

Move Beyond YOUR Failure

Many Christians allow shame to immobilize them. Yet Jesus can remove the reproach of the past.

Too many people allow the past to paralyze them. Even people of faith who know what the Bible says about forgiveness and redemption often disqualify themselves after they experience a disappointing failure.

Such failures come in many forms: A messy divorce. A child on drugs. An out-of-wedlock pregnancy. A failed business venture. A church split that results in broken relationships.

Such tragedies tend to leave a brandmark on people's souls. And society—along with the church—often stigmatizes people when they go through such experiences.

Yet this is a time when God is restoring the hearts of His people and preparing us to cross over into our inheritance. As a part of this, He is removing the reproaches of the enemy that have held us to our past and hindered our futures.

When Israel was crossing the Jordan into their promised land, the Lord said to Joshua, “‘This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you’” (Josh.5:9, NKJV). He is speaking the same to us today!

What is a reproach, and how can it be rolled away? Let's go back in time to a story that helps us discover the answers.

William Shent was an 18th-century barber who became a prominent Methodist preacher under John Wesley. Sadly, Shent

fell into sin, but the response of many of his fellow believers was even more sinful.

Wesley heard that the church had been unusually hard on his close friend. He blistered: "I have a few questions. ... Who was it that invited me and received me when I came? William Shent. Who was it that stood by me while I preached in the street with stones flying on every side? William Shent.

"Who was it that bore the storm of persecution for the whole town and stemmed it at the peril of his life? William Shent. Whose word did God bless for many years in an eminent manner? William Shent. By whom were many children now in paradise begotten in the Lord and many now alive? William Shent.

"Who is he that is ready now to be broken up and turned into the street? William Shent. And does nobody care for this? William Shent fell into sin ... but must he be also starved? Must he with his grey hairs and all his children be without a place to lay his head? Can you suffer this? ... Where is gratitude? Where is compassion? Where is Christianity?"

Then Wesley issued a compassionate command to those who had condemned the fallen preacher: "Arise as one man and roll away the reproach. Let us set him on his feet once more."

How Reproach Works

A reproach is a supernatural condition of shame or disgrace that settles into a person's spirit. Shent's problem was not just that he had fallen into sin. It was also the subsequent shame and despair that the enemy brought upon him—using God's people! Wesley acted quickly to ensure that Shent's reproach

would be rolled away.

Reproach is a demonic device that leaves us feeling disgraced and unworthy. Psalm 44 reveals how reproach surrounds us with the lies of the enemy:

The Psalmist said: “My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me, because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the enemy and the avenger” (vv. 15-16). Reproach changes the way we see ourselves. It establishes a mind-set of shame that is contrary to the way God sees us.

Like a heavy cloud, reproach blocks out the light and warmth of the Father’s love, leaving us in the chill of hopelessness. David’s inner struggle with reproach broke his heart and drove him into depression: “You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness” (Ps. 69:19-20)

Though many Christians struggle with reproach, the finished work of Jesus on the cross can roll these dark clouds away and release us into the fullness of our future. Freed from reproach, we gain new joy and faith. With the mind-set of shame broken and our hope renewed, we can cross over into our inheritance—but only if we first allow the Holy Spirit to expose the lies and root them out with the promises of God.

The Lies of the Enemy

Though there are an endless number of reproaches the enemy may use, Scripture points out a few strategic ones he favors most:

1. The reproach of barrenness can come over women who are unable to bear children. This lie says, "You will never be fruitful or significant." The difficulties of infertility or a miscarriage can be an anguishing trial to couples, but when a subsequent reproach tries to settle over them a more sinister force is at work.

This reproach can also hit people who feel insignificant compared to those they feel are successful. Pastors of smaller churches, owners of smaller businesses, and anyone who struggles to feel productive in life may face this reproach.

Even believers who have not received their prayer language may battle this. They may even have been told by cruel Christians that they are somehow second-class.

2. The reproach of widowhood seeks to suffocate those who find themselves lonely in life. This lie says, "You will always be alone." There is a cruel strategy of the enemy to oppress widows and widowers with a supernatural hopelessness that goes beyond the normal feelings associated with their situation.

Similarly, singles and divorcees often hear the enemy whisper that they are defective and doomed to be alone. It doesn't help when we isolate them and forbid them full participation in the life and ministry of the church.

Yet God truly is the God of a second chance. This reproach is broken by the promise that we will never be alone. Since the Lord is our Spouse, our mourning can be turned into the joyful dancing of a wedding party.

3. The reproach of defeat can settle on those who have entered

into life's challenges only to come up feeling like losers. This lie says, "You are a loser in life."

Who hasn't witnessed the fallen countenance of an athlete who suffers a loss in an important game? How much more does defeat affect those who fall short in business, lose a job or struggle with an addiction?

The enemy is right there to suggest shame and implant a reproach. Yet the promise of God is that our faith brings us into supernatural victory, no matter what defeats we may face in the world.

4. The reproach of poverty is devastating, but the Lord promises to take it away (see Ezek. 36:30). This lie says, "If you don't have much, you aren't worth much." Lack brings its own emotional and spiritual pathology into families, nations and cultures around the world.

The enemy knows poverty is a stifling source of humiliation to people. He uses it as an opportunity to drive us to hopeless passivity or (especially in the West) to birth the fear-filled triplets of overwork, greed and ostentatious living.

But material things can never lift the imbedded reproaches of lack. It's only when we realize how eternally rich we are in Christ that we can come to the place of true security.

5. The reproach of moral failure can be a merciless tormentor, especially in the case of fallen spiritual leaders. This lie says, "There is no hope for those who fail."

Remember Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*? She was forced to bear the reproach of her adultery by wearing an embroidered letter "A" wherever she went. Many never recover from the scarlet letter the enemy has placed on their lives after sexual sins.

Though falling into any sin brings a serious spiritual injury, it need not be terminal. God prescribes the cure of restoration. We must carefully and humbly administer this cure, resisting the urge to pull the spiritual life-support plug on a fallen brother.

Countless other reproaches seek to afflict God's people. Victims of sexual abuse, people suffering from HIV or AIDS, those who have been given up for adoption, members of minority communities and those who suffer from disabilities can all feel the unfair oppression of the enemy's shame.

Reproach can enter our lives through the front door of our own failures or sneak in through the back door of the sins of others. But if we will look to the cross, the enemy's last-ditch effort to keep us from coming into our place of blessing will be removed.

No More Shame on You

Once our eyes are opened to the reality of reproaches, they are easily rolled away through the promises of God. Before Israel could cross over the Jordan, they had to be circumcised. Once that was accomplished, the Lord rolled away the reproach of their former lives in Egypt (see Josh. 5:7-9).

In Christ, our hearts have already been spiritually

circumcised, paving the way for our reproaches to be removed so we can move beyond our past into our inheritance.

The cross is the guarantee that we can be free from reproach. Galatians 3:13-14 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse ... having become a curse for us ... that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." No curse or reproach can remain with us if we stand on the finished work of Christ, who became a reproach for us.

If you are suffering under the weight of reproach or would like to minister to those who are, keep the following steps in mind:

1. Reclaim the promises of God. Isaiah 61:7 promises: "Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs."

This verse lets us know that He has lifted our shame and we are free to move forward into the land with a double portion blessing. Take the promises of God that the enemy stole from you back into your spirit and hold them tight. They are yours.

2. Remove the shame. Once you trust these promises, you can remove the condition of shame by addressing it in the name of Jesus and commanding it to disconnect from you. Boldly condemn the enemy's shame and the lies that breed hopelessness. Ask a strong believer to agree with you in faith for freedom from every torment.

3. Receive restoration. Allow the healing, restoring work of the Holy Spirit to roll back every reproach of the enemy. Allow a new mind-set that is aligned with the will of God to form. Let a new confession come from your lips.

Agree with the truth that you are being restored and made new. Say aloud, “The Lord has removed my shame, and this reproach has been rolled away!” Your confession allows faith to rise up and lift the shame from your life (see Rom. 10:10-11).

A woman came into my office who had faithfully served in a ministry until she was prompted to leave by the unwanted advances of a spiritual leader. Reluctant to tell others of her situation, she quietly resigned.

When some who did not understand her decision questioned and then condemned her for “abandoning the sheep,” she found herself not only alone but also in the shadows of a haunting reproach. She believed she had failed. She had lost hope.

After telling me her story, we prayed together and walked through these steps. The Lord Jesus rolled back her reproach. Her tears were turned into joy because God’s promises were claimed and the shame had to lift. Today, she walks in her inheritance.

The same freedom can come to you in Christ. Claim the promises of God, renounce the shame and hopelessness, and rejoice in the power of the cross. Your reproach will be rolled away, and soon you’ll be crossing over into your promised land.

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