

Healthy Shame

This week we begin a four-week study on the topic of shame. This is an issue about which the Bible has much to say. Shame is something that surfaces in all of our lives in one way or another at some point. Shame thrives in hiddenness and so the hope for this series is that it would help all of us find the courage and freedom to bring our shame out into the open that we might experience healing. Jesus wants to do that in all of our lives. There is, however, a kind of shame that is healthy. Today, we begin by looking at healthy shame.

Opening Question: What do you think of the definition that Steve used for shame?

“Shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. You feel exposed and humiliated.”
(Edward Welch, *Shame Interrupted*)

Read Genesis 2:20-3:13

1. Out of all the things that the author of Genesis could have said about Adam and Eve’s condition and experience before sin, why do you think he chose to describe them as he does in verse 2:25?
2. How does shame enter the experience of Adam and Eve? And how does shame begin to affect Adam and Eve’s relationship with God and with each other?

Read Psalms 119:78-80; Jeremiah 6:13-15

3. What does the psalmist understand about shame? In what ways is this a healthy view of shame?
4. How did a lack of healthy shame affect the people about whom Jeremiah writes?

Steve said:

Edward Welch . . . writes this paragraph in his book *Shame Interrupted*:

Addicts live with shame, whether the problem is drugs, alcohol, food, or sex. No one tells you that when you fall in love with any of these, you also say "I do" to shame. Then, when shame strikes, it is so nasty you have to numb yourself, and what better anesthetic than your addiction? It is the perfect vicious circle.

I would encourage you not to be afraid of healthy shame in the areas in which you struggle with habitual sin. The impulse is to think that shame is **always** bad and destructive. But that's not the case in Christ Jesus. A healthy shame can warn us and humble us and drive us back to Jesus.

5. What is the difference between healthy shame and a shame that is toxic?
6. How might a healthy shame help you in areas where you struggle with habitual sin?
7. Have you ever experienced a healthy shame warning, humbling and driving you back to Jesus? If so, explain.

Read Revelation 3:14-22

8. How does this passage connect to Genesis 2 and 3?
9. What does this passage say that Jesus wants to do to our shame (v. 18)?

Steve said:

If you answer the door and let Jesus come in, He will sit at your table and eat your food and drink your wine. Jesus will share table fellowship with you. You will have gone from being "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" to enjoying the friendship and the camaraderie and the affection of the One who is described in Revelation 1 as "the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." Because you are now clothed in righteousness and because of your association with One so glorious, you can almost feel your shame begin to melt away. But there's more:

10. What might it mean in your life right now to open the door to Jesus so that you can experience his "friendship and the camaraderie and the affection" in a deeper way such that you begin to have your shame "melt away"?
11. What other questions or thoughts or comments do you have about shame?