

Bible Reading: John 8:3-11 – Let's talk about feelings of shame.

Shame has kept many of us in hiding. The thought of revealing ourselves to another human being stirs up feelings of shame and the fear of being publicly exposed. "The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. 'Teacher,' they said to Jesus, ... 'The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?' ... Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, 'All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!' Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one ... until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman" Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."(John 8:3-11). Many believe that it was Jesus' writing in the dust that caused the accusers to leave. Perhaps he was listing the secret sins of the Jewish leaders. If this is true, it gives us a beautiful picture of the kind of person Jesus is-a person with whom we can safely expose our secrets. Our confessor needs to be someone who is not surprised by sin and will not wait to condemn us. Such a person needs to take private note of our wrongs, writing them in the dust, not etching them in stone and posting them in public. Since shame can be a trigger for addictive behavior, we need to be careful about whom we choose.

We need to admit to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. Then, with the help of God we can accept his forgiveness and be released from our shame, dishonesty, self-deception, fear of rejection, and denial. Jesus brings a cleansing.

Bible Reading: Acts 26:12-18 – Let's talk about receiving forgiveness.

As we work toward recovering our Life in God, we go through a process of accepting the truth about our lives and the consequences of our choices. We may feel like we have to earn forgiveness instead of just receiving it. We may find it easier to forgive others who have hurt us than to forgive ourselves for the hurt we have caused. When Jesus confronted the apostle Paul, he gave him this mission: "Now get to your feet, for I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness... Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18). God's goal in sending his Word to us is that we may receive forgiveness and a place among his people, like anyone else who turns to him.

The process involves opening our eyes to our true condition, which happens in steps 1, 2 & 4. This, then allows us the opportunity to repent, changing our minds so that we are in agreement with God and ready to admit our wrongs. God wants us to receive immediate forgiveness based on the finished work of Christ. We don't work the rest of the 12 steps as a form of penance. Forgiveness awaits us right now if only we will confess our wrongs and receive God's mercy.