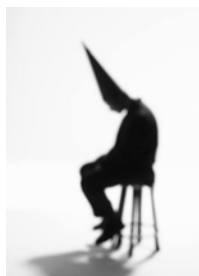




A Measure of Grace

May 2008
Volume 12, Issue 5

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds



The Effects of Shame *by Roger Jones*

A few months ago as I was wandering through a bookstore, I came across the self-help section. I occasionally like to peruse this section to see if there are any new books by authors I've read before. One book caught my attention, *Shame & Guilt: Masters of Disguise*, by Jane Middleton-Moz (Health Communications, Inc., 1990). I picked up the book and flipped through the pages. I could relate with many of the examples inside, so I bought the book.

People often mistake guilt for shame and vice versa. For clarification, it is important to remember that guilt is how

I feel when I've done something wrong, a fear of punishment or consequences. With shame, we feel that our "self" is being judged, which brings a fear of isolation and abandonment. Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad."

We have all experienced shame at some point in

Inside this issue:

The Effects of Shame	1
Readers' Comments	3
Reflections	4
April at a Glance	8
May and Beyond	8

Where Grace Abounds
P.O. Box 18871
Denver, Colorado 80218-0871

Office: 303/863-7757
Fax: 303/863-7769

email:
info@wheregraceabounds.org
website:
www.wheregraceabounds.org

wga
where grace abounds

(Shame continued from page 1)

our lives and to varying degrees. Some were made to feel useless or always in the way. Parents, unhappy with how they were raised, may attempt to create a perfect environment for their children. This atmosphere of perfection doesn't allow for mistakes or anything less than excellence. Mistakes made by children become more than just opportunities for correction. The shame they are made to feel because of their mistakes or for not being perfect is internalized.

The message of shame comes from other places too. Peers tease the kid in school who isn't good at sports. Some respond by pressing into this and learning to excel, while others internalize the shame and never try a sport again. Sexual abuse causes men and women to feel a deep sense of shame as well, thinking things like, "I did something to cause this to happen," or "It felt good when he touched me, so there must be something wrong with me."

Those for whom shame was a constant presence while growing up, the effects carry forward into adulthood. In the book *Shame & Guilt*, the author lists twenty one ways that adults who experienced shame in childhood are impacted. Here are a few of those:

Adults shamed as children:

- Are afraid of vulnerability and fear exposure of self.

- May suffer extreme shyness, embarrassment, and feelings of being inferior to others.
- Fear intimacy and tend to avoid real commitment in relationships.
- May appear either grandiose and self-centered or appear selfless.
- Frequently feel defensive when even minor negative feedback is given.
- Apologize constantly. They assume responsibility for the behavior of those around them.
- Project their beliefs about self onto others. They engage in mind reading that is not in their favor.
- Often feel controlled from the outside and the inside. Normal spontaneous expression is blocked. One common thought is, "I'm making a fool of myself."
- Feel they must do things perfectly or not at all. This frequently leads to performance anxiety and procrastination.
- Block their feelings of shame through compulsive behaviors like workaholism, eating disorders, shopping, substance abuse, list making, or gambling.
- Have caseloads rather than friendships.
- Are stuck in dependency or counter-dependency.

After reading the entire book, I believe I have a pretty good understanding of shame and how it differs from guilt. The book was 108 pages long,

(Continued on page 6)



A Reader's Comments

by Mary Heathman

A long-time WGA friend, Pastor John Bennett, of the Salvation Army New Heights Church, sent me a few emails while I was writing about “The Way They See Us.” With his permission, I offer excerpts from his messages:

“I am intrigued by your new series. I think we are all concerned about Christians being perceived as annoying.”

“I think that in some cases the “outsiders” are correct – some of us are in fact the way they describe us.”

“What I have seen in my own life and the life of others is that many of us don’t really get involved in the grit of life. Some of us believe that reading the Bible, praying, going to church, not involving ourselves in “sin” is what the Christian life is about. I guess what is needed is a view that sees those things as “fuel” not ends in themselves. However, I notice that younger Christians are much more involved. Actually the age

group that UnChristian looks at.

“This morning I was reading Ps. 146:7-9 and I was bothered. There is a list of suffering people that the Lord helps. He upholds the cause of the oppressed; gives food to the hungry; sets prisoners free; gives sight to the blind; lifts up those who are bowed down; watches over the alien; sustains the fatherless and the widow.

“But how does the Lord do it? I believe Ps 146 is the Word of God, so I have to believe that he is doing it, but I don’t see it. Many people on earth are suffering and they do not seem to be receiving any help from the Lord!

“I thought about Jesus – he healed every sickness and disease. He saw the crowds and had compassion on them. But his response to his disciples was strange: ‘the harvest is plentiful – the workers are few.’ Jesus equates the harvest with those who are suffering – and his answer is to send people to work with them. How does he help the oppressed, the hungry, the pris-

(Continued on page 7)

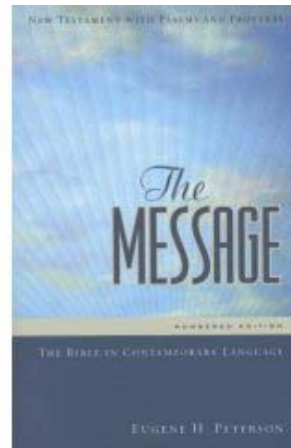
Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

Debilitating self-criticism

My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves. And friends, once that's taken care of and we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God! I John 3:18-21 (The Message by Eugene Peterson)

These four verses have been working on me for a couple of weeks. And they are beginning to feel almost magical. When I am weighed down by self-criticism, my perceived history of failure rides my back heavily and whispers in my ear, "Why keep trying? You've never done this right. You can't do this. Don't you remember the shame? Can't you see it coming again? Why do you



hope to change this time? You will fail and look like a fool in the bargain.” I have found myself timid and immobilized as the weight of past failures and shame and condemnation make me terrified to move forward.

John offers a guilt-loss program to reduce that debilitating weight: practice love. Practice real love. Go commit either a spontaneous or well-planned act of love! It's really brilliant. Practicing love calls me out of the past and into the present. Practicing love invites me to focus on the person in front of me and not so much on the person inside of me. It urges me to

(Continued on page 5)

(Reflections Continued from page 4)

think of someone besides myself.
And finally, practicing love allows me to feel God's pleasure.

I'm glad John acknowledges that our self-criticism often "has something to it." We are guilty. We do fail. We do come up short. We struggle with sin and fear and blinding self-consciousness. But "God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves." He knows that loving is the antidote we need. And once "we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God!"—transformed from timid and immobilized to bold and free!

Practicing love doesn't have to involve adding an 8 hour soup kitchen shift to your weekly schedule. Practicing love simply means pausing to listen to the Voice or Love and joining in what He is already doing around you. That might look like writing a short note of appreciation, an email of encouragement, a silent prayer for the checkout lady as she rings up your groceries, raking a neighbor's leaves, stopping to help someone with a flat tire . . .

The daily possibilities are endless, and the benefit—truly free living.

(Shame continued from page 2)

of which the first 101 pages described the development of guilt and shame in a person and how these problems surface as adults. The few remaining pages at the end contained all that the author offered to help with the problem. This left me feeling a bit lost as to what to do with all the things stirred up within me by the text. “How do I fix the problem?” I was asking. “Where are my 10 easy steps to freedom?”

After giving this some thought, I realized that perhaps the solution really is simple. This does not mean that it is easy, however. The author pointed out that along with shame comes a feeling of aloneness. We feel like no one will understand what we are feeling. “If I tell someone how I feel, I will be rejected and abandoned.” Based upon past experiences, these fears may be justified. The truth is that while someone may have abandoned you in the past, not everyone will. Finding a safe place to share these feelings is imperative to moving on from them.

Does healing mean the absence of shame in our lives? Probably not. When we have years of reacting emotionally to the circumstances we find ourselves in, it takes time to recover.

We may not be able to choose how we feel in the moment, but we do have power in how we respond. When we feel ashamed and shaken to the very core with “I am bad” thoughts, we can stop ourselves from living there. We can pray for God to pierce our hearts with the truth of who he made us to be. We can call a safe friend or share the feelings in a small group, confessing our negative beliefs about ourselves. Creating new habits in how we respond to shame greatly de-

creases its effects in our lives.

These aren’t magical solutions. They simply take the power out of shame, which is based in lies we believe about ourselves. Asking God to reveal truth to us and getting a reality check from a trusted friend brings clarity in a way that harboring secret thoughts cannot. People who truly know and love us will be able to

reflect back a more accurate representation of who we truly are.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2, NIV)

***Finding
a safe place
to share these
feelings is
imperative
to moving
on from them.***

(Comments continued from page 3)

oner, the fatherless, and the widow? He sends us to them! (Matthew 9:35-38)

“There are two key phrases in Ps 146:7-9: ‘The Lord loves the righteous; but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.’ I think that the Lord is saying that those who help sufferers are righteous – and those who don’t are wicked. The Lord loves the righteous – and he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

“The message behind books like Un-Christian goes like this: ‘if all we do is read the Bible, go to church, pay our tithes, take care of our families, pray – and do not help those who suffer, never inconvenience ourselves to help them, or if we judge them and are cruel to them – then we are wicked – no matter how many godly things we do. It is sad that it takes ‘outsiders’ to see it.

“I remember seeing a poster that said something like this: ‘I was sick and you called a prayer meeting. I was homeless and you took up an offering. I was without

clothes and you formed a committee. I was in prison and you fasted. You sure are getting more holy – but I am getting weaker and I’m dying.’

“So what do we do? We HAVE TO go out into the world – we have to walk ‘naked’ in the public square – without defense, without weapons, without laws, without judgment – and HELP those who suffer. The only way that we can legitimately be known as a non-judgmental, sincere, godly people is to truly *be* non-judgmental, sincere and godly.

“Hopefully this is helpful?

“God bless, . . . johnb.”

Mary’s Prayer in response: “Yes, indeed, Lord, bless John Bennett and all our brothers and sisters whose hearts ache to be known as people after your own heart! Help us to know what it is to see what you see, feel what you feel and do what you do!”

Some of us believe that reading the Bible, praying, going to church, not involving ourselves in “sin” is what the Christian life is about.



April

At a Glance

April 8th: Mary will be speaking at Tuesday Morning Joy, Abundant Life Church

April 25-26th: WGA's Family and Friends Retreat.

Thursday Night Group

April 3rd: 49
April 10th: 47
April 17th: 48
April 24th: 46

Orientation meeting: 6 new people

May

And Beyond

June 7th - Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00 - 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

July 9-13th: Mary will be presenting at the Friends United Triennial

July 15-20th: Exodus International Freedom Conference in Asheville, NC

September 19-21st: Mary will be speaking at the New Hope Family and Friends Retreat in San Rafael

June 7th - Intercessory Prayer. Join us from 7:00 - 9:00 am at the WGA offices.

WGA Staff

Roger Jones
Executive Director

Scott Kingry
Program Director

Mary Heathman
Founding Director

Janet Moine
Staff

A Measure of Grace
is edited by
Elodie Ballantine Emig

Where Grace Abounds
exists to guide and support
men and women who seek to
understand sexuality and
relationship, and to inspire
all people to know and
personally appropriate
God's plan for their
sexuality and relationships.

Printed in the USA
Copyright 2008