

FREEDOM: *BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME*

LEADER'S GUIDE

A BIBLE STUDY FROM THE CONNECT SERIES



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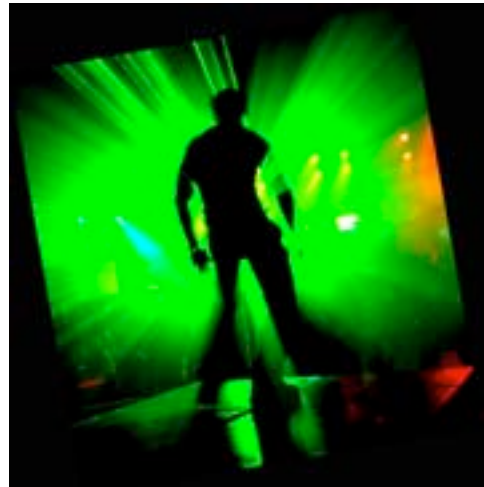
CONTENTS

Welcome	3
A CONNECT Series Overview	3
Experiencing Spiritual Transformation	4
Enjoying Your Role as a Leader	4
Building an Environment and Community for Spiritual Growth	5
Where to Begin?	7
<i>Who to invite into your group?</i>	
<i>Which study should you select?</i>	
<i>What preparation is necessary?</i>	
<i>How much time will it take?</i>	
<i>How will this Bible study connect with our thoughts and feelings and actions?</i>	
<i>Why have lots of images?</i>	
<i>Why read from different Bible translations?</i>	
<i>Why memorize Scripture?</i>	
<i>How can I share the role of leading?</i>	
<i>How does prayer fit it?</i>	
Your First Gathering	9
Guiding a Discussion	10
<i>Preparing before each discussion</i>	
<i>Keep time</i>	
<i>Kicking off the discussion</i>	
<i>Exploring the topic</i>	
<i>Using follow-up questions</i>	
<i>Wrapping it up</i>	
Guidelines for Making It Safer to Talk About Shame	13
Evaluating Your Experience	16
Chapter-by-Chapter Guide	17
CONNECT More!	31

Welcome . . .

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:18



Thanks for being willing to help others grow and become more like Jesus!

We all have the genuine privilege of discovering and embracing the Triune God. The CONNECT series is designed to help you experience God by exploring the amazing ways, truth and life of Jesus. We long to see you enjoying life as a member of God's kingdom and family, deeply experiencing His presence, knowing His truth, resting in His love, and confident in His hope. These studies are designed to be used in small groups where people can encourage, trust, and support each other on their spiritual journeys.

This particular Leader's Guide goes with **FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame**—a Bible study that looks at the universal human experience of shame and how to experience healing. Sometimes shame happens when we've really blown it and done something we deserve to be ashamed of. That comes with being part of the sin-prone human race and is embedded in our identity as sinners. It is intended to usher us into God's healing presence, into the bath of His forgiveness, into His loving mercy. At other times shame is heaped on us from outside over things we aren't responsible for and don't deserve. Some of us feel shame over traumatic events in our lives—abuse, victimization, etc. Others of us struggle with “smaller” issues. Regardless of the “size” of one's shame, the remedy is the same for all of us.

In this study you will unpack the stories of many people from the Bible who struggled with shame. Throughout the study you will discover the difference between guilt and shame, identify hiding styles and types of shame, and even consider shamelessness. This Leader's Guide includes suggestions on how to enjoy your role as a leader and build community, some practical tips, an evaluation, and a chapter-by-chapter guide to help you invite your group members into engaging conversation over God's Word. But before we get into details, let's look at an overview of the CONNECT series itself.

A CONNECT SERIES OVERVIEW

The six study books in the CONNECT series take us on a journey of what it means to “Behold the Triune God 24/7,” and are anchored in Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission. Three of the studies (“God,” “Identity,” and “Soul”) focus on learning to accept and love yourself appropriately (the second part of Jesus' Great Commandment). Why? Because seeing ourselves through God's eyes sets the stage for the rest of the Great Commandment—loving others—and His commissions to make disciples and steward the earth. They help you discover your true identity in Christ and learn how to live out of who God says you are, not the false identities that we pick up from others or carve out for ourselves.

Growing in your love for God, for others, and for yourself while managing your personal life in ways that honor Him—now that is a real spiritual journey!

To simplify all this, imagine the CONNECT series being built on three pillars . . . three things our Triune God has commissioned and commanded us to do in our world.

- Jesus gave His followers the greatest commandment of them all—to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

- Before Jesus descended into heaven He commissioned His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mathew 28:19).
- From our creation God desired for us to “rule over” or nurture the earth by taking good care of it (Genesis 1:28).

If we focus on these three things, just about everything else falls into place as we live life, beholding the Triune God. (See page 31 for description of the CONNECT Bible studies and supplemental resources.)

EXPERIENCING SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

So what is spiritual transformation? And how does it happen?

Spiritual transformation is the mysterious work of God’s Spirit maturing the human soul into the likeness of Christ. It is the lifelong change process by which God restores His image in us that was marred by sin. He does this by transforming our hearts, minds, wills, and bodies over the course of our lifetime, all for His glory. He also brings healing influence to our brokenness, difficult life issues, unresolved sin, wounding and relationships—with ourselves, our family, friends, the lost, society, and within the Church.

While God is the initiator and sustainer of our transformation, we participate with Him in the process with an attitude of humble dependence and submission. It’s not just about skill in facilitating. Our example of **admitting that we’re broken—to ourselves, to God, to others—releases God** to continue His deep work within us. So we lead by humbly offering our whole selves to God. God can really use us to influence others when we, as leaders, are responsive to His healing work, and released—to relate to others out of our brokenness rather than our pseudo have-it-all-together-ness. Cultivating lifelong habits of beholding God and worshipping Him 24/7 become **powerful examples** of our leadership.



Biblical spiritual transformation stands in sharp contrast to the many alternative views of spiritual formation offered by Scientology, Hinduism, Buddhism, and many others. Biblically, the power to experience such deep change comes from four sources:

- 1) through the life and continuing prayers of Jesus
- 2) by the indwelling work of God’s Holy Spirit
- 3) through the Living Word of God in the Scriptures
- 4) and among an authentic community and Body of believers (1 Corinthians 12)

The heart of spiritual transformation is becoming more and more like Jesus. These changes in YOUR life can become a powerful model to those you are trusting God to influence in your group.

ENJOYING YOUR ROLE AS A LEADER

What images come to mind as you think about leading a group through a CONNECT study? Do you imagine your group members expecting you to have it all together? To be an expert on the Bible? To offer profound answers to their tough life questions? If so, you can relax! Even if such a person exists somewhere, that’s not really what your group members need from you.

Your most important role as a leader is to be an **authentic, growing person and let God’s Spirit use the designed process**. You don’t have to have it all together. Be willing to consider sharing your brokenness, shortcomings, and

barriers as well as breakthroughs, victories, and strengths with others in the group. Authentic journeyers influence more than instruct . . . encourage more than enlighten . . . and gently draw out the truth as the Holy Spirit nudges. They keep it real and invite others to join them on their journey of lifelong transformation in Christ.

So relax! As an authentic journeyer, you don't need to be an expert. Your role is to come **alongside** your group members and help them process whatever they are discovering. You are not alone in leading. God's Spirit will work AND use others in the group to minister to each other. This includes:

- taking the initiative to keep things moving ahead by asking good questions (more than giving "right" answers)
- listening to the views of your group members (even if you don't agree)
- giving room for the Scriptures to teach (rather than doing the teaching yourself)
- helping the group create and develop an environment where each one offers safety and grace and truth to the others

In addition, what you do outside of the small-group time may be just as important as what happens when you get together to discuss your study. So be creative when it comes to deepening relationships life-on-life. You could pray for group members, call, text, or e-mail them throughout the week. You could just do life together, grab dinner, or work, play, or hang out together. Some in your group may even want to consider a casual or intensive mentoring relationship. This Leader's Guide will help you build relationships on your journey with Christ.

BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

What do spiritual friends actually do for each other? Among other things, they create and protect a relational environment packed with "grace upon grace," truth, authenticity, and creativity. An environment of grace is a place where:

- all of us can bring our condemnation, shame, guilt, and sin out of hidden darkness
- we receive unmerited favor, acceptance, and love from God and others
- my grace motivates and provides safety for you to mature, affirms your identity, and gives you room to live creatively
- guilt and shame aren't used as methods to motivate, discipline, or manipulate



People are invited into a safe place where they can bring their sin issues and shame out of hiding and into the light, where there is hope of healing in Christ.

In such an environment anchored by the truth of Scripture to guide, correct, and instruct, God asks us to experience Him as *the Truth* in the midst of a culture jaded by spin, hype, relativism, and outright lies. Our truthfulness admits when things aren't working in relationships, offers alternatives, and identifies obstacles to grace and love. When kindness like this leads to repentance, the painful realities of our sinful and broken condition are exposed and handled gently. Truth flourishes in non-manipulative and non-legalistic environments where people experience trust, respect, understanding, and empathy.

In this kind of environment, followers of Christ experience the fertile soil of profound life transformation as described by Larry Crabb:

In the middle of the wild ocean of shattered dreams and broken lives, the community of Christ celebrates God's forgiveness; they believe in what each other could become, they never minimize sin but they love to

*maximize grace. They are carriers of Christ to each other. That's what spiritual friends do when they act together on a journey to God. —Dr. Lawrence Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*¹*

A good group discussion involves trust. As people in your group develop trust among themselves, the quality of your discussions will deepen. You can guide this process by sharing your struggles and failures, not just your successes and growth. Each time you meet, trust is being developed or eroded. You can also help nurture trust by praying specifically for God to build a safe environment among your group. You may from time to time address this issue by encouraging people to be honest and to keep what is shared in the group confidential.

¹ Dr. Lawrence Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1999), 179.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

WHO TO INVITE INTO YOUR GROUP?

The CONNECT series is for everyone who desires to follow Jesus. The series can be used by motivated high school students, college students, or adults. It is for married couples and singles, men and women. This series is appropriate for smaller and less formal groups, such as home Bible studies, “growth” groups, and businessmen’s meetings. People who are already followers of Jesus, along with those who want to explore Jesus’ life and ways, can all be invited to participate.

Usually a group size of 6-10 is best for discussion. If your group is larger, consider dividing into smaller groups. Also consider asking someone to assist you in leading.



A word about gender: Small groups discussing most topics can include both women and men—no problem. But when the topic you’re discussing is “shame” (or related topics like sexuality), you may want to revisit the gender composition of your group. We’ve seen the topic of shame discussed successfully in groups of same-gender participants and in trusted groups of married couples. However, you should be more careful in a group of mixed-gender singles because of the very personal nature of this topic.

WHICH STUDY SHOULD YOU SELECT?

That depends on where you all are in your spiritual journeys and what interests you most. The studies can be used in any order. It may help to look over the chapter titles in each study to get an idea of the variety of topics each one explores. However, we recommend that you not begin with **SOUL: *Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions*** or **FREEDOM: *Breaking the Power of Shame*** until your group has developed a higher level of trust and vulnerability with one another.

WHAT PREPARATION IS NECESSARY?

Those who are considering a CONNECT Bible study should be aware from the beginning that individual **preparation for each group discussion really is necessary**. Why? Because you want to hear first from God and His Word; then you can process and share what you are learning when you get together. In the beginning you will want to show them the study and page through one of the chapters to let them see how much weekly preparation is involved. On average, people devote 60-90 minutes to preparing the whole chapter. Some have enjoyed using their daily devotional time to prepare their study. This personal preparation time spent alone with God reading and meditating on the passages and questions is often the most valuable time of all—with the group discussion inviting others into our journeys. Encourage group members to write something down for each question, even if it is only 4-5 words.

You will probably have at least one participant who comes without having done any preparation. Life has a way of interrupting even the best-laid plans! How will you respond? What if you don’t respond? You might invite them to participate but urge them to do the study later in the week. If someone habitually comes unprepared, you might get together during the week and actually do part of the study with them in order to catch up with the group.

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?

One important decision for your group to make together is whether you’ll devote one week or two weeks to each chapter. Many groups study one chapter per week, devoting 60-90 minutes to personal preparation and then spending 60-90 minutes discussing selected questions from the whole chapter. If your group is fairly small and they know each other well, one chapter per week would work well for you. Other groups prefer a more leisurely pace; they may take two weeks to prepare and discuss the chapter in more detail (discussing Pauses 1 and 2 during the first week and Pauses 3 and 4 during the second week). This approach might be better for a larger

group or with people who don't know each other very well yet. You could start out covering a whole chapter in one week, and then re-evaluate your pace after a few weeks.

Either way, don't feel compelled to discuss every single question! The Holy Spirit will direct you and your group members to discuss just those questions that are particularly relevant to your group. (More on this later.) At the pace of one chapter per week, a typical group will spend about three months completing one book.

HOW WILL THIS BIBLE STUDY CONNECT WITH OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS AND ACTIONS?

It is important that we engage with Scriptures at both a head and a heart level. That's why you'll be asked some questions that invite you to explore your feelings and emotions—not just your head observations. Proverbs 4:23 suggests that many of the real issues of life are often heart issues. So don't be surprised to find questions like these:

“What feelings surface within you as you consider [this passage or this section]?”

“How do you feel about [being created in God's image]?”

Don't forget that every person in your group (including you) is on a journey spiritually. This includes discovering truth cognitively *and* embracing it with the heart. Many of us may not realize we can become disconnected from our hearts and emotions and the effect it can have on our souls. So how will you allow people to be “in process” in their maturing and in your group times? Forced agreement isn't the goal; inviting people to share where they are is more helpful. When you ask, “Does anyone have a different opinion or perspective?” versus asking “Do you agree with [someone or something mentioned]?” you are inviting them to think for themselves rather than to just conform to what the group thinks.

It is also important to take steps of action, putting whatever you've discovered or God has spoken to you about into action. That's why Pause 4 contains some practical application questions to respond to.

WHY HAVE LOTS OF IMAGES?

Another key component of the CONNECT series is the use of photo images. Maybe you're more familiar with Bible studies consisting entirely of words. In today's culture, the impact of visual images is increasing while the impact of the written word seems to be decreasing. In fact, images actually create meaning and unlock the heart for many of us. For those of us under the age of 40, images profoundly influence how we look at life. Images often connect deeper than words with our hearts because they are inexact and layered with meanings. Images will be interpreted by people in many different ways, especially across cultures.

In each chapter of the CONNECT series we've included pictures and artwork to help you reflect on the topics. They are there to stimulate your imagination and heart. The images are considered an essential part of the content. In fact, we strongly encourage you to discuss the images (not just the verses and questions) by asking what meanings and feelings they communicate to each individual. Encourage group members to take time to look at the images and place themselves within these visual stories and to consider how Scripture “speaks into” our world of images. If a photo disturbs you or a group member, that's okay; try to figure out why. By discussing the images you will discover things about each other that the questions alone might not reveal.



WHY READ FROM DIFFERENT BIBLE TRANSLATIONS?

Typical Bible studies provide Scripture references only for participants to look up in their own Bibles for study. This is always a good idea because it helps them become familiar with God's Word. However, there may be participants in your group who may not be that familiar with the Bible—the location of the books and how to look up verses. The CONNECT series assists all participants by printing about 75 percent of the verses and passages right in the study.

In this series, the *New International Version* (NIV) is the primary translation used. Other translations and paraphrases are also quoted in the studies where indicated, such as *The Message* (MSG) or the *New Living Translation* (NLT). They were carefully selected to provide a fresh, contemporary rendering that might connect with younger participants. If you or someone in your group is not comfortable studying from these Bible versions, feel free to study exclusively from another accurate translation.

WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?

The Bible mentions the value of memorizing key verses of Scripture in many places. Jesus memorized Scripture; so did Paul. We are encouraged to store up God's word in our hearts (Psalm 119:9) by meditating on it and memorizing it. So in Pause 4 of each chapter, you will find one verse selected from the chapter that captures the chapter topic well. You and your group members are encouraged to commit yourselves to memorizing that verse every week.

However, memorizing Scripture may not come easily for some people. You can stimulate your group members by being the first to memorize and review the memory verses. You'll find tips for motivating and training your group to memorize at the end of each study. Perhaps a good way to start is for the group to actually memorize the verses for the first three chapters together. Another option is for some to memorize while others use the key verses primarily for meditation. This may be an opportunity for your group to think together creatively on how to "store up" the Word of God in your lives.

HOW CAN I SHARE THE ROLE OF LEADING?

As you initiate this group experience and get to know each member, ask God to raise up an assistant for you to mentor who will help facilitate the group. This is important for several reasons. As God draws people into His Kingdom and into His family, our role becomes that of discipling or providing spiritual parenting. This can help others grow in their experiential knowledge of Jesus and make progress on their lifelong journey of transformation (Matthew 28:19-20). In cultural contexts where so many biological generations are fractured by divorce and abuse, many young people would welcome the gracious influence of a spiritual "parent" or mentor. This mostly life-on-life process provides the context for Gospel truths to grow deep roots. There is perhaps no joy greater than when God uses us as a conduit to help mature the next generation in His family! As you help develop a co-leader in knowledge, skills, and heart, you are multiplying the laborers in His Kingdom.

HOW DOES PRAYER FIT IN?

As a leader, praying for and with your group members and modeling a prayer life will be a tremendous gift to them. Yes, other things are important—your skills as a facilitator, the hours you spend preparing, the healthy environment you create, and the relationships you deepen. Remember, the CONNECT series is only a tool, a resource—God and His Spirit does the actual work of spiritual transformation. Prayer is an integral part in deepening our relationship with God and each other.

YOUR FIRST GATHERING

For the other books in the CONNECT series, preparation is required for chapter 1. However, in this study, **FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame**, your group members won't have to do much (if any) preparation before launching into chapter 1. But as a leader you will need to become familiar with the content and comfortable leading your group through the study. See page 17 in the Chapter-by-Chapter portion of this Leader's Guide for specific suggestions related to your first gathering before moving into chapter 1.

GUIDING A DISCUSSION

The group will be looking to you for leadership and direction, so lead out in a confident way. You'll probably want to select key questions to discuss (see "Chapter-by-Chapter Guide" for suggestions). But also relax! You don't have to have all the answers! You may want to experiment with various methods for discussing the material.



PREPARING FOR EACH DISCUSSION: Each group member should prepare the study ahead of time. This personal time with God over His Word allows Him to surface issues and speak to us individually. In addition, as the leader you should devote some time to preparing for the discussion. To help you focus on key concepts and promote effective discussions, we've identified 8-12 questions from each chapter you may want to check or highlight in your study book (see "Chapter-by-Chapter Guide" for suggestions). As you gain more experience guiding discussions of the Bible, you will find yourself thinking of your own effective questions in the midst of the discussion.

KEEP TIME: Your group will really appreciate it if you ensure that they stay within the agreed-upon time limits. After some brief socializing, you will want to devote at least 60 and preferably 90 minutes to the discussion. Consider structuring your time this way:

Opening story: 5-10 minutes

Pause 3: 15-20 minutes

Pause 1: 15-20 minutes

Pause 4: 10-20 minutes

Pause 2: 15-20 minutes

Don't hesitate to move the discussion on in order to honor your time limits.

KICKING OFF THE DISCUSSION (OPENING STORY): Begin by spending no more than 5-10 minutes on the opening story. This allows members to connect with the theme of the chapter.

EXPLORING THE TOPIC (PAUSES 1, 2, AND 3): In most chapters, Pause 1 invites you into the story of real people in the Bible who struggled with shame. Pauses 2 and 3 invite you to identify where you are in terms of shame. They also explore biblical principles for breaking the power of shame and other helpful material. These three pauses contain the core biblical principles of the chapter's topic and should be the main focus of your discussion time.

APPROACH A: For groups with very little Bible study experience, one simple approach is to discuss the chapter **question-by-question**. You can do this by asking most of the questions in the study and asking group members to respond briefly. It may take two meetings to cover one chapter with this method. That's okay because the whole idea is slowing down, focusing on relationship with God versus filling the head with more information about God.

APPROACH B: For groups with a bit more experience in Bible study, another discussion method is the section-by-section approach. This can provide more spontaneity. Don't try to discuss every question! Instead, go section-by-section (one Pause at a time). But as the facilitator, select 2-5 key questions from each Pause ahead of time for the group to discuss. **See "Chapter-by-Chapter Guide" (beginning on page 19) for the 1-5 key questions we would suggest for each Pause.**

For Approach B, read the questions you pre-selected to discuss in each Pause, and invite people to respond to each. Also invite them to discuss any other questions that particularly impacted or disturbed them.

APPROACH C: For an even more open-ended approach, you could invite people to share highlights from each Pause. Again, don't expect to discuss every question. Do expect to cover the chapter in one meeting with this method.

For Approach C, start the discussion by asking the group for its impressions of Pause 1. Say something like:

"What impressed you most from this Pause?"

"From this first Pause, what stood out to you about [how God created us]?"

This lets members know that you won't be discussing every question in order, but that they are free to share a highlight or observation from *any* question in this section. Of course, starting with such an open-ended question assumes that members have actually completed their own preparation. Remember to direct your questions to the entire group, rather than to a certain person. These are "open-ended questions." That is, they can't be answered with a "yes" or "no."

Parts of each approach can be combined in any chapter as appropriate for your group.

USING FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS: Your discussion will be more engaging as you follow up people's comments with good questions. For instance, you could invite someone to go a bit deeper by asking:

"That's interesting, Craig. Would you explain that a bit more?"

"Would you give us an example of what you mean?"

"What does that mean to you?"

You can have others share their answers to the same question by asking:

"What do others think about that question?"

"Are there any other thoughts on that?"

Feel free to contribute your own discoveries and observations now and then, but don't try to add your two cents' worth to every question. After talking and asking questions to stimulate further discussion, go on to the next section. **Please remember, you are not obligated to discuss every question.** The point of discussing the lesson is to share the significant things the Holy Spirit has taught them during their time alone with Him.

WRAPPING IT UP (PAUSE 4): In each chapter, Pause 4 offers several ways to bring the discussion to a close. The purpose is to help you focus on the most significant thing God impressed on you from the chapter, and to move it from a nice but vague idea toward real-life practical application. Occasionally you should share how God has impressed you to apply the study, giving an example to others in your group about application.

But even if you have not discussed every question from the study, try to leave the last 5-10 minutes of the group time to do the Voices of Mercy and one or two of the following closing activities—*not all of them*.

Voices of Mercy: At the end of chapters 2-9, you'll have an opportunity to actively resist messages of condemnation and language of shaming by replacing them with God's messages of mercy and language of blessing. This will be done in community by reading aloud to each other and personalizing carefully selected passages of Scripture. Help your group member move from merely listening to actively receiving these affirming words from our God of mercy.

Summary of Key Thoughts: This section provides a brief, broad overview of the chapter. Read these key ideas. Or you could ask a general summary question such as, "As you consider this chapter as a whole, what one or two truths most stand out to you?"

Scripture Memory: Members are encouraged to memorize one key verse from the study. This discipline is a valuable way to store God's Word in our hearts, and it can really help change lives. If your group decides to commit yourselves to Scripture memory together, you may need to teach them why and how to memorize, as well as keep them motivated. You might encourage members to review their memory verses in pairs as soon as they arrive, or do the review all together at the close of each session. More suggestions for helping others build the invaluable habit of memorizing Scripture are provided at the end of the study book.

Images and Quotes: Each chapter includes one or more quotes, as well as several photos and other images. Sometimes they move us—while at other times they might disturb us. Either way, we encourage you to invite people to comment on any image or quote in the chapter that they connect with.

Prayer: Plan to spend the last few minutes in prayer. Be aware that some of your group members may not be comfortable yet praying aloud. Invite people to share particular requests briefly, and to pray over their applications from this lesson. Agree with your group members that personal matters shared in the discussion or for prayer should be kept confidential within the group.

Regularly trusting God together as a community can refresh and revitalize, like living water!

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING IT SAFER TO TALK ABOUT SHAME

❖ CREATING TRUSTED COMMUNITY

As a leader, your primary role is to create community (not to have all the answers) because too often shame persuades us to keep things hidden in the dark. Or we think that the way forward is just to try harder on our own. But when trying harder doesn't "work" and the cycle continues, what's missing is often true community. God often uses others walking alongside us to channel His healing grace, life-giving truth, and abundant kindness into our lives.



Maybe in the past you've been afraid of being alone in the discussion. Or you risked and got burned by someone's judgment or rejection. As a leader, you want to create a safe place in which to share needs for friendship, acceptance, and connection. Invite others to move away from isolation and develop authentic, healthy friendships that can bear the weight of truth—even truth we're ashamed of exposing. So if you're ready to be authentic and accountable with a few others, pull up some chairs and get started.

❖ HANDLING WITH CARE

Let's face it. Talking about shame can feel, well, downright shameful. The emotions attached to most sources of shame are deep and painful. We have felt the contempt of others, and we often struggle with self-contempt, too. As you walk with someone, validate that pain; don't minimize it. That includes validating the pain and shame of perpetrators just as much as victims. Handling with care means honoring appropriate boundaries by not compelling people to share more than they are ready to share. One of those boundaries may be gender. By that we mean that women may be uncomfortable talking about shame with men, and vice versa; consider that when you form your group. Let Jesus be your example. In Isaiah 42:3 the coming Savior was described this way: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." We who follow Him must know how to do the same thing in compassion and mercy with the "bruised" hearts and "smoldering" souls of those who bring their shame issues to us.

❖ HONORING CONFIDENTIALITY

This topic requires extra commitment to confidentiality. Whatever dialogue you may be a part of—a Bible study group, a support group, or a one-on-one relationship—expect it to take some time for you to develop genuine trust and drop your urge for self-protection when it comes to heart and soul issues. Perhaps start by sharing a few facts. As trust is established and as you grow in giving and receiving the protective love of others, your sharing will deepen. And you'll want to continue taking risks to be more authentic. From the beginning, and throughout your relationship, take the time to affirm your promise of mutual confidentiality. If necessary, sign a simple confidentiality pledge. What's said between you, or in the group, must stay there if people are going to feel safe enough to step out of the shadow of shame into the light of community.

❖ BEING VULNERABLE YOURSELF

As you walk alongside someone struggling with shame, the best thing you can do is to be transparent about your own struggles with shame—past and/or present. There's really no way around it: the "leader" has to "strip" first . . . has to admit struggles and the negative hiding strategies tried and abandoned, and then tell the story of Jesus meeting you right in the midst of it all. Nothing speaks safety, grace, and hope as powerfully as personal example, especially how you are on the road to healing. Your vulnerability opens your heart and gives permission for others to respond with love, acceptance, and guidance. You don't have to explain all the gory details. And don't feel pressured to be vulnerable with everybody—only within the protective boundaries of trust.

❖ OFFERING HOPE AND AFFIRMATION

One of shame's most persistent lies to whisper into our struggling hearts is, "Nobody else struggles with this. This is who you *are!* And nothing will ever change!" There is no sin or shame you can imagine that is stronger than God's love! Offering hope includes assuring the victims that it isn't their fault. It also includes assuring those who abused or shamed others that this doesn't have to define them any longer or shape their core identity. And for those whose own careless or sinful choices make them ashamed, we offer hope for God's forgiveness. It includes pointing them to the mercy and kindness of God, who is the only one who can cover and wash away their shame for good. Reading selected passages out loud from the Bible as a form of blessing from God is a powerful way to affirm. For example, you could say, "Kyle, there really is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

❖ HANDLING CONFESSIONS WISELY

Lots of things can make us hesitant or afraid to admit our struggles openly—our shame, embarrassment, fear of being judged or rejected or punished, not wanting to lose face, or maybe we're just not ready to give it up. So when someone does confess the stark truth about his/her struggle with shame, the first response from others needs to be compassionate. We need to acknowledge the struggle, accept the person (not any sinful behavior attached to it), and offer mercy and hope for healing and freedom. The second response should probably be to re-affirm the group's commitment to keep what was shared confidential. If we affirm the person for taking the huge risk to be honest, that will open up space for them to continue to entrust us with their darkness and pain. And that allows God's grace to flood in and heal.

❖ AVOIDING UNINTENTIONAL SHAMING

Avoid shaming or shutting others down unintentionally. There are lots of ways that could happen. For instance, when we respond to another's sharing in a judgmental or critical way, they feel shamed all over again. Or when we respond to their sharing in one of the following ways (either verbally or with our body language):

- ❑ **Spiritualizing:** For example, saying, "There must be sin in your life if you still feel that way," or "Your struggles are because of spiritual warfare; you need to pray more."
- ❑ **Minimizing:** Like saying, "It's not that bad," or "Just think about the positive," or excusing or making less of another's experience.
- ❑ **Shock:** Like giving a "deer in the headlights" look or saying, "You did *what?!?!?*"
- ❑ **Changing the subject:** When you don't know how to respond or feel uncomfortable, saying, "Thanks for sharing that. Who else has something else to share?"
- ❑ **Laughing inappropriately:** Sometimes when we're uncomfortable, we express it by laughing or using sarcasm—and that can hurt. If that's your tendency, own your discomfort and suppress the inappropriate laughter.
- ❑ **Being embarrassed:** For example, withdrawing emotionally or physically from the person who is sharing because you feel embarrassed or ashamed, or looking at someone else in the group and grimacing or rolling your eyes.

The fact is that people can easily hurt other people—especially in a group setting where such a deeply personal and potentially painful topic of shame is being explored. So it isn't enough for the facilitator to be aware of safe discussion guidelines: *everyone* in the group needs to practice them for the protection of all. Occasionally check in as a group to see how well you're all doing with these guidelines and make adjustments.

❖ AVOIDING COMPARING STORIES

One common way we unintentionally shame someone else is by comparing their stories to our story, or to others in the group. We might say, "I know just how you feel. It's like when . . ." and then launch into some part of our own story. Or we try to comfort by commenting, "Hey, that's nothing compared to . . . It could have turned out so much worse." We think we're just empathizing or connecting, but the effect is to minimize or dismiss the other person's

story and set a tone of competition. Some of us do bring devastating, traumatizing issues into the discussion. But most of us grapple with “smaller” stuff—the shame of unpleasant body issues, not making the team or getting the promotion, losing your temper *again*, etc. Keep in mind, and help your group keep in mind, that whatever its “size,” we all experience shame in varying degrees. Don’t focus on the relative “seriousness” of the issue, but rather on the common experience of the underlying pain.

❖ **CONSIDERING PROFESSIONAL HELP**

Sometimes our shame-related issues are very deep—especially if we have been abused or have abused others. If abuses or traumatic memories surface in your relationship or group, consider recommending a skilled counselor or pastor who can help process these pains and recover from their powerful effects. Specifically listen for signs of someone spiraling down into depression, self-destructive behaviors, or suicidal tendencies. You should have a list of credentialed and recommended professional resources available to refer others to, if necessary.

❖ **TRUSTING GOD’S SPIRIT**

Relax! Remember that the Holy Spirit is the true leader of your group—and your Guide, Comforter, Healer, Truth-teller, and Encourager. You don’t need to give advice, have all the answers, or be a therapist. As a group and individually, commit your journey to prayer often. Praying together is crucial to trusting the Holy Spirit. When you pray, create space for Him to speak and for others to be heard by avoiding gossip or advice-giving. Invite Jesus to reveal what legitimate needs drive any inappropriate behavior. Ask God to help you receive what is good and release what is harmful. Celebrate growth as you learn to trust each other and become vulnerable and transparent in your group.

EVALUATING YOUR EXPERIENCE

Evaluated experience is one of the most valuable development processes you can go through. This is not so much a critique as it is an opportunity for you to grow and develop as a leader.

While you can do a self-evaluation, this process will be richer if you have input from another person. Your group co-leader is an obvious first choice, but if you do not currently have a co-leader, you might consider asking one of your group members to help you in this evaluation from time to time.



The following questions are designed to help you improve your skills in the future:

- Did you know the material well enough to have freedom in facilitating your small group?
- Did you listen closely to others' answers in order to ask follow-up questions?
- Did you discuss the major points in the chapter?
- Are people growing in trusting each other? Are they sharing their hearts as well as their minds?
- Was the discussion practical?
- Was the discussion relaxed and conversational?
- Did everyone participate?
- Did you begin and end on time?
- Do you need to adjust anything for your next meeting?
- Are there any group members you should contact individually before you meet again?

Chapter-by-Chapter Guide for

FREEDOM: *Breaking the Power of Shame*



The rest of this Leader's Guide walks you through each chapter in the Bible study called **FREEDOM: *Breaking the Power of Shame***—one of the six books in the **CONNECT** series. For each of the 10 chapters, you'll find a short chapter summary, a list of 1-5 suggested key questions from each Pause for group discussion, and some leader tips and suggestions. As someone who is providing leadership and guidance for your group, you'll want to do a bit of extra preparation for each group gathering.

- Study and complete the chapter for yourself as a learner. Write at least a few words in response to each question.
- Summarize a few key points that God spoke to you about through this chapter.
- Pray specifically for each member of your group, asking God what is most important from this chapter for each of you to know and live out.
- In your study book, in each chapter highlight or mark 1-5 key questions from each Pause that are identified as particularly good for discussing together, and other questions of your choice.
- Wherever you see a check ✓, you will find a valuable tip for leading your group with sensitivity and creativity.

YOUR FIRST GATHERING

THE BIG PICTURE. When your group meets for the first time, try to accomplish these four things:

- Establish a relaxed atmosphere, making sure everyone is acquainted and at ease with you and with each other.
- Let them know a little about the **CONNECT** studies, how each chapter is organized, and how to prepare.
- Agree on guidelines to provide safety and protection for each other.
- Spend some time in prayer.

CREATE AN INVITING ATMOSPHERE FOR GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER. This may include having snacks, coffee, or other drinks available. Have extra Bibles and pens on hand, too. To establish a relaxed atmosphere in a group of people who may not know each other well, spend a few minutes just getting acquainted. If you share about yourself first, it will put others more at ease.

FAMILIARIZE GROUP WITH THE **CONNECT SERIES AND THE BOOK YOU'LL BE STUDYING TOGETHER.**

- Make sure each group member has a copy of the **FREEDOM** study.
- Look over the Contents (page 3) to see the stories you will be discussing.

- Summarize the Introduction (page 5) briefly to be sure your group is motivated and ready to discuss this topic.

AGREE ON GROUP NORMS TO PROVIDE SAFETY AND PROTECTION.

- Take some time to read the “Commonly Asked Questions” (pages 6-7). Ask group members to briefly describe their thoughts and reaction. Welcome any other questions they may have.
- Now read aloud the Guidelines for Small Groups, and process the related two questions (pages 8-9).

CONTINUE FAMILIARIZING GROUP WITH THE FREEDOM STUDY BOOK.

- Also glance through the “Chapter Flow” (page 10) to find out how all the chapters are organized into four sections called Pauses.
- Read about “Images” (page 11). Take a few minutes for people to select any image from the book that they connect with, and explain why.
- Read through “Your Journey Through Each Chapter” (page 11) and agree on a pace to start with—one or two weeks to discuss each chapter.
- Talk about why each member will be expected to prepare the lesson individually before coming to the group. Ask if they can commit to this because your conversations will be much richer when members have processed and prepared the material ahead of time.
- Confirm the time and place for your next meeting. Clarify that for next week they could glance through chapter 1, but no written preparation is necessary. You’ll process it together. All other chapters will need written preparation.

PRAY TOGETHER.

CHAPTER 1—Shame at First Glance

GETTING STARTED

This first chapter will be quite different from the remaining chapters. In chapter 1, because group members have not done any person preparation, expect to read together some important material related to shame. Some people are not comfortable reading aloud, so be sensitive to that.



STORY – Read the story aloud.

13 - What do you think words . . .

13 – Is there anything in Ryan's . . .

✓ *Some group members will be very sensitive about shaming comments from childhood. Others may be numb or indifferent and not be connected to the pain of such put-downs. In either case allow room for each person's experience and gently move your group on to Pause 1.*

PAUSE 1: *How It All Started* – Read through the material on pages 14-15.

15 – How would you describe shame?

PAUSE 2: *Exploring Shame – Why It's Important* – Read through the material on pages 16-17.

17 – What would your group . . .

17 – As you read through this list . . .

✓ *This could be a big aha! moment for some in your group as they may connect more with the descriptor words of shame.*

17 – **Prayer Pause**

✓ *As you invite all group members to pray, tell them it's okay to remain silent if they want.*

PAUSE 3: *Our Starting Points*

18 – Before you launch into . . .

✓ *Make sure each member has an opportunity to respond to questions 7 and 8. Question 7 will give you a good idea of the starting point for each member, and question 8 is a powerful way to connect with members through the use of images.*

19 – Can you think of an example . . .

19 – Every day as you read or listen . . .

20 – As we dig into this Bible study, what are your observations, questions, fears, or hopes? Take a minute or two to respond on page 20.

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame* (Reserve 20 minutes for this.)

Key Thoughts

Look at the bulleted list of key thoughts. Which was key for you?

Scripture Memory

Spend about 10 minutes reading the material on page 22 about Scripture memory. Also read the motivating principles and practical tips for memorizing found on pages 149-150. Actually memorize Genesis 50:20 (page 23) together out

loud, following the simple methods described. Encourage your members to memorize the key verse each week. But allow the group to decide whether they want to continue this practice.

Quotes and Images

Each chapter includes one or more quotes, as well as several photos and other images. Sometimes they move us—while at other times they might disturb us. Either way, you may want to invite people to comment on any image or quote in the chapter that they connect with. Ask your group, “Who would like to discuss a quote or image from this chapter that was meaningful or disturbing—how did it impact you? Do any of the Scriptures from the chapter speak to the image?”

Confirm the time and place for your next meeting.

CHAPTER 2—Walking Through Shame

Using Your Time Well

Starting with this chapter through chapter 10, your group members will have prepared ahead of time. So you don't need to discuss every question in the study. We suggest that you spend about 5 minutes discussing the opening story. Then move into Pauses 1-3, where the core issues of the study are explored. Depending on how much time your group has for discussion, we suggest that you focus on the questions mentioned below. You can mark these core questions in your own study for ease in leading. If you have additional time, feel free to discuss any other questions that you or your group members find especially stimulating.



STORY

25 – Can you identify with . . .

PAUSE 1: *Peter's Journey into Shame*

26 – What do you think made Peter . . .

27 – Is there anything . . .

27 – Try writing what you think . . .

29 – What do you think Peter learned . . .

29 – Imagine, if you can, jumping . . .

PAUSE 2: *Voices of Condemnation*

32 – From these verses, what is . . .

✓ *This may be the first time some members have considered the influence of Satan and realize that it is not God who condemns. The grace and acceptance of group members will strengthen the capacity of those struggling with inner condemnation to receive the mercy and acceptance God has for them.*

32 – How can we be . . .

PAUSE 3: *The Language of Shaming*

35 – What do you think name-calling . . .

35 – What typical “shaming” messages . . .

36 – How (if at all) have shaming comments . . .

✓ *For some, especially men, recognizing or admitting these feelings can be threatening. Acknowledging the risk can create safety. Others may not have connected shaming comments to feelings, and that is okay as well.*

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

37 – **Voices of Mercy**

This interactive experience of affirmation occurs at the end of each chapter. Take time to hear and receive God's loving messages of mercy through the lips of other people. As one person personalizes Scripture, the other listens and receives those words as though Jesus were right there looking into his/her eyes.

✓ Some in your group may feel uncomfortable with this level of vulnerability and connection. The listener may not be able to look into the eyes of the reader, and that is okay. Encourage the listeners to sit with some possible discomfort and allow the words of Scripture to settle in their hearts.

Choose to discuss one or two of the following closing activities:

38 – Key Thoughts

You can simply read the key ideas. Or you can ask a general summary question such as, “As you consider this chapter as a whole, what one or two truths most stand out to you?”

39 – Scripture Memory

If your group has decided to memorize Scripture together, practice reviewing the chapter memory verse together. Review aloud both Genesis 50:20 (from Chapter 1) and 1 John 3:19-20 (from Chapter 2).

Quotes and Images

Each chapter includes one or more quotes, as well as several photos and other images. Sometimes they move us—while at other times they might disturb us. Either way, you may want to invite people to comment on any image or quote in the chapter that they connect with. Ask your group, “Who would like to discuss a verse or image from this chapter that was meaningful or disturbing—how did it impact you? Do any of the Scriptures from the chapter speak to the image?”

Application

Every chapter already includes one or more questions specifically designed to invite members to apply the truths to their lives. However, if this kind of sharing has not occurred as you reach the end, you might ask a general application question like this: “As you reflect back over your study of Scripture, how have these passages impacted you this week? How do you think God wants you to apply these to your daily life during the coming week?” Occasionally you should share how God has impressed you to apply the study, which will give an example to others in your group about application.

Prayer

Plan to spend the last few minutes in prayer. Be aware that some group members may not be comfortable praying aloud. Invite people to share particular requests and to pray over their applications from this lesson.

CHAPTER 3—Hiding in shame



STORY

41 – How did they try to . . .

✓ *The story about abortion may stir up some powerful shameful emotions for both men and women. (It is estimated that 1 in 4 women in America has experienced one or more abortions.) As some may confess this for the first time, you must set the tone of mercy, grace, and safety to receive confession. Your group can have a powerful healing influence as you “hold” others in their shame and listen as they reveal unprocessed, often hidden emotions.*

PAUSE 1: *The Birth of Guilt and Shame*

42 – Explain what you think . . .

43 – How did Adam . . . How did God . . .

44 – What if God had just . . .

✓ *Reinforce that God seeking Adam and Eve out in their shame was actually a good thing. This may be a new concept for many.*

44 – What do you think is true . . .

PAUSE 2: *Guilt and Shame: Destructive or Redemptive?*

46 – Do you think Adam and Eve . . .

✓ *For those who have been severely abused or who struggle with deep issues of shame, the concept that guilt and shame can be good might be too much for them to process. Often, victims are taught the abuse was all their fault and they deserve the shame they feel. Some may become overwhelmed or flooded with feelings of despair. If so, professional referrals may be necessary. If a group member is really struggling with this section, sit with them and listen and pray. You may want to skip forward to the Voices of Mercy section and read Isaiah to them. If anyone is struggling, encourage them to stick with the study because each chapter provides healing and a place to process the shame we’ve experienced from others.*

47 – When we feel guilty . . .

48 – Have you felt ashamed in the last . . .

PAUSE 3: *Ways of Hiding Guilt and Shame*

51 – Of course many other factors can . . .

51 – When we take the risk . . .

52 – Where do you think you are in this process . . .

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

54 – From this passage . . .

54 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 4—Shamed by others

STORY

57 – How is Mateo’s shame . . .

✓ *Rape and molestation are some especially sensitive issues a group could discuss. It is very possible that someone in your group experienced being molested. It is also possible that some have molested others. And most will have someone close to them who has experienced being raped or molested. Some may open up about this for the first time. As a leader ensure the safety for group members to share as much or as little as they need. Also, be prepared to help hold and contain some “messy” feelings. For some who may be getting in touch with this for the first time, encourage them to seek professional help.*



PAUSE 1: Amnon’s Abuse

58 – Write down whatever emotions . . .

59 – How did he show contempt . . .

PAUSE 2: Amnon’s Shamelessness

60 – Try to describe what . . .

62 – In light of the last three passages . . .

PAUSE 3: Tamar’s Shame

64 – How do you think the silence . . .

✓ *For those who’ve only experienced silence regarding wrongs done to them, your group can provide the comfort, validation, and healing someone may have waited years to experience.*

65 – If Absalom or David could get a second . . .

66 – Have you ever felt like . . .

66 – Imagine Jesus spending time with . . .

✓ *Some may have a difficult time imagining what Jesus might say. Your group has the opportunity to be “Jesus with skin on” and speak words of validation, grace, and healing.*

PAUSE 4: Breaking the Power of Shame

67 – Regardless of your gender . . .

68 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 5—Types of Shame



STORY

- 71 – If we could ask Matthew Winkler why . . .
✓ *Expect some in your group to be struggling or affected by pornography. As you listen to members share about Matthew and Mary, gently invite members to open up if they can relate.*

PAUSE 1: *An Invisible Woman*

- 73 – Why do you think Jesus . . .
74 – In what ways (if at all) can . . .
74 – If you could text message . . .
✓ *This can be a powerful exercise. Take some time for the affirmations to sink in. Some may feel awkward and vulnerable publicly giving or receiving affirmations, so texting may provide a level of safety.*

PAUSE 2: *Five Types of Shame*

- 76 – What type(s) of shame . . .
77 – Then summarize in your own words . . .
✓ *For some, distinguishing between heaped-on shame and identity-level shame can be very difficult. If so, don't focus on sorting it out. Rather, focus on being present with a member in the struggle and validating their feelings while offering comfort and grace.*

PAUSE 3: *Shame Redeemed*

- 78 – Write on the chart anything you notice . . .
✓ *Take some time to focus on God's desire to heal, redeem, and restore.*
79 – From these verses, one thing . . .

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

- 80 – **Voices of Mercy**
Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 6—Overpowered by Shame



STORY

84 – How (if at all) has your life . . .

✓ *Some in your group may have attempted suicide, and most will know someone who took their own life. Those dealing with loss of a loved one may need more processing time; if so, schedule another time to meet. If someone shares their own thoughts of suicide, ask direct questions about the seriousness and intent. Urge them to seek professional help, if necessary.*

PAUSE 1: *Dying in Shame*

86 – Have you ever chosen to . . .

✓ *Some may have wounds from opening up to unsafe people. Encourage those who may be afraid to open up again to risk trusting your group. Remind group members about the keys to confidentiality and safety.*

88 – Read Romans 8:38-39 . . .

PAUSE 2: *Five More Types of Shame*

90 – Is there one of the above types . . .

91 – How (if at all) can you relate . . .

✓ *Be prepared to hear stories of spiritual abuse. You can set the tone to avoid gossip and sensationalism. Acknowledge the experience of the abused with care and sensitivity, but limit others from naming, berating, slandering, or getting sidetracked about religious leaders.*

PAUSE 3: *Shame in the News*

93 – Mark whatever you notice about shame . . .

✓ *Set firm boundaries when discussing the story to focus on the topic of shame only. Limit discussions about political views, public policy, etc.*

94 – What are a few things about . . .

96 – How does God's view of . . .

96 – From these passages, what . . .

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

97 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 7—Offering Truth with Mercy



STORY

101 – Can you identify with . . .

PAUSE 1: *David Faces His Shame*

103 – Have you ever experienced . . .

103 – Read Luke 22:31-34 and notice . . .

✓ *Some people in your group will be inclined toward grace and others more toward truth. Your role is to balance these dynamics so that both are valued and offered.*

PAUSE 2: *David Faces Heaped-On Shame*

106 – From these verses, what did . . .

106 – So then, what do you think . . .

✓ *If it comes up, challenge the belief that some people are called to give mercy while others are called to give truth. Though we might be stronger in one, we are all called to offer both—just as Jesus did.*

PAUSE 3: *Being a Messenger of Mercy*

108 – From any of these verses identify one . . .

✓ *Remind your group members that both those who have hurt others and those who have been hurt need to be met in their shame with understanding and mercy. God longs for the responsible parties to experience His mercy and forgiveness as much as He longs for the innocent victims to experience His mercy and healing.*

109 – From those same verses, what is one . . .

109 – But before others can help us . . .

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

110 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 8—Tasting God’s Mercy

STORY

113 – What (if any) messages of shame . . .

PAUSE 1: *Restored by Jesus*

115 – Try to imagine what . . .

116 – Imagine you are left alone . . .



PAUSE 2: *Receiving God’s Love*

118 – Do you know in your head . . .

✓ *Protect the place of process for each person. Don’t allow others in the group to “truth” people into experiencing God’s love with their heart.*

118 – From all God’s . . .

PAUSE 3: *Unlearning Shame and Offering Blessing*

120 – If God helped you delete . . .

121 – How can we “overcome evil with good” . . .

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

122 – How can fixing our eyes . . .

122 – Remember the echo you wrote . . .

✓ *Sharing your blessing from God with your group can be a powerful healing experience. Saying it out loud in community combats the silent voice of condemnation and gives root for the blessing to take hold. If all the group members haven’t written a blessing, take 5-10 minutes of quiet time in the group for each member to process the activity. Affirm each member as they read their blessing. If some are still struggling to receive the blessing, be prepared to speak a direct blessing into their life. God can use you as His healing voice to replace a deceptive shame echo with His truthful healing message.*

123 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 9—Shame Exchanged



STORY

125 – Jason’s wife is the one . . .

✓ *As noted in Chapter 7, remind your group members that both those who have hurt others and those who have been hurt need to be met in their shame with understanding and mercy. God longs for the guilty perpetrators to experience His mercy and forgiveness as much as He longs for the innocent victims to experience His mercy and healing.*

PAUSE 1: God Tastes Shame

126 – As you read each paragraph, try to express . . .

✓ *Some may still be having a hard time identifying emotions God may have experienced. Spend time here, especially highlighting the positive, merciful emotions of God.*

130 – Why do you think Jesus . . .

✓ *Help members sit with the truth that they actually bring God joy.*

130 – Do you believe Jesus . . .

✓ *Sharing your own story of how Jesus can relate to you in your shame can help others connect how Jesus can relate to them.*

PAUSE 2: God’s Solution for Our Shame

132 – If someone asked you to explain . . .

✓ *If you are unsure of a group member’s understanding of the gospel, ask if they’d like to share their response to this question. It may reveal to you how to specifically guide them on their journey.*

132 – After everything you’ve studied . . .

PAUSE 3: Jesus Carries Our Shame

134 – How does it impact your heart to know . . .

✓ *Help others sit with the comfort that God longs to meet them in their shame and can relate as a friend who has been similarly wounded.*

135 – If you were Jason’s friend . . .

135 – Imagine how David felt when . . .

✓ *Ask your group if you can put your hand under their chins and lift their gaze to meet yours while reading these words: “_____ (his/her name), God is a shield around you, He is your glory and the one who lifts your head.”*

PAUSE 4: Breaking the Power of Shame

136 – **Voices of Mercy**

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Key Thoughts, Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

CHAPTER 10—Celebrating Your Group

PAUSE 1: *Facing Shame and Finding Mercy*

140 – What have you discovered . . .

141 – How have Jesus and others . . .

141 – As God's mercy . . .

PAUSE 2: *Exchanging Our Shame*

143 – What specifically do you need . . .

143 – What do you want and need . . .



PAUSE 3: *Celebrating Your Group*

145-146 – **Reflect Back**

145 – Envision Forward

✓ *Specifically pray for group members who may not have invited Christ to live in them and with them, that they'd place their trust in Jesus and become God's child.*

✓ *Also discuss whether one or two group members might desire to begin a new group. This is one way to multiply the laborers.*

146 – **Pause to Affirm**

PAUSE 4: *Breaking the Power of Shame*

147 – Read the passage together.

Select and discuss one or more of these activities to close your discussion: **Scripture Memory, Quotes/Images, or Application.** Also pray together.

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Available from NavPress at <http://www.navpress.com/landing/connect.aspx> OR call Customer Service toll-free in the USA at: 1-800-366-7788.

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Unpacking some very practical life realities like money, time, beauty and pleasure, our bodies, work, etc. You'll learn how to live life well even if you've made some serious mistakes in these areas in the past.

FREEDOM: BREAKING THE POWER OF SHAME

Looking at the universal human experience of shame and how to experience healing. You'll reflect on the stories of many people from the Bible who struggled with shame as you also unpack your heart. Throughout the study you will discover the difference between guilt and shame, identify hiding styles and types of shame, and even consider shamelessness. Sometimes shame happens when we've really blown it and done something we deserve to be ashamed of. This comes from being part of the sin-prone human race and is embedded in our identity as sinners. At other times shame is heaped on us from outside over things we aren't responsible for and don't deserve. It can drive people into utter darkness, desolation, and separation from life. Into this sense of shame, the power of the gospel and the cross and can enter to bring hope. God's many voices of mercy bring us into God's healing presence, into the bath of His forgiveness, and into the streams of His freeing love. God's mercy can touch and transform every ounce of shame.



As a leader, you'll help your group members discover principles and truths about the Triune God. Each of these studies will move you forward on the lifelong journey of spiritual transformation through relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CONNECT Leader's Guides

Free downloadable guides for each book in the CONNECT series: <http://www.navpress.com/landing/connect.aspx>.

Supplemental CONNECT Resources available from NavPress:

The New Me: My New Identity in Christ – a meditative booklet on personal identity.

Searching the Ordinary for Meanings by Ralph Ennis – 32-card photography set reflecting on the richness of life.

The Issue of Shame in Reaching People for Christ by Ralph and Jennifer Ennis and Paula Rinehart – a guide to help believers penetrate a veil of shame in sharing the gospel with the next generation.

The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom by Steve and Sally Breedlove and Ralph and Jennifer Ennis

Scripture Memory and Meditation Cards for CONNECT series:

- *The Heartbeat of Jesus*
- *Identity in Jesus*
- *The Way of Jesus*