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**Deliverance from Shame
through the Power of the Holy Spirit
Psalm 3:3**

One of the more amazing stories of healing that we find in the NT is found in Mark 5:25-34. It concerns the woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for over 12 years. She had spent virtually every dollar she owned on doctors and other remedies hoping to be set free from this debilitating condition. But we are told in Mark 5:26b that she “was no better but rather grew worse.”

What made matters even more distressing was that because of this condition she was regarded as ceremonially unclean. In Leviticus 15:19-30 we read that everything she touched or that even inadvertently touched her was regarded as unclean and thus would be prohibited from engaging in temple worship or other religious activities in Israel. She would have been isolated and ostracized from her family and community.

One day she must have heard people talking about Jesus. Perhaps a glimmer of hope rose up in her heart. When she got the news that Jesus was in her community, she made up her mind that no matter what it might cost her, she would find him and seek him for healing. I don't know where or how she got such incredible faith, but she was convinced that she didn't need to talk to Jesus or have him lay hands on her or pray for her. All that was needed, she said to herself, was to touch him. “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well” (Mark 5:28). So she quietly sneaked up behind him and reached out and touched the hem or fringe or tassel of his garment. Instantly she was healed. She felt it in her body and Jesus felt it in his. Here is how Mark describes it:

“And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my garments?’ And his disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’ And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease’” (Mark 5:30-34).

Did you hear what Jesus said to her? There are three things, each of which is remarkable in its own right. First, he told her she was healed of her disease. Can you imagine what that must have felt like to her? After 12 long years of physical suffering and social rejection and intense feelings of shame and an untold amount of money spent and lost on trying to find a cure, she is instantly healed!

Second, he told her to go in peace. It's as if he said, “I know you've lived in fear for the past 12 years. You've watched as people ran from you lest they touch you and incur ceremonial defilement. You've laid awake at night filled with anxiety and doubt and worry that perhaps you were going to have to live the rest of your life in this condition. But I say to you, be at peace! Let not your heart be troubled! Rejoice that you are now healed of this horrible affliction.”

But the third thing he said may be the most important of all. Did you hear how he spoke of her? He called her **“Daughter”**! I don't want to read more into this than I should, but it strikes me as significant that he didn't call her “woman” or “lady” or any other label of designation. He called her “Daughter”, clearly a term of affection and endearment. Something has happened here that goes far beyond her physical healing. Jesus didn't just give her a new body. He gave her a **new identity**! “You're part of my family now. You're a true child of God. You are accepted just as you are. I'm your spiritual brother.”

Jesus clearly did more than alleviate physical suffering. He lifted her out of shame. One can only imagine the self-contempt she felt in her soul. One can only imagine her feelings of worthlessness, of being a nuisance, the pain of being constantly avoided and shunned. She had no place in society, much less in the kingdom of God. She was devoid of any sense of personal dignity or value. But Jesus changed all that with a single word: “Daughter!” Of all those in the crowd who were pressing in on him, touching him, shoving him, demanding that he do something miraculous for them, Jesus singled out this one woman and with a simple touch transformed her life for now and eternity!

When I think of this woman in Mark 5 I can't help but think of the lady in Luke 7. She was a former prostitute. She wasn't ostracized and shunned because of a physical affliction but because of a moral flaw. She undoubtedly felt as worthless and ashamed of who she was as did this woman in Mark 5. But Jesus recognized her repentance as she bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them dry with her hair and then anointed them with oil. Jesus didn't recoil from being touched by her any more than he did when he was touched by the woman in Mark 5. They didn't render him unclean by touching him. Instead, by touching him in faith he rendered them clean and whole and accepted.

What was the common denominator in the lives of these two women? I'm convinced it was *shame*. I'm certainly not suggesting that this is a struggle only for women. Men live mired in shame no less so than their female counterparts. *Shame does not discriminate based on gender*. It is an equal opportunity offender!

If you and I had lived when Jesus did and had encountered either or both of these women on the street, I can assure you of their physical posture. They would both have rushed by, dropping their heads, diverting their eyes, not wanting to feel the shame of making visual contact with you. At least, that is what they would have done before they met Jesus.

That is why I so greatly appreciate how King David put it in Psalm 3. David was being ridiculed and persecuted and mocked by his enemies, primarily when he was forced to hide in the wilderness. The reason is heartbreaking. His son, Absalom, had usurped the throne and betrayed David. According to 2 Samuel 15:6, "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." One can well imagine *how ashamed David must have felt*. It was worse than simple embarrassment. He was humiliated. His competency as king was now in question. His name was being defamed throughout the land. And yet here is what David said:

"But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and *the lifter of my head*" (Psalm 3:3).

David was mired in shame. He undoubtedly began to question his calling, his competency, his value both as a man and as a leader. He quite literally hung his head in shame. But he is confident that God will elevate his face and restore his hope.

When people are shy or unsure of themselves, perhaps due to some insecurity or recent failure, they rarely look up or make eye-contact with you. Their aim is to pass by without being noticed. They hug the wall lest a personal encounter expose their shame. Their deep feelings of inadequacy lead to withdrawal and silence. The last thing they want is to see or be seen. Fixing their eyes on the floor is safety for their soul. Embarrassment always expresses itself in a physical posture that is guarded and cautious.

Absalom's treachery inflicted a depth of humiliation on David that the human soul was never built to endure. It was emotionally crippling and threatened to destroy David's credibility and his confidence as a man after God's own heart.

Some of you know exactly how David felt. In your case it may have been a stinging defeat, an embarrassing failure, or perhaps a public humiliation that you fear has forever destroyed your usefulness or your value to God or a place in his purposes. It's a devastating feeling. The enemy will often exploit the opportunity by reminding you of virtually every sin you've committed, reinforcing the painful conviction that you are now beyond recovery, hopelessly helpless, a stain on the public face of the church.

It might even be the rebellion of a child, as in the case of David. For some it's the demise of a business venture into which you poured every ounce of energy and income. Or it might be something less catastrophic, but no less painful, such as a failed attempt at public ministry or an embarrassing misstep that left you feeling exposed and unprotected. In David's case, despite this crushing blow at the hands of his son, his faith in God never wavered, or at least not so as to throw him into utter despair. There was always and only One who was able to restore his strength and straighten his body and give him reason to hold his head high.

This isn't arrogance or presumption or fleshly defiance, but humble whole-hearted assurance that God can do for us what we can't do for ourselves. People often say: "I just can't bear to look anyone in the face after this." But God will make you able! He is the Lord who "makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (1 Sam. 2:7-8).

What is Shame?

It's actually easier to identify the *effects* of shame than it is to define its *essence*. But I'll try. Shame is the painful emotion that is caused by a consciousness of guilt, failure, or impropriety, that often results in the paralyzing conviction/belief that one is worthless, of no value to others or to God, unacceptable, and altogether deserving of disdain and rejection. As you can see, ***shame and guilt are not the same thing.***

The difference between guilt and shame is a very fine line. Guilt is the objective reality of being liable to punishment because of something we've done. Shame is the subjective feeling of being worthless because of who we are. It's the difference between *making* a mistake and *being* a mistake. Feeling guilt when we sin is a good and godly and healthy response. So we run to God and seek his forgiveness. But feeling shame when we sin is a bad and destructive response that compels us to run from him for fear of his disdain and contempt.

Shame can lead to a variety of emotions and actions. It leads to feelings of being not just unqualified but ***disqualified*** from anything meaningful or of having a significant role in the body of Christ.

People enslaved to shame are constantly apologizing to others for who they are. They feel small, flawed, never good enough. They live under the crippling fear of never measuring up, of never pleasing those whose love and respect they desire. This often results in efforts to work harder to compensate for feeling less than everyone else.

Shame has innumerable effects on the human soul. Those in shame have a tendency to hide; to create walls of protection behind which they hunker down and hope no one will see the true you. They are terrified that their true self will be seen and known and rejected by others. So they put on a false face, they adopt a personality or certain traits that they think others will find acceptable. They are convinced that if someone were to see them for who they really are, they'd be repulsed and disappointed. So they are led to be less than their true self. They deliberately stifle whatever strengths they have. They say to themselves: "Whatever I do, don't be vulnerable. It's dangerous."

Breaking free from shame is almost always a process, but it begins with a miraculous breakthrough. One can be enabled by the Spirit to see the lie of shame and the truth of forgiveness but there is often a lifetime of behavior and attitudes that must be progressively brought into alignment with the truth of who we are in Christ.

I want us to explore the only lasting and meaningful cure for shame. It comes from embracing in your heart the simple truth that ***your value and identity are not determined by what others have said to you, about you, or perpetrated against you. Your value and identity are determined by who you are as an image-bearer and what Christ has done on your behalf.***

Let's begin with several important observations about how shame is portrayed in Scripture.

(1) We must be careful to differentiate between justifiable, deserved, and well-placed shame, on the one hand, and illegitimate, undeserved, and misplaced shame, on the other.

When our actions, attitudes, or words bring dishonor to God we justifiably and deservedly should feel ashamed. There are other actions, attitudes, or words for which we should not feel ashamed, even though they may expose us to ridicule, public exposure, and embarrassment.

(2) Misplaced or unjustifiable shame is often mentioned in Scripture. Here are four examples.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

We should feel boldness and courage in proclaiming the gospel. If people mock us and mistreat us because of our vocal and visible declaration of the gospel, we should not feel any shame. After all, the gospel is the power of God to save human souls. The non-Christian world may think we are weak and silly, but the gospel is powerful and true.

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8).

If you feel shame when the gospel is made known or when you are identified and linked with someone who is suffering for having made it known, you are experiencing misplaced or unjustifiable shame. Christ is honored and praised when we boldly speak of him and willingly suffer for him.

“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name” (1 Pet. 4:16).

Being maligned and mistreated solely because of your commitment to Christ is no cause for shame. In fact, it serves to glorify God. Thus, *shame is not determined based on how we are regarded in the minds of people but rather based on whether or not our actions bring honor and glory to God.*

“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor [shame] for the name” (Acts 5:41).

To be arrested and stripped and beaten and exposed to public ridicule is a shameful experience. But the apostles did not retaliate. They willingly embraced the feeling of shame because it ultimately honored God.

(3) Often the Bible speaks of behaviors or beliefs that ought to induce shame in a person’s heart.

“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

In other words, when we refuse to obey the exhortation of Jesus to be humble and meek because we fear that people will laugh at us for it, we should feel ashamed. When we fail to strive to live a life free of sexual immorality and the world congratulates us for not yielding to an “outdated” view on morality, we should feel shame.

“I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?” (1 Cor. 6:5-6).

“Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34).

In both cases their behavior is bringing disrepute on God. They have dishonored him and thus should justifiably feel shame. Two other texts that speak of well-placed shame are:

“But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?” (Rom. 6:21).

“If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14).

The Key to Deliverance from Shame

There are several things that help break the power of shame and deliver us from its paralyzing grip.

(1) We wage war against the lies that bring shame by fighting for faith in the forgiveness of God. In other words, belief in the truth of the gospel is the power to overcome shame.

The prostitute who anointed the feet of Jesus with ointment and wet them with her tears had much of which to be ashamed. She was a “sinner” and an outcast. But Jesus pronounced that her sins were forgiven and told her to “go in peace” (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus overcame her shame by promising that her sins were forgiven and that she could now live “in peace.” She could have chosen to believe the condemnation and judgment of the other guests, and remain mired in shame. Or she could choose to believe that Jesus had truly forgiven all her sins. The way to wage war against the unbelief that we are not truly forgiven is to trust the promise of Christ.

The solution to sin in our culture is to celebrate it, brag about it, join in a public parade to declare your pride in it. Thus, people tend to cope with the pain and weight of guilt by simply declaring that the behavior in question isn't bad after all. It's actually quite good and will contribute to my sense of identity and flourishing in life. As someone said, "By denying sin, they attempt to take away its sting."

But the solution for shame isn't celebration or denial but forgiveness. The message of Scripture is that you are probably far worse than even you can imagine, but that you are far more loved than you could ever possibly conceive. You can't solve your struggle with shame. Only Jesus can. And God's immeasurable and inconceivable love for you was demonstrated and put on display by his sending of his Son Jesus to endure the judgment you deserved.

Some of you think that the solution to your shame is to ***try harder, do more***, obey with greater intensity. Sometimes you are tempted to create even more rules and commands than are found in the Bible and by legalistically abiding by them all you hope to suppress or diminish or perhaps even destroy your feelings of inadequacy and shame and worthlessness. No! The solution is found in only one place: the cross of Christ, where Jesus took your shame upon himself and endured the judgment of God that you and I deserved.

(2) We overcome the crippling power of shame when the Holy Spirit strengthens us to trust and experience the reality of God's immeasurable love for us in Christ.

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you ***to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being***, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:14-21).

The Holy Spirit is directly responsible for making possible our experience of feeling and rejoicing in the love God has for us in Christ.

(3) We break free from shame when the Holy Spirit awakens us to the glorious and majestic truth that we are truly the children of God.

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16).

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:4-7).

Notice that in both texts the experiential, felt assurance of our adoption as the children of God is the direct result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

(4) We win in the war against shame when, by the power of the Spirit, we turn our hearts to the unbreakable promise of Christ that nothing can separate us from his love.

"But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ***By the Holy Spirit*** who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:12b-14).

Here we see that Paul overcomes the tendency to be ashamed by trusting the truth of God's promise that he will guard him. It is "by the Holy Spirit" that we find the strength to guard the good deposit of the gospel. "The battle against

misplaced shame,” says Piper, “is the battle against unbelief in the promises of God.” As Paul elsewhere says, “everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” (Rom. 10:11).

(5) When we are made to feel shame for something that we didn't do, we conquer its power by entrusting our souls and eternal welfare to the truth and justice of God.

“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God” (1 Cor. 4:3-5).

In other words, explains Piper, “for all the evil and deceitful judgment and criticism that others may use to heap on us a shame that is not ours to bear, and for all the distress and spiritual warfare it brings, the promise stands sure that they will not succeed in the end. All the children of God will be vindicated. The truth will be known. And no one who banks his hope on the promises of God will be put to shame.”

(6) We overcome the enslaving power of shame by confidently believing that the promises of God of a glorious and more satisfying inheritance are true.

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach [or shame] of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Heb. 11:24-26).

The “reproach of Christ” likely means the public disdain, rejection, and shame that one experiences from unbelievers for having prized Christ above all earthly praise, possessions, or promotion. He strengthened his soul to endure undeserved shame by fixing his faith on the promises yet to come.

The Holy Spirit: The Power that Conquers Shame

And so we must pray:

- That the Spirit would bring into conscious awareness the cause(s) of shame. What specific incidents in one's past were the reason why one now feels shame? Ask the Spirit to bring light and insight into what happened, when, and by whom it was done.
- That the Spirit would awaken you to the realities of the gospel; that the Spirit would strengthen your faith in the truth of all that God has done for us in Christ to secure for us the complete and comprehensive forgiveness of sins.
- That the Spirit would awaken you to who you are as an adopted child of God (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7).
- That the Spirit would break the stranglehold the enemy has exerted on you. Satan wants to undermine your intimacy with Christ by convincing you that he would never want fellowship with someone who has done the things you've done. Satan wants to paralyze your usefulness to the church and to others by convincing you that you are an embarrassment and a reproach. Thus, we must pray that the Spirit would silence the voice of the Enemy that has led you to believe that you are beyond the hope of God's love and forgiveness.
- That the Spirit would indelibly imprint on your heart the deep and abiding conviction that God rejoices over you and sings over you in delight (Zeph. 3:17).
- That the Spirit would shine the light of truth into your heart and dispel the darkness of lies.
- That the Spirit would quicken your heart to feel the love of Christ (Eph. 3:14-21).
- That the Spirit would bring to mind any sins committed that led to bondage and shame.
- That the Spirit would enable you to repent honestly and openly and thoroughly.
- That the Spirit would enable you to openly confess your sins to others.