

# Breaking the cycle of Shame

A Bible Study

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## Excerpts from Breaking Cycles

“Shame keeps us in the cycle of sin, lack and destruction. It drags us back to the thing we despise. It keeps us connected to the sins of the past. It ensures that we will commit those sins again by keeping them alive in our consciousness.”

“It insists that we define our life by our personal failures. It is an emotional connection with everything from which Jesus died to free us. It not only says, “this is what you have done,” but it also says, “this is who you are; this is who you will always be.”

“Few things are more destructive than shame, Shame robs you of the sense of dignity and worth. It paralyzes you in the past. It disempowers you from living a new and different future. It intoxicates you with confusion. It clouds your mind with an emotional stupor that leads to horrible decision-making. It keeps you in a never-ending cycle of negative emotions, negative decisions, and negative results.”

“People who live in guilt and shame seldom make quality decisions unless they understand the difference between the two. Guilt is the feeling we have when we violate our conscience. It is a negative emotion. A negative emotion will call us to take action. But we must understand that it is not a call to a negative action. It is a call to a different kind of action than we are presently taking. Sadly, though., when people feel negative emotions, they tend to be moved to negative actions. Often they are bona fide negative actions. In reality, negative emotions are a call to a different kind of action.”

“Guilt is like a warning light in your car. It is telling you that whatever you are doing, you must stop now or the engine will break down. Negative emotions simply tell me I must initiate a positive, life-giving action. Otherwise I will plunge myself into a cycle of destructive thoughts, feelings, and actions. Guilt is our minds way of saying, “It’s time to do something different.

“Shame is a self-induced punishment for our wrongs. Many people feel they should live in shame in order to pay for their wrongs. Ironically, one can never suffer enough to pay the cost. The price for our negative actions keeps rising. The more we think about our sin, the more we think we should pay. The more we feel shame, the less deserving we feel of God’s love and mercy. There is no end to shame.”

# Guilt/Shame



# Guilt/Shame

- The difference between shame and guilt is best understood as the differences between “I am bad” [shame] and “I did something bad” [guilt].
- Shame is about who we are, and guilt is about what we did.

- We feel guilty when we hold up something we've done or failed to do against the kind of person we want to be. It's an uncomfortable feeling, but one that's helpful. When we apologize for something we've done, make amends to others, or change a behavior that we don't feel good about, guilt is most often the motivator.
- Guilt is just as powerful as shame, but its effect is often positive while shame is often destructive.

Guilt is a good emotion that must be properly processed so that it does not lead to shame.

Genesis 3:8-13

Guilt is the universal verdict of Adam's sin.  
Shame is an individual diversion resulting  
from mishandling the inherited guilt.

Romans 3: 10-23

# Guilt

## Helpful

- Helpful guilt is a feeling of psychological discomfort about something we've done that is objectively wrong.

## Unhelpful

- Unhelpful guilt is a feeling of psychological discomfort about something we've done against our unrealistic high standards.

## Helpful

- Example: Chris hit someone while driving drunk and feels guilty

## Unhelpful

- Example: Pat forgot a coworker's name and feels terribly guilty about it.

## Helpful

- Healthy guilt allows us to seek forgiveness and correct a wrong. It leads to healing.

## Unhelpful

- Unhealthy guilt leads us to emphasize self-punishment over behavior change, trapping us in guilt

# Shame

- Shame is an intensely painful feeling of being fundamentally flawed.
- Shame is a feeling of worthlessness and intrusion.
- Shame is internalized and deeply connected to our sense of who we are which makes it more difficult to resolve.

Break the cycle of shame by accepting the responsibility of guilt.

If you did it, say you did it. You can't heal it if you won't own it. Don't shift the blame. Being responsible is a step that helps to avoid shame.

Adam and Eve both shifted the blame and walked in shame.

Break the cycle of shame by refusing to be consumed by guilt and overcome by shame. Jesus has dealt with both.

Romans 5:18-19

James 5:16

1 John 1:9