

Book Discussion Group
The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves, Curt Thompson, M.D.
Questions & additional bible studies by Kevin Greene

Introduction: The Story that Shame is Trying to Tell

1. Thompson makes the case that his approach to shame will be distinctive from popular mental health approaches (*Brene' Brown, John Bradshaw*) and secular frameworks (*naturalistic evolutionary framework, existentialism, emotional & cognitive phenomena*). **How will it be distinctive?**
 - a. "The way shame operates is an extension of something larger and more sinister. And to realize this is also to realize that the healing of shame is not merely going to be a function of greater social awareness of it or a novel mental health exercise. To effectively enter into the healing of shame requires us to know which story, exactly, we believe we are living in. This book, therefore, is not just a book about shame. It is a book about storytelling—the stories we tell about ourselves (which of course include others and especially God), how we tell them and, more importantly, the story that shame is trying to tell about us." (11)

2. **How will we know the "true story"?**
 - a. "In this book I will examine shame in the context of the biblical narrative. And...if shame is not understood in this context, it will become a powerful driving force in telling a different story... What if shame is embedded in a story that does have a purpose? Even more troubling, what if it is being actively leveraged by the personality of evil to bend us toward sin?" (12)

3. **What is the scope of shame?**
 - a. "Shame, is not just a consequence of something our parents did in the Garden of Eden. It is the emotional weapon that evil uses to (1) corrupt our relationships with God and each other, and (2) disintegrate any and all gifts of vocational vision and creativity,' including 'any area of endeavor that promotes goodness, beauty, and joy in and for the lives of others.'" (13, book premise)

Chapter 1: Our Problem with Shame

1. What is shame?

Romans 3:10-18

"None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹²All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one."

¹³"Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

¹⁵"Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery,

¹⁷and the way of peace they have not known."

¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Romans 7:15-25

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

2. "One of the purposes of this book is to emphasize that what we do with shame on an individual level has potentially geometric consequences for any of the social systems we occupy, be that our family, place of employment, church or larger community" (22). **Was this a new idea for you, that shame is operating in our social systems? What examples come to mind?**
3. **On shame's emotional features:** "One way to approach its essence is to understand it as an undercurrent of sensed emotion...that, should we put words to it, would declare some version of *I am not enough; there is something wrong with me; I am bad; or I don't matter*...and therefore exudes the aroma of being unable or powerless to change one's condition or circumstances....the *felt sense that I do not have what it takes to tolerate the moment or circumstance*" (24-25). **Can you relate to the "I need to get out of this moment" feeling? What other words describes how shame feels?**
4. **On shame's proximity to judgment & condemnation:** "One of the hallmarks of shame is its employment of judgment... The spirit of judgment Jesus warned about is such a common part of our mental lives that we barely notice its presence... much of it passes as 'reasonable observations'...Shamed people shame people." (28-29). **What does judging others or ourselves do for us? What connection do you see between judgment and shame?**
5. **On shame's hiding quality:** What do you notice physically when a person feels shame (i.e. lowering your eyes)? What do you think might be the cumulative effect of a life of hiding?
6. **On shame's self-reinforcing nature:** "We feel shame, and then feel shame for feeling shame. It begets itself." (31) **Do you agree with Thompson's statement? How do you respond?**
7. **On shame's power to isolate:** "Isolation and disconnection are natural consequences of hiding and resisting reengagement. With enough reinforcement of the features we have thus far considered, we see how the outcome is the separation of people from one another [*and the disintegration of self, as we will see in chapter 2*]" (32). **How do we see this on both personal and social levels?**
8. "Exposure is the very thing that shame requires for healing. Given how compelled we feel to turn away, strike inward at ourselves or strike out at others in response to shame, it is not our intuition to then turn quickly toward the other as a means to resolve the problem... The work required to overcome the inertia of shame and turn in a posture of vulnerability toward someone else can initially feel overwhelming...shame's healing encompasses the counter-intuitive act of turning toward what we are most terrified of" (33-35). **What do you think about this statement? What reaction do you have?**
9. ["The Incredible Testimony as a Former Gymnast Confronts Her Sexual Abuser in Court"](#), *The Gospel Coalition*, Justin Taylor.

"The Bible you speak carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you. I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me—though I extend that to you as well."

Former gymnast Rachael Denhollander addressing the court during the sentencing hearing of Larry Nassar, the former Team USA gymnastics doctor who molested her 16 years ago at his Michigan State University clinic.

Chapter 2: How Shame Targets the Mind

Let's review last week's discussion of the Introduction and Chapter 1:

- a. Shame is not simply a mental health or social issue. It is essentially a spiritual issue.
- b. Shame is a consequence of the Fall (Genesis 3). It is a universal state that affects every human being and every human system (Romans 3:11-12). Shame profoundly affects our relationship with God, one another, the creation, ourselves, and purposes as God's image bearers.
- c. Shame is a powerful driving force writing a story that bends us helplessly toward sin & self. We need God to speak to us to tell us the truth about Who He is, who we are, and what He has done about our sin & shame. God has revealed these important truths to us through His Word and in His Son, Jesus Christ.
- d. We often come to know shame through its features, indicators such as:
 - i. Emotions (*I am not enough; there is something wrong with me; I am bad; I don't matter*)
 - ii. Self-righteous judgment (Matthew 7:1-5) & Condemnation (Romans 7:21-24)
 - iii. Hiding & Isolation
- e. Exposure is the very thing that shame requires for healing (1 John 1:5-7)

Psalm 32. A Maskil of David.

¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

- **David describes the blessedness of God's pardon in four ways. What are they?**

³For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

- **David reflects on the effects of hiding your sin. What are they?**

⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

- **David reaches a wonderful point under God's hand. What happens? How does God respond?**

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

- **David tells us that being forgiven by God brings a wonderful freedom. What marks that freedom? What shift occurs in David's relationship with God?**

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

- **David knows he is forgiven. But God in His grace promises even more to David. What else does God promise?**

Chapter 2 Discussion

1. "The mind is a **fluid, emerging** process that is both **embodied** and **relational**, whose task is to regulate the flow of **energy and information**" (39). **Describe your reaction to Thompson's working definition of the mind. What parts of it seem novel? What parts are helpful?**
 - "Fluid...in that it is literally never completely at rest. We are always sensing, imaging, feeling, thinking or acting out something." (39)
 - "Emerging... refers to the idea that the whole activity of the brain is greater than the sum of its parts" (39). A mind is more than a bunch of neurons. From our biology emerges a mind with capacity for great good or great evil.
 - "Embodied...not some abstraction...Via the brain's extended nervous system the mind interacts with the world both inside and outside our skin." (39)
 - "Relational...the mind's capacity to do what it does is crucially dependent on the presence of relationships." (40)
 - "Energy refers to the literal electrochemical communication from neuron to neuron....Information refers to...meaningful perceptions" (40). Shame has a tendency to disrupt this process.
2. **What is the purpose of the mind?** Thompson outlines Siegel's domains, or functions, of the mind & how their integration contributes to robust mental health (42).
 - **Consciousness:** Our general level of awareness of what we are sensing, perceiving, feeling, thinking and doing at any given moment.
 - **Vertical.** Our brains develop from the bottom up, from basic functions to complex moral and logical processing.

- **Horizontal.** Our brain has two hemispheres, and the left brain works to make sense of what the right brain is sending it.
- **Memory.** We remember things in order to predict what the future will be like.
- **Narrative.** We try to make sense of our lives. This narrative is highly influenced by our most intimate attachment relationships.
- **State.** Much of what creates trouble for us in life is related to our unexpected movement from one state of mind to another, or our inattentiveness to that transition.
- **Interpersonal.** There is rarely anything I do that is not either influencing or being influenced by other minds.
- **Temporal.** Only human beings have the capacity to reflect on our past and our future.
- **Transpirational.** Human beings have the ability to attend to the other eight functions simultaneously.

These functions are a witness to the “Genesis narrative which declares that we mysteriously hewn creatures are both dust and breath ([Genesis 2:7](#)); we are inseparable embodied and relational...the feature of integration is reflected in the psalmist’s plea that God would give him an undivided heart ([Psalm 86:11](#)) and God’s deep desire to do so while transforming hardened, disintegrated hearts into flexible, connected ones ([Ezekiel 11:19](#))” (46). **How do you react to this idea that we struggle with disintegration?**

3. Thompson says that what the medical community calls *neuroplasticity* is actually descriptive of spiritual reality (47-48). A mind renewed by God’s mercy becomes “able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” ([Romans 12:1-2](#)). “Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ([Romans 8:5-6](#)). “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” ([Philippians 4:8](#)). **Why is it so hard to pay attention to God? How have you seen the need to practice this kind of attention to Him?**
4. Shame inflames, mutes & confuses our emotions as we feel our way through our days. **What role does emotion play day to day for you?**
5. God designed us for fellowship with Himself and one another, and it is not good for man to be alone ([Genesis 2:18](#)). But shame has undermined our ability to make faithful attachments to others. “[Hagar] gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” ([Genesis 16:13](#)). **What is your reaction to the idea that we are “attached” to God in Christ?**

Chapter 3: Joy, Shame & the Brain

1. **What is joy?**
2. “Leo Tolstoy wrote, ‘Life cannot have any other purpose than joy and goodness. Only this purpose—joy—is ultimately worthy of life’...The Westminster Shorter Catechism...declared that the chief end of humankind is ‘to glorify God and enjoy him forever.’ Later C.S. Lewis, in his sermon titled *The Weight of Glory*, writes of how ‘glory’ for humans is hearing that we are pleasing to the One whose pleasure we most long to fulfill. It is no more realized than when we hear our Master say, ‘Well done!’ The common theme these voices herald is joy” (59). **Do you experience joy in your daily life? What is a source of joy for you?**
3. “Joy is the signature indication of deep, mindful, intentional connection” (61). **Is there someone in your life who consistently demonstrating their delight upon encountering you?**

4. "Guilt is something I feel because I have done something bad. Shame is something I feel because I am bad...A necessary element of the emotion we call guilt includes empathy...In order for me to feel guilt, I must in some way simultaneously feel the pain I have caused another. In this sense guilt tends to draw my attention to another and is often accompanied by a desire to resolve the problem by being closer to him or her[admitting a wrong-doing, seeking and being offered forgiveness]. Shame, on the other hand, separates me from others, as my awareness of what I feel is virtually consumed with my own internal sensations... we can experience shame without guilt but are unlikely to experience guilt without shame" (63). **Is it helpful to reflect on the relationship between guilt and shame? How so?**
5. Thompson talks about the unexpected *shearing effect* of shame, a "certain shearing off of joyful anticipation, a blindsiding that overtakes [us] and completely catches us off-guard" (65). In response to that traumatic, shearing interaction, the functions of our mind become disintegrated. "For instance, when I experience shame, I find it personally impossible to turn my attention to something other than what I am feeling. I can become overwhelmed with the activity of my brainstem, and my [prefrontal cortex] goes offline. I'm not able to think coherently, and my logical thought processes, which usually help me make good choices, are unavailable to regulate my right brain, from which all of the emotion in pouring" (67). **Describe a time when your experience of shame stopped your sense of joy & curiosity. What were some of the physical, emotional, and cognitive consequences you experienced?**
6. "This...separation is our desperate attempt to deescalate the awful emotional sensation that we are enduring at the moment" (67). **What happens to a person and their relationships if this disintegration of functions becomes the norm?**
7. When we experience shame, we will eventually try to make sense of what we feel. We may associate the feeling of being **accused** and **contemptible** with our shame. Though we experience shame by ourselves, "we must never forget that there will always be someone outside my experience playing a collaborative role in the disintegration of my mind" (69). Thompson notes that Satan is known as our accuser ([Revelation 12:10](#)), and this will be explored in chapter 5.
8. "Shame is a leveraging affect that anticipates abandonment while simultaneously initiating movement away" (72). **Have you ever experienced this dual movement of shame?**
- 9.

Chapter 4: The Story of Shame You Are Living

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away...I did not cover my iniquity...You forgave the iniquity of my sin...You are a Hiding Place for me." from Psalm 32

Last week we discussed Chapters 2-3 and talked about the way **our shame wrecks relationship with God, self, and others.**

- **When we are ashamed, we feel cut off from God.** Shame leads us in a futile attempt to hide from the Lord. It is only by His merciful hand that we repent, receive forgiveness, and He becomes our Hiding Place.
- **When we are ashamed, we feel cut off from ourselves.** Shame is powerful enough to disintegrate the mind, divide the heart, and cloud the soul. And when we see the favor of our Heavenly Father, we are strengthened to single-mindedly trust & follow Jesus.
- **When we are ashamed, we feel cut off from others.** Shame "shears off" joy & we flee from others in confusion & fear. But knowing that our God delights in us restores the joy of His people.

Jesus really has died for sinners, and has taken our shame. Do you believe Him?

We've talked often about how Jesus submitted to the open shame of the Cross to remove our sin and shame. Psalm 22:1 was quoted by Jesus as he endured our Cross & shame ([Matthew 27:46](#)). In each cycle, what does David experience and feel? How

does he then locate himself with respect to God? How does this then point us to Jesus, who took on human flesh, affliction, weakness, and shame.

Psalm 22

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn.

A Psalm of David.

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

- **What does David experience?**
- **How does he then locate himself in God's story?**
- **How are we pointed to Jesus in these verses?**

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

- **What does David experience?**
- **How does he then locate himself in God's story?**
- **How we pointed to Jesus in these verses?**

¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.

¹² Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;

it is melted within my breast;

¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs encompass me;
 a company of evildoers encircles me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—
¹⁷ I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my garments among them,
 and for my clothing they cast lots.
¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far off!
 O you my help, come quickly to my aid!
²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
 my precious life from the power of the dog!
²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!
 You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!
²² I will tell of your name to my brothers;
 in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
 and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred
 the affliction of the afflicted,
 and he has not hidden his face from him,
 but has heard, when he cried to him.
²⁵ From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
 my vows I will perform before those who fear him.
²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek him shall praise the LORD!
 May your hearts live forever!
²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
 and turn to the LORD,
 and all the families of the nations
 shall worship before you.
²⁸ For kingship belongs to the LORD,
 and he rules over the nations.
²⁹ All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
 before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
 even the one who could not keep himself alive.
³⁰ Posterity shall serve him;
 it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;
³¹ they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,
 that he has done it.

- **What does David experience?**
- **How does he then locate himself in God's story?**
- **How we pointed to Jesus in these verses?**

Chapter 4 Discussion

1. In addressing Robert's depression and malaise, Thompson asks about his client's spiritual life. "I assured him that I was not attempting to find out about his belief in God. Rather, I was inquiring about what he believed about *anything*. Indeed, *what was the story that-whether he attended to it consciously or not,- was dominantly shaping the life he was embedded in?*" Thompson goes on to say, "...we believe we live in a world created by God whose character and acts are found in the pages of the Bible..." (80). **Why would locating ourselves within God's larger story serve to keep us in our right mind?**
2. We can be aware of the large (worldview), medium (ongoing, emotional memory) or small (brief, immediate details) aspects of our story. **Which do you find yourself paying the most attention to?**
3. "Long before you arrive on the scene...people started talking about you: They talked about your gender, what you will be named, who they hope you will resemble in appearance and character (and likewise, who they hope you will not resemble)" (86). **Is there part of your story that was told around your birth/early years that seems to influence how you think about your life now?**
4. If you believe God made you ([Psalm 139:13-16](#)), chose, knew and predestined you([Ephesians 1:4-5](#)), **how does that that part of your story have influence over your life?**
5. One of the image-bearing qualities that sets man apart from the rest of God's creatures in the ability to think in terms of a story. What goes through your mind to feed the story about yourself throughout the day? Those thoughts can give us insight into what story we really believe we are living. **Why is it a key part of Christian discipleship to constantly tell the story of God, humanity, the people of God, and your personal story?**
6. A story "is what tends to emerge between speaker and listener, both playing a crucial role in its telling" (88). **Who is someone in your life who helps you to tell your story by listening to you? Whose story do you help by being a good listener?**
7. Our shame is a powerful voice competing to write our story every day. The world, the flesh and the devil ([Ephesians 2:2-3](#)) conspire to amplify the voice of shame in our lives. Consider your "shame attendant" (93) this week. What does he say to you? How does he look at you? His tone of voice? Her frequency of judgment? In what way does your shame attendant "shear off" your experience of or connection to joy and creativity?

Chapter 5: Shame & the Biblical Narrative

"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Ephesians 1:4-5

Last week we talked Chapter 4 and about how **knowing you are a part of God's larger story can keep you in your right mind.**

- **Every day, many factors work to influence our view of ourselves.** Both the good and the bad can profoundly shape the way we understand our purpose and place in the world. And God powerfully reveals in His Word that we are made, chosen, known and predestined by Him. We must daily remember that central part of our story.
- **It is a key part of Christian discipleship to constantly tell the account of God, humanity, the Church, and ourselves.** It's true that the world, the flesh and the devil conspire to amplify the voice of shame in our lives. It is also true that Jesus leads us back to the true account of God & His people.

Just as we saw in our study of Psalm 22, **can you take a bold look at your heart & situation and locate yourself with respect to the Living God? Can you see Jesus, who took the place of sinful, ashamed and afflicted people as our substitute?** That's the story of the His people.

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil....

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

- 1) Picture the context of this scene: the garden, the trees, and the new man in his new job in this beautiful place. What strikes you about how God made man, and where God had placed him?
- 2) Thompson suggests, "*We are invariably made for faith, to operate out of a need to trust something we cannot control* (p.101)." In Genesis 2, how might God's commands be not only protection for man, but also an invitation to operate in accord with how he was designed by God, to live in trust and faith in the relationship?

Genesis 2:18-25

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- 1) Verse 18 holds the first “not good” in the Genesis account. It is ‘not good’ for man to be alone. What does God intend to do in response to this need He sees? What does that say to you about God?
- 2) Verse 24-25, what do you feel as you read this description of the relationship between the man and the woman?
- 3) Why do you think the writer of Genesis highlights their nakedness and unashamedness, above other things?

Genesis 3:1-13

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

- 1) What do you notice about what the serpent says to the woman in 3:1-5? What words stand out to you? What do you feel/sense as you hear his question?
- 2) Thompson suggests that “*Doubt is planted as a way to discredit not so much Eve’s rendition of the facts, which could easily be resolved by waiting for God’s next stroll through the garden. It is used to rupture relational connections.*” How do we see that here in this very first question?
- 3) In verse 2, compare what the woman says in her reply to what God had *originally* said to Adam in 2:15-17. How are they different? What might this say about how the tempter disorients and confuses us?
- 4) Jesus calls the evil one the father of lies (John 8:44). The book of revelation calls him “the accuser” (Revelation 12:10). Can you hear lying and accusing –about God *and* about man- in verse 3?
- 5) Thomson writes, “*Shame is primarily an emotion that undermines... our felt sense of connection and safety....We also see that the serpent has no trouble talking about God rather than inviting the woman to have a conversation with God. This is one of shame’s most important means of creating the isolation....At this point the woman can begin to consider God in her own mind, by herself. She is given the opportunity to decide independently who God is and what he thinks and feels in response to her. She begins the process of analyzing God-of judging him from a distance, rather than interacting with him. (104)* Do you ever notice yourself doing this? What impact does it have on your sense of connection to God or to others?
- 6) In verse 6, Eve considers the fruit in light of her conversation with the serpent. Compare what she “sees” with how the fruit was already described in chapter 2. What has shifted in her perspective?
- 7) Notice who was “with” her through all this. Why was Adam so silent, do you think? What does this say about temptation’s impact on our connection with one another?
- 8) Remember the final verse in Genesis 2. “They were both naked and unashamed.” Compare that reality to this scene in verse 7: What has happened *within* them? *Between* them?
- 9) Thompson says, “*This hiding comes not only because we anticipate that we will be shamed, but even more important, in our memory we carry a sense that we are shameful. When I am in the presence of another who elicits discomfort*

within me, though I easily point to the person outside my skin as the responsible party for my distress, the real problem is far more proximate. For it is ultimately within me” (109). Can you relate to this? If so, how?

- 10) In verse 8, what impact does the “sound of the Lord” have on the man and the woman?
- 11) Look at verse 9. Why do you think God asks questions (also in 11 and 13) if he already knows the answers? What might this tell us about God?
- 12) Do you have any people who come calling to you, inquiring of your whereabouts, as God did with Adam? What impact does it have on you?
- 13) Adam’s answer to God describes the experience of the human race. How do we hide from one another and from God? What are our ‘fig leaves’ and trees?
- 14) Do you think Adam has correctly identified the problem?
- 15) God asks another question in verse 11. Why do you think God asks “who?” before he asks “what?” What might this tell us about God’s care? What does he seem to want Adam to realize?
- 16) Look at Adam’s response to God’s pursuit, in verse 12. Does it seem like Adam is “covering” here? How so?
- 17) Thompson remarks, “A simple yes or no would do. But the horse of shame has left the barn, and the man and woman respectively do what we have a tendency to do when we are genuinely sought, even when sought in love. Our shame screams out in judgment of those closest to us” (112). Does this feel familiar in your own relationships? Why do you think we resort to blame-shifting?

Genesis 3:14-24

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,
“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said,
“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷And to Adam he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,

till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

- 1) Thompson says, “*Disintegrated are the relationships in which God and the couple enjoyed the love of being known. It matters not that God attempts to engage the man and the woman, looking for a real conversation, a real partner in a real relationship. Shame would have none of that. No longer would connection, curiosity, and creativity be engaged freely, without the worry of failure or of being exposed and humiliated for making mistakes. There was a new, bent order, one filled with thistles, undermining and abuse.*” (112) In light of this reality, how do you interpret God's clothing of Adam and Eve in verse 21, as well as His prevention of them from eating from the tree of life and “living forever” in this state in 22-24?

Matthew 4:1-10

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

- 1) Jesus Christ was “tempted in every way, just as we were, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Consider this scene when the tempter came to Jesus after his baptism by John. Can you hear the tempter's attempts to accuse God and to accuse Jesus as God's Son? What do you notice about how Jesus responds?

Chapter 6 Shame's Remedy: Vulnerability

“The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Genesis 2:25

“I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” Genesis 3:10

Last week we discussed Chapter 5 and walked through the first chapters of the book of Genesis to see **how wonderfully God made man**, and **how the terrible Fall of man brought with it shame, fear, and hiding**.

- **Our shame is a deeply relational problem.** The man & woman gave the accuser an authority that belongs to God alone. Eve does not go to her husband, nor to the Lord who loves her. Adam does not speak in defense of Eve, nor to the God who made him. And a deadly division erupts between Man & God and between man & woman.

- **When Satan leverages our shame, a deep confusion & forgetfulness sets in.** The accused can't see the truth about God. We can't see the truth about ourselves.
- **And so, God Himself must endure the temptations and accusations of the evil one for us** (Matthew 4:1-10). Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus knows our shame and sets out to deliver us.

Psalm 25. Of David.

- ¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
²O my God, in you I trust;
 let me not be put to shame;
 let not my enemies exult over me.
³Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
 they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

- **How does David entrust himself to God?**

- ⁴Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
 teach me your paths.
⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are the God of my salvation;
 for you I wait all the day long.
⁶Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
 for they have been from of old.
⁷Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
 according to your steadfast love remember me,
 for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

- **How does David entrust himself to God?**

- ⁸Good and upright is the LORD;
 therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹He leads the humble in what is right,
 and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
 for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

- **How does David entrust himself to God?**

- ¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
- ¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
- ¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
- ¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
- ¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

- **How does David entrust himself to God?**

- ¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
- ¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.
- ¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.
- ¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
- ²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
- ²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.
- ²² Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all his troubles.

- **How does David entrust himself to God?**

1. From the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, we are introduced to a “vulnerable God...open to wounding. Open to pain. Open to rejection. Open to death...God knew creation would bring trouble, he had confidence that his triune relationship would bear the weight of whatever trauma would come his way” (121-122). **How do react to this idea that God Himself is vulnerable?**
2. “Vulnerability is not something we choose or that is true in a given moment...It is something we are...For the man and woman to be naked and unashamed was to be vulnerable, was to be open to wounding. It emphasized that they, in their vulnerable need, were dependent on each other in order for life to flourish. For surely it is not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18)” (120, 122). **How do react to this idea that we were actually created by God to be vulnerable?**
3. In pursuing Adam & the woman after the Fall, God does so in a way that requires the two to appear before Him and cease their hiding. “Vulnerability is the state we must pass through in order to deepen our connection with God and others, given our condition. There is no other way” (123). **How do react to this idea that reconciliation means you must past through vulnerability?**

“If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.” ([1 Corinthians 8:2-3](#))

Chapter 7 Our Healing Cloud of Witnesses

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing 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." ([Hebrews 12:1-2](#))

1. *"We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses."* We are not alone. **What role is the Christian community to play in healing shame and leading us to repentance?**
2. *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.... fixing our eyes on Jesus."* So much sin begins as a function of attention (136). **What role is the church to play in encouraging us to turn our attention from sin to Jesus?**
3. Christians have to practice this kind of changed focus—it does not often come easy. **What "acts of imagination" (136) has God used as a means of shifting your attention away from shame and toward Jesus?**
4. *"He endured the cross, scorning its shame."* **What does it mean to scorn shame? How did Jesus do this?**
5. *"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* In the context of Hebrews 12:1-2: **What is the race? What about it requires perseverance?**
6. *"For the joy set before him".* **What was the joy set before Jesus? How did that joy strengthen His to endure the cross and scorn its shame?**
7. Consider the various groups of which you are a part (family, work, friends, church, sports, etc.) **What is the general posture of each of these groups in regard to vulnerability? To revealing hidden shame?**
8. Not every community is interested in eradicating shame. Thomson points out that if a community runs on shame, it will seek to maintain equilibrium (146), we will need more than "the facts" to undermine shame (147), and when shame is dealt with faithfully, not everyone in the system will be happy about it (148). **Have you observed any of these to be true?**
9. Communities of healing are not limited to the church. **Do you have a community that serves as a place of healing?**

*“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.”
Hebrews 12:12*

Last week we discussed Chapters 6 & 7. It is important to see that the Lord Himself is not a distant deity, but opens Himself to the possibility of pain and transgression in the creation. **He was not surprised by the Fall of Man, but still He suffered a deep, personal offense in Man’s sin and rebellion.**

- And when God made man in his image, He created us vulnerable. We normally think about vulnerability as a negative thing. But we see that **Adam and Eve were made for dependence on God, and intimate relationship with one another.**
 - And since the Fall, **it is only in humbling ourselves and trusting the Humiliation of God in Christ that we are redeemed and delivered from sin and shame.**
 - The fellowship of the Church is designed by God to be the place where the ashamed are given grace. Grace to turn from our shame to see Jesus & be changed into His likeness. **His hatred of our shame, His atonement on our cross, and the sufficiency of His sacrifice becomes our story & our message.** It is the only true encouragement we offer each other.
1. Thompson begins this chapter with a case study of how a family blighted by shame repents and is renewed. Some of the elements included:
 - a. “When we share our own vulnerabilities with our children, we send a powerful message to their brains that they are not alone in their own weaknesses... When we invite our children to talk about their uncertainties and to honestly share our own with them, we make possible the integration of their minds, bringing them not to certainty of knowledge, but confidence in relationship” (153-4). **What are the risks and blessings of a parent confessing sin and sharing weakness with a child?**
 - b. “This is a story of how one family disregarded shame, doing the hard, persevering work of listening to the voice of God and living into his delight, something God wants all of us to experience” (156). **How do you react to this vision of family life?**
 2. Similar dynamics occur in the church, the family of God. “How do we directly address the issue of shame *in* the church so that shame can be healed *through* the church? As it turns out, the process of being known in the context of our vulnerability *within* the church becomes one of the most powerful means of evangelism and healing” (156). **What are the risks and blessings of confessing sin and sharing weakness in the church?**
 3. Thompson highlights [I Corinthians 12:20-26](#) as part of the Biblical vision for redeeming shame in the church:

²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

What does God say we are to do with weakness in the Body of Christ? Why? What effect would this have on the community?

4. Thompson explores an experience that is common to nearly all readers of this book: educational settings. He notes that education can be shame-based or can inspire learning, creativity, curiosity, relationships, and vision. [Romans 5:1-5](#) calls this kind of development to mind in the spiritual development of the believer in Jesus:

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that

suffering produces endurance, **(How?)**

⁴and endurance produces character, **(How?)**

and character produces hope, **(How?)**

⁵and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Have you ever had a teacher, mentor, or educational context that was inspiring? Why was it so effective?

Chapter 9 Renewing Vocational Creativity

1. **What is your "vocation"?**
2. "There is no substitute for knowing the engineering principles in constructing a building. There is no replacement for learning to tie a proper knot when closing off a surgical procedure. Good relationships won't build a proper ship by themselves. That is not the point. At issue is *knowing*, which represents the necessary information about how things work, is always in service to *being known*, which represents the relationship for which all of that information matters. And shame works to ruin the creative possibilities of every vocational endeavor by tainting the relationships those endeavors rest on" (170). **How do you respond to this idea that knowing how things work serves the relationships impacted by knowledge and work?**
3. "When we resist the disintegration customary of the soul of shame, one byproduct is that we establish space for enhanced creativity" (171). **Have you experienced this to be true?**
4. Thompson uses I Corinthians 12-13 as a model of a flourishing church. "[Paul] writes these words to a group who at the time were not necessarily in the best shape. There was factional infighting between some who thought others didn't belong, the flaunting of an adulterous affair, and the rather brusque, insensitive approach toward sharing the Lord's meal together" (172).

^{12:4} Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

- **The Spirit gives a variety of gifts to one body. How does God get glory from this arrangement? How can the church be tempted in this arrangement?**

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

- **We cannot thrive on our own. Why? Why can this so difficult for us to believe?**

¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

- **How does shame undermine the vision of many parts, one body?**
- **How does Paul propose we disregard shame in vv.22-26?**

And I will show you a still more excellent way.

^{13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- **What contrast is Paul setting up in these verses? What is the “still more excellent way”?**

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Paul's vision of Christian maturity is knowing God, others and ourselves in light of the way God knows us. He tells us to turn our attention away from self to "faith, hope & love". Can you share a recent experience where God turned you to Himself?