

The Grace That Empowers You to Obliterate Shame

One of the biggest blocks in many Christian's lives—one that keeps them from walking in freedom—is shame. Shame is defined as a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety.

Our human nature has typically been conditioned to avoid the pain of embarrassment or humiliation, so when we find ourselves guilty, falling short or in sin, shame takes over and we go into hiding. What is the best way to free ourselves from the pain of the problem? We decide it's to keep it covered, unexposed to the judgement of those around us.

As we're covering up, we don't realize we are now also effectively blocking the Holy Spirit's ability to access that area of our heart. Over time we find our hearts getting more closed off and harder. We wonder why we can't seem to receive the Father's deep love for us. We know all the verses and hear all the testimonies, but the revelation never seems to make its way into our hearts where it has the ability to change our lives.

Shame leaves no place for grace to hit, repentance to happen and freedom to be birthed. My husband recently had a moment when he tangibly experienced that kind of grace for the first time, even though he grew up in church and has walked with Jesus just as long. He says the experience happened when he was able to confess that *he* is the adulterous woman in John 8.

Let's go to that familiar story. It's John 8:1-11 if you need a refresher. Put yourself in this woman's position. Think of the deepest, most hidden part of your story.

You may have never done anything so seemingly terrible as sleeping with someone who isn't your spouse, but Jesus said

that even lusting in your heart for someone is the same. Unholy anger is the same as murder. I could keep going but I hope you get the picture. Man looks at the outer appearance but God looks at the heart. If not outwardly, in your heart you are most likely a murderous adulterer.

Confessing to something as strong as that may seem counterintuitive, when we've conditioned ourselves to always present our best side, however, our hearts can only experience His grace in the areas that we have allowed to be exposed. Anything that is hidden cannot experience the grace He freely offers.

With that in mind, imagine being fully exposed. There is no secret that hasn't been found out, lie or fear left uncovered. You are surrounded by shouting voices, accusations being slung, the things you most desired to stay hidden are being told in front of everyone you care about.

Directly in front of you is Jesus. He is the only, truly pure one on the scene. Even in His heart, He is guilty of nothing. What is His response? First with only a few words He silences and scatters every single accuser, tormentor and mocker. Then when all that's left is you fully exposed, in all the pain of your shame, lying in the dirt, His response looks like an arm outstretched and eyes filled with compassion.

Allow your heart to be fully exposed, and dare to reach out to accept that hand. Lock your gaze to His, you'll find no condemnation there. His voice will override all the accusations and fear. When He refuses to condemn you in your worst moment, when you receive that kind of mercy, you open yourself up for grace to come in and change everything. Grace will now cover what you hid in shame, and empower you to walk out of sin into glorious freedom.

I love this story, because if we are truly honest, we can find ourselves in the shoes of every person. I have certainly been

in the place of the Pharisees. Insecurity can take us in several directions. It can lead us on the path of the woman, lying in the dirt, taking hits from the accuser, or it can lead us into the role of the accuser.

We think if only we can prove that we are better than that other person it will surely make us feel better about ourselves. We plant ourselves in self-righteousness, and pick up our proverbial stones ready to hurl them for our own advantage. We make judgments based on what our eyes can see, and in the process de-humanize the objects of those judgments.

Again, we are just dealing with another cover. We are covering deep feelings of insecurity and fear. Pride is rooted in fear as much as shame is, it just looks more put together on the outside. Inside, though, our hearts are just as unreachable. Both the coverings of shame and pride leave no place for grace to hit and bring freedom.

Jesus, on the other hand, shocks both the ashamed and the proud with His response. With just a few words He brings humility to the proud. With an outstretched arm He invites the ashamed out of condemnation. In both instances His offers have the power to lead us into freedom. The Pharisees had the choice to hear His words and be forever changed, to lay down their stones once and for all, and in so doing lay down the burden of being in control. In the same way, the woman was invited into true freedom from her sin. The choice was hers though. If she received His mercy, then His grace would also empower her to walk out His command to go and sin no more. In both cases, Jesus offered true freedom, but it had to be received and walked out with an open heart.

As disciples of Jesus I believe all of us would read this story and say that our desire is to be like Him. The only way we can ever respond to others with His mercy is to first experience that same mercy.

We must be the woman. We must be exposed in every area of our heart, and still look up to find His kind gaze and words of mercy. We must accept His outstretched hand and allow our hearts to be changed by His lack of condemnation.

This kind of grace empowers us to live with soft hearts, unhindered by sin and shame. It also keeps us from picking up the rocks of judgement, bitterness or accusation. Instead we eagerly offer outstretched arms of mercy to a world that desperately needs some Good News.

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