

## Week 2 – Spiritual Abuse – Shame Systems

Power is always at the source of every conflict, every control mechanism and every abuse issue. Power is at the heart of parent-child conflict, husband-wife argument, and just about every war that has been fought.

Children are born and at just a few weeks, they raise their arms to their parents while lying in bed. We see that as communication and it is...it says, "Meet my needs." In this case, the powerless is using the only method he or she has to ask one more powerful to meet his or her needs. We all learn how to do this. And we willingly meet loved one's needs because we love them. So when does this move from love to abuse, from service to power grabbing?

Lets look at each of our needs for power: We might call it "empowerment" or "self-actualization" – but we all struggle with who will control our lives. Interestingly, when we marry, we willingly give up part of the power of our own lives and give it to another person. When we have children, we surrender power or control over parts of our lives to give them to our children's needs. The challenge is that there is a slow creep into our lives of that insatiable desire to not just control our own lives, both others as well. Every one of us, whether with our peers, parents or our children...we perform a variety of ploys to get our way and/or to get others to do our bidding.

Some of it is blatant manipulation, other times it is more subtle. We may use emotional blackmail, guilt, brute power, humiliation, shame, bargaining, or even threats. Children become quite adept at using these tools as well, sometimes they learn them by watching their parents. Other times, they simply develop them through trial and error because they finally found something that works. Power games begin with children at about 12-15 months of age and really escalate, especially when the child hits around 24 months...or as most parents call it, the "terrible two's."

With teenagers, their behavior is less about rebellion and more a statement about the desire to become or exercise independence. Teens find that they desire more and more control over their own lives as they begin to grow adult brains and bodies, and their parents try to hold them back, knowing what a terrible quagmire adult life is. It seems that we are in a hurry to grow up until we get there and then we wish we could return to our youth.

We are speaking here today and last week about the abuse of power– in this case, religious abuse which has at its root a subtle motive of disempowering someone else, of reducing their dependency upon God and increasing their dependency upon someone or something else. Abuse is damaging. And as in every form of abuse, there is a natural side to it as well as a religious side. Today we will examine something called shame.

## Outline:

1. *Shame – what it is/isn't*
2. *Shame – where did it come from?*
3. *Shame – what does it do, how does it happen, what it feels like, who does it.*
4. *Shame – where is the cure?*

### “Why do I feel like Hiding?” – (Genesis 3) – Shame

The Bible speaks about shame from beginning to end. I was surprised to find in the concordance that there were six times as many references to shame as to guilt in the Scriptures. The first time we find it in the bible, we find it in Genesis 2:25, and surprisingly, we find it mentioned as something missing from the lives of the first man and woman.

#### [Ge 2:25](#) - [Show Context](#)

*“Now, although Adam and his wife were both naked, neither of them felt any **shame**.”*

In it's simplest form, shame can mean the strong feeling of exposure, embarrassment, humiliation, or disgrace. The Greek word for Shame is a very unique word.

It is the word “Entropy.”

If you are familiar with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics, Entropy is a word that describes the chaos that results from the absence of an outside force working, literally, the decay or falling apart of something, the very disorganizing of something once organized.

In fact, the word Entropy is formed from two greek words, **en** and **tropy**. **En** means “in” and **tropy** means to turn. Together, they mean to turn or collapse inward. Interestingly, psychologists describe depression as “a turning inward.”

Let's get a picture of the concept of shame in the third chapter of Genesis.

Genesis 3:6-13 *“The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too. At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt **shame** at their nakedness. So they strung fig leaves together around their hips to cover themselves. Toward evening they heard the LORD God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The LORD God called to Adam, “Where are you?” He replied, “I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.” “Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten the fruit I commanded you not to eat?” “Yes,” Adam admitted, “but it was the woman*

*you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "How could you do such a thing?" "The serpent tricked me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."*

1. You can see that now there is the experience of Shame.
  - a. It is the emotional experience of recognizing guilt.
  - b. Shame can be from our own action of guilt – a feeling we have from having violated and broken our relationships.
  - c. Shame can be imposed by self or others.
  - d. Shame has the power of driving me inward.
2. Guilt is commonly regarded as related to actions (we feel guilty for what we do)
  - a. And shame is related to emotions (we are ashamed of who we are).
  - b. However, guilt is not understood “simply as an external violation of God’s law, but also as an internal embarrassment and mortification.
  - c. As for Adam and Eve, the self was stricken before God. It was not simply that they had done something wrong; they were also wrong in themselves.
  - d. Shame reveals a gnawing feeling that something is wrong with me.
  - e. I see my sin exposed—I deserve to be rejected by God and cast away from His presence.”
    - i. Oh, what a painful feeling of rupture, of not-rightness!
    - ii. In the grips of an intense feeling of shame, we can hardly even stand to look at ourselves, at the exposure of our shortcomings.
  - f. Shame not only makes us hide from God, and each other, but we hide our shamed state from ourselves by a myriad of smoke screens.
  - g. Shame is a powerful, social emotion.
    - i. It is learned as we learn the expectations and standards imposed upon us by others, and amplified as we develop expectations of ourselves.
    - ii. Parenting that attempts to change child behavior through disapproval and/or humiliation may well be received by the child as global inferences about the self rather than the (perhaps) intended parental reactions to specific behavior.
      1. Because Shame is a social emotion, it has its most profound effects upon the victim when shaming (embarrassing, humiliation, disgracing) occurs in public, where that persons’ peers or support group might be.
      2. The emotion called shame in its mildest form it is simple embarrassment; in its most potent form, self-loathing.
      3. All shame feels the same--it makes us want to hide or withdraw.
      4. It makes us blush, bow our heads, avoid eye contact, become defensive.
      5. It is a sense of disconnection from someone else
  - h. Shame shouldn’t be confused with guilt. Look up the word "guilt" in the dictionary, and you will find that its primary, historic meaning is "the fact of having done something wrong," whereas "shame" is an emotion that is experienced.

- i. "**Guilt**" is an issue of status and standing. In a courtroom it doesn't matter what the defendant is feeling--the only thing that matters is whether he or she is guilty or innocent. "Guilty" means you've actually done something wrong; in spiritual terms, you've sinned.
      1. Guilt is an emotional indication of WRONG actions or attitudes. It is the flare that goes off that says "I did something wrong and I feel terrible about it."
      2. Guilt and shame are different, though the two are easily confused because both make us feel so terrible about ourselves. Guilt, however, is about things we have done that we regret because of the harm they caused.
      - 3.
3. Lets look at the **Shame Response**: The shame response to the experience of rejection is a strong, physiological response. The more intense it is, the more painful it is.
  - a. The intensity of the shame response determines what follows.
    - i. One may become angry and direct that anger outward.
    - ii. When anger is directed inward, it may lead to a vicious cycle of self-hatred, in which the person becomes isolated and withdrawn in order to avoid the possibility of further rejection.
    - iii. A slight rejection may release the pent up pain associated with previous, painful experiences of rejection.
  - b. You and I need to understand how painful, acts of rejection are in our society, and how people are seriously wounded by them,.
    - i. Adults have enormous power to behave in ways that cause children to experience rejection and intense physical pain.
    - ii.
    - iii.
4. When does shame begin and what is healthy shame?
  - a. Our sense of shame appears around the age of two.
  - b. We learn the distinction that certain things are private, such as our hygienic activities—we learn boundaries.
  - c. It is necessary to have the feeling of shame if one is to be truly human..
  - d. Shame tells us of our limits.
  - e. Shame keeps us in our human boundaries, letting us know we can and will make mistakes, and that we need help.
  - f. Our shame tells us we are not God.
  - g. Healthy shame is the psychological foundation of humility.
  - h. Healthy shame is modeled by the Prodigal Son. That shame says, "I have fallen from grace, ungrateful wretch that I am. I deserve to be rejected by God, but He is full of mercy and loving-kindness. I trust in His mercy, and dare to pray to Him with hope!"
5. In other words, healthy shame still remembers that we are God's creation and that He loves us. We need cleansing and healing, we need rebirth not discarding.

- a. Shame motivates people to do something or not do others.
  - b. .
6. But...in large doses, shame becomes poisonous.
- a. Called **Toxic shame** – it is experienced as the all pervasive sense that I am flawed and defective as a human being.
  - b. Toxic shame is no longer an emotion that signals our limits, it is a state of being, a core identity.
  - c. Shame can become a destructive signal about you and your worth. It is the belief that you are bad, defective or worthless as a person.
    - i. Toxic shame gives you a sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being.
  - d. Toxic shame is a rupture of the self with the self.
    - i. It is like internal bleeding.
    - ii. Exposure to oneself lies at the heart of toxic shame.
    - iii. A person who carries toxic shame will guard against exposing his inner self to others, but more significantly, he will guard against exposing himself to himself.
  - e. Toxic shame is so excruciating because it is the painful exposure of the believed failure of self to the self.
    - i. Rather than telling us that we need correction, it tells us that we are incorrigible.
    - ii. It is that shamed sense of self which we constantly seek to drown out—the feeling is irrational and so there is no way to resolve it.
    - iii. For example, if I feel rationally ashamed and guilty because of a thoughtless remark, that will prompt me to seek forgiveness and to watch my tongue in the future.
    - iv. The guilt is resolved by making amends, and the shame is resolved by a firm decision not to repeat that sin.
    - v. But toxic shame says, “Don’t look at me—I’m a mistake!
      - 1. I have a hole in my soul and I should never have been born.
      - 2. If people really knew how I was inside, they would hate and reject me.”
      - 3. Unhealthy shame makes us feel that we have a defect that others do not share.
      - 4. That we have a hopelessly bad nature that cannot be fixed, cured, or changed.
  - f. The truth is close however...we do have a nature that cannot be cured...it can only be fixed by the work of the cross of Jesus Christ, where our old nature is put to death and we receive a new nature in the person of Jesus. The bible calls it being born again.
  - g. Psychologists spend a great deal of time trying to fix the effects of unhealthy shame in our lives. It may be shame that was imposed on us by others, or it may simply be the shame we have developed as the result of our sin.
    - i. None-the-less, it cannot be fixed by simply polishing up the outside of ourselves to become more presentable.
    - ii. Something radical inside must occur to change the very root where these beliefs, feelings and experiences exist.

- h. Shame is about who we are. It is more fundamental and harder to cleanse than guilt -- we can find atonement for our actions, but we cannot readily change who we are
  - i. Thus why Jesus paid not only the price for our sin (atonement) or covering.
  - ii. But also makes us a brand new creature! He changes who we are! When we don't like ourselves because of what we have done and who we have become, we are at the crossroads of life, where the opportunity to find a new start is given to us.

7. Types of Shame:

- a. **Moral Shame** is that appropriate sense of remorse or regret that we have when we truly have done something wrong. It is the God-given conscience telling us we have sinned, and we react best to it when we swallow hard, confess, and seek reconnection (see Psalm 34). It humbles us when we realize we've lied, or slandered, or cheated.
- b. **Imposed Shame** is a sense of disgrace or devaluation put on someone who doesn't deserve it. Some people are great imposers of shame.
  - i. In marriage it is the spouse who spews the venom of demeaning talk in order to dominate the other person or as a way of hiding his or her own sin, or the spouse who pulls away and withdraws.
  - ii. We are born shameless but are taught shame very early -- it begins with toilet training and proceeds from there.
  - iii. It is a primary tool that first our elders and later our peers use to manipulate and control us and to achieve dominance.
  - iv. Imposed Shame can be evoked by subtle means, from raising an eyebrow and statements like, "I'm surprised that you..." or "I'm disappointed that you..." all the way to blindsiders like, "It's a good thing your mother isn't around to see this!" or "I thought you were a better person than this.
  - v. Several Forms of Imposed Shame are:
    - 1. Outloud shaming – Put downs, comparison, “what is wrong with you.
      - a. Effects: Negative view of self, negative self talk.
    - 2. Performance focus: We gain value by what we do and not by who we are.
      - a. Effects: Perfectionism, giving up without trying, doing only the things you are good at, unable to admit mistakes, procrastination. Can't have guilt free fun.
    - 3. Manipulation – relationships and behavior is manipulated by unspoken rules.
      - a. Coding: “Oh you don't have to go through all that trouble” actually means “I'm embarrassed to ask for special treatment, but I like it”
        - i. Includes dirty looks
        - ii. Walking out of the room
    - 4. Preoccupation with Fault or Blame
      - a. Because performance is big to the abuser, shame is used to control performance. “I always got A's and B's when I was your age.”

- b. Fault/Blame – wants a confession in order to know who to shame and blame/humiliated so they won't do it again. It is a form of punishment.
- 5. Enmeshment – no clear boundaries between people. You are made to responsible for how others feel. The truth is that you are only responsible for how you feel.

ii. Imposed Shame is the currency of emotional blackmail.

- 1. Some people are likely to escalate their shaming techniques and evoke even more of it in order to regain control.
- 2. Why? But somehow, we believe that we deserve what we get according to our this-worldly sense of the fairness of the universe—if we are treated shamefully we feel ashamed.
- 3. We learn to assess our worth from how others treat and see us.
  - a. The only way of dealing with imposed shame is to reject it on the basis of God's truth, to place responsibility where it properly lies, to rest in the assurance that one need not "feel guilty" (shame) unless one really is guilty.

- vi. There is nothing wrong with a resolve that says: I will not let someone else get away with this perversion of truth (see 2 Tim. 1:12).

- c. **Natural shame** is that general sense that we carry about with us that we are limited, fallible, and frail. It is a kind of humble sensitivity that causes us to go about our days knowing that we will makes mistakes, will probably have to apologize sometime soon, that we cannot go around blaming everybody else for our problems, and that we desperately need God every day of our lives.

2. Do's and Don't's for Shame(rs):

- a. Resist the temptation to impose shame on others.
  - i. It just isn't right to get your spouse or your kids to do what you want by belittling, blaming, demeaning, or other forms of emotional manipulation.
  - ii. You shouldn't defend yourself by putting others to shame. Get out of the shame cycle.
  - iii. Avoid using shame to push the other person away which only makes both of you feeling disconnected and alone. .
- b. Confess to your spouse when you know you are guilty.
  - i. For some people "I'm sorry" gets stuck in their throats every time.
  - ii. The hardest part about confession is just doing it, but the potential for healing and grace in it is tremendous. It is the Holy Spirit's way of sanctifying us, thus, our marriages.
- c. Don't take the blame for things that are not your responsibility.
  - i. You are not loving your spouse if you assume his or her responsibility or if you let shame be imposed on you.

- ii. If you find this to be a difficult judgment, seek the perspective of someone else who is honest, mature, and objective, especially if you know your tendency for most of your life has been to take the all the blame and feel all the shame.
- d. People who admit their failings, who forgive and accept forgiveness, and who refuse to accept imposed shame are in a position to enjoy safety and intimacy in their marriages.
  - i.
- e. Young children blame themselves when they are hurt. They must deserve it, or their parents wouldn't hurt them. To admit that the parents were at fault seems to breach a taboo. But to remember that our parents were sinned against by their parents, who were sinned against by their parents, all the way back to Eden, puts things in a right context. Our parents sinned against us, not because they were terrible people, but because they are fallen human beings, tempted by the devil, just like everyone else. Our parents and family members need our forgiveness, but not just the cheap forgiveness of saying, "It's not a big deal."

### 3. Healing and Deliverance from Shame

- a. For most of us, our plan for dealing with shame looks like this...
  - i. (1) Dig a really big hole and bury it.
  - ii. (2) Present a shiny, perfect exterior and hide the mess.
  - iii. And if we are a part of a church or a group of people who we don't feel truly safe with, we cannot break through the fear of being shamed again and again.
- b. We tend to say to ourselves: I am a mistake.
  - i. No one could possibly love or accept me as I am.
  - ii. Therefore, I need something outside to make myself acceptable and lovable.
  - iii. Enter again the word Entropy: The Greek Word for Shame. The 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics and entropy, which says everything in the universe will fall apart and become disorganized, fall into itself unless acted upon by an outside force.
  - iv. You and I need something outside of ourselves to find ourselves delivered from shame.
- c. **Jesus, is our solution because he experienced shame in a way we cannot even fathom.**
  - i. **looking unto Jesus...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame... [Hebrews 12.2](#)**
  - ii. **Roman crucifixion was explicitly designed to bring shame upon its victims.**
    - 1. Crucifixion was the public execution of a naked person whose crimes were posted on a sign at the top of the cross; death by crucifixion took hours, prolonging the humiliation.
    - 2. A naked body dangling from a wooden cross clearly sent the message, "Anyone who dares to defy the Roman Empire is worthless, not even deserving of a decent death."
    - 3. But there God was, in Jesus. Jesus' death on a cross demonstrates the depths to which humanity will sink.

4. We crucified God, the very God who became incarnate as a tender expression of love and compassion.
- iii. Then came the shame, as prophesied. *I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.* ([Isaiah 50.6](#))
  1. With the promise of the Father before Him, with His inheritance at stake, with the plan for the redemption of the elect moving to the crisis, the crux of the cross, Jesus came to that place, the place of the skull, and to that experience we call abandonment, alienation, separation
- iv. Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" demonstrates that he experienced first-hand what it means to be rejected. Jesus' cry brings back the dark, painful memories of times when I have screamed heavenward at God, "Where were you?"
  1. The crucifixion reveals a God who is willing to be vulnerable, who chooses to bear the pain of shame and rejection.
  2. On the cross God meets us in our shame.
- v. Sometimes we say, God, I'm sorry for the abuse I suffered. God, I'm sorry for the way the abuse cripples me. God, I'm sorry that I feel so worthless."
  1. Certainly, I do things that require repentance.
  2. But God doesn't ask me to repent of the abuse I suffered as a child—nor does he leave me to suffer its consequences alone.
- vi. Instead, on the cross Jesus enters into my shame and experiences its destructive influence, and then he triumphs over its power in the resurrection.
  1. The resurrection is our hope that God will wipe every shame-filled tear from our eyes.
  2. The resurrection is a call to every shamed, oppressed, hopeless, scared, messed-up person out there: "He is risen!"
- vii. Encountering this God has taken my focus off myself.
  1. Shame drives me inward—I bow my head, afraid to look others in the eye.
  2. The cross issues an invitation to all who live in isolation, shame, and fear to come, lay down their shovels (where they used to bury their feelings), and join God's family. Yes, we are called to pick up the cross and follow Him...and he reminds us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

#### 4. What will you do today?

- a. Perhaps you have been a victim of spiritual or emotional shaming and abuse. You feel trapped, alone and hurting. And you cannot admit it to anyone. You just know that you feel as if you are worthless. You don't like the way you feel but it seems there is no alternative. Today, you have a choice. God took your shame. All of it. You no longer have to bear it. It was never yours to

carry. You were broken but that was why God sent His son Jesus...to take the brokenness and bring healing and wholeness. Won't you begin your journey today?

- i. Romans 8:1 reads, "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus"
  - ii. You no longer must carry this burden. Enter into Christ today. Let Him carry your shame forever.
- b. Maybe you have been a blamer and a shamer. You have been carrying the burdens of your past and unloading them on others. You shout at traffic, you shout at your family, your children, you grow frustrated and impatient at every turn in life. There is hope for you too. Jesus came to heal you. You can find relief from your pain as well. You can be forgiven and find forgiveness so you can release the need to blame and shame others. Do it today before you crush someone else under your own pain.
- c. Use this opportunity to pray here at the kneeling rails or allow me to pray with you. Today can be a change of direction for you.

## Other thoughts (for reference)

### Silence:

In some churches there is “an unwritten and unspoken rule that said, ‘It is better to be nice than honest’.”

“If you speak about the problem out loud, *you are the problem.*”

“The truth is, when people talk about problems out loud, they don't *cause* them, they simply *expose* them.”  
(p.68)

“Too many churches communicate this kind of shaming message: ‘The problem is not that your boundaries were crossed and violated, **the problem is that you talked.** If you would not have made such a big deal, everything would still be fine.’ If a person accepts that message, they *will* stop talking.

### Misplaced Loyalty

“The next characteristic of spiritually abusive systems is that a misplaced sense of loyalty is fostered and even demanded. We're not talking about loyalty to Christ, but about loyalty to a given organization, church, or leader.” (p.76)

“A common way this is accomplished is by setting up a system where disloyalty to or disagreement with the leadership is construed as the same thing as disobeying God. **Questioning leaders is equal to questioning God.** After all, the leader is the authority, and authority is always right. This causes people to misplace their loyalty in a leader, a church or an organization.” (p.76)

“There are three factors that come into play here, adding up to misplaced loyalty. First, leadership projects a **‘we alone are right’** mentality, which permeates the system. Members must remain in the system if they want to be ‘safe,’ or to stay ‘on good terms’ with God, or not to be viewed as wrong or ‘backslidden.’

The second factor that brings about misplaced loyalty is the use of **‘scare tactics.’** For example:

*God is going to withdraw His Spirit from you and your family.*

*God will destroy your business.*

*Without our protection, Satan will get your children.*

*You and your family will come under a curse.*

The third method of calling forth misplaced loyalty is **the threat of humiliation.** This is done by publicly shaming, exposing, or threatening to remove people from the group.

In the abusive system, it is the *fear* of being exposed, humiliated or removed that insures your proper allegiance, and insulates those in authority. You can be ‘exposed’ for asking too many questions, for disobeying the

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unspoken rules, or for disagreeing with authority. **People are made public examples in order to send a message to those who remain.** Others have phone campaigns launched against them, to warn their friends and others in the group about how ‘dangerous’ they are.” (p.76,77)

### Secrecy

“When you see people in a religious system being secretive —*watch out*. **People don’t hide what is appropriate; they hide what is inappropriate.**” (p.78)

“One reason spiritually abusive families and churches are secretive is because they are so image conscious. People in these systems can’t even live up to their own performance standards, so they have to hide what is real. Some believe they must do this in order to protect God’s good name. So how things look and what others think becomes more important than what’s real. They become God’s ‘public relations agents.’ The truth is, He’s not hiring anyone for this position.”