



TIME OF GRACE®

How to Deal With Shame

Study Notes

Summary

Shame is the unshakable feeling that we don't belong. It is the painful feeling, caused by our past, that tempts us to run away from God and his people in the present. Shame can be tied to something done to us, something we have done, or something we have continued to do. Often it is connected with abuse, sexual brokenness, or addiction. So how do you deal with that? You remember that believing makes you belong, that trusting in Jesus is the way to be unashamed, to be included, to know that there is a place for you.

- Four powerful types of shame: _____, _____, _____, _____.
- How do you deal? A: Be _____.
- **James 6:15:** Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.
- **1 Corinthians 6:5:** I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?
- **Mark 8:38:** If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.
- **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.
- **Hebrews 11:16:** Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.
- **Hebrews 2:11:** So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.
- **Romans 10:11:** As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Points to Ponder

1. Evaluate: For a church to properly deal with shame, the pastors need to talk regularly about *everything*.
2. Agree/Disagree: It is impossible to carry out God's beautiful commands to "pray for one another," "encourage one another," and "bear one another's burdens" if shame is causing us to keep secrets. If you agree, what could you do personally to deal with shame in your circle of friends?
3. "Anyone who believes in [Jesus] will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:11). What is your favorite word in that passage? Why?
4. Do you have an intentional plan to give a set percentage of your income to the poor and to the spread of the gospel? If not, don't be ashamed to ask another Christian how joyful giving works.
5. Can you think of someone who believes they are too broken to belong in a church? Share this message with them and follow up with an invitation to watch next Sunday's program.

Homework for Next Week

Read Mark 10:17-27.

Time of Grace Ministry
How to Deal with Shame

James 6:15; 1 Corinthians 6:5; Mark 8:38; Hebrews 12:2; Hebrews 11:16
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I had this really brilliant plan. I had been meeting people in different areas of my life, and I noticed that all these people had something, you know, really big and really difficult in their life. There was drug addiction, there was alcoholism, there was pornography, there was sexual sin, there was adultery, there were problems in marriage, and I thought to myself, what would happen if I could get all these people in the same room, and we could open a Bible, and we could talk about God and we could talk about life.

Like, I know all these people well enough that none of us are saints. We've all got baggage, we all got stuff, so there's no one to impress. We can just be real before each other, before God, that was my plan. And it didn't work. I invited the people. And the people came to the study. We opened the Bible and talked about Jesus. We prayed for each other and talked about the ups and the downs. But do you know what never came up? The stuff. It wasn't my place to betray anyone's confidence or reveal a secret that someone had told the pastor, but week after week, I just kept thinking to myself, come on. Come on. Just say it. Because once you say it, she's going to say it, and once you say it, he's going to say, "Me too," and this is going to be the best Bible study ever. But they didn't say it. Here's the thing. Shame is really hard in the church. I'm not sure what it all is, but I have a hunch it's this.

In the church, we have incredibly high moral standards. All right, we love the teachings of Jesus, we love what he said about self-control, and generosity, about love and about purity. We love the biblical teaching on love and respect and unity and healthy families, and I think because we push that up so high, and rightly so, that when people like you and like me fall short of that standard, we instinctively feel shame. Like we're not living up to it, we're not being the good church people, the holy Christian people, and so, we kind of keep it quiet, and we pray about it, and we battle it by ourselves, and we keep our secrets, and we wonder deep down if we belong.

So today, I have one big goal. I don't think I'm going to persuade all of you. But my goal is to persuade as many of you as I can to cross the line. To take a deep breath and show you the beautiful result of what happens when a Christian community or just a Christian family can learn how to deal with shame. It will not be easy. It will be terrifying. For some of you, it will be the scariest thing you've ever, ever done in a church. Don't worry, I'm not passing a microphone around by the end of the service, but I hope I can persuade you today to deal with shame as a community of people. Because communities of people are the only way to deal with shame.

So, if you're ready to dive into that deep end, let me start with this. While a lot of things can make us feel embarrassed or humiliated or ashamed, I think there are four particular things in my experience, in the church that people don't want to talk about. So, if you're watching at home taking notes, if you're taking notes in your program here at church, I'd love for you to write these four things down.

The first very powerful type of shame that I have seen is legal shame. When your sin and transgressions have crossed a legal line, it can be really tough to talk about. If you just don't have a name, but in your past you've had a number, from having sat behind bars, if you're applying for an apartment, if you're going to go out on a first date, and someone could look up your legal history on the Internet, and you're just hoping deep down they don't find out that part of your past. If you're worried about what you're going to wear to church because you got the ankle bracelet, if your parole officer texts you and you're embarrassed to tell your friends who it is, there can be a deep sense of shame if we have crossed a legal line. Especially if the crime we've committed has hurt other people, if it's embarrassed our family, if it made us miss our son's birthday or a really big moment, it is very easy to feel shame. I mean, how many church services have you been to where someone talks about being in prison, or jail, or a loved one who is. That's just stuff that we generally don't talk about. But we need to.

And not just that, but secondly, we need to talk about chemical shame. If your struggle spiritually has been with a chemical substance, with alcohol, with pills, with narcotics, with drugs, that is something we need to talk about. I've got to tell you, in our community, and in our church community, this is everywhere. But it's tough to bring up. I mean, if you can't have a glass of wine with the ladies from church like the other normies do, because you know that one's going to turn into seven, that's tough to admit. If friends are going out afterwards for pizza and beer, and you just know that you can't walk into a bar because you know where that's going to go, that's tough to confess. If you go to Bible study and all that week you've been struggling taking pills that you really don't need and shouldn't have been prescribed, that's tough to talk about. And when you've been high and it wasn't just back in college with a little weed, but it was like last weekend and it was something more than that, if you've tried coke, if you've hit up heroin, if you've done meth, that's tough to talk about in church. People start to wonder if you've been down that road, what you could do if you got hooked again. And they might take a step away and you would feel shame.

And if all that weren't enough, number three, there's relational shame. If your family history, past or present, is messy, you might feel relational shame. I actually notice this all the time when divorce happens in our church. Like, a couple is a huge part of our spiritual community, things get off-track, they separate, they divorce, and the time they most need to be here for encouragement, support, the time when they're most broken and wounded is the time they don't even want to come. Right, because when someone says, how have you been? How's your husband? And so, when you've been through a divorce or two, when your mom and dad weren't the perfect couple, maybe they weren't even a couple. When you grew up with a step-this, and a step-that, and dad's girlfriend, and mom's other boyfriend, and you come to church where it's supposed to be, you know, man and wife, and love and respect and beautiful kids, baptized and confirmed. It's tough when you don't come from a great family. And so, we feel shame. Some

of those church families that, you know, come in their coordinated church outfits, and they got the family trips to Florida with the matching neon t-shirts, and you just know, that's not how I grew up. That's not my family. We barely talk to each other. And you kind of feel like you don't belong.

And then, there's the worst shame of all. It's a shame that I'm not sure existed in the first-century with the Greeks and the Romans, but in the 21st century with the Americans, it absolutely does. There's legal, there's chemical, there's relational, and can you guess the last blank? There's sexual shame. You know, the Bible pretty frequently talks about orgies, lust, prostitution, and the like, but when's the last time you had coffee with the ladies from church and talked about that? And so, if lust is your struggle, if you're hooked on porn, if you compulsively masturbate, when's the last time someone prayed for you for that? If you've lost track of the number of sexual partners you've had, or you can count exactly how many sexual partners you've had, when's the last time someone helped you with that? If you know what it's like to pay a prostitute, to call a hotline, to know the feeling of walking into the parking lot after having been in a strip club, how do you talk about that?

Here's what you should know. All the stuff I just talked about has happened in our church. You don't have to be a megachurch with 10,000 attendees, this stuff happens all the time in our church, but you might not have known it, and the reason is shame. And that's why today, I want to help you deal with shame. And to do so, I looked up every single passage in the Bible that uses the word shame, shamed, or ashamed, and you know what I found out? It's really complicated. I actually had a sermon I was going to share with you today. I trashed the entire thing, and wrote a second one. It's really a complex issue to talk about shame and belonging and me and you and you and God and me and the world and the world and God, and it actually got so muddled and complex, I threw that one out.

So today, instead of giving you the whole biblical teaching on shame, I want to just make one main point. If you're taking notes, here's the biggest thing I learned from God's word about shame. Is that your Heavenly Father who adores you as his kids, says this. "Be ashamed temporarily." The world would say, you know the way that we should deal with shame, is we should all just be okay, you're okay, I'm okay, we're all good, nobody's perfect. No shame. Everyone's welcome here. You belong. But the Bible wouldn't say that. The Bible instead says this. "Be ashamed temporarily."

Let me prove it to you. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah preached to a bunch of people who looked pretty religious. They would come to church, they would say their prayers, they would offer their sacrifices, but then, they would go and they would not love the poor, and their courts were not places of justice and fairness, and people who had more money were getting away with murder, and people went to church the next Sunday because they belonged with God, right? And Jeremiah in Jeremiah 6 said these words. "Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush." Jeremiah said that blushing is sometimes a blessing. When you can do something detestable, something shameful, and just smile up at God, that's not a sign of spiritual health, but a major red flag. If you're into church lingo, this is what we call living in sin, or a life that lacks repentance.

When we do something that God detests, and don't feel shame, humiliation, or embarrassment about it, Jeremiah says, they have no shame at all. Not a good thing, that's the bad thing.

And that's why if you jump ahead to the New Testament, the apostle Paul actually used the power of shame to correct a wayward church. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul started a church in the Greek city of Corinth, and after he left, another pastor came to shepherd the church, and Paul heard this rumor that two members of the church were dragging each other to court. Like, they couldn't work it out, and I don't know, he said this, and the other guy said that, and they dug in their heels, and they lawyered up, and they went to court and when Paul heard about this, do you know what he said? You should be ashamed. We're supposed to be the people that will sacrifice everything because we have God. You're dragging this drama out in front of a world that doesn't even believe in Jesus? And Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 6, he says, "I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there's nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?"

There's this young woman from our church who got engaged, and the guy that she was in love with was not a Christian, and he was not ashamed of any of it. And so, they came into my office to talk, and you know, I don't expect everyone to be Christians, and so, I was trying to get to know him, and trying to make some small talk, and I said to him, "So, what do you like to do?" And he smirked back at the pastor and he said, "Strip clubs." And before he and I had a few words, I glanced over at his fiancé and felt so bad for her. Like, do people who are engaged struggle with sexual sin? For sure. Do some even struggle so much they end up in a strip club? For sure. But the fact that you don't just struggle with that, or you didn't just do that, but you like doing that, without blushing embarrassment, I thought to myself, how in the world is this going to work? And soon after they left my office, and through my office window, I could see them by their car, and they're far enough away that I couldn't hear their conversation, but I just remember, she was standing there like this. And he was doing all the talking. And I thought to myself, without shame, it is impossible for a relationship to survive.

And that's why I want to say to you today, be ashamed. If you choose something before God, be ashamed. If when you're stressed, you turn to a drug, to a bottle, to a click, to a purchase, to work, to numbing yourself with whatever, if that's your functional savior, feel that. So, learn to blush. Take seriously the goodness, the holiness, and the commands of God. And be ashamed. Temporarily. I've got to tell you, if Christianity was about long-term shame, I'd bounce. If I came to church and some pastor made me feel bad in the beginning, in the middle, and the end, I wouldn't come back. But the best news I have for you is that God allows us to feel shame, but not for long. He allows us to cry tears of repentance, but soon, he wipes them away. Some of you know that a part of my story is an addiction. For many years, I gave into a sexual sin, pornography, and did not turn away from it, and I hid it, and I covered it up, until one day, I had a really good friend, and I was so reluctant, but finally, I said it. And he did not put me to shame. In one of the most important moments of my spiritual story, there was a guy who acted a lot like God, and made sure that my remorse did not remain.

But he took my shame to the only place where shame can really be dealt with, a cross where Jesus bled. You see, this is what the Christian faith is all about. We come to God in remorse,

feeling like we don't belong, and he does the craziest thing, and assures us that we do. Hasn't he been doing that since the start? Let me show you a great picture. When I was at the MET, that famous museum in New York City, a few years ago, I took this picture. It's from the famous sculptor, Rodan. Remember, he's the guy that did "The Thinker". And he also crafted in bronze Adam and Eve ashamed. This is his depiction of Eve after her sin. She buries her head in her bronze arms. If you've ever read the first three pages of the Bible, you've heard this story. Adam and Eve, they sin against God, and they're so ashamed that they run and they hide, they're naked, and exposed. But do you know what God did? He found them, he covered their shame, and he gave them a promise about Jesus. He said to the devil, "No, no, no. You did it. But not for long. You made my kids run and hide, but not forever. You separated them from me, but I'm not going to let that happen," and God in that moment gave the first shamed people the antidote for shame. He promised the Savior to come, one born of a woman who would crush the shame giver's head, which is exactly what he did.

I love this passage from the Book of Hebrews, speaking of Jesus, it says: "For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, and he sat down at the right-hand of God." The reason Jesus died like that instead of peacefully in his sleep was so that you and I wouldn't have to live with shame. All the humiliation, the embarrassment, the feeling of not belonging, he wanted to drag it there to an old, rugged cross, and scorn it, mock it, nail it, and leave it behind. That Jesus so badly wanted joy for you that he was willing to do that. And before his last breath, he said, "It's finished." It's dealt with. It's done.

Let me prove it, three passages. Here's the first one. "Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God." You ever notice these days when some celebrity really messes up morally? When he tweets something really stupid, or they find something in her high school yearbook, everyone takes a step back. Every sponsor cuts ties, every director chops them from the movie. God's not like that. He doesn't cancel us; he doesn't take a step back. I love this. God himself, a holy, perfect God, is not ashamed, he's not embarrassed, to be called their God. When you say that's my God, that's my Savior, he's not like -- no. He says, "Yes, I am." I'm a child of God, we sing here in church. In my Father's house, there is a place for me. With my history, my past, your story, there's a place for you, too. And when you see the Father's face, Jesus shows up. And when the Holy Angels gather around, Jesus doesn't take a step back from you. No, look at Hebrews 2. It says: "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." It's my family. Jesus isn't taking the Christmas card and chopping and scaling it down so your face isn't in it. He sends it to everyone he knows.

I'm not ashamed that these are my people. I'm Christ and these are Christians. And I'm not embarrassed to belong to them. And so, the Book of Romans leaves us with this incredible promise. "Anyone who believes in Jesus will never be put to shame." Never. Through Jesus, we're cleansed, we're made holy, we run out of the grave of secrecy and we admit, here's what I did. Here's who I've been, but God is not ashamed. Yeah, yeah, I hate it, I did that. But I love it, because he did this. And so, I'm not going to hide. I'm not going to fake it. I'm done with image management; I'm done with trying to impress or prove that I'm better than you might think I am. Here's the sinner that I am. And here's the saint that he made me to be.

And so, week after week and day after day, we lift up the cross of Jesus, we cling and praise the blood of Jesus because in him, we will never, ever, ever be put to shame. So, maybe next time the Bible study will work. Maybe I'll invite you. And you'll remember this. And you'll say, so, I need help with -- and he'll say, "Me, too." And he'll say, "I've been there." And she'll say, "I'll pray." And we'll become the kind of church that Jesus always wanted. A kind of people that feel shame, but not for long. God, make it so. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you so much. I cannot imagine if Christianity was just about being good. Being better, or trying harder. Thank you that you scorned our shame when you brought our sin to the cross. Thank you, God, that a guy like me is holy in the eyes of a perfect God, and everyone who believes in you is exactly the same. Thank you, God, that we don't have to hide. Thank you that this church is not a competition. Thank you, Lord, that this isn't about impressing each other, thank you that there's no score board in the lobby, there's nothing to do with this. We're just here as struggling sinners who have been made holy by the blood of Christ.

And so, I pray God, that we could help each other, that we could bear real burdens, pray for real struggles, and encourage each other in real battles. Help this be the place where convicts come, felons. Let this be the place that people show up the day after the divorce is final. Let this be the place that people come on Sunday after getting high on Friday. God, let this be the place. And let us be the people that rid us of pride of the holier-than-thou spirit. Instead, clothe us with compassion, just like you clothed us with the righteousness of your son.

Thank you God for those who taught us about grace. Thank you for the inheritance of mercy that we have and a no-strings-attached love in the Gospel. We love you God and we want to love each other well, so help us learn how to deal with shame. We pray this, for your glory and for the good of our spiritual home. And all God's people who wanted this to be true, they joined their voices and they said, Amen.