

Freedom

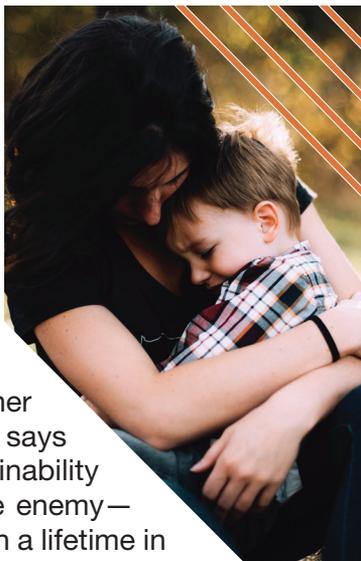


FROM SHAME

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WE ALL HAVE EXPERIENCED shame at one time or another, but for many in our world today, it is a lifelong companion. Even for those of us who have surrendered our lives to the Lord, shame often lurks in the shadows, waiting to shipwreck faith, destroy relationships and ruin lives. For many, that shame is so entrenched that the love they seek, the identity that is theirs in Christ, remains just beyond their grasp. Rather than believing the truth of who God says they are, they are trapped by their inability to forgive themselves. The lie of the enemy—that they are unforgivable—can mean a lifetime in bondage to shame.



The Meaning of Shame

Merriam-Webster calls shame “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety” or “a condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute.” The Bible uses at least ten different words over 300 times to refer to shame, many of them referring to a collective shame that falls on those who dishonor the name of God by refusing to follow Him. But Paul often reminds his readers that Jesus (Yeshua) gave little thought to His own pain, humiliation and disgrace in order to absolve them of their guilt and cleanse them of their shame.

Shame Versus Guilt

The Bible also speaks often of shame’s cousin, guilt. Although there is a family resemblance, recognizing the differences can keep the deceiving nature of guilt from leading us into the trap of shame. Guilt appears over 180 times in Scripture and is represented by several different words. *Awah* means to deviate from the way while *asam* refers to an offense committed against God. There are additional words in both Hebrew and Greek that refer to this concept, often relating to that vague sense of guilt that, if you are like me, you have experienced in your life. It’s that feeling in the pit of your stomach which tells you that you have done something wrong. It may

have been a minor infraction or a serious sin. Or if you have grown up with critical parents or teachers, you might feel guilty when you have done nothing wrong at all. Such guilt can become a lifelong habit that easily devolves into crippling shame.

Guilt, however, we can deal with. And that is what separates it from shame. Paul calls it “*godly sorrow*” (2 Cor. 7:11 NIV). It’s what convicts us of our sin. Guilt tells us that we have taken a specific action that transgressed God’s instruction. We have done something bad, but it leads us to repentance, and then to freedom. Guilt properly dealt with strengthens us as believers.

Shame, on the other hand, offers no such path to freedom. It is not about an act for which we can seek forgiveness. It is not conviction but rather condemnation. Shame doesn’t tell us we have done something bad—it tells us we *are* something bad. Guilt brings us to repentance and releases us to experience the joy of the Lord, the wonder of His love and the fellowship of our community. Shame imprisons us and disconnects us from other believers. Guilt says, “I have done something wrong,” and shame replies, “Yes, you are a bad person, and you need to hide.”

In the Beginning

Adam and Eve were the personification of purity and innocence, living in total serenity in a garden of incomprehensible beauty. Imagine hearts that were totally devoid of envy, minds that had never had an evil thought and lips that had never spoken ill of anyone or anything. They were absolutely and perfectly guiltless, with no idea that evil existed. Then they believed the lie. They disobeyed one of God’s specific instructions. Scripture says their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. *Ayin*, the Hebrew word for eye, can actually mean mental and spiritual faculties, and *yada*, the word translated “knew,” refers to knowledge gained only through experience.



In an instant, that perfect innocence was shattered, those eyes were blinded with visions of ugliness and their minds filled with vile thoughts. Violence overwhelmed their hearts, as their mental and spiritual faculties were

inundated with the reality of evil. In one crushing, devastating moment, they *experienced* evil. And they were ashamed—not just because they had disobeyed God, but because of what they had seen, heard and experienced. They now stood uncovered and exposed; their innocence and purity gone, replaced by remorse and shame, and they hid.

Although our actions are not likely to have an effect like Eve’s decision, we may have chosen to do the one thing God told us not to do. In so doing, our innocence was shattered, our purity lost, replaced with remorse and shame. We experienced evil, and we’ve been hiding.

The Evil of Envy

Joseph’s brothers hated him. The book of Genesis tells us that they despised him because he was their father’s favorite, chosen to inherit the headship of the family, even though he was nearly the youngest. He followed them around, wearing that fancy coat his father had given him, reporting back to dad on their every movement. When the opportunity to be rid of him presented itself, they couldn’t resist. They stripped him naked, threw him in a pit and eventually sold him into slavery. Perhaps even worse was the pain they inflicted on their father when they covered Joseph’s torn coat with blood and told Jacob that his son had been devoured by a wild animal. For years, their father lived in a state of mourning while the brothers bore their guilt that turned to shame. When famine struck and the boys were sent to Egypt to buy food, their world was turned upside down when they found Joseph, alive and well. Joseph forgave them, but the brothers could not shake their shame. They could not believe that Joseph’s forgiveness was real because they knew that they were unforgivable.

Sometimes, without thought, we choose to do or say something that will hurt someone else, acting out of anger or jealousy. Or we tell a lie—a





big one—that causes someone else real pain. We feel convicted, but we don't repent. We bear the guilt, and it turns to shame. And we hide.

A Man after God's Heart

God says that David was a man after His own heart. He was the greatest of Israel's kings, and his name appears in the lineage of the Messiah. He was a passionate leader, a fighter, a poet and a musician, a man of godly integrity. Yet one spring evening, from the balcony of his Jerusalem palace, he was overcome with lust when he saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop. His desire for her was so all-consuming that he devised a plan to position her husband on the battlefield where he was certain to be killed. It worked, which made David a murderer in addition to an adulterer. Through the prophet Nathan, God reminded David of his guilt and the shame that he had been hiding.

One of the worst of David's many transgressions was his blatant abuse of power. We may not be responsible for someone's death, but sometimes it is easy to let power get the best of us. We can be vain, inconsiderate, even abusive to those over whom we have authority. On the other hand, we may have been coerced or manipulated by someone in authority over us, victimized by someone who should have had our best interests at heart. Abusing power is wrong and should make us feel guilty. Being abused by someone in power, however, can only result in shame. And we will hide.

Healing in His Wings

We don't know a lot about the woman with the issue of blood, only that she had been sick for 12 years (see Matt. 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34 and Luke 8:43–48). The purity restrictions that God had put in place for ancient Israel did not allow a woman

who was bleeding to interact with or touch another person until her bleeding stopped. That meant women spent part of each month in complete isolation until their bleeding was over and they could reenter community life. This woman had been isolated for 12 years with no interaction with anyone but an occasional doctor, for fear of making others ritually unclean. No touching, no hugging—only loneliness that certainly eventually turned to shame.

The sages of Israel had taught her that the Messiah was coming, and when He did, He would bring healing even to those who touched just the corner of His cloak. She knew if this Jesus (Yeshua) she had heard about was in fact the Messiah, she would be healed if she could only touch His garment. Risking her life, she made her way through the crowd, trying desperately not to touch anyone, and when at last she was able to touch Him, she was healed immediately. Freedom! But her shame came crashing down around her again when Jesus turned and asked, “*Who touched me?*” Quaking in fear, her shame exposed, she fell before Him, expecting only the worst. But Jesus did not intend to condemn her, only to cleanse her of her shame and send her forth with joy and thanksgiving.

Sometimes we may feel shamed by situations that are not of our own making. We’ve done nothing wrong, but our situation isolates us from others and creates the perfect opportunity for the enemy to lie to us. He likes nothing better than to convince us that we are somehow deficient, we don’t measure up, we can’t be part of the community. We allow our circumstances to define us, and we hide.

What Gives Shame its Power



Regardless of the source, you may have been left with a feeling of humiliation or worthlessness; a sense that what you have done, or what has been done to you, makes you a pariah. And your first reaction was to hide. The last thing you want is to be exposed and rejected again, to let others see your failures and weaknesses. As a Christian, the first step in breaking the power of shame is to embrace the fact that part of the

work of Jesus (Yeshua) on the cross was to restore you to wholeness, scrub the stains from your heart and tell you who you are: You are His. He was hated, dogged by those who would kill Him; publicly shamed, spat upon, beaten, stripped and crucified—the most humiliating death possible. But He “thought little” of the shame because of His love for you. If you must hide, make Him your secret place. Open your wounds, talk to Him about your shame and allow Him to heal you.



Make His word your defense. Memorize Scriptures like 1 John 1:9, Micah 7:19, Ephesians 5:25–26, Hebrews 4:15–16 and Isaiah 50:7. Each time the enemy tries to convince you that you are worthless, follow Jesus’ example and respond with the words of God. Speak them out loud, as often as you must, until the enemy retreats.

When your heart is telling you that you have done something bad, remember that guilt is the right reaction. Repent immediately, and believe that you have been forgiven. But when it tells you that you are something bad, worthless or unforgivable, pull out those Scriptures and tell your heart that it is mistaken.

As far as the east is from the west, the Bible says, has He removed our sins (and our shame) from us (Ps. 103:12). Not because of what we have or haven’t done, or who we are or aren’t, but because of who He is and His extravagant grace and goodness. There is no God like our God, no love like His love, no forgiveness, cleansing or restoration like that which He offers. So come out of hiding and begin the journey to freedom. Reading Romans 8:31–39 is a good place to start.



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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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