT OF GOD³
 - Psalm 103:14, 17 *For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust. And that the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him.*
- OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST
 - New creation - 2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, He is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.*
 - God's purpose is deeper than removing our guilt. In the book *Untangling Emotions*, the author writes, "He wants to heal our identity by identifying with us, by becoming one with us. Restoration with God means being restored to our status as His beloved children." (Groves & Smith, *Untangling Emotions*, p. 204)
 - Ephesians 1-2 will also help a believer embrace their identity in Christ. A very simple but effective exercise is to take a piece of paper and fold it in half — lengthwise. Label one side "In Christ" and the other side "According to" or "by whom".
Start with reading Ephesians 1:3-8. Then have them write down every identity they receive in Christ. Just in five verses, they will find that they are eternally beloved, chosen, holy, adopted, forgiven, and redeemed. On the other side, have them write down what the verses say in, "according to who" or "by whom" that they receive this identity. With every Scripture it will point them to Christ or to The Father. The goal is that they learn that the character of God is the basis for our connection to Him, not our own worth, works, depravity, or human limitations.
- Lastly, TEACH them GOD'S EXTRAVAGANT GRACE²
 - Luke 15 - teach how extravagant God is in His forgiveness and grace.
 - v. 1-7 **Parable of the Lost Sheep** What happens when one sheep is found? God rejoices! How? What does Jesus compare this with?
 - v. 8-10 **Parable of the Lost Coin** A woman with ten coins loses one, what does she do? What does she do when she finds it? What does Jesus compare this with?
 - v. 11-31 **Parable of the Prodigal Son**

C. How to Help Someone Overcome Improper Shame, Example #1

1. Help them to start thinking biblically.
2. **Don't** counter their self talk or poor self image with good self talk or worthiness. This is not helpful, nor biblical.
 - They may hear what you're saying but they upload it with self-condemning ears.¹
 - We have to give them a biblical worldview and make much about how our worth is in Christ alone.
 - Encouraging better self talk will never help them overcome improper shame.

- Always remember that these men/women have been believing lies for a very long time, so expect some resistance and be patient with them as overcoming this type of improper shame will take more than one meeting, and more than one Bible exercise.

BEING SINNED AGAINST

Some examples of being sinned against is sexual, physical, emotional abuse (well, all the abuses), rejection, betrayal, constant criticism, and unfortunately so many more. You might here the same words as mentioned in the self-loathing:

- I want to be invisible
- I hate myself
- I fail to measure up, win approval, achieve such and such
- I'm worthless, disgusting, damaged goods, filthy, repulsive
- I can't do anything right, so I deserve it
- My family would be better off with another mom/dad, etc.

When a person is sinned against, they often take on the responsibility of the sin and its suffering as if it's their own fault. In other words, they carry the burden of sin as though it's their own. Their hopelessness often comes from their thought that they don't deserve God's mercy, grace, and cleansing; but rather they feel unclean and should live as an outcast, a self-imposed exile. We can all agree that this is warped shame, but they can't (or don't) distinguish it as warped.

What is God's Remedy?

- WE ARE NOT CONDEMNED FOR ANOTHER PERSON'S SIN AGAINST US
 - No matter how the person feels, Scripture teaches us that the sins of another do not condemn us in God's sight (Ezekiel 18:20).
 - They will not believe this so you will have to teach it again and again. Ask challenging questions like: *'Will you believe God more than you believe yourself?'* Based on their answer, ask them: *'Do you see that when you believe Him you are moving toward Him? Do you notice that when you don't believe Him you are moving away from Him?'*
- WE ARE MADE CLEAN (Ed Welch, *Shame Interrupted*, Ch. 8)
 - We can learn from studying the Old Testament that the unclean were untouchable and cut off from other people (sent outside of camp). This is often how someone feels when they've been sinned against. Unknowingly, they place themselves in the same category as the perpetrator because they've been in contact with something sinful. Do you hear the Old Testament system in this?
 - In the Old Testament system we can learn that the clean can be defiled, and the unclean can be purified. Your Life Group member can absolutely distinguish between being clean and unclean and they feel/think that being unclean means that they are unwelcome by God and always the community. This is not so — even in the Old Testament system! But God does have to do something for them to make them clean so that they can be in his presence. Gently ask them about

they time in God's throne room. Some won't go because they feel unclean, others want a covering on them in His presence.

- With the Mosaic sacrificial system, the Old Testament teaches that to re-enter the community they need to be cleansed, typically using an animal as an offering. Sounds barbaric to us, but the Old Testament is teaching us that there is a significant cost involved in moving from unclean to clean. We don't have to pay it, but it still had to be paid. Those that suffer under this improper shame need to be shown that the unclean can be made clean through the blood of Jesus! And through His sacrifice we are made holy, which brings closure to the matter of their uncleanness, and also their return to community.
- Hebrews 9 is useful to walk a person through the Mosaic system fo clean to unclean but that the old order is useless since it cannot deal effectively with sin. Hebrews 9 then ushers in the new order which is the blood of Christ.

Again quoting from the book, *Untangling Emotions*, the author writes, "On a mission of love from his Father, Jesus reclaimed us from the possession of the Accuser and made us his children. We are no longer defiled, less than what he created us to be. We are his." (Groves & Smith, *Untangling Emotions*, p. 205)

D. How to Help Someone Overcome Improper Shame, Example #2

1. Help them to start thinking biblically.
2. Because we tend to respond sinfully to being sinned against — your Life Group member has somehow responded sinfully, which only confirms their interpretation that it's their fault; therefore their guilt and shame are justified. They need your help to untangle and separate what is his/her sinful response from the perpetrator. So you help them see what he/she is responsible for (guilty of) and what they are not. Then lead them towards God through confession and repentance of their guilt and shame, but not he sin of the other.
3. Follow Jesus' oder of care: He Loves, He Listens, He Learns, He Instructs.¹ These folks have lived in exile and condemnation for many years, so when we start with instruction, it's not soothing to them. They need it, but it's painful and they fear the process. Be careful and go slow, model the grace and mercy of our Father. Empathy and careful approach are essential but so is personal change, meaning that empathy without a call to change does not help either. Encourage them to not listen to the voice inside that tells them to hide, withdrawal, or escape. Once you've built hope and trust then you being to help your Life Group member to think Biblically and then help them turn towards forgiveness of their perpetrator.

WHEN OTHERS LOOAD US WITH SHAME even though THERE IS NO PART OF DISHONORING GOD. AND, WHEN OUR SIN HAS BEEN DEALT WITH BIBLICALLY

- Parenting styles; homeschool or not
- Vaccine or not

- Our sin has been dealt with properly and is covered under the blood of Christ and yet others still hold it against us (divorce, adultery, being the perpetrator, abortion, etc.)
- Being shamed because of following Jesus

What is God's Remedy?

- JESUS
 - Isaiah 53:3 They called him a winebibber and a glutton. They called him a temple destroyer, a hypocrite. He healed others but he can't heal himself. Their goal was to load Jesus with a shame that wasn't his to bear.⁵
- PAUL
 - They called him mad when he defended himself in court. They called him an enemy of the Jewish customs, and a breaker of Mosaic law. They said that he taught that you should sin because grace may abound. All this to load him with a shame that was not his to bear.⁵
- BELIEVING THE PROMISES OF GOD
 - Isaiah 45:17 *But Israel will be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you will never be put to shame or disgraced, to ages everlasting.*

E. How to Help Someone Overcome Improper Shame, Example #3

1. Help them to start thinking biblically.
2. Continue to take them to the Gospel of Christ. Use the *Gospel Primer* booklet to help them through this improper shame.
3. Identify God's promises from the Word that relate specifically to the improper shame. Ask them to teach it back. Ask them how they will apply it to their situation.

Resources Used

¹Rick Thomas' Blog, <https://rickthomas.net/blog/>

²*Untangling Emotions* by J. Alasdair Groves & Smith T. Smith

³*Help! I Feel Ashamed* by Sue Nicewander-Delany

⁴*Shame Interrupted* by Ed Welch

⁵Desiring God Blog, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles>