



Shame

"To be human is to be infected with this phenomenon we call shame."

The Soul of Shame by Curt Thompson

What is shame?

For many of us, shame isn't something we think about often, but that doesn't mean we aren't impacted by its power. However, once we learn the language of shame, and grow in identifying its nagging voice, we can start to see its lingering impact and cultivate resilience in dealing with shame. The reality is that we are all affected by the power of shame, and we don't have to read very far in our Bibles to see how it has impacted the human experience.

The final picture we get of creation before the Fall is a significant statement that sums up the shame-free experience that God intended us to live in: "Adam and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame," (Genesis 2:25). But the moment sin entered the world, shame pounced on them. The very first impact of sin on Adam and Eve was their overwhelming sense of shame—they immediately sewed fig leaves together, covered themselves, and hid from God (Genesis 3:7-8).

This is what shame does. Shame is something you feel internally, and yet it has social ramifications. It causes us to want to hide from others and from God and to cover our sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. Before we go further, let's define shame.

Shame is a sense we are not enough; a sense of deficiency, inferiority, inadequacy, and unworthiness; a sense that you are flawed and unworthy of acceptance.

Christian psychiatrist Curt Thompson says in his book *The Soul of Shame*, "To be human is to be infected with this phenomenon we call shame." Have you ever battled a nagging thought or feeling that you are not _____ enough? This blank may be filled in countless ways, but its root is the same—shame. It could be that you felt like you were not smart enough, pretty enough, athletic enough, charismatic enough, strong enough, funny enough, desirable enough, competent enough... and the list could go on. That deep sense of not being enough? That's shame.

Where does it come from?

We gather this sense of shame in a couple of different ways. The propensity towards shame is inherited as a part of humanity, but it is also developed and fed over the course of our lives.

1. Shame is the result of our own fallenness.

No one is more aware of our own sinful tendencies than we are. We have the highlight reel of every time we have blown it in our minds and this can lead to a sense of shame.



2. Shame also comes to us through the fallenness of others.

We are wounded by the sins of others, and those wounds can leave us with a sense that we are not enough. It could have been a sense that you could never satisfy or measure up to someone's expectations for you and so you developed a sense that you are not enough. It could be that you were betrayed by friends and were left with a sense of not feeling valuable. Some of us have endured abuse that left us carrying a deep sense of shame. The list of ways others' sins impact us could go on and on, and the shame those sins bring often lingers.

3. We live in a fallen world.

A sense of shame can be developed or reinforced simply by scrolling through Instagram. We see a joyful photo of many of our friends that got together and we are not there. We scroll through the filtered and curated highlight reels of other people's lives and compare them to our own ordinary lives, and the feeling of not being enough grows as we sit alone in our room.

What is the impact of shame?

Shame can impact almost every area of our lives. It can impact the way we approach work. Many of us become perfectionists, driven by the belief that we must prove our worth through our performance. Our shame says we cannot mess up or even be average, or we will be exposed as not being enough. So we work tirelessly, trying to prove ourselves and erase our sense of inadequacy. As Brené Brown says, "When perfectionism is at the wheel, shame is in the passenger seat, and anxiety is in the back seat."

Shame can impact our friendships. We think to ourselves, "I value my friendship with them more than they value their friendship with me." Deep down, we wonder if we are truly worthy of lasting relationships or if we are simply not enough for others. Shame can even impact our walks with God. When shame is present, we have a hard time understanding and receiving grace. We feel like God's basic posture towards us is one of disappointment, not love.

If shame has a superpower, it would be shape-shifting, as it can work its way into any area of your life. Curt Thompson has an illustration called the "shame attendant" to describe just how subtly shame embeds itself into our daily experiences. Here is how he describes how the shame attendant can function:

"The shame attendant's intention is not good, is not to care for you but rather to infuse verbal and nonverbal elements of judgment into every moment of your life. The word attendant at first may seem counterintuitive, as it usually applies to someone who has our best interest in mind. But, this is how shame works, a wolf disguised in sheep's clothing. Hence, our shame attendant appears in language, feelings, sensations and images that may on the surface seem acceptable, common and normal, but its purpose is anything but being helpful. It lurks in the bedroom, your wardrobe and your bathroom (especially the ones with really big mirrors). When we wake up each morning our attendant greets us with the words "Wow, you really didn't get enough sleep last night. What were you thinking?" You move to the bathroom to take a shower and you are reminded that you look like you put on more weight. You head out the door and your attendant whispers that the test you are about to take is going to go poorly because you are ill-prepared and wasted your time. ...And as the day goes on the attendant watches you, offering multiple

opportunities to assimilate a story that tells you, in essence, that you are not enough, you do not have what it takes to be okay.

How do we tend to respond when we experience shame?

When we experience shame we tend to respond in one of two ways. We compensate for our sense of shame either by puffing up and trying to make ourselves bigger than we are or by shrinking back and trying to make ourselves smaller than we are.

When we experience shame and puff up it can look a couple of different ways. We can puff up with pride and try to prove how great we are to overcome our sense of shame. We may puff up in anger towards others and respond with our shame by saying, “There isn’t anything wrong with me, there is something wrong with others.”

When we experience shame and shrink back, we internalize the sense of shame, and rather than exploding in anger at others, we implode internally with self-contempt. In these moments we tend to withdraw from others and ghost people when they text. Like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, we tend to hide. Shrinking back can lead to self-contempt and anxiety, and leave us feeling depressed.

How should we respond when we experience shame?

The first step to defeating shame is to name it. When we experience an impulse of shame—we need to recognize it for what it is. We say, “This is shame. I am experiencing shame.” As Curt Thompson says “to name it is to tame it.” The beginning of breaking its power in our lives is to bring it out of the shadows and into the light and recognize that you are experiencing shame.

Secondly, what Brené Brown says we are to do when we experience shame is: “Don’t puff up, don’t shrink back, but stand your sacred ground.” Our sacred ground is the truth we find in Scripture about who we are *in Christ*. At the end of this resource, you will see a list of things that the Bible declares to be true about us as we are *in Christ*. It is a list of glorious truths! When we live in shame, we are living a lie. When we stand our sacred ground, we let Scripture flip the script of our lives—from one of shame to one of love, acceptance, and honor.

So, when we experience shame we need truth, truth of who we are in Christ. However, there is another key step we need to take when we face shame. We need to reach out to others. Shame seeks to separate you from others, so one of the keys to breaking its power is reaching out. Here is the problem. When you are riddled with shame, what you need the most is what you want to do the least. Don’t just send a text to someone—call someone, or better yet, get in the same room as someone and share with them the battle of shame that you are fighting.

There are times when the power of shame can be so powerful it seems like you are unable to absorb truth on your own. Michael John Cusick says, “Shame can be like a raincoat around the soul that keeps us from absorbing the living water of Jesus that makes us the beloved.” So, what do we need to do when we find this to be the case? We need to reach out to the community! We need to connect with people who embody the truth of Scripture.



We need connection with others, and we need truth to break the power of shame. There is something powerful when we experience the truth of who we are in Christ in community.

So, the next time you face shame head-on (and you will), I want to encourage you to name it—"I am experiencing shame." Then, turn to the truth of Scripture and let Scripture flip the script from shame that is based in lies, to one of honor that is based in truth. Finally, make sure you reach out to someone else who can speak the truth and embody the truth in the flesh. The way out of shame is not in isolation but in connection!

As we close, I want to remind you that Jesus was crucified naked, in shame. The cross was all about shaming the one being crucified. But Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus *scorned the shame* of the cross so that you could be saved and brought into God's family. Jesus experienced the shame of the cross so that we could live in the honor of being a child of God. By God's grace and the Spirit's power, let's live in the honor of who we are in Christ and not let shame rule our lives!

Shame-defeating Scripture:

Ephesians 3:14-19

Romans 8:31-39

1 John 3:1

Other resources:

The Soul of Shame by Curt Thompson

Surrender to Love by David Benner

Who I am In Christ by Neil Anderson

Questions:

- How are you tempted to fill in the blank of: I'm not _____ enough?
- In what areas of your life have you wrestled with feelings of shame?
- How do you tend to respond when you experience shame?
- What kinds of moments tend to bring up feelings of shame for you?
- Who will you reach out to when you experience shame?



WHO I AM IN CHRIST

ORIGINALLY COMPILED BY NEIL ANDERSON

I AM ACCEPTED...

<i>John 1:12</i>	I am God's child.
<i>John 15:15</i>	As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ.
<i>Romans 5:1</i>	I have been justified (declared righteous).
<i>1 Corinthians 6:17</i>	I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit.
<i>1 Corinthians 6:19-20</i>	I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.
<i>1 Corinthians 12:27</i>	I am a member of Christ's body.
<i>Ephesians 1:3-8</i>	I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child.
<i>Colossians 1:13-14</i>	I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins.
<i>Colossians 2:9-10</i>	I am complete in Christ.
<i>Hebrews 4:14-16</i>	I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ.

I AM SECURE...

<i>Romans 8:1-2</i>	I am free from condemnation.
<i>Romans 8:28</i>	I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.
<i>Romans 8:31-39</i>	I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God.
<i>2 Corinthians 1:21-22</i>	I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.
<i>Colossians 3:1-4</i>	I am hidden with Christ in God.
<i>Philippians 1:6</i>	I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me.
<i>Philippians 3:20</i>	I am a citizen of heaven.
<i>2 Timothy 1:7</i>	I have not been given a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.
<i>1 John 5:18</i>	I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me.

I AM SIGNIFICANT...

<i>John 15:5</i>	I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life.
<i>John 15:16</i>	I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.
<i>1 Corinthians 3:16</i>	I am God's temple.
<i>2 Corinthians 5:17-21</i>	I am a minister of reconciliation for God.
<i>Ephesians 2:6</i>	I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.
<i>Ephesians 2:10</i>	I am God's workmanship.
<i>Ephesians 3:12</i>	I may approach God with freedom and confidence.
<i>Philippians 4:13</i>	I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

