

Shame Lifter

Discussion Guide

Chapter 1: Fears and Tears

1. Can you identify with having an emotionally distant parent? If so, how has that impacted your life?
2. Do you remember ever being shamed as a child? If so, how would you complete the following sentence: I felt shamed when I _____.
3. Psalm 39:12 (NLT) says, “Hear my prayer, O LORD! Listen to my cries for help! Don’t ignore my tears.” (By the way, *ongoing* tears may be an indicator that something more is going on inside.) How do you typically express your hurt? How might you bring your shame or disappointment to God?
4. Have you ever felt hindered by hurtful, destructive words or names that were said over you? What were some of them?
5. Do you now have freedom from those words, or do they still have their paralyzing grip on you today? Explain.

6. Are you dealing with any past or current fears? In what way?

7. In Isaiah 41:13 (NLT) God promises, “I hold you by your right hand—I, the LORD your God. And I say to you, ‘Do not be afraid. I am here to help you.’ ” What hope does this passage offer you?

Chapter 2: Loved like Crazy

1. What were your mom and/or dad’s parenting styles like? How did they encourage you? Did they ever do anything to discourage you? If so, what?

2. What is the most nurturing thing someone (a parent, teacher, coach, etc.) did for you as a child?

3. Have you ever had an opportunity to come alongside someone who feels humiliated and shamed? What did you do to help that person?

4. Proverbs 10:7 says, “The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.” What can you do to ensure that after you die your memories will bring a blessing to the next generation?

5. How do you tell your family members “I love you”?

The following questions are specifically for you if you are a parent:

6. How has your parents’ parenting style personally affected *your* parenting style?

7. Based on your actions, do your children hear you say, “I’m crazy about you” *or* “You’re driving me crazy”? Explain.

8. One of the best ways to ensure your kids aren’t burdened by shame is to begin teaching them early about God’s great love for them. My mother did this through her consistent love and nurturing. She also spent one-on-one times with me going through fun Bible workbooks. How could you help your kids begin to feel confident about God’s love for them?

9. The psalmist talks about the importance of making our homes safe places: “I will try to walk a blameless path, but how I need your help, *especially in my own home, where I long to act as I should*” (Psalm 101:2, TLB, italics mine.) In what ways can you ensure your home is a “safe” home and a nurturing place?

10. What comes to your mind when you realize the child entrusted to your care—whether he or she is your biological, adopted, or foster-care child—is truly *God’s* child?

Chapter 3: Good-bye, My Love

1. Have you experienced the loss of a loved one to whom you were emotionally close? If so, describe some of the feelings you experienced then—or are experiencing now.

2. Is there someone you could come close to as they go through a difficult grieving time, like Aunt Ellen and Ruth Harms Calkin did for me? What encouragement might you offer?

3. “But to all who believed [God] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God,” according to John 1:12 (NLT). No matter what difficulties we go through, God loves us as His children and longs to have a relationship with us. What next step will you take to begin—or grow in—your relationship with Christ?

4. Can you recall a time of being shamed for having needs or shamed for your feelings? Describe.

5. The apostle Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Those words are loaded with responsibility! Do others listen and desire to follow you because they see you following hard after God, or do your life and words discourage and hinder them? Explain.

Chapter 4: Neglected

1. When my mother died, I resolved to bury my dark secret with her in her casket. Have you ever tried to bury a secret or your feelings, hoping they would never be brought to life again? If so, how well did that work?
2. Were any childhood names or labels (positive or negative) attached to you when you were growing up? If so, how have they affected you? If they were negative, take heart! God says one day He will give each of His children a new name—and every one of those names will be good (Revelation 2:17).
3. Author Rick Richardson writes, “If as you were growing up your birthday was forgotten or minimized, you may well have very little sense of celebration that you are and that your existence is to be rejoiced over.”¹ Were you celebrated on your birthdays? If not, what can you do on future birthdays to help you remember your birthday is special to God—after all He planned you before you were born? Psalm 139:16 (TLB) tells us, “You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your Book!”
4. Can you identify any shame givers in your life?
5. What are some healthy ways you can reject their shame messages so you do not fall into the trap of being a “shame receiver”?

¹ Please refer to *Shame Lifter* for source information for all quotes in this discussion guide.

6. Have you ever caught *yourself* being a shame giver? (I have.) What can you do differently to guard against slipping into that behavior again?

7. My friend Sherry Harney called recently and asked if I could meet her at a coffee shop. I presumed she wanted to share something with me. It turns out she scheduled the time for me to talk and her to listen to me! I kept trying to turn the conversation back to her. “No, this is your time to talk,” she replied sweetly. What a meaningful and rare gift she gave to me.

8. How would you rate your ability to listen to someone?

Great_____ Good _____ Okay_____ Fair_____ Poor_____ Improving_____.

What might you do to improve your listening skills?

Chapter 5: Loss after Loss

1. Do you have any “dislocated relationships”— the kind of relationships that forces you to “do life” with people who continually hurt you? If so, how is it impacting the other areas of your life?

2. Have you experienced a deep father or mother wound that you have not worked through? Are you willing to admit that this hurt exists and then take the necessary steps to begin to clean out the “infection” from this wound?

3. “Lord, when doubts fill my mind, when my heart is in turmoil, quiet me and give me renewed hope and cheer” (Psalm 94:19, TLB). Sometimes we go through a period in life where everything, for quite a while, seems to go wrong—no matter how hard we try. What does Psalm 94:19 tell us about how God can help us handle those times?

4. Have you been able to identify any shame shapers in your life? Shame shapers are experiences that destroyed your confidence or words that negatively impacted how you see yourself. If shame has affected you, how does it come out—as perfectionism, anger, an addiction, or some other self-destructive form?

Chapter 6: My Other Father

1. Is there someone in your life you continually hope will change, only to find that your hopes are dashed again and again? How difficult is it for you to accept that you cannot “fix” him or her and that it’s possible this person will not change?
2. Remember how the Lord provided the exit tax I needed to leave Israel? Put your name in the phrase: “To _____, Love Jesus.” What do you think the Lord Jesus wants to give to *you* right now?
3. Look back on your life and identify at least one God sighting.
4. Job 21:23-25 points out that “one man dies in full vigor, completely secure and at ease, his body well nourished, his bones rich with marrow. Another man dies in *bitterness of soul*, never having enjoyed anything good” (italics mine). Do you carry any symptoms of bitterness? If so, is it manifested in anger, resentment, negativity? When people “bump” into you, what spills out of you?
5. Affirmation was one of my deepest—yet unnamed—soul needs for many years. What area “below the waterline” do you need God to reveal and then help you work through? It may be helpful to draw an iceberg. Write down issues you already have an awareness of on the top portion of the iceberg. Next, ask the Lord to reveal any issues that may exist below the waterline. If something comes to mind, write it down below the waterline. What would it take for you to move that issue to the top of the iceberg as an acknowledgment that you are seeking to work on that issue as well?

6. Is there a person in your life whom you find difficult to be around or deal with? Jesus understands. He had to deal with difficult religious leaders. Scripture also mentions that His own brothers did not believe in Him (before His resurrection). Check out John 7:3-4 for what they said to Jesus. Can you relate in any way?

7. Can you think of anyone who has been like the Bauer family to you? Are you able to be a “Bauer” to someone you know who is hurting or needs financial help?

Chapter 7: Seeing the “Give” in Forgiveness

1. Three phrases are sometimes difficult for us to say: “I’m sorry”; “I forgive you”; and “I love you.” Is there anyone you would like to hear any of those phrases from? Is there someone you need to say any of those phrases to?

2. Have your parents ever shared some of their past with you? How did their words help you understand where they were coming from? In what ways, if any, has their baggage affected your adult life?

3. Do you catch yourself repeating negative statements you heard from people years ago? Are you passing on the disease of shame to the next generation in any way?

4. What specific destructive cycles has God already helped you break? Celebrate that and rejoice! What other cycles still need to be broken?
5. Look back at the quote from Brad Johnson at the beginning of this chapter. Do you consider yourself a “broken” person? How might God use your brokenness to help others?
6. Have you ever noticed the word *give* in the word *forgiveness*? What significance does that have when you consider offering forgiveness to someone who doesn’t deserve it?

Chapter 8: Forgive and Reforgive

1. I believe that sometimes when we are wounded, especially as children, we do not know how to grieve the wound or have it “dressed” properly. We just go on with life. The Lord sometimes allows these memories to come to light to remove built-up scar tissue and to give us a time to grieve and heal properly. Can you recall a time when a painful memory resurfaced? Did it allow you to experience a deeper emotional healing?
2. Dr. Robert Enright says, “a grudge is an anger that won’t quit.” Are you avoiding anyone because he or she “bugs” you or are you holding a grudge against that person? What first step might you take to restore this relationship? By the way, it takes two to reconcile, but it only takes one to extend forgiveness. (Note: There are some people we need to avoid because they are not “safe people” for us to be around. We can forgive them, but reconciliation might not be advisable.)

3. Author John Stott says, “Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us.” Spend some time reading Matthew 27, which recounts Christ’s death on the cross. Write down all of the injuries that were done to Him. Keep this list handy.

4. What sin committed against you has been the hardest for you to forgive?

5. Do you feel burdened by a sin you committed that you’re sure God would not want to forgive? If so, explain.

The apostle John reminds us, “If we confess our sins to him, he can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from *every* wrong” (1 John 1:9, TLB, italics mine). Psalm 103:12 also mentions that God removes our sin as far as the east is from the west. We know where the north and south poles are, but where do east and west meet? We can’t go there. God removes our sin and it’s gone!

6. Do you need to temporarily place someone in the “Jesus Jail” (see pages 118–119) while you work with the Lord on the issue?

7. “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others” (Colossians 3:13, NLT). What comes to your mind as you read those words?

8. Can you think of some offense you’ve recently had to “release” or “send off” that would illustrate the meaning of forgiveness? Explain.

9. Is there anyone you need to reforge because his or her name and the offense keep coming to your thoughts?

Chapter 9: Intermingling the Good and the Bad

1. The first step to releasing shame is to allow the Lord to help you open the door of your heart and face any bad memories that are shrouded in darkness. As Rick Richardson writes, "If God can heal our images, he can heal our heart." What bad memories have you locked away?
2. Is your life open and transparent, or do you continue to hide any secrets? Why is it destructive to hold on to dark secrets of *any* kind?
3. According to Dr. Dan B. Allender's definition of abuse (see page 131), have you ever been sexually abused? (Note: I realize that this is an intensely personal question. Please give it some thought even if you do not write anything down. If you have been sexually abused and have not acknowledged it, please don't hold on to that secret as I did. Confide in a person whom you know to be safe. Please find a godly counselor in your area who comes highly recommended. Don't put it off. Just as if you found a tumor, you would make an appointment with a doctor for a diagnosis, so it is important to deal with the malignant tumor of shame.)
4. If you have abused someone (or know that you are currently abusing someone), what first step do you need to take to put an end to the abuse and resolve the hurt you have caused or are causing? (Note: Again, I know this is a very personal question. If you have been abusive, I would urge you to seek professional help if you haven't already done so.)

5. Describe a situation in which you felt powerless. What hope do we receive in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NLT): “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness”? Isaiah 40:28-31 reminds us of the powerful God we have and what he does for us: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (v. 29).
6. Jesus’ last words were “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). In what way do those words comfort us when we’re hurting?
7. Psalm 31:5 also records these words: “Into your hands I commit my spirit. . . .” Take a moment to look up this passage. What additional information do we learn about God from the rest of that verse?
8. What does “resurrection power” signify to you (see page 133)?
9. What spoke to you the most in the story of Jehoiachin, king of Judah (2 Kings 24:8-16; 25:27-30)?
10. “We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28, NLT). Can you share an experience where God took your bad situation and intermingled it with His good? Or can you tell about a time when you found “treasure amidst the ruins”?

Chapter 10: Unlearning the Shame Language

1. Now that you've been introduced to the shame language, would you say you ever speak it?
Have you ever recognized it in the speech of others? If so, how might you lovingly confront yourself or another person speaking it?

2. Can you see areas in your life where Satan has stolen your identity in Christ?

3. Look at the following verses: John 14:16-17; John 15:26; and John 16:13. They all speak of the Spirit of _____. (In other words, truth isn't just a good character trait to possess; Truth is a living person.) How does recognizing this give you hope?

4. Have you ever condemned yourself? Explain. Scripture says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). How would your life be different if you really accepted this truth?

5. Someone once told me, "Shame is responsible for many of the things I can't stand about myself." Can you trace any of the things you can't stand about yourself back to toxic shame?

6. Take some time and write out any lies you believe about yourself.

7. What can you do to begin counteracting these lies?

7. If you wrote down a lie or lies after question 6, seek to find a verse (or verses) that you believe corresponds to your lie(s). Ask the Lord to show you a verse that will help you. You might check a concordance at the back of your Bible for ideas. For example, if you lack confidence and tell yourself you'll never be good at anything, you could look up the word *confidence*. Commit the verse that counteracts your lie to memory.

8. Put your name in the blanks in the following verse: "For _____ [is] God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for _____ to do" (Ephesians 2:10). What does this Scripture mean to you?

9. Have you allowed yourself to fully grasp that you are:

Deeply loved by God
Completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God
Totally accepted by God
A new creation, complete in Christ

Which phrase above means the most to you? Why?

Chapter 11: Set Free

1. Can you name one or more people of grace in your life with whom you can share your deepest self without feeling overexposed or embarrassed?

2. “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (Proverbs 24:26). What does this verse say to you?
3. If you believe a lie about yourself, what makes you want to hold on to it? How might it create a false sense of safety?
4. Second Corinthians 10:5 reminds us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Think of a lie about yourself that you have accepted. Now picture yourself capturing that lie in your hands and giving it to the Lord Jesus. How would your self-talk change if you took this verse to heart?
5. “How strengthening it is, to know that [Jesus] is at this moment feeling and exercising the same love and grace toward me as when He died upon the cross for me,” notes John Darby. Can you picture Jesus responding to you that way today? How might this image of Christ’s love aid in eliminating your shame?
6. The Lord views you as His child, worthy of His time and love. Your worth matters to Him. He longs for you to live a life that is free from shame and lies. His truth does set you free. Can you visualize His nail-scarred hands reaching out to embrace you? Can you picture yourself being held by Jesus? How does knowing that God longs to connect with you so closely affect how you think about yourself—and Him?