

IDENTITY CRISIS - OVERCOMING SHAME

Shame: (noun) A painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior. The painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable, improper, ridiculous, etc. done by oneself or another. A painful emotion resulting from an awareness of inadequacy or guilt.

I'm confident we've ALL felt this at some point in our lives. Growing up in a Christian home, as a Pastor's Kid, I had a good idea of the difference between right and wrong. I was able to navigate my way around decisions and usually come out on the right end of them. There were certain things that I could easily say no to – drugs, alcohol and smoking were easy vices for me to stay away from. As a high-level athlete (yes, at one time I was in very good shape) I had no desire to get involved in things that I saw as harmful to my body. But porn was a different animal – (Dave gave us a tremendous talk a few weeks ago - "The Ugly Truth about Porn." If you missed it, please watch it.) This was one vice for me that I could hide, that I could keep a secret, and that I didn't think would have a long-term effect on me. As is the story for most of us, we know that is not the case. Porn takes a firm grip on your brain, and we have no way of controlling or stopping the behaviour. Enter "shame." I knew my behaviour was wrong and that I shouldn't be doing it, but I couldn't ask anyone for help because I was ashamed of what I was doing. The enemy said, you can't be forgiven for this, you'll lose your family, you'll lose your job, your position at church, your friends etc. On top of the shame, I began to feel depressed, hopeless, hypocritical, unworthy, unlovable – to the point where my only escape was more porn – and the cycle continues.

But where does shame come from? If we have a healthy view of who God is, then we know it doesn't come from him.

Romans 9:33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Romans 9:33 (NLT) God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, "I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

From the Message in Romans 9 - *Who in the world do you think you are to second-guess God? Do you for one moment suppose any of us knows enough to call God into question? Clay doesn't talk back to the fingers that mold it, saying, "Why did you shape me like this?" Isn't it obvious that a potter has a perfect right to shape one lump of clay into a vase for holding flowers and another into a pot for cooking beans? If God needs one style of pottery especially designed to show his angry displeasure and another style carefully crafted to show his glorious goodness, isn't that all right? Either or both happens to Jews, but it also happens to the other people. Hosea put it well: **I'll call nobodies and make them somebodies; I'll call the unloved and make them beloved.** In the place where they yelled out, "You're nobody!" they're calling you "God's living children." Isaiah maintained this same emphasis: If each grain of sand on the seashore were numbered and the sum labeled "chosen of God," They'd be numbers still, not names; salvation comes by personal selection. **God doesn't count us; he calls us by name.** Arithmetic is not his focus. Isaiah had looked ahead and spoken the truth: If our powerful God had not provided us a legacy of living children, we would have ended up like ghost towns, like Sodom and Gomorrah. How can we sum this up? All those people who didn't seem interested in what God was doing actually embraced what God was*

doing as he straightened out their lives. And Israel, who seemed so interested in reading and talking about what God was doing, missed it. How could they miss it? Because instead of trusting God, they took over. They were absorbed in what they themselves were doing. They were so absorbed in their “God projects” that they didn’t notice God right in front of them, like a huge rock in the middle of the road. And so, they stumbled into him and went sprawling. Isaiah (again!) gives us the metaphor for pulling this together: **Careful! I’ve put a huge stone on the road to Mount Zion, a stone you can’t get around. But the stone is me! If you’re looking for me, you’ll find me on the way, not in the way.**

God has no desire for his children to live their lives in shame, guilt, or condemnation. Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Who is in Christ Jesus? If we have humbled ourselves, submitted to his leading and accepted him as Lord and Saviour of our lives, then WE ARE! So, let’s unpack this in relation to shame and how we overcome it.

WHERE DOES OUR WORTH COME FROM?

Identity: (noun) The individual characteristics by which a thing or person is recognized or known. Who you are, the way you think about yourself, the way you are viewed by the world and the characteristics that define you.

We have experienced many things in our past – trauma, neglect, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, broken homes, failed marriages, business/personal failures – the list goes on... The enemy tries to fill us with the lies that our worth or identity is tied to these events. For the longest time, I believed those lies. The shame I felt was too much to bear. I was at the end of my rope; I was at the point where I either had to end my life or bring my addiction into the light. So, on December 15, 2018, I wrote a letter to my wife. Coming clean about my addiction and what it was doing to me. I went to the home of one of my pastors, who is my Wingman to this day. We spent a couple hours in prayer, diving into my identity, where my worth came from, what could have been behind my addiction. “I’m no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God!” God has plenty to say about our worth.

Satan wants us to believe that our identity is tied to our past, the mistakes we make, and the hurts we’ve caused. We are so full of shame, that we begin to believe these lies. We need to revisit the truths of Scripture to recover from these lies.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Psalms 139:13-14 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

We are born with worth. It is not our achievements, our abilities, or our contributions to society that give us value but God himself. He calls us his masterpiece! We have a purpose, a destiny – to honour God, our King – and although we never do this perfectly, our status as God’s masterpiece/image bearer

is glorious and unchanging! In the same way that our worth is not determined by our achievements, neither is it diminished by our failings. Our value comes from God and cannot be splintered, torn apart, or unraveled. No matter what we have done sexually, or what has been done to us, we are image bearers of God, and we have eternal value.

We must also realize that our purity does not come from us, Jesus is the only one who can make us pure. We have been taught that sexual purity is a badge of honor, as a way to secure future blessings – such as a great marriage, a great sex life etc. If we failed to remain pure, this would damage our reputation and jeopardize our future happiness. These teachings lead us to an unattainable works-based righteousness, thinking that purity depends on “our” performance. This contradicts the gospel, which says that our righteousness comes from Christ alone. He is the one who makes us pure by cleansing us from all our sins. If our purity depended on us, not one of us could stand before God. Thankfully, we are not the source of our purity.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Luke 24:47 It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’

When we repent, Christ forgives us and purifies us from all unrighteousness. He makes us pure. And not only that, but our purity through Christ cannot be stolen, ruined, or tarnished. Hebrews 13:8 says that Jesus does not change. He is “the same yesterday and today and forever.” This means that, even when we stumble and fall, for those of us in Christ, our purity is permanent.

When it comes to sexual shame, we all carry one burden or another. For some, it is the weight of our own sexual sin and selfishness. Others carry the memory of sexual abuse—of being sinned against. This shame is often complicated by purity culture rhetoric, that wrongly places responsibility on victims for things they could not stop or control. For every form of sin and shame, we need healing—the kind that comes from outside ourselves.

It was not only Jesus’ soul pain on the cross that hurt God but the way his flesh was torn by thorns and nails, the way he was stripped, humiliated by public nakedness, and whipped almost to the point of death. Our bodies matter to God. What we do in our bodies matters to God. What others do to our bodies matters to God. And our shame is not invisible to him.

Psalm 34:4-5 I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

It’s hard to imagine, but for those in Christ, it is our future hope. No matter how many sins we have committed or how many times we have been sinned against, there is coming a day when we will look to God and be unashamed because of the forgiveness and wholeness we have received in Christ. Even with this future hope, it can be difficult to deal with the memories of our sexual failings and the failings of others. Many of us live with very tangible consequences that act as regular reminders of the power of sexual sin and abuse. The concept of forgiveness can be hard to truly grasp.

Psalm 103:10-13 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

The Psalmist describes God as someone who refuses to give us what we really deserve. Our sins deserve punishment. But instead of us having to pay the price, God looks to his son, Jesus, who paid it for us on the cross. It reminds us that we are not only forgiven but loved, steadfastly, by God himself. This realization should provide us with a hope that we never thought possible. When we focus on the extraordinary worth we have from Christ, we can live with hope and joy every day, despite the challenges we may be facing on a daily basis. The hope of eternity with Jesus, being called to live the life that HE has for us, God's word helps to fix our eyes on a future with Jesus.

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

MOVING PAST THE SHAME

Purpose: (noun) The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists. An intended or desired result/aim/goal.

The goal of recovery is so much more than to just "stop looking at porn." God wants so much more for our lives than just to be clean. From a reading plan I posted in the chat last week - *You know that song "Give It Away," by the Red Hot Chili Peppers? For years I didn't know what it was all about. But recently I picked up lead singer Anthony Keidis's autobiography, Scar Tissue, and found out the meaning behind the song.*

Turns out it's about recovery and the consistent message woven throughout most programs created for addicts like us. The principle states that, by giving away what sobriety, the program, or what others within those confines have given to you, you become more empowered to maintain it. In a nutshell, it means the more we get out of ourselves and freely give back to others, the stronger we become. Paring it down even further, the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says it like this: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking (or sex addiction) as intensive work with other alcoholics (or sex addicts)." The magic behind giving back is how it strengthens you. The more you give away the stronger you become!

Personally, telling my story has greatly reduced the amount of shame I feel about it. God has given me purpose in this journey. God can use our greatest weaknesses and turn them into an amazing story to use for HIS glory. Our story may be the exact thing that someone else needs to hear for them to make the next step of reaching out and getting help. God calls us to be faithful with our gifts, and for some of us, that gift is our story of redemption, reconciliation, unfathomable freedom, and hope! Some of us might feel that we are not ready to share our story. The only problem with that, is that if we wait until we think we are ready, we may never get there. God asks that we trust him, step out in faith and obedience to his prompting when he leads us there. God won't leave us hanging.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all thing through Christ who gives me strength.

As we submit to his will, he will continue to remove the shame from our lives. No longer living under the dark cloud of guilt, fear, and condemnation – but stepping out in faith to live with hope, courage, discipline, strength, peace, and the realization that MY LIFE MATTERS! My worth is in the one who calls me HIS son! Our hope can rest in the fact that HE is for us. He loves us no matter what we have done. *Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.* No matter what our past looks like, or how much baggage we have. **He's seen everything we've ever done and still loves us just the same.** Think about that in this journey – GOD LOVES US, GOD IS FOR US, GOD HAS A PLAN FOR US, A FUTURE AND A HOPE FOR US.

REFLECT

1. Am I still living in shame?
2. Do I know (and truly believe) where my identity comes from?
3. What am I holding back from God, have I given him absolutely everything?
4. What area of our lives is God challenging us to let him work on?
5. How can we be obedient in sharing our story?
6. What purpose does God have for me?

Take some time to think about these questions. If God is speaking to you, share it with your Wingman or with your group.