

Break the Power of Shame

Are you man enough to give yourself to Him, even in the midst of your failure?

There is no issue more fundamentally important to your spiritual growth than your understanding of the personality of Jesus Christ. It goes beyond just knowing His mission to what He thinks and how He feels—especially the way that He thinks and feels about people in their weakness.

Jesus says, “Who do you say I am?” Be careful how you answer. If your perception of Him is incorrect, you will end up running from God instead of to Him when you discover the weakness of your own flesh. And you will run in circles of frustration trying to get God’s approval.

The human heart was created with an insatiable longing to be enjoyed and desired by God. We need to sense that He desires us, that He delights in us, that He actually likes us! If you struggle with how God feels about you, I have good news. God’s personality is filled with passion and pleasure, especially for weak people!

If you can grasp how Jesus Christ feels about sincere believers who are spiritually immature, it will revolutionize your life. Yes, God hates sin. But there is a difference between spiritual immaturity and rebellion. Often, I am immature in my faith. But there is a longing in my heart to walk with God. I want to live as a godly man. I long for areas of victory that I do not have. The Lord sees that longing, even in the midst of my immaturity.

This longing to be desired and enjoyed by God is a very powerful force in the human heart. If we do not answer this longing in the right way, it will drive us into dysfunction. But God has powerfully answered this deep longing in Christ Jesus. He does desire us. He wants us. He longs for us. He

enjoys us, not just when we are fully mature in heaven, but He actually enjoys us while we're on the journey. As fathers, we enjoy our children when they're young. In the same way, God likes us while we are growing, not just after we are grown. The revelation of this is what leads us to maturity.

Most of us imagine that God relates to us and defines our lives according to our track records of failure. But He sees the longing of our spirits and defines us according to this because He sees the heart as clearly as the outward life and the outward stumbling. He sees all things; nothing is hidden from His eyes.

The Apostle Peter learned this the hard way.

In Matthew 26:31 and 33, at the Last Supper, Jesus said, "All of you will stumble this night." But Peter argued, "No way! I will not stumble tonight."

When Jesus went on to explain that that night, Peter would deny Him not once, but three times, Peter said, "Even if I have to die I will not deny you!"

Like Peter, we often give God guarantees that we will not fail. We want to stand before the Lord based on a vow that we will not do a particular sin again. The heart of religion wants to bring something to the table that will motivate God to love us. We want to give Him a reason to love us instead of just freely receiving His embrace. But God enjoys us because of who He is and what He did on the cross, not because of who we are.

In Matthew 26:69-75, Peter denied Jesus three times. This was a devastating experience in Peter's life. As men, we all have experienced this same spiritual crisis. We love Jesus, but we sin against Him. Our desire to obey Jesus is greater than our ability to walk in obedience. Our spiritual intentions to please Him are greater than our actual attainment of spiritual maturity.

In John 21:3, the story takes on a new dimension. Jesus had now risen from the dead, but Peter couldn't forget how he had failed the Lord. So Peter said, "I'm going fishing." This was a dramatic statement. To understand this we must ask why he is going fishing.

Peter did not go fishing for financial reasons. He is not fishing for recreation.

Peter was changing his vocation. When he said he was going fishing, he did not mean for the weekend. He was going back to the fishing business that he had in Galilee. Peter loved Jesus, but Peter could not bear his spiritual failure. This decision to go fishing was a statement of despair and hopelessness. He felt like a hopeless hypocrite. He lost his confidence before God as a genuine lover of God.

The crisis Peter faced was a result of his misunderstanding the heart of Jesus. He had more confidence in his commitment to Jesus than in Jesus' commitment to him! When we have a wrong understanding of who God is, we begin to imagine that when we struggle with sin, He is so disappointed that we cannot stand before Him with confidence. We feel the pain of the disappointment that we imagine God has toward us. We begin to reason, like Peter, that we will always have a second-class relationship with God. So why not just quit and go fishing?

What a difference it would make in our lives as men if we had confidence that even during the times that we are immature and are still growing, Jesus has passion for us, and even takes pleasure and enjoyment in us. This is what gives me courage to press in to God. When I fail, I do not imagine that He is repulsed and exasperated. Oh, to feel the longing of His heart for me. This is what makes me want to run to Him and not from Him when I discover my own weakness.

Finally, in John 21:15-17 Jesus appeared to the disciples and asked Peter, "Do you love me? Do you love me more than these?"

He is pointing to the fish on the ground. In other words, Jesus is asking Peter, do you love me more than your safety zone? Will you give yourself to Me even in the midst of your failure? Will you reach again to be a lover of God like I called you to be even when you have fallen?

I imagine Peter struggled to acknowledge and confess that he had genuine love for God since he had just failed so profoundly. Peter felt much more like a hopeless hypocrite than a lover of God.

There were three denials in Peter's failure and now Jesus asked three questions. There is a question to correspond to each denial. When the sovereign God asks us a question it is not because He needs information from us. He already knows everything! When the Lord went after Adam in Genesis 3:8, and Adam had just sinned, He said, "Adam? Where are you, Adam?" It is not that the Lord had lost Adam. It was a relational question. Thus, when He asked, "Peter, do you love Me?" He was asking, "Do you know where you stand with Me, Peter?"

The problem was that Peter did not know where he stood. The shame of his failure had caused him to lose his confidence as a lover of God and to define his life as a hopeless hypocrite. This is so common today with men who sincerely love Jesus but confuse their spiritual immaturity as rebellion.

I believe the Lord was breaking the shame off of Peter's heart. Soon, Peter would stand with great boldness on the day of Pentecost because of this recovery from shame.

Finally, Peter said to Jesus in John 21:17, "You know everything, and You know that I love you!" The power of that confession was breaking shame and awakening Peter's heart to deep love again. It takes confidence before God to be an extravagant lover of God. We must feel confidence in God's love for us and confidence that He sees us as genuine lovers of God and not hypocrites.

A vital part of my worship before God is to use Peter's words. I pray, "Lord, You know everything. You know that I love you." This truth cleanses me. "My friends often define me by my failures, but You define me by my longings for You."

If you want to have a passion for Jesus, if you want to live as a new man in Christ, you must relate to God with the confidence that He enjoys you. Religion wants us to stand before God with a guarantee that we will not fail. But God wants us to stand before Him with the guarantee that He will never let us go.

Mike Bickle is director of the International House of Prayer of Kansas City. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." —Matt. 16:13-16, NIV