

"Shame," by Jacob Harada

I have shame. I have shame in my head.  
It's like walking on a broken leg.  
Like pushing through a barbed wire fence,  
I've got shame in my head.

Its like the rot in the walls of the shack we forgot.  
Like the wound from the rifle shot that cracked,  
on the day I lost my childhood peace in this hollowness and shame.

Like A toxin in the air I breathe  
A plague that seems to feed despair,  
And wipes the beauty out of life and poisons every smile.

Like critics spewing caustic noise,  
An ever present voice accusing ,  
All my motions, all my choices, everything I do.

I have shame. I have shame in my head.  
It's like walking on a broken leg.  
Like pushing through a barbed wire fence,  
I've got shame in my head

I'm a drummer boy with a broken drum I'm a bird with a crippled  
wing.  
My feathers are a mess and I have no gift to give a king.

My conscience drags me to my execution at the stone.  
But can I find some kind of absolution at your throne?

What can wash away my sin?  
What can make me whole again?

Light

Light has dawned within in the voice of Christ, Immanuel.  
The blood he shed presents an invitation to world:

Come you weary, come you beggars.  
Come inside; escape this weather.  
Come find life in this new water,  
Come to me.

Come outside your prison bars,  
Leave the shame you always wear.  
Let me tell you who you are,  
Come to me.

Royal priesthood. Spirit bearers.  
Enter into Heaven's matters.  
Step into a life that's better,  
Come to me

I'm your shield and I'm your Father,  
I have claimed your heart forever.  
You're my joy and it's my pleasure when you,  
Come to me.

I've come to you.

I have peace, I have peace in my head,  
Like walking with my closest friend.  
Like finely learning how to rest.  
I have peace in my head.

Living with shame is like walking on a broken leg, like hidden rot in your bedroom walls, like unseen toxins in the air that we breathe. Shame is like an unwelcome house guest who pitches a tent in the middle of our living room. Shame punishes, shame poisons, shame destroys.

Last week I began a teaching series entitled, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Our Hurts To The Cross*. Last week I addressed the wound of rejection, this week I'll address the wound of shame, and next Friday we will address the wound of disappointment. As we approach Easter weekend, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, on His cross, and seek the healing that all of us need.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of Jesus saying, “*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*” The wounds Jesus bore at the the cross have become for us wounds that heal.

This morning, hear Jesus' invitation to bring the wound of shame to the cross; instead of shame, Jesus offers acceptance and honour. Will you come to Him?

Before we get to the cross, I want to explore some of the contours of shame. And while I've had many personal encounters of my own, I want to share a few that stand out.

**illus:** The first encounter I can remember happened in 2nd grade. In my haste to get out to the playing field, I stopped eating my lunch.

Every day my mom would pack a lunch in a brown paper bag, and every day that lunch would be shoved in the back of my locker. This pattern continued for weeks, until the unmistakable stench of rotting food began to waft from my locker. I can remember the day my mom and my teacher stood by my locker and asked me to open it—I had been caught red-handed and was without excuse. I can remember feeling ashamed.

In grade 3, I began to have “accidents” during the night while I slept—that was my mom's code word for wetting the bed. I would wake up in the middle of the night, soaked and smelling of urine. There was nothing I could do to stop it, but every time it happened I was humiliated—I told myself that I was no better than a baby. To make matters worse, I either had to crawl back into a wet bet, or, I had to wake up my mom so that she could help me get dry sheets on the bed. I was always glad it was dark when I woke her, that way she couldn't see my face burning with shame.

Once, when I was in high school, I went out to a corner store and bought a swimsuit magazine—I snuck it into my room and hid it in a dusty desk drawer. It didn't stay there for long—the shame I felt was so strong that I took it out into our back yard, dug a hole, and buried it. My shame deepened and a few days later I dug up the magazine burned it, and then reburied it.

Many of you know that I love sports, and while I'd rather play than watch, I do enjoy watching sporting events on t.v. A number of years ago, when Luke was 5 or 6 years old, I began to watch the U.F.C. (Ultimate Fighting Championships). Essentially, two guys square off together in a ring, throwing elbows, fists, and feet at one another

until someone taps out or is knocked out—the sport is fast, intense, and violent.

As I was watching one fight, Luke wandered in from the other room and sat down beside me. At that very moment, one guy straddled the other guy's chest and began to throw punches at his face—left, right, left, right—the guy on the bottom was taking a beating. And that's when Luke asked me, "*Daddy, why is that man punching the other man in the face?*" His question hung in the air; I had no answer for him—not a good one anyways. I turned the t.v. off, but I felt ashamed. How could I consider this "entertainment"? What was I teaching my son about human dignity?

One dictionary defines shame in the following way: "a loss of respect or esteem; a painful feeling of humiliation caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behaviour." As I've thought about it this week, it's much harder to define shame than it is to describe it. Jacob has said it so well—**shame** is "*like rot in the walls, like toxins in the air; an ever-present voice accusing.*"

### The Shame We Experience

We all experience shame—it is as old as humanity itself. In Genesis 1-3, the Bible introduces us to Adam and Eve; the perfect couple, living in a perfect garden paradise. Genesis 2:25 tells us that Adam and Eve walked in the Garden with God, that they were "*naked and felt no shame.*" There was nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide, nothing to protect, and nothing to gain by doing so. There was no mistrust, no posturing, and no manipulating. But all of that changed

when Adam and Eve rebelled against God; for the first time they felt vulnerable and exposed.

Genesis 3:7 says, "*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, Adam and Eve knew that had done something wrong; they felt shame. Shame led to covering up (hiding from one another), and covering up led to running for cover (hiding from God).

Genesis 3:8-10 says, "*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden...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.'*"

In the face of shame, the temptation to run and hide is overwhelming. Many of us are as well-trained when it comes to running as any Olympic runner, the difference being that we aren't running for gold, silver, or bronze—we are running away from God, others, and self.<sup>1</sup> It is a fool's errand of course, but that rarely stops us from running to hide.

When we are discovered in our hiding place, we move from hiding to blaming—we shift the blame to deal with our own shame. *It's not me, it's not my fault—it's them, it's him, it's the system.* Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. And while redirecting blame might help us hide a little longer, it cannot cleanse the shame from our soul.

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<sup>1</sup> *Living Waters Training Material*, 4.

There is a difference between guilt and shame. **Guilt is about what we've done; shame is about who we are.** Lewis Smedes suggests that shame is rooted in the awareness that we do not measure up, and maybe, “will never measure up to the sorts of persons we were meant to be.”<sup>2</sup> Shame is the voice inside your head saying, “*What’s 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!*”

**illus:** when I was pastoring in Calgary, a girl who had grown up in my youth group was involved in a car accident. She was driving home one night—it was dark, the visibility was poor—and she accidentally struck a pedestrian who was walking across the street. Ashley called 911 and within minutes fire, ambulance, and police were on the scene. The woman was rushed to hospital but the injuries she sustained were too severe—she died not long after she arrived.

This case was brought to court and the judge ruled in Ashley’s favour—her guilt was absolved and she was declared “innocent” of negligence. But though Ashley was declared “not guilty,” it didn’t stop her from wearing a cloak of shame. She would look at herself in the mirror and think to herself, “*What kind of a person am I? I’ve taken someone’s life.*” Guilt is about what we’ve done; shame is about who we tell ourselves we are. Shame is what lingers long after a deed has been atoned for. Seamands writes, “It is the self regarding the self with the withering and unforgiving eye of contempt.”<sup>3</sup>

As you entered the sanctuary, you were given a card that has the word “shame” printed on it—I wonder, what shame have you carried in with you this morning?

**Sometimes shame comes by our own hands.** Perhaps you’ve done something foolish, something you know is wrong. *Maybe it’s something you said:* you yelled at your kids, you disrespected your spouse, bad-mouthed a coworker, or made fun of a friend. *Maybe it’s something you did:* cheating on your taxes, lying about your addiction, stealing from your business partner, or living a double life—one way in public and another way in private.

**Sometimes shame comes by the hands of others.** Maybe you were picked on when you grew up: too short or too tall, too skinny or too heavy, too smart or not smart enough—these words of others caused shame. Maybe you grew up as a minority in a majority culture—you were made to feel less because you looked and talked different than others. I’ve talked with many people who feel deep shame because of their poverty, and others because of their mental illness. Perhaps you’ve been abused physically, sexually, or emotionally and you are deeply ashamed about what has happened to you—it’s not uncommon for victims of abuse to blame themselves for not being strong enough to stop it.

**Other shame is harder to categorize.** Perhaps you’re ashamed of how you look—we measure ourselves against the images on billboards and can’t stand our own reflection. Often it is deep shame

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<sup>2</sup> Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace*, 5, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Our Hurts To The Cross*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Seamands, 44.

that fuels the fires of alcoholism. Often it is deep shame that drives eating disorders.

If you're trying hard, but falling behind in school, you likely feel shame—*what's wrong with me?* Maybe everyone around you is being promoted at work—everyone but you. Maybe you feel like you're a lousy friend, parent, spouse, or pastor. Or perhaps you're here this morning and you're drowning in the shame of sexual brokenness. Maybe you're living with an unwanted sexual orientation. Maybe you're involved sexually outside of marriage. Maybe pornography has a hold on your life and you can't break free.

More often than not shame leads to covering up (hiding from one another), and running for cover (hiding from God). We tell ourselves, "*I shouldn't struggle with this,*" or, "*I'm better than this,*" or, "*what will others think if they found out?*"

### **The Shame Jesus Encountered**

If you are bearing wounds of shame this morning, I want you to know that you're not alone—Jesus experienced shame too.

Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to "*fix [our] eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" This morning I want to invite you to consider the life and death of Jesus in terms of the shame He endured.

As Jesus began His public ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing, He had to endure the shame of rejection from His family. In Mark 3:20, we're told that they "went to take charge of Him, for they

said '*He is out of His mind.*'" In front of a packed house, Jesus' family showed up and told everyone that He was crazy—He was discredited, embarrassed, and shamed.

Everywhere Jesus went, the doubters were loud and mocking—He was dismissed as unimportant, ridiculed, and treated with contempt. Jesus knows what it feels like to be laughed at publicly. Jesus also knows the shame that comes through physical abuse. Jesus' body was punished, violated, and desecrated against His will. Perhaps you felt powerless before your abusers—Jesus knows this pain; in His humanity He was powerless stop His attackers.

Jesus knows the shame of being passed over, rejected, and cast aside. Matthew 27:15 tells us that it was "*it was the governor's custom at [the Passover Feast] to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"*" You know the story—the crowd chose Barabbas, a convicted killer, over Jesus. Have you ever known the shame of being picked last for a team? How must Jesus have felt?

Crucifixion was designed to be excruciating and humiliating, so much so, that it was reserved for criminals, slaves, and enemies of the state. It was considered too degrading to be administered to a Roman citizen. While crucifixion was common in the Roman world, the word "cross" was deemed to be too vulgar and uncivilized to be spoken aloud by its citizen. The Roman philosopher Cicero once wrote of crucifixion saying, "It should never pass through their thoughts, eyes, or ears."

Perhaps you have seen artistic renderings of Jesus hanging on the cross—every one I’ve ever seen has taken artistic license. Jesus is typically portrayed, wearing a loincloth to cover His indecency, but no such covering would have been present. Jesus would have hung naked, humiliated, and exposed. He would have felt suffocating pain and shame.

Is it any wonder that the ancient world was offended by early Christian talk about the cross? Shortly after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the cross took on new meaning for those first followers of Jesus. Yes, the cross was an instrument of shame and death, but Jesus had somehow redeemed it—the cross was also the place of God’s victory over sin and death. In 1 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul writes “*we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*”<sup>4</sup>

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, eating fruit from a forbidden tree—naked and ashamed they hid from God. Just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus was stripped naked and nailed to a tree. One ancient Christian writer put it like this, “A tree had destroyed us. A tree now brought us life.”

The first Adam sinned, rejecting God and His ways. The second Adam, Jesus Christ, lived in perfect obedience before the Father, and His sacrifice on the cross secures our pardon. The power of shame

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Seamands, 37.

has been met and overturned through the cross of Jesus Christ—He was laid bare that we might be clothed with His righteousness.<sup>5</sup>

### **Bring Your Wounds To Jesus**

Jesus understands shame firsthand. He took up your pain and bore your wounds of shame on His body—the perfect Son of God suffered with you and for you. Seamands writes, “Remember what has happened to you in light of what has happened to Him.”<sup>6</sup> He is a fellow sufferer who understands.

Because He bore our shame, we can now run to God instead from God. Jesus’ wounds are wounds that heal. He calls to you this morning, “*Come to Me. Give to me your shameful words and deeds. Give to me the shameful things said and done against you. You were not meant to carry this shame—let me bear these wounds for you.*”

### **A Word About Healing**

When my children have done something wrong, when they feel shame, they struggle to look me in the eyes. *Why?* Because they cannot imagine that they could look into my eyes and see love. We are not so different are we?

I want you to imagine God thinking about you—*what do you assume God feels when you come to mind?* Most people choose words like

“disappointed,” or “angry,” but is not “love” the correct answer? Your sin does not dominate God’s mind—it has been put to death with Christ on the cross.

As I said last week, the healing of our wounds begins with a reordering of our minds, and an encounter with God’s love. Let me recall a line from Jacob’s poem, “*Come outside the prison bars, Leave the shame you always wear, Let me tell you who you are*”.

The question of your value and worth was settled once and for all at the cross. The final word has been spoken: **You are loved. You are significant. You are of infinite worth.** *God sees you, He knows you, He loves you—surrender to His love today!* Welcome it as a gift today, and then look for it again tomorrow, and the next day, and the next—His loving kindness is new every morning.

Shame is like a warning light on the dashboard of our souls—it tells us when we step outside God’s boundaries, it reminds us that we all fall short, and, that we need God. But the voice of shame is often the voice that drives us from God instead of to God. It whispers convincingly, saying, “*the only way to survive is to stay hidden.*” It’s a lonely way to live—cut off from God and others.

There is another way to live—Jesus invites us to step out of the darkness and into the light.

**illus:** Probably all of us have played the game “hide and go seek”. It’s a simple game with clear rules. One person is designated to be “it,” and they close their eyes and count to a predetermined number. When they arrive at that number, they offer one final warning before the game begins in earnest: “*ready or not, here I come!*”

When Adam and Eve, broke relationship with God, the first consequence was shame, and their first instinct was to hide. God called out to them, “*Come out, come out, wherever you are.*” Eventually, they gave up on the idea that they could hide from Him—they may have been foolish to rebel against God, but they were wise enough to leave their hiding place. There is no healing in the hiding place. All shame flourishes in the soil of silence. Shame’s grip is strengthened in secrecy.

God calls to us, “*Come out, come out, wherever you are.*” He sees us, hiding our shame, in plain sight. Confession—to God, and at times to other safe people—is the pathway to healing and freedom. Psalm 32: 3, 5, says, “*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...Then I acknowledged my sin to you...I said, “I will confess”...And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*”

Some of us have carried our shame for years—we have exhausted ourselves through running, blaming, pretending, and hiding. We have looked in vain for a place to hide from our shame. But we cannot run from our shame, because it follows wherever we go. Let me ask you this morning, *are you ready to try another way? Are you ready to bring your shame to the One who will not be ashamed of you?*

There is no healing in hiding place. All shame flourishes in the soil of silence. But as we turn to Jesus, breaking our silence with Him and others, shame’s power can be broken. As we surrender to the truth of His love, the fearful voice, the accusing voice that keeps us hiding, loses its strength. When we know how deeply we are loved, shame presses us into God, instead of away from Him—for He has everything that we need.

## **Bringing Shame To The Cross**

**April 13, 2014**

Jesus' love for you is greater, and more real, than the shame that you feel. Come to Him this morning—Jesus bears on His body your wounds of shame, and by His wounds, we can be healed.

**Pray**

**Worship Response**

**Benediction**