

FIVE STEPS TO OVERCOME SHAME

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Like you, I know those you minister to are hurting and facing a multitude of struggles. This article will help you address one of the key underlying factors driving some of these issues—shame in a person's life.

Different from guilt which says “I did bad”, shame says “I am bad.” Shame plays a significant factor in the unhealthy thoughts and actions we struggle with on a daily basis. Many of us don't yet see ourselves as God sees us, because we're stuck in seeing ourselves as the world, friends, and even the haters see us. We struggle to love our neighbor as ourselves because we don't love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). We struggle to accept God's love for us because we view life through the filter of our shame.

Shame has been at the root of mankind's struggle since day one, when sin entered the Garden of Eden. But Jesus can break the chains of shame.

In my life, it took a proactive daily choice, and praying for God's healing, to overcome my “worthless sinner” shame mentality. Jesus brought healing and freedom through the following five steps. I encourage you to help others take them too.

1. Help Others Understand What God Says About Them

They have inherent value and dignity (Genesis 1:27), are loved for who they are (Ephesians 2:4), are uniquely gifted (1 Peter 4:10), and created for a purpose (Ephesians 2:10). Christ defeated not just sin, but the effects of sin on the cross — including shame. Jesus gave them a new identity as a son or daughter of God when they began their personal relationship with Him (1 John 3:1) and received His forgiveness for their wrongs. These understandings will develop the foundation of truth that their shame-free identity will be built on.

2. Help Others Surround Themselves With People Who Affirm the Truth of Who God Says They Are

Encourage them to get around people who affirm their true value, who love them for who they truly are, and who accept and encourage them no matter what. These affirming experiences will help the truth of their value in God's eyes to sink into their heart.

3. Encourage Them to Stop Listening to Certain Voices

It's important that they stop listening to the voices of those who perpetuate a “worthless sinner” mentality in their life—including certain bible teachers, authors, bloggers, and friends. Many voices in their life are communicating lies rather than the truth about their identity.

Many teach that “humans are evil and bad,” rather than the Biblical truth which is “humans are broken.” (For more, check out the post “Are You A Worthless Sinner? at Josh.org/blog) Many obsess about sin and the old self (Romans 6:6), rather than putting their emphasis on our inherent value as the pinnacle of God’s creation (Genesis 1:26-27), His love for us, and our new identity as saints (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:11-13, Ephesians 2:18-20).

4. Help Them Cut the Trash-Talking Voice of Shame

For years, I had been turning inward on myself, letting my thoughts and emotions run wild. I routinely told myself lies like, “Yeah, I guess I am worthless,” and “I can’t do anything right,” which only reinforced the deeply rooted lies. When I felt really sad about myself or situations in my life, I’d just sit with it rather than confront the lies that led to the deep sadness. How self-defeating was that?! I don’t think Satan had to whisper many lies to me, because I was feeding so many to myself. Over time, confronting the voice of shame helps rewire out the old default brain patterns of shame thinking.

5. Help Them Meditate on the Truth

In my personal journey, I began meditating morning and night, on specific verses about who God is and who I am as His loved, righteous, redeemed son. Then, whenever the lies about myself came up, I’d take those thoughts captive and make them obedient to the truth of Christ (2 Cor 10:5), who I am in Christ. For this to not simply be intellectual, but to sink into my heart, I visualized past experiences with God, where I had encountered His presence, love, and goodness. Doing this for years has lessened the shame in my life. It also led to default brain patterns of Biblical thinking about God and myself rather than shame thinking.

Shame Off You

Each of the above steps will help draw individuals closer to God, as they begin to see Him for who He truly is: their loving Father. As their default view of themselves begins to change, they’ll be freed up to share the love they are experiencing with others. As they get God’s eyes on themselves, they’ll be able to get God’s eyes on other people.

It is my prayer that these steps will help you guide others into freedom from shame and the lies that often keep someone stuck in hurts and unhealthy habits. As you help others take these steps, they’ll be freed up to experience a life of maximum satisfaction, living into their true identity, as they encounter deeper love with God, self, and others.