As a Christian you have come to know and experience Jesus as your Savior, as the one who willingly took your sins upon himself, becoming for you the source of all forgiveness and comfort. Do you also know that the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice extend to your shame? If you are a person keenly aware of your shame, or if the experience feels distant, this study is for you. Jesus is as concerned about the shame you experience as he is about your guilt.

Guilt seems fairly straightforward, it is about what you do. It results when you fall short of a moral standard or you cross a line. But shame is more difficult to grasp, it is about who you are and how you feel before the eyes of someone whose opinion matters. Shame is different than embarrassment. You feel exposed and worthless, rejected and humiliated.

This study emphasizes the human experience of shame, not because the problem of guilt isn’t important, but because shame is often overlooked as a universal struggle. So one goal of this study is to uncover shame and understand its relationship to guilt. Here you will learn how to identify the experiences of guilt and shame, know how Scripture speaks profoundly to both, and see how God responds.

What is the benefit of wrestling with and uncovering shame and guilt? When we become more aware of these experiences, we will grasp the depth of Christ’s love. We will know better how to pray, how to ask for help, and how to find help and healing in God’s Word. And as we grow in wisdom, we are better equipped to walk with others.
Uncovering Shame & Guilt: How Jesus enters our experience
Copyright © 2017, by Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation.
All rights reserved.

Speakers
Edward T. Welch, MDiv, PhD
David Powlison, MDiv, PhD
Pastor Joe Novenson, MDiv

Curriculum Development
Bruce E. Eaton, MDiv
Rebecca Eaton, MA

Permissions
This workbook is intended for personal and group use. The Group Handouts and Diagrams may be reproduced or copied. Other parts of this workbook may not be reproduced or copied except with the prior written consent of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation.

Requests for additional permissions should be sent to:
Customer Service
1803 East Willow Grove Avenue
Glenside, PA 19038
customerservice@ccef.org


ISBN: 978-1-938294-33-4

The Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) is a non-profit ministry founded in 1968. CCEF exists to restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the church by thinking biblically about the issues of living in order to equip the church to meet counseling-related needs. We accomplish this mission through our teaching, writing, and counseling ministries. We are located in Glenside, PA. To learn more about our ministry, visit us at www.ccef.org.
Getting Started

As a Christian you have come to know and experience Jesus as your Savior. Jesus is the one who willingly took your sins upon himself, becoming for you the source of all forgiveness and comfort in this life and the next. What this study seeks to uncover is that Jesus is as concerned about the shame you experience as he is about your guilt. This study will emphasize the human experience of shame, not because the problem of guilt isn’t important, but because shame—and how the Bible addresses this fundamental human problem—is not often prominent in our minds.

We learn throughout Scripture that shame will plague humanity just as much and just as long as guilt does. But we also learn that the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice extend to our guilt and to our shame. What is shame like? Shame is different than embarrassment. If shame isn’t attended to, it will persist and can even grow over time. Shame can cripple us with doubt—doubt about ourselves, the people in our lives, and God. Shame often comes attached to feelings of fear and exclusion. We feel exposed and worthless. We are rejected and humiliated. Shame says, “There is something about me that if people know it or see it, then I won’t be worthy of acceptance and I won’t be worthy of love.”

The reality is you will experience shame in this life, because shame is as much a part of the human dilemma as guilt is. But the good news is that because the right person, Jesus Christ, went through the shame of life and death for us, shame has been transformed because of it. The result is that we do not need to hide from our shame. We can turn to the One who bore our shame and our guilt. Humiliation and rejection need no longer have controlling power over us, because the lowly and shamed are raised-up as they are associated with Jesus Christ.

What is the benefit of wrestling with our experiences of shame and guilt and uncovering them? When we become more aware of our experiences, we can find hope and help for our struggles in Jesus Christ and in the Bible. As we grow in wisdom we will know better how to pray, how to invite others into our struggle, how to find help in Scripture, and find healing through relationship with God. When we become more aware of the experiences of shame and guilt in our own life, we become better equipped to walk with someone else who is living with the unrelenting burden of them.
About the Workbook
Each section of the Workbook includes a Before You Begin activity. Immediately following is the Introduction which corresponds to the beginning of a video. Talks conclude with a Reflection Activity followed by Study Questions.

A Note For Groups
This study can be used at two different levels for groups. For an in-depth study, both leader and participants will purchase and use the Workbook. Participants will have the time (2 hours per meeting) and interest (study and reflection outside the group) for in-depth study.

For an introductory study, the group leader can purchase and use the Workbook as preparation for facilitating group discussion in a small group setting or Sunday School class. The group leader will provide participants with copies of the Group Handouts. In this setting, we do not recommend you try to answer every question, but instead focus on those that meet the particular interests of the group. You can select a few Study Questions or use a Before You Begin or Reflection Activity to be discussed in your allotted time-frame.
What is Shame?

Shame is a difficult topic.

On the one hand, the topic seems elusive. Guilt is very specific, but shame? It can be hard to wrap your mind around the experience. For some of us, even the topic seems foreign—“I don’t think I feel shame. Do I?”

On the other hand, when you do feel it, shame is crushing. You feel like you are drowning in a sense of personal failure, inferiority, and humiliation. For some of us, shame is something we can’t escape—“I always experience shame. How could I ever even deal with it?”

So we begin this study by affirming two things. First, shame is always significant, and everyone experiences shame. Second, Jesus Christ enters our experience to touch our shame. He welcomes us. He washes us. He clothes us. He singles us out for honor.

As you will hear Ed Welch discuss in the first lesson, shame is a noteworthy topic even before Adam and Eve disobeyed God. We learn something striking about their life experience before the fall: The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Genesis 2:25). Can you imagine walking around entirely exposed and experiencing only honor and joy in God’s presence, with no shame at all, with nothing to hide?!

But when Adam and Eve fell from their created perfection and sense of freedom, the immediate result was to experience their guilt as nakedness and shame. They knew that they were guilty of doing something wrong. They felt that they had become shameful. They needed to run and hide. They knew they were naked. They felt exposed. They covered themselves and hid from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 3:7–8).

Like guilt, shame is an essential part of our fallen condition and experience. Guilt is about what you do. It results from falling short of a moral standard or crossing a line. But shame is about who you are. It results from feeling unacceptable in the eyes of someone whose opinion matters.

Where will this study go with this topic? It will take you to Jesus. He is as concerned about the shame you experience as he is about your sin. Both register how we are in trouble before God. Both threaten your soul. In response to shame, Jesus is your refuge and hiding place. He is tenderhearted and merciful toward you. He is your friend. When he touches you, you are no longer identified by your shame. Instead, he joyously welcomes you into his presence. He calls you a saint and a beloved child. He rejoices over you, and you rejoice in him. Can you imagine anything grander for a person who struggles profoundly with feeling shameful and unacceptable?
The Experience of Shame
Edward T. Welch

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Take a moment and reflect on the essay you just read and respond to this statement:

On the one hand, the topic seems elusive. Guilt is very specific, but shame? It can be hard to wrap your mind around the experience. For some of us, even the topic seems foreign—“I don’t think I feel shame. Do I?”

On the other hand, when you do feel it, shame is crushing. You feel like you are drowning in a sense of personal failure, inferiority, and humiliation. For some of us, shame is something we can’t escape—“I always experience shame. How could I ever even deal with it?”

Which experience most resonates with you and why?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

What are you thinking about related to the topics of shame and guilt as you begin this study?

What goals do you have for yourself? And others?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________
INTRODUCTION

*Genesis 2:25:* The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

There are at least two possible meanings in this statement at the end of Genesis 2. One possibility is that this statement is simply an interesting fact. The second possibility is more profound. The placement of this statement at the end of the account of Adam and Eve’s life in the garden may be the most important feature of the story, a feature worthy of reflection.

In his annual presentations as the CEO of Apple Computer, Steve Jobs used to wait until the last minute to share the most important new product that year. In the same way, the author of Genesis is trying to grab our attention. It is as if Genesis 2:25 is saying, “Oh! And one more thing…” And that one more thing is surprising and important.

Can you imagine a time in human history when shame did not exist?

If it is true that *the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame* then there was a time when shame was not part of the human dilemma. On the one hand, this is encouraging to us. But it is also a set-up for what takes place in Genesis 3.

*Genesis 3:7:* Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The realization of nakedness and the act of covering up is the very first feature of the Fall. And if this is true, then in witnessing this act we are introduced to the human dilemma. This is the problem we will struggle with, and so we anticipate that Scripture will address this problem over and over again in a glorious and life-changing way.

God’s response to the shamed isn’t what we expected.

Are you familiar with shame? Is it something you can identify in your own life? If so, you are one of God’s people. We can see throughout the Scriptures that God has a unique affection for the shamed. Who would have thought?

The goal of this lesson is to define guilt and shame and to identify the distinctions between the two, and then to see how shame presents itself in various ways. And then to go through some of the Old Testament trajectories that speak about the shocking and counterintuitive way that God is speaking to the most profound human dilemma.
DEFINING GUILT

- You are in the courtroom
- Only one gaze matters
- You are legally liable before God for your sin
- You need someone to rescue you
- Forgiveness of sins is secured only by Jesus
- In response to God’s continual appeals, you turn toward the slain and risen Lamb, acknowledge your sin, receive forgiveness, and turn away from your sin.

How does this definition compare to the definition of shame? Generally, people are more familiar with guilt than shame. The imagery of guilt is usually (but not exclusively) a courtroom; and in this courtroom only the gaze of the Judge matters. It is irrelevant whether there are other people in the courtroom or not.

DEFINING SHAME

Once you get a grasp of what shame is and understand the distinctions between guilt and shame, you will see it everywhere.

- You are in the public square
- All eyes are on you
- You are not acceptable before God and other people
- You are defined by sin—your own or your humiliation because of the sins of others
- You need rescue (forgiveness of sins but also covering), inclusion and cleansing, especially when you have been humiliated—these are secured only by Jesus
- In response to his continual appeals, you touch the Holy One and he touches you back, and he becomes your refuge.
Shame is a large category in Scripture; it even encompasses the category of guilt. The words listed in the diagram below help to identify the experience of shame.

**Shame Encompasses Guilt in the Fall**

Humiliation is a critical extension of shame. You have been humiliated by the sins of other people, and yes you need rescue and forgiveness of sins, but you also need something more. This ‘something more’ can be expressed as a triad of needs:

- You need covering because you experience nakedness.
- You need inclusion because you feel like an outcast.
- You need cleansing because you feel contaminated.

The benefits of covering, inclusion, and cleansing are secured by Jesus Christ at the cross. In response to the continual appeals of Jesus, you touch the Holy One and he touches you back. This is one of the images we can use to express God’s amazing and shocking response to the experience of shame. In God’s response to human shame, he becomes a refuge and a hiding place.

There is even more good news. Because the Holy One has touched you, you are no longer identified by your shame. You are a saint, you are a holy one, and you belong to God.
Shame and guilt are not distinct in the Fall

Guilt enters human experience right in the beginning. Adam and Eve sinned, and as a result the legal feature of guilt is immediately present. But what you find in the garden is that shame encompasses the experience of guilt. Adam and Eve's experiences of guilt are those things that we identify most closely with shame. You feel naked, utterly worthless, like a failure. You feel, and are, an outcast, contaminated and disgraced.

Many people struggle with guilt even though they know forgiveness of sins. The challenge of shame is that we can go into the courtroom and the Judge pronounces us “not guilty,” but we leave the courtroom and still feel naked and exposed. We still feel contaminated, like an outcast, and like scum. Yet Scripture tells us that the benefits of Jesus extend to our guilt and to our shame.

Shame and guilt become distinct after the Fall

As shame develops after the Fall, two distinct aspects of shame occur. One is that there is an aspect of sin that can be spoken about publicly. Others are with you when you acknowledge these types of sin rather than staring at you. Two examples: breaking traffic laws and selfishness in relationships.

A second development in the category of shame that distinguishes it from events in the garden is the addition of being rejected and humiliated at the hands of other people. Those who have left the courtroom of guilt can still live with a sense of rejection and feel unacceptable before other people and God himself. Scripture is aware of this fundamental human dilemma and speaks profoundly to it.

Shame & Guilt Become Distinct

Shame
unacceptable &
unpresentable

Guilt
Rejection
Finding the experience of shame in our own lives

As we begin to understand the category of shame, we can see it in our own lives and in the lives of others around us, and we can bring the good words of Scripture to bear deeply on our hearts.

Consider the example of the woman who struggles with pedophilia—she has an unusual attraction to infants. What would happen if this woman stood up and spoke about her sin struggle? No one would nod their heads in affirmation and acknowledge that they are with her sharing this struggle. If you saw her after her disclosure, you might want to avoid her. Here is a woman who every single hour of her life struggles with the shame of being identified by that particular sin.

Consider also the man who was unfaithful to his wife many years ago. As he spoke about the difficulties that his unfaithfulness caused, you could see the typical posture of shame. His head was bowed low, even 15 years after the transgression.

There is something about shame that is much different than embarrassment. Embarrassment is a temporary experience. People may turn away from us, or we don't want to be seen for a moment because of what we have done, but the next day what has happened no longer impacts us. Shame, when it is not attended to, will persist—and even grow. Feelings of shame can be more intense rather than less intense over time when people are known by particular sins.

Scripture captures the experience of shame

One way Scripture captures the experience of shame is by identifying people who live in poverty and destitution. Those who had nothing were nothing. According to appearances, they must have been under the judgment of God for them to be so thoroughly destitute.²

Neediness is shameful. How many of us have had the experience of asking for something from another person? Sometimes even asking another person to pray for us can be challenging because we have to acknowledge our spiritual poverty.

The story of Naomi in the book of Ruth provides an ideal story of poverty and destitution.

Naomi is a woman who is familiar with shame. She has lost her husband, her children, her land, and she returns to Israel impoverished and destitute.

But Naomi's story is a story that will be found over and over again in Scripture—someone's story begins with a pronounced form of public shame, but by the end there is honor. By the end of Naomi's story, we see that she is in the birth line of Jesus!
We find in Scripture over and over again that God is looking for the person who is familiar with shame. If you do not experience shame and you cannot identify even small aspects of it in your life, then you have some reason to doubt God’s love. Because as you go through Scripture, it seems as though God only cares about those who struggle with guilt and shame.

**It can be difficult for people in Western cultures to identify shame**

The problem of guilt is easier for people in Western cultures to identify. If you are in an Asian or African culture, shame is also easy to identify. In Western cultures shame has become submerged under problems like low self-esteem, and it is dealt with by an inept form of positive thinking. Even in the Christian church in the West, you will find much more teaching on guilt than shame, even though Scripture seems to be about shame that encompasses guilt from beginning to end.

**CAPTURING THE EXPERIENCE OF SHAME**

In order to see how Scripture addresses the problem of shame we need to first identify the experience of shame.

**You feel different.**

You feel racially different. You feel physically different. You feel intellectually different. Consider the man who grew up with learning differences. When he read a description of those differences as a 28 year-old, he began to cry because, for the first time, he felt included and understood. People who experience shame feel like outcasts, they feel invisible and worthless.

**You feel like a failure.**

People who experience shame live with a sense that they haven’t measured up. Fear of public failure, or actual public failure, can create a depression dip in an otherwise emotionally stable life. Public failure is an especially shameful experience.

**You feel like a fraud.**

People who are successful tend to struggle with this. They live with an inner monologue that says, “If I’m ever found out, people will know I don’t deserve these successes. If I’m ever found out, people will truly see my incompetency.” Temporarily, success can cover this sense of being naked, but most people who experience success have a sense that it is not going to be a sufficient covering.
You experience rejection every day.

Consider the man who experienced memorable rejection by his father at a professional baseball game when he was a boy. This person’s father talked baseball with the person sitting on the other side of him for the entire game, never acknowledging his son or introducing his son to the person he was talking to. We who hear this story could find justification to minimize this man’s experience, but here is a man who believes that this one story captures his life.

He is an ordinary person, active in the church, but he says, “This is what life feels like for me every single day. I haven’t measured up to those people who are important in my life. I am seen by others as a kind of reject.” This is the kind of person that Scripture targets. This is the kind of person who is the recipient of the Father’s unique affection.

You have been violated.³

If you have been violated, and especially if you have been sexually violated, you palpably experience shame, always, unless you are momentarily distracted. I was speaking with a woman who had been sexually violated. When I said, “You seemed a little quieter on Sunday. Anything happening?” She responded, “I was afraid to open my mouth because if I opened my mouth black bile was going to come out on other people.”

This response is a reflection of her feelings of being loathsome, disgraced, vile, and a discarded person. It was if she was saying, “If I open my mouth the contamination may come out and dirty other people, and I don’t want to make the world around me unclean.” This is a woman who is an active member, part of worship, and involved in the ministries of the church.

Shame is a universal experience.

Once you identify the particular experiences of shame, you see shame everywhere. We want to be covered somehow, perhaps by a resume or our reputations. We are afraid to be seen. We never feel like we quite belong. Everyone else seems to be a part of everything, and you are a bystander on the side. You sense there is something wrong with you, or there is something dirty about you.
MOVING FROM SHAME TO HONOR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Now that we are familiar with the human experience of shame, we can look to Scripture to see what it says.

In the Old Testament we see that God covers the naked, accepts the outcast as part of the group, and thoroughly washes the unclean inside and out. What does he replace the experience of shame with? He grants the shamed person honor, glory, holiness, and beauty. There is movement along a trajectory.

Shame Transformed to Honor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Banished</th>
<th>Pursued &amp; included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Riches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked</td>
<td>Clothed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclean</td>
<td>Holy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From banishment to being pursued and included as part of God's people

Most people are familiar with the experience, “I don’t quite fit. I feel like an outcast and somehow I’ve been banished, and everyone else seems to be doing well.” From the story of Scripture we know that we are, indeed, exiled people from the Garden. Curiously, even though God says: “Leave, this is no longer your garden because this is my territory.” God himself pursues us even as we leave the garden.

God pursues banished people. Are you intrigued by the possibility that if you are familiar with shame, then the Lord has an unusually unique affection for you? It is a characteristic of God’s people to be familiar with shame, because the shamed are God’s people.
An example from Hosea

When the Lord says in Hosea 1:9, *for you are not my people, and I am not your God,* this is shameful. The people are outcasts. But God continues to speak in 1:10, *And in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” they will be called “sons of the living God.”* The Lord knows his people’s primary dilemma, and he responds by infusing them with hope for the coming of the Christ!

God takes this promise of inclusion even farther in Hosea 2:23, *I will say to those called “Not my people,” “You are my people”; and they will say, “You are my God.”* God uses a possessive pronoun in this passage—**my**—the Lord is pursuing his people and has a unique interest in them.

You see a trajectory of relationship with God in the Scriptures that only gets better over time. This change in relationship is even expressed in the book of Hosea itself. God says to his disgraced people in Hosea 2:16, *“In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’”*

From being impoverished to the richest of meals with God

In Old Testament times to have someone over for a meal was a way to identify with and associate with other people. A meal is intimate and joins people together. God calls out to the destitute and shamed in Isaiah 55:1 and invites them to a meal with the richest of fare.

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!*

One of the ways Scripture identifies shamed people is by emphasizing their poverty. But Isaiah 55:1 continues speaking to the people of God,

*Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*

These words deal with the deepest problem of life—our ongoing struggle with shame.

From being naked and exposed to being clothed with dignity and honor

After Adam and Eve fell they experienced a sense of being naked and exposed. God first covered them with animal skins, but these were garments of shame. This covering sent a message, “If you want to act like an animal, if you want to follow an animal, or if you want to be associated with an
animal, then I will dress you as an animal.”

But this was not the Lord’s final word on dressing humanity. In Exodus 28:2 the Lord said to Moses,

“Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor.”

God is the tailor of these garments. The garments invest the priests with dignity and honor. The words Holy to the Lord engraved on the gold plate of the turban the priests wore in Exodus 28:36 is God’s answer to the human problem of shame. We are naked and exposed, but our God knows this and he is in the process of dressing us with himself.

The people of Israel were familiar with Adam and Eve’s story of nakedness and shame. They were familiar with the shame of being slaves. But they also knew that when the priest wore these beautiful garments, the Lord was investing the people with beauty also.

These trajectories in the Old Testament deal with the fundamental human problem that all of us are seeking a solution for. And if we view the benefits of Jesus Christ only in terms of forgiveness of sins in a legal sense, then our understanding of Christ’s benefits for us will not capture the totality of what he has done for us.

**From contaminated and unclean to being holy and cleansed**

Do you feel contaminated? In Isaiah 6:5, the prophet is an example of a contaminated and shameful person entering the courtroom of the king. And before this king, before the Holy One, he assumes he is dead: “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined.” Instead of sending death, the Holy One sends an intermediary to touch his lips in Isaiah 6:6–7.

When something that belongs to God touches us, it changes us and renders the unclean person holy. This work of the Lord is also a set-up for a time when God himself is going to come close, and he will no longer use a seraph to touch us. And notice what Isaiah does when the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send?” This shamed person, who is now cleansed and belongs to God, becomes a volunteer to serve the Lord.
WHY ARE YOU ASSOCIATED WITH?

When Scripture speaks about the transition from shame to holiness—from shame to covering, to inclusion, to cleansing, to glory, to beauty and to honor—it is not because of something we have earned or because we have done better than others. Scripture tells us this transition occurs because of who we are associated with.

Who are you joined with?

It is obvious from the story in the garden—being joined with the serpent is not an honorable thing. Rather than being associated with the most-high God, you chose to be associated with a beast.

It is important to understand that shame and guilt are about our associations. Those who have experienced sexual violence understand this reality. You feel an association with a person who has humiliated you, and you feel like there is no way to cut these contaminating links and ties that you have.

The Barren Woman in Isaiah 54

Isaiah is using an example of shame that everyone in his culture would understand. If a woman’s place was to have children, because this is how she images God, then barrenness was seen as a great curse.  

Isaiah has a promise for this shamed woman:

“Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,”

“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes…

“Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth…

“For your Maker is your husband…”

(Isaiah 54:1–4)
Her Maker is her husband, and he is the one she is associated with. He is the one who breaks the links of rejection and humiliation. The Old Testament sets the stage for what is to come—your Maker has taken your reputation and given you his. And when your husband is the Lord Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, there is no way that shame has a permanent place in your being.

CONCLUSION

Here are three final comments to take you forward in this study.

Guilt and shame can freeze you spiritually

If you struggle with guilt and shame, know that both will tend to paralyze you spiritually, making it hard to grow in the face of it.

If you are wrestling with a palpable experience of guilt and shame, growth may be something you feel is out of reach.

Be on high alert about this essential point: Your goal is to move toward being a person of hope.

If you are familiar with shame, God is interested in you

Do you feel dirty? Do you feel like you don't belong? It just so happens that just about every page of Scripture is about you.

If you cannot identify a sense of 'not belonging' or a sense of nakedness or contamination at all in your life, then you may need to examine your heart.

Taking on the name of an honorable God changes your reputation

To take on the name of an honorable person changes your reputation—and the Lord gives you his name. The Lord knows your sin, and he isn't turning away from you but toward you with favor. He blesses you by putting his name on you.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

(Numbers 6:24–27)
REFLECTION ACTIVITY

Isaiah 54 is a passage of Scripture that describes the experience of shame and shows God’s response of honor and restoration—even transforming the experience of a shamed person. Take time to reflect on the Barren Woman’s experience of shame and God’s response in Isaiah 54. Notice the connection of Isaiah 54 to Ed’s discussion of Hosea 1–2 in this talk.

Write about a difficulty you are facing right now that causes you to experience shame. How does taking the name of an honorable God change your reputation? Keep God’s promises from Isaiah 54 in view; some of the promises are listed below.

1. God is your husband (verse 5)

2. God is your Redeemer (verse 8)

3. God’s love will never depart from you (verse 10)

4. God will establish you (verse 14)
STUDY QUESTIONS

The following study questions are divided into three sections. Section 1 questions are introductory and allow for an opportunity to reflect on the lecture. Section 2 questions focus on the content of the lecture. Section 3 questions help you apply the material you have learned. Feel free to select a couple questions from each section for reflection. If you have time, answer each question.

Section 1: Introduction Questions

Shame is a large category in Scripture that even encompasses the category of guilt. In this lesson Ed says shame is the human dilemma and the problem that everyone faces.

1. Do you agree with these statements about shame? Why or why not?

2. How do you summarize the differences between guilt and shame? What place does sin have in each definition?

3. How has your understanding of the category of shame grown from this talk? What surprised you the most from this lesson?

Ed provides a general observation about shame and guilt in different cultures: The problem of guilt can be easier for people in Western cultures to identify. Similarly if you are in an Asian or African culture, shame is easy to identify. In the Christian church in the West you will find more teaching on guilt than shame, even though Scripture addresses both.

1. How do you tailor his observation to fit your cultural and personal experience?

2. In Western cultures shame has become submerged under problems like low self-esteem. It is dealt with by an inept form of positive thinking. How have you seen this impact the church’s teaching on shame?
Section 2: Interacting with the Material

The tendency among evangelicals is to think primarily about guilt in reference to the Fall, and in doing so we overlook shame. In the Fall the soul of man was changed forever because of guilt, and after the Fall humanity’s experience has been changed forever because of shame.


1. It is easier to identify the fall of Adam and Eve using the lens of guilt—they fell in temptation and disobeyed God. How is your understanding of this passage enhanced when you view it through the category of shame?

2. What were Adam and Eve’s initial responses after their sin (3:7–8)? How do those responses illustrate what you have learned about the experience of shame?

3. What ways can you identify with their experience of shame in this passage?

God has a unique interest in people who experience shame. We see in the Old Testament that God covers the naked, accepts the outcast, and thoroughly washes the unclean inside and out. There is movement along a trajectory throughout the Old Testament, a trajectory that finds even greater fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

1. Compare and contrast how the Lord dressed Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 and how the Lord dressed the priests in Exodus 1:1–4.

2. The priesthood of Israel was temporary (1 Peter 2:9). With the coming of Christ come permanent garments of holiness. Galatians 3:27 says that those who are in Christ have “put on Christ.” How does our union with Jesus bring greater fulfillment of God’s plan to transform shame?

3. Read Colossians 3:12–15. How does our new clothing change our identity and give us a mission? How are our new clothes supposed to change the way we live? How is the connection between the outer person and the inner heart described here? See also Ezekiel 11:19–20.
God responds to our experience of being outcast and banished by pursuing and including us as his people. Just as Adam and Eve experienced shame in their banishment from the garden, so also did Israel when they were banished from their land. Hosea prophesies of Israel’s destruction and banishment as God’s just response to their sin. But even as God banishes he promises to pursue and restore his people.

1. How does Hosea 1:9–10 describe the experience of banishment and make the promise of restoration? What makes these words so powerful in human experience? How do they speak to humanity’s primary dilemma of both guilt and shame?

2. In Hosea 2:16 a change in God’s relationship with his people is described. “In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’” How does this change in relationship reflect God’s affection for shamed people? How does it express the promise of even greater honor for the shamed?

3. Consider Hosea 2:16 in light of Ephesians 5:22–27. How does Paul in Ephesians speak to the honor that God intends for his people?

Section 3: Application Questions

Let’s trace the definition of shame developed in this talk, seeking to highlight the challenge of it and God’s answer to it in Scripture.

One consequence of shame is that a person can be defined by sin, by their own sin or by the sins others have committed against them. This means that shame has the potential power to define a person’s identity, either wholly or in part.

1. Why does this aspect of shame, its power to define and shape identity, make it an important problem to address in ministry?

2. How does this challenge influence how you would approach someone struggling with shame, and what words of hope would you offer?
Another consequence of shame is that although we are not guilty, we still experience humiliation. In this lesson that experience is described as going into a courtroom, being pronounced “not guilty” but leaving the courtroom still feeling naked, exposed, unacceptable, and unpresentable.

1. How do you respond to this particular challenge of shame and guilt? How do you describe the challenge of the difference between what is eternally true and a person’s temporal experience?

2. Read Isaiah 6:5–7. How does God respond to Isaiah’s plea? What does it mean to touch the Holy One and have him touch you back?

3. Why is your identity as a saint, as a holy one who belongs to God, so profoundly important when you experience shame?

If we view the benefits of Jesus Christ only in terms of forgiveness of sins in a legal sense (our justification by faith), then our understanding of Christ’s benefits for us will not capture the totality of what he has done in his death and resurrection. When Scripture speaks about the transition from shame to holiness—from shame to covering, to inclusion, to cleansing, to glory, to beauty and to honor—it is not because of something we have earned or because we have done better than others. Scripture tells us this transition occurs because of who you are associated with.

1. “Who are you joined with?” How does this baseline question help you approach this topic of shame, particularly if you experience a lot of shame or are in a helping relationship with someone who does?

2. How can using the category of shame expand the amazing impact of Christ’s redemption? One passage to look at is Ephesians 1:18–20.

3. We are heading toward Jesus and how he has responded to the universal problem of shame and guilt. What connections have you already made to Jesus? What from this first lesson helped you to make that connection?

2 See Job's calamities in Job 1–2 and Eliphaz's interpretation in Job 4:7.

3 Abuse and sexual assault are intense examples of violation. See two resources by David Powlison Recovering from Child Abuse (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008) and Sexual Assault (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010).

4 There are two accepted interpretations of Genesis 3:21. The first is that when God clothes Adam and Eve before casting them out of the Garden, he makes a sacrifice for their sins, offers them repentance, and shows his care by providing clothing. The second, used here by Ed Welch, would include that interpretation but adds that the original clothing, at least, has a double meaning in that it was clothing that was connected with death. “In partaking of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve succumbed to their animal instincts, acting with no regard for their spiritual identity and seeking only immediate gratification. The spiritual consequences follow immediately: God clothes them in animal skins or leather. A metamorphosis has taken place. Their new clothing reflects their diminished status” (Bereishit Genesis 1:1–6:8, Clothing of Light, aish.com, accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48951486.html).

5 See also Isaiah 61:6, 1 Peter 2:9, and Revelation 1:6.

6 This feature of barrenness is prominent in the story of Abraham and Sarah as they struggled with waiting for the promised child Isaac in Genesis 15–17.