

# Beyond Shame

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Kindled by real or imagined failure, the painful emotion known as shame can be rooted in blame or self-condemnation. Conscious or unconscious, shame can be activated in childhood or adulthood and often includes an intense fear of rejection and an uncomfortable, sometimes imperceptible, sense of being unable to meet either one's own or others' expectations.



**We can learn to recognize shame's impact on our minds and bodies.** If you identify with any of the following aspects of shame, you can choose to move into God's deliverance.

- 1. Shame can rapidly control us.** When shame hijacks logical thought, it remains in control unless we interrupt the process. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and *suddenly felt shame at their nakedness* (Gen. 3:7). In Genesis 3:15, God promised a Savior, with tangible deliverance. Like Adam and Eve, we can be rescued from our own or others' destructive choices. *He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me* (Psalm 18:17, NLT).
- 2. Shame can keep us trapped in despair, discouragement, or depression, and God wants to lift us out of the pit of despair.** Not only does He set our feet on solid ground, but He also steadies us as we walk forward (see Psalm 40:2). When others hear and see what God has done for us, they'll *be astounded...and put their trust in the LORD* (Psalm 40:3).
- 3. Shame is driven by fear—of rejection, revulsion, or repetition.** To numb shame's pain, some try addictive behaviors, some choose avoidance strategies, or worship idols and *are put to shame ...trusting something that can give him no help at all* (Isaiah 44:9, 20). Instead, we can trust El Shaddai—the LORD God Almighty—with confidence our failures cannot disconnect us from His power to deliver us. *For the LORD watches over the path of the godly* (Psalm 1:6).

The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM) says to “effectively work with shame, we have to understand its neurobiology and why it can be so difficult to erase this deeply ingrained emotion.” **Moral injury**, for example, is complex spiritual, social, mental, or emotional harm occurring after someone has done something violating his or her core beliefs. Those who experience *moral injury* often are in so much repressed pain that they can't imagine moving forward. For military personnel, survivors of human trafficking and other forms of abuse, first responders, veterinarians, and others, it's vital to move forward in God's love and forgiveness. Sharing your pain with a trusted friend or counselor can help.

**Real or false shame?** The source of shame's pain can be real (when we've done something wrong) or false (perhaps after repeatedly being told, “shame on you” or falsely accused, one agonizing aspect of spiritual abuse). A basic difference between real and counterfeit shame is this: when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sinful behavior or attitudes, we can confess it (agreeing with God), moving into His forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9). False shame leaves us trapped in a cycle of guilt, sadness, shame, regret, and hopelessness, and it feels like there's nothing we can do to stop it—or be forgiven from it. Whenever false shame emerges, we need to rely on God's promises—not our feelings!

## Practical steps to move beyond shame:

- 1. Believe God.** The psalmist prayed, *O LORD, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be put to shame. Rescue me, for you always do what is right* (Psalm 31:1, NLT). *Protect me! Rescue my life from them! Do not let me be disgraced, for in you I take refuge* (Psalm 25:20, NLT).
- 2. Understand what's happening in your brain and body.** Traumatic memories can be reactivated in as little as 1/12 of a second by anything we notice with our five senses. We can be alert, observing when we've moved into any of the Five Fs [Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fornicate, or Feed], and immediately do grounding/anchoring exercises—mental, physical, or soothing techniques to help us live in the present.
- 3. Go continually to Jesus.** He bore our shame, and we no longer need to be defined by it! Colossians 2:15 (AMP) explains: *When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities [those supernatural forces of evil operating against us], He made a public example of them [exhibiting them as captives in His triumphal procession], having triumphed over them through the cross.*

Live in the wonderful freedom Christ won for YOU!

If you're unable to move beyond shame, please know you're worth getting the help you need! Ask your pastor, priest, or rabbi to recommend professional counselors near you. For helpful ideas to live free from shame, you can read or listen to *Core Healing from Trauma*, a biblical counseling workbook for individuals or groups, available on Amazon (<https://cutt.ly/occdejH>). You can also watch “Strengthening Your Core,” a 12-week video series on YouTube at <https://cutt.ly/Or6EiiW>). Each week of the series provides additional information about grounding exercises. You can subscribe to my blog at <https://corehealingfromtrauma.com/>.