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C H A P T E R O N E



SHAME IS SATAN'S SIGNATURE LOVE IS GOD'S REPLY

*I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.*



PSALM 34:4–5

I still remember the outdated furniture and stale coldness of that room. Women from all walks of life were there, and forever they and I would have something in common. Our paths had crossed at this awful place, a place where life was exchanged for death. We would now share an unmentionable secret that would shake some of us to the very foundations of our lives.

I wish I could say I was concerned about the others there and reached out to help, but I was consumed with my own crisis. No one let her eyes meet another's. Though medical fluorescents brightly lit the room, the heavy darkness in my soul made true vision nearly impossible.

What had brought me to this place? Certainly I had people to blame. There was the man who sexually abused me in childhood. Was I still that little girl who felt trapped by his threats and



abuse? I remembered standing in the only room in his house where I could have escaped through a small window in a bathroom with a high ceiling. Though I stretched with all my eight-year-old might, I could not reach the window. For three years the abuse continued. I never grew tall enough to reach that window.

I could blame my biological father. Maybe if he had given me the love and acceptance I so desperately longed for, I would not have come to this place. Why had he abandoned our family? In my second year of high school, my dad had called the social services department of Florida and reported that he had raped me during one of our weekend visits. I felt broken, rejected, and ashamed. Why had my dad said those things? They were not true. What was so wrong with me that my own dad would reject me in such a shameful way? My own father couldn't even love me; what made me think any other man ever could?

I could blame God. Why had a loving God let such terrible things happen to me? Why had he let my baby sister die after I begged and pleaded for her healing? Why didn't He just wave His majestic hand and fix all that was broken in my life? Where was He? Why did He leave me all alone?

Tears filled my eyes and deep sobs poured from my soul in that cold room. I knew I could not blame anyone but myself. I'd walked into this place. I'd signed the papers. I'd allowed my baby to be aborted.

SHAME IS SATAN'S SIGNATURE

Satan, sin, shame. You can almost hear the slithering beast hissing at the mention of these words. They blend together in their pronunciation and work together in the destruction of all that lies in their wake. I can just imagine Satan slithering close to an unsuspecting victim, hissing enticing words that lead to sin and then boastfully signing his name across the victim's heart: *Shame*.



Satan bursts out laughing as his devastated prey is left to piece together a broken heart.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines shame as “a painful feeling of guilt for improper behavior.” I can identify with this definition because I have felt shame’s pain—a deep, constant throbbing of regret from the past mixed with dread of the future.

Shame consumes you. It overwhelms you. You try to run from it but quickly realize there is no escape. So you accept the mark shame has placed on you, while trying to hide it and pretend it’s not there. It is an age-old feeling that has plagued every human God ever created. As a matter of fact, it is the first negative emotion recorded. Let’s look at the first time shame made his debut.

Adam and Eve were living an amazing life. They were surrounded by beauty and plenty. They lived in a lush garden, had all the delicious food they could ever want, and had an incredible marriage. There was no sin, and as Genesis 2:25 says, “The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

Then the craftiest of all the creatures slithered onto the scene and set out to deceive Eve. He first questioned her about what God had instructed. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1), making her doubt the validity of God’s instructions. Eve replied that God said they must not eat (true) or even touch (not true) the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or they would die (v. 3).

But Satan twisted God’s truth and answered, “You will not surely die. . . . For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (vv. 4–5).

Do you see why Satan is called crafty? The root word from the original Hebrew for “craftiest” is *’aram*, which means “to form a cunning plan.” Mustering all the skill he possessed, Satan contrived a well-thought-through plan to deceive Eve into sin.

His tactics are the same when Satan deceives us today. “Did



God *really* say that sex before marriage is wrong? Surely something that feels so right can't be wrong, now can it? It's a good thing to experience the ultimate expression of love before you are married. If you don't, how can you be certain he's the right partner? Isn't this something you want to know before making that lifelong commitment? Hisssss, hisssss, hisssssss."

Then, just like Eve, we let Satan's lies enter our minds and we rationalize our way into shame's grasp. Genesis 3:6–7 records the tragic fall of man (comments added).

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food [first rationalization: I have to eat] and pleasing to the eye [second rationalization: surely something that looks this good can't be bad], and also desirable for gaining wisdom [third rationalization: it is a good thing to want to be like God—three strikes and you're out], she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it [they sinned]. Then the eyes of both of them were opened [they moved from rationalization to realization], and they realized they were naked [shame grabs his victim]; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

We've been trying to cover shame's mark ever since.

Not only do we try to cover our sins, but we also mimic Adam and Eve's attempt to hide from God. Verse 8 tells us that "they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden." But God never leaves us in this hiding place long. He looks for us, calls us to "come out, come out, wherever you are."

This is exactly what God did for Adam and Eve: "The LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (v. 9). You can almost hear the heartbreak in the Creator's voice as He cries, "My beloved creation, why, why? I gave you everything and you could not honor My one request. Oh, if only you knew what you've done. If only



you could see all the tears that will come as a result of this tragic mistake. If only you knew what I will have to sacrifice to bring you back to everlasting life.”

God confronted Adam and Eve and told them the consequences of their sins. There are always consequences to our sins, and often they are deeper than is obvious at first. God said, “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (v. 19).

Interestingly enough, when I looked up the Hebrew word for dust I found the word *'aphar*, which contains “ashes” as part of its definition. Our bodies literally die and turn to dust as a natural part of the decaying process. This is just the opposite of our experience in Isaiah 61:3, where a different Hebrew word is translated *ashes* to tell that when we grieve, God can comfort our hearts by bestowing on us “a crown of beauty instead of ashes.”

I also know firsthand how God can take what Satan meant for shame and use it for His glory. Think of it this way: Just when we think we've messed up so badly that our lives are nothing but heaps of ashes, God pours His Living Water over us and mixes the ashes into clay. He then takes this clay and molds it into a vessel of beauty. After He fills us with His overflowing love, He can use us to pour His love into the hurting lives of others.

The story ends with a reminder that even though God can redeem our sins, sin always separates us from God's best. Sin's consequences could not let Adam and Eve stay in Paradise. They were banished from the Garden of Eden. But love would not let God abandon Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:21 is so precious. It says, “The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”

I can just imagine God gently removing Adam and Eve's frail little fig leaves and saying, “Don't disguise your shame with inadequate coverings. I will make a good covering for you. It's not to hide your shame as the fig leaves, for we have already revealed your sin and dealt with it. This is the protective covering of a sacrificed



animal.”

Sin demands a sacrifice. God knew that this time the shed blood of animals would be shame’s sacrifice, but one day that sacrifice would require precious blood dripping from a cross.

LOVE IS GOD’S REPLY

Here we stand at the foot of the Cross. Love has made the ultimate and final sacrifice. His red blood drips onto our shame, and this is where the miracle occurs.

Does love’s blood add to the stain, making the guilt of our shame grow? No. Love’s red blood pours onto shame’s stain and washes it pure white. In Isaiah 1:18 God says, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

In the original, the word for the red mentioned here is *’adam*, which means “dyed red.” This word is very similar to a Hebrew term for mankind, which we see in the name Adam. God knew even before Adam was created and named that he would fall into sin and be dyed red—and that only the shed blood of His Son could wipe man’s slate clean—yet He still chose to create us.

This is love’s reply: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16–17). Note that it does not say, “For God had pity on us,” or even, “God felt obligated.” No, it was love that nailed His Son to that tree. Love, my friend. Agape love. Pure, unfathomable, unconditional love for you and me.

Make no mistake, love’s reply was not just to forgive us and bring us back into eternal fellowship with God, though surely this would have been enough. Love went one step further to show us the depth of His care and compassion. First Peter 2:24 reveals



something more to us: “He himself [Jesus] bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds *you have been healed*” (italics added). Not only are we forgiven, not only is our relationship with God eternally restored, but we are healed!

This is shame’s defeat. This is the end of his story. This is where he exits the stage of our lives, never to appear again. As a matter of fact, his name is wiped from the program as if he had never even slithered into the play at all. Can anyone give me an “Amen” right here?

So we know we are healed, but our human minds compel us to ask how. Never fear, my friend; love has an answer. It occurs in that same passage of 2 Peter. Let’s read it again: “He Himself [Jesus] bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; *by his wounds you have been healed*” (italics added).

Now we have to walk back to the Cross. There we see Jesus’ wounds: The pierced hands and feet, the gashes on His head from a thorny crown, the bruises and cuts from merciless beatings, and the swollen lips from extreme thirst.

In John 19:31–34, two amazing truths are revealed about Jesus’ wounds. First, verse 31 tells us that the soldiers had been instructed to break the legs of those crucified and remove their bodies in preparation for a special Sabbath. Crucified men would be an eyesore for their religious holiday, so the religious leaders wanted the men dead and gone. When a person was crucified, excessive pressure on the diaphragm made it extremely difficult to breathe. So a person being crucified would push himself up with his legs to catch his breath. Breaking his legs would prevent him from catching his breath, resulting in death.

We learn in verse 32 that the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus were broken and their bodies taken down. Then in verse 33 we learn that they did not break Jesus’ legs because He was already dead. The point that Jesus’ legs were not broken is significant, for



it meant that the Scriptures would be fulfilled even in this detail of Jesus' crucifixion. We know from prophecies in Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; and Psalm 34:20 that "not one of his bones will be broken" (John 19:36).

The first truth about Jesus' wounds is that Scripture will be fulfilled even if it is at the hands of evil. Nothing can alter God's plan. Isaiah 54:10 says, "'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

Nothing shakes God and makes Him change His mind mid-stream. God does not forget His promises. Not even seeing His Son die for people who cursed Him and spat upon Him could make God forget His love for us. God had said that not one bone would be broken and none was.

So let me ask you, in light of this profound truth, if God does not condemn you, are you condemned? No, as we stand here at this old rugged cross and feel His Son's blood washing us clean, we cannot deny love this victory.

Now, just to make sure love is allowed a triumphant processional, we move on to a second truth gleaned from Jesus' wounds. John 19:34 says, "Instead [of breaking his legs], one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water."

I was once in a Sunday school class in which the teacher focused on this passage. In doing extensive medical research she found that the only way a person's side would pour forth both blood and water was if his heart literally broke apart and burst open. Now, I do not know all the physical ramifications of this medical claim, but I do know "When in doubt, check God's Word." To do this we turn back to Psalm 22, where David prophesied Christ's crucifixion.

In verse 16 we read of His hands and feet being pierced. Verse 18 tells of His garments being divided and lots being cast for His



clothing. And in verse 14 we learn of the condition of His heart: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me.” This takes my breath away. Christ died of a broken heart! Yes, the soldiers beat Him and nailed Him to the cross, but it was my sin that broke His heart and killed Him. It was His love for me that kept Him there until death.

That’s why we had to walk back to the Cross. You see, this was not just an event that happened two thousand years ago, something we read about as history. No, we were there. Jesus saw shame’s ugly mark on all of us. Yes, you and me. He saw Lysa TerKeurst sitting in that abortion clinic and knew she would need the healing only His wounds . . . only His death . . . only His love could give her! He also thought of you as He hung there on that cross. He could have called down a legion of angels to rescue Him, but His love for you kept Him there. Don’t deny that by His wounds, you are healed. Jesus paid the ransom with His love. Now give to love what is due: shame’s captive.

⇒ *It is your choice. You know love’s truth. Write in your journal these three truths:*

1. *By His wounds, I am healed.*
2. *God never forgets His promises. When He says that nothing I have ever done could make Him stop loving me, it is absolute truth. His love for me cannot be shaken.*
3. *Jesus died of a broken heart so that I don’t have to. He thought of me on that cross, and because of His sacrifice, I am forgiven and set free.*

Psalm 44:21 tells us that God knows the secrets of our hearts. He does know them, but He wants us to release them to Him and His healing truth.



⇒ *In your journal record whatever is heavy on your heart. Write your hurts out, and ask God for forgiveness for your sins and for healing today.*

Releasing your pain in this way and letting God's truth be the healing balm that settles over your wounds will set you free from shame forever. Yes, sin's consequences may still remain, but remember that God can bring good even from sin's ashes. It all comes down to repentance and being willing to turn and walk away from shame.

Oh, shame will reach for you and try to recapture you, but the arm of the Lord is longer still. Romans 8:37–39 proclaims,

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Lord will take you where shame's touch can no longer be felt. Now, when you stumble over sin's rocks in the road, you'll get up. You'll feel the Master's touch as you ask Him to forgive you and He wipes you clean. You'll smile as you look for shame's old marks and all you see is love's stamp: "Forgiven and set free."

Love has provided you with your true identity. You are a child of God, holy and dearly loved.

⇒ *Write in your journal about how you have always viewed yourself. Now write out Ephesians 1:4–5, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."*



God holds you up high for all the world to see, and He declares, “This one is Mine, forever and ever. No longer is she defeated and conquered, for through Me and My love, she is a conqueror!”

“Through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken” (Psalm 21:7).

A HEART RENEWED

It was the day I had dreamed about all my life. I was surrounded by all those I loved. My dress made me feel like a princess, and the church and reception hall never looked more beautiful. But as the church doors opened and everyone stood as I entered, my heart was broken. I pressed my bouquet against my chest, hoping no one would see the shame I had buried there. You see, just a few months earlier, I had learned I was pregnant.

I was terrified to go to my friends at church for fear of becoming an outcast. *After all, I wrongly reasoned, if people discover I'm not perfect, then I can't be a Christian.*

I knew well the sting of rejection and decided to go where I wouldn't be judged. So I went to an abortion clinic and was told the procedure would be quick, easy, and that I'd never think about it again. I bought their horrible lie and had an abortion.

The moment I awoke from the anesthesia, I knew I'd regret this decision for the rest of my life. The shame and guilt overwhelmed me.

Now, here I was, promising to love another when I so desperately hated myself. No one but me knew about the uninvited guest who was there. Shame stole the show on my wedding day.

Not long after we returned home from our honeymoon, all the guilt and pain from our mistakes began to haunt us. Our marriage was falling apart, and we both knew we needed help. After many counselors seemed unable to help us, one wise older pastor told us that he felt we needed to let God do a work in each of



our hearts as individuals; then God would knit our hearts back together.

Finally, I found out about a post-abortion Bible study at the local crisis pregnancy center. Every week my husband would drive me to a back entrance of the clinic where I would shamefully walk up a back staircase to meet with my counselor. I was so afraid someone might see me that I would not take a chance on parking my car at the center.

One day my husband couldn't drive me to the center. I don't remember exactly what happened, but just before I reached the center, I ran into the back of the car in front of me. As the man in the other car approached my crumpled vehicle, I fixed my eyes on his wild blond hair. He never concerned himself with his car; rather, he came up to me, asked if I was all right, and told me not to worry about his car. Then he instructed me to get where I was going, and as quickly as the accident happened, he was gone.

Now, I don't know if you've ever encountered an angel, but I think I had a car accident with one! I knew at that point that God had not left me and that somehow everything was going to be all right. Somewhere in the midst of the sound of car engines, I was almost certain I'd heard the brush of an angel's wings.

I drove up to the center that day and parked right in front. There in that Bible study I met a God I'd never known before. I learned a lot about God's character. We read in the Scriptures that God is a loving God who would forgive and who could heal the hurts of His people. The process was slow and painful, but as I dealt with the abortion, my heart felt hope for the first time.

Soon afterward I made some wonderful discoveries in Scripture: I am a holy and dearly loved child of God; He is my heavenly Father; nothing can separate me from His love; He sent His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross so that I could be forgiven and have my slate wiped clean. (We'll look at these Scriptures later in the book.)



For years, whenever I looked in the mirror, all I could see was an abused, rejected little girl who'd turned her back on God when she couldn't understand Him. Then she'd had an abortion and thought that was one sin for which there was no forgiveness. But that's not what God saw. He saw a dearly loved child, and He longed for fellowship with her. His heart broke for the things that caused her so much pain.

When I finally looked into God's Word and let Him be my mirror, I saw for the first time the truth of who I really am. The chains of bondage started to release their painful grip as I realized it was not *religion* that I needed but rather a *relationship*. That day I met two people. First, I met the Jesus I never really knew before. Even though I'd accepted Him into my heart some twenty years earlier, I had not pursued a personal relationship with Him. The second person I met was Lysa TerKeurst, a holy and dearly loved child of the Most High King, who was accepted and set free!

Soon after I came to understand my identity in Jesus, I was working on a Bible study that posed a very difficult question: Would I go wherever and do whatever God asked me to? At first I said yes, of course, and then I attempted to move on to the next question. Again and again my eyes were drawn back to the first question. God was making me examine more than just the question; I was also having to examine my heart.

You see, I felt God's call to share my testimony, but I was not willing. I told God that I would do whatever He desired except share my life story. I felt God impressing on my heart that I needed to trust Him, that He had plans to take what the devil meant for evil in my life and use it for His glory. A few weeks later I drove to a little country church where I had a speaking engagement. I told God that I would share my testimony just this time.

That day I witnessed a miracle of God. Tear-stained faces all over the room confirmed that this was a message people needed to hear. Over half the women in attendance recommitted their lives



to Christ. As I drove home, I promised God that I would go wherever He called me to go and share my story—*our story*.

I don't know the events in your life. I don't know what hurts might haunt you. I don't know what secrets are in your heart, but God knows, and He's calling you to give them over to His healing touch. We all come to a critical place at one time or another where we must decide whether we will walk life's journey with God or without Him. There is no in-between. I chose God, and what He has done for me is truly miraculous.

It's called amazing love. He has filled me with His love, and that love now spills over into every area of my life. I am now able to love my husband. I am able to be the kind of mommy my three daughters deserve. My home is filled with joy. My friendships are characterized by an openness that fosters loving accountability. I can now extend my hands out into the community with the love of Christ. I can do all of this not because of my own strength but because of God working in me and through me.

I walk with Jesus every day. I seek His face on good days and bad. Now let me assure you, I still mess up. My dear sisters, not one of us is perfect. That's why we need a personal and ongoing relationship with the One who is.

Let me encourage you to start a new journey with God today. Pray and ask Him to draw near to you. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you like never before. Be faithful to read your Bible and journal verses through which God speaks to you. Lift every area of your life up to Him in prayer. Praise Him for His faithfulness. Thank Him for His goodness. Let Him guide your every step from here on out. Take His hand and trust His heart. He will never leave you, my friend. He loves you. Oh my, how He loves you!¹



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. John 8:31–32 says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” What can the truth set us free from?
2. Is there any truth at all in Satan? What hope does this give us?
3. How does Satan use shame to defeat people?
4. What new truths did you learn about what Jesus did at the Cross?
5. Which of these truths had the greatest impact on you personally?
6. What should you do when you start feeling shame try to pull you back?