

Sunday, March 15, 2026

Wounds That Heal: Bringing our Shame to the Cross

Genesis 2:25 - 3:13; Romans 5:12-21; Psalm 32:3, 5

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Adapted from Stephen Seamands' book *Wounds That Heal*

Throughout this Lenten Season, we are fixing our eyes on the cross. The cross can be hard to look at. It is a place of brutality, suffering, and pain, but it is also a place of hope and healing. At the cross, Jesus took upon Himself our sin *and* our pain and suffering. His wounds are **wounds that heal**. In this season, we come to the cross seeking the healing that all of us need.

Last week we addressed the wounds of rejection. This morning, Jesus is inviting us to bring to him our heavy burdens of shame. At the cross Jesus offers forgiveness, acceptance, love, and honor. Would you **pray** with me as we prepare our hearts to hear the message God has for us today?

Shame. Shame. Shame. One dictionary defines shame as “**a loss of respect or esteem; a painful feeling of humiliation caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.**” Shame is that ugly feeling that fills us when something dishonorable, improper, or ridiculous is done by ourselves or by another. It is disgrace, regret, guilt, and embarrassment. Shame is like infection in a wound. It continues to fester, to ache, to plague us long after the initial injury has occurred. Shame can grow out of the deep hurts we've experienced. Shame can wreak havoc in our lives, and it often lies at the root of much of our self-destructive behavior.

Step back for a moment, however, and consider that guilt and shame aren't completely negative. In fact, our capacity for shame is God-given, reflecting His glory at work in us. Created in God's image, our capacity for shame points to the fact that we can discriminate between good and evil. We'll call this “healthy shame.” Counselor and author **John Bradshaw** explains it this way: “It is necessary to have the feeling of shame if one is to be truly

human... Shame tells us our limits. Shame keeps us in our human boundaries, letting us know that we can and will make mistakes and that we need help. Our shame tells us that we are not God. **Healthy shame** is the psychological foundation of humility. It is the source of spirituality.”

Roll the tape waaaay back to the opening chapters of our Bibles in Genesis, back to the Garden of Eden. We read in **Genesis 2:25**, “*Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*” Honestly, what a weird thing to come across in the text...but as we keep reading we understand why it’s there. Adam and Eve felt no shame because their relationship with God and with one another was one of perfect trust. They had nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide. There was no mistrust, no posturing, no manipulating.

Later, however, when they rebelled against God and disobeyed His command, the *first* consequence of their action was to feel shame. We read in **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.*” Immediately, the two knew they had done something wrong. For the first time, Adam and Eve felt shame, they felt vulnerable and exposed. This shame led them to covering up, hiding from one another, and running for cover, hiding from God.

We keep reading: “*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’ And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’” (Genesis 3:8-11).*

Like a dashboard warning light, when Adam and Eve broke trust with God, shame alerted them to the fact that something was wrong. This is a **healthy kind of shame**. At that point, they *could* have heeded the warning, faced up to what they had done, and turned to God in brokenness and

repentance. Their broken trust would have begun to mend, those feelings of shame would have helped restore their relationship with God. Here in Genesis we encounter a loving God, pursuing His beloved children out of grace, fully knowing what they have done.

But Adam and Eve do not respond to their shame by owning up to their disobedience. Instead, they hesitate, focusing on their shame and filled with doubt and fear, they hide from each other, from God, even from themselves. When God questions their actions, we read in Genesis 3:12-13 that they each pass the blame to another, seeking to direct attention away from themselves by pointing fingers: Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. While redirecting blame helped them hide a little longer, it did nothing to *cleanse* them of guilt and shame. Shame reaps a deadly harvest as the breach in their relationship with one another and with God continues to widen. This is the **destructive kind of shame** - shame rooted in our painful hurts and our sinful, unhealthy reactions to those hurts.

Destructive shame distorts and destroys our God-given glory, rather than reflecting it. **Destructive shame** gets bound up with our identity, the core of who we are. Whereas guilt is about behavior; shame is about our being. It is a heavy feeling rooted in our feeling of not measuring up, a vague disgust with ourselves. The infection that lingers long after the cut. *I may have paid the fine, canceling the guilt incurred by my traffic violation, but I may continue to feel the shame for being the flawed person who did such a stupid thing in the first place.* **Destructive shame** is the harsh voice of contempt and condemnation inside your head declaring: *“What the matter with you? You’re such an idiot! Only a loser would do what you’ve done! You’re useless! Worthless! A waste of space!”*

Whether positive or negative, healthy or destructive, shame exposes us. When Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened, they realized they were naked. **Shame painfully exposes our nakedness**, our vulnerabilities, our ugliness, our foolishness, our deficiencies. This exposure is disorienting; we feel powerless and out of control. Shame is so distressing we will go to great lengths to avoid it. Like Adam and Eve, we rush to find fig leaves for

cover and trees to hide behind, ways to not feel so exposed and to gain back control. In this way, shame often fuels addictive behaviors. These painful feelings of self-exposure are too much so we turn to various things to help us find relief, control, and acceptance: drugs, work, food, sex, shopping, entertainment, or some other self-created world of numbness.

Shame not only exposes the nakedness of our fragile selves, but understood Biblically, **shame also exposes the impotence of the false gods we worship and trust**. When Adam and Eve accepted the serpent's lie, they bowed down to the false god of wisdom, immortality, and pride. When they ate the fruit, their eyes were opened, just as the serpent had said. But instead of becoming like God, as the snake promised, they only discovered how un-Godlike they were. Shame exposes our misplaced trust in false gods, gods that are impotent, powerless, incapable of fulfilling their false promises.

The prophet Isaiah declares, *"But those who trust in idols, who say to images, 'You are gods,' will be turned back in utter shame"* (Isaiah 42:17). Our sins and idolatries can cause us to feel shame. We may be guilty of bowing down to false gods of control, safety, approval, power, freedom, perfectionism, and invincibility, and, as the prophet promised, we will put "put to shame" when they fail to save us.

This morning you were given a bulletin with a **notecard** inside. **I wonder what heavy weight of shame you are carrying with you this morning?** Perhaps it's shame at your own hand - you've done something foolish, something you know is wrong. Maybe it's something you said or something you did that is causing you to feel great shame this morning. Or perhaps the shame you're carrying has come at the hand of others. You have been the victim of the sin of *others*, by *their* words or actions. Perhaps you've been made to feel "less than" because of your circumstances - poverty, mental illness, a disability. Perhaps you have been abused and you are deeply ashamed by what has happened to you.

Or perhaps the shame you carry is harder to categorize. You don't feel like you measure up; you're falling behind; you feel deep shame over an addiction; you're drowning in brokenness.

More often than not shame leads to covering up, hiding from one another, or running for cover, hiding from God. Take a moment this morning to search your heart and be honest with yourself and honest with God. Without looking around, take a moment to acknowledge what you're carrying by writing it down on the back of that notecard...

If you are bearing wounds of shame this morning, I want you to know that **you're not alone**. Jesus experienced shame too. This morning I want to invite you to consider the life and death of Jesus in terms of the shame He endured, especially on the cross.

The author of Hebrews encourages us to fix our eyes on Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning (or disregarding) its shame.." (**Hebrews 12:2**). Last week, we briefly considered the excruciating physical pain that Jesus endured when he was crucified, but do you realize that people in the time of Jesus dreaded the *shame* of crucifixion even more than the physical pain of it?

Crucifixion was designed to be excruciating, degrading, and humiliating, so much so, that it was reserved for hardened criminals, slaves, and enemies of the state. It was considered too degrading to be administered to a Roman citizen. If a Roman citizen was condemned to death, they were usually beheaded; their execution over and done quickly.

Crucifixions were purposely carried out in public and turned into spectacles. Executioners heightened the shame and disgrace by turning it all into public entertainment. The public mockery heaped on Jesus (Mark 15:29-32) was typical of most crucifixions.

In most paintings, films, and other artistic depictions, the crucified Jesus is partially covered with a loincloth. But in the ancient world, the victim was

always crucified naked. The shameful exposure often continued even after death, a crucified body becoming food for wild beasts and birds of prey. Occasionally, the condemned who had already died were nailed to a cross. Although they were unable to suffer the physical pain of crucifixion, they were still made subject to the degrading humiliation associated with it.

Jesus would have hung naked, humiliated, and exposed. He would have felt suffocating shame and pain.

Because of the horrendous shame associated with crucifixion, early hearers of the message of the cross found it offensive, foolishness, revolting. For the typical Greek or Roman person, the Christian belief that someone who had been crucified was Savior and Lord of all was sheer madness. According to Deuteronomy 21:23, crucifixion was a sign of God's curse. How could the cursed one be the Messiah, God's "chosen one"? How could someone who had been hanged on the tree of shame be worthy of worship?

On the cross, Jesus experienced unfathomable shame and humiliation. So much so that it was extremely difficult for Jews and Gentiles to believe he was the Son of God. Yet for those who have believed - in the first century and ever since - Christ and His cross have become sufficient to atone for all sin and even overcome our shame. **Because Christ willingly endured shame on the cross, we are able to find healing for our shame at the cross.**

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, eating fruit from a forbidden tree. As a result, they were naked and ashamed and hid from God. Just outside Jerusalem, Jesus obeyed God, stripped naked and nailed to a shameful tree. As a result, we can stand before God, naked and unashamed. The first Adam sinned, rejecting God and His ways. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, lived in perfect obedience to the Father, and His sacrifice on the cross secures our pardon (Romans 5:12-21). As one ancient Christian writer declared, "***A tree had destroyed us; a tree now brought us life.***" On the cross, Christ overcame the painful self-exposure

bound up with shame by both identifying with and participating in our shame.

In his book *Wounds that Heal*, Stephen Seamands tells the story of a young woman who heard how during his crucifixion, Christ experienced shame and humiliation: “On hearing this,” Seamands writes, “[she] felt deeply moved. She never realized Jesus had endured these things. It dawned on her that Jesus could identify with her and other victims of sexual abuse. Like her face covered with a pillow, his face had also been covered. He too must have felt powerless and unprotected by God. She had been stripped of her clothing; so had he. He too had shameful indignities inflicted on his naked body...

Jesus could understand her hurt and anger. He knew why it was so hard for her to forgive her [perpetrator]. Jesus did not condemn her for her struggle. He wept for her and with her. He knew first-hand about the humiliation she had experienced. On the cross he bore the shame she [had] experienced.... Knowing that Jesus knew her pain, understanding that he understood her shame broke through her resistance and softened her heart. As she prayed at the altar, bottled-up tears gushed forth, washing away layers of shame. Christ’s wounds began to heal hers.”

Not only does the cross address the exposure of our selves, our nakedness, vulnerability, and pain, the cross also addresses shame’s exposure of our trust in false gods. Not only did Jesus bear shame on the cross, he also shamed shame. As the Apostle Paul declares in his letter to the Colossians: “*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*” **(Colossians 2:15).**

By crucifying Jesus, the religious leaders and Roman authorities sought to expose Him, to make a spectacle of him. But having endured the awful shame of the cross, Jesus was vindicated by God. Raised three days later back to life Jesus made a public spectacle of *them!* Jesus exposed the religious leaders and authorities not as God’s agents, but agents of false

gods, of principalities and powers. Christ's nakedness exposed their nakedness, their powerlessness. Jesus' act of being shamed, overcame shame itself.

In the same way the cross exposes our false gods and misplaced trust. Our pretense is stripped from us, our wisdom revealed as foolishness, our strength as weakness. But praise God, the cross also revealed the grace, love and power of God.

In spite of all the ridicule and shame heaped on Jesus; in spite of people's accusations and his own feelings of God's forsakenness, Jesus was not abandoned by God. He was *still* the beloved Son of God. **And no matter how much shame we've experienced, or how often we put our trust in false gods, we too are not abandoned.** Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).

Jesus understood and experienced shame. He took up our pain and bore our wounds of shame on His body. The perfect Son of God suffered with you and for you. **Because Christ bore our shame, we can now run to God, instead of from Him.** Instead of being bound by shame, the blood of Jesus invites and enables us to come with confident boldness. Jesus' wounds are wounds that heal. He is calling to us this morning: "Come to me. Give me your shameful words and deeds. Give me the shameful things said and done against you. You were not meant to carry this shame. Let me bear these wounds for you."

The healing of shame that binds us takes time. To expose, loosen, and sever all that binds us is a process, but thanks to Christ's death on the cross, shame can be overcome. Remember, the question of your value and worth was settled once and for all at the cross. **The cross proves and proclaims that you are loved, significant, and of infinite worth.**

Adam and Eve could not hide from God and we cannot either. There is no healing in the hiding places. All shame flourishes in the soil of silence.

Confession - to God, and at times to other safe people - is the pathway to healing and freedom.

The Psalmist knew this to be true. He declares, *“when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin”* (**Psalm 32:3, 5**).

I'm going to invite you to respond to this message and Christ's invitation by coming forward to bring your notecards which represent the shame you're carrying. Leave them at the altar and, if you would like, you can exchange them for a symbol of Christ's love for you, His grace, His healing and freedom. If you did not pick up a small thumb cross last week, these are a beautiful gift for you to hold as you spend time in prayer through the week. There are also some other small tokens of His love and mercy for you.

Is there shame in your life that needs to be brought to the light? Brought to the cross? He has everything you need. Jesus' love for you is greater, and more real, than the shame you feel. Come to Him this morning. Jesus bears on His body your wounds of shame and by His wounds, we can be healed. Come, spend as much time as you need with Him at the altar and receive these reminders of His love.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song: Lord, I Need You

Benediction

May Jesus Christ, who bore your sin and your suffering, heal you by His wounds. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in His love and peace to serve the Lord!

Questions for Reflection

- Healthy shame is like a warning light that shows up where we have done something wrong, leading us to turn to God. Think of an example of healthy shame that led you to repentance and to restoration with God and others.
- Destructive shame is often rooted in the wrongs done to us and in our sinful, unhealthy reactions to them. Those burdened with negative shame are often driven to “drugs, work, food, sex, or some other safe, self-created world of numbness” where they find temporary relief and a sense of the acceptance that they crave. Where has your destructive shame driven you?
- Stephen Seamands writes that “shame always exposes our misplaced trust in false gods, gods that are impotent and incapable of fulfilling their false promises.” Later, he specifically mentions false gods of control, safety, approval, power, freedom, perfectionism, and invincibility. Have you ever put your trust in any of these gods? How has shame revealed that these false gods do not deserve your trust?
- Have you ever had an experience of cleansing and being released from shame? Do you long to be released from shame and guilt? Do you need to humbly invite Jesus to meet you in some place of shame?