

Another Beautiful Life

How To Deal With Feelings Of Shame

Shame is similar to guilt, but more personal. You might feel guilty for stealing a TV last month, but you might feel shame for being a thief. When you feel guilty, you feel bad about a particular event. Shame is more pervasive and personal. You might feel shame for being a poor parent or even being the victim of abuse.

Think of guilt as “I did something bad” and shame as, “I am bad.”

The only people that never feel shame are psychopaths. At least now you know you don't have to deal with that issue!

Use these ideas to deal directly with any feelings of shame:

1. Explore why you feel shame.

Be honest with yourself. Sit with these questions for some time to see what comes up. Your brain may resist exploring these questions because they're “hard” things to deal with. Remember, the brain does everything it can to avoid pain. Determine with your will to make your brain cooperate.

- What happened?
- What does that event or series of events say about you?
- Is that a reasonable interpretation on your part?
- Are you being too hard on yourself?
- Is it possible that you didn't do anything wrong at all?
- What does the Word of God say about you?

A simple confession can remove the power of shame over your life. Confession just means “agreeing with God.” We can confess and own up to the things that we are responsible. We can also confess (agree) that God loves us and forgives us completely. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Refusing to address the “why” behind your shame just makes it stronger and gives it more power in your life. The more you hide it or resist addressing it, the more intensity it has. Bring it into the Light and its power over you will dissipate.

2. Understand that you are not defined by your behavior. No one is perfect 100% of the time. The Bible is full of examples of Christ followers who made wrong or immoral choices, yet Jesus still loved them. The good news is, you are defined by Christ, not your behavior. Everyone has thoughts that make them feel ashamed. It's part of life. So, the question becomes, “When you sin, what will you do about it?” Think about this:

- The things that you've done, or have happened to you, or that you're feeling don't have to affect you forever. They don't define you.

Another Beautiful Life

How To Deal With Feelings Of Shame - pg. 2

3. Forgive yourself. Even if you understand the cause of your shame doesn't taint your character forever, you might resist the idea of forgiving yourself. Why? Does your suffering accomplish anything? Does it help the people around you?

- Jesus died to take away your sins (1 John 2:2). If God is willing to forgive you (and He is, proven by His Son's sacrifice on the cross), shouldn't you honor His sacrifice by being willing to forgive yourself?

4. Sometimes the thing that made us feel shame is within our power to avoid in the future. If so, can you prevent this from happening again? Is there something you can do about it? How can you avoid the situation or behavior that led to this feeling? Can you make changes in your life that will alleviate the feelings of shame?

5. Avoid those that are intent on making you feel shame. There's always someone that feels obligated to make you feel as bad as possible about yourself. This is precisely the type of person no one needs in their life. Surround yourself with people that want the best for you and see you as God sees you.

6. Connect more with others. Studies show that the more isolated you are, the more likely you are to feel shame. When you're regularly interacting with others in a meaningful way, you're less likely to feel shame. The Bible says to confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16). It also encourages us to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). God intends for Christians to be connected and in community with one another for our good and for our healing.

Shame is another of those unenjoyable parts of being human. It is a product of our sin-nature. But as a Christian, you don't have to carry the burden of shame any longer – it has been defeated. Jesus died so that you wouldn't have to feel shame. Bring your shame and lay it at the foot of the cross. In Him there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1)! Letting go of your shame will set you free again!