BREAKING FREE FROM SHAME
BY AMY RIORDAN

Hi! I'm Amy Riordan, and I am the founder of Walking in Freedom Ministries and owner of Free to Be Me Coaching. My heart is to help you walk in freedom as you pursue intimacy with Jesus and discover who you were created to be.

Shame is something that has affected the majority of the women I have coached and ministered to over the years, and it is something that greatly affected my life for so many years, as well.

And guess what? It affected my life for many years before I even recognized it. It was just there. It was way of thinking and seeing myself…for as long as I could remember. So, I didn't see it.

Shame makes it difficult to see ourselves as we really are.

I'm very excited to share with you there is so much freedom and healing to be found when we discover who we were created to be!

Shame has no place to stay when you (and I) know who we are.

Several years ago, I was asked to be a guest speaker at a women's group. I was so excited for the opportunity, and I felt honored to be given the chance to share my testimony with them.

I had not shared my story too many times at that point, so I was nervous but also excited to prepare what I was going to say. I

personally knew a few of the women in the group, and some of them were already familiar with my story.

A few days before I was scheduled to share my story with the group, the group organizer called me and told me that after thinking about it more, she didn't think it would be a good time for my testimony, and she asked me not to come.

A couple of days later I ran into some women from the group, and I found out that the organizer had said she asked me not to come because she thought my testimony would be "too much" for them.

My heart sank to the ground, and I felt something that took me days to identify…

…shame

That old, almost too-familiar feeling of shame from my past came flying back, and it felt like someone punched me in the stomach.

Several years earlier, I had attended a conference where one of the topics was about breaking free from shame. I knew I struggled with many things, but I didn't realize shame was one of them.

As I listened to the speaker that weekend, I was in shock. The Holy Spirit spoke right to my heart to show me how deeply shame had been affecting my life for so many years. Shame had been affecting the way I saw myself, so many of my decisions, and my relationships with others.

Most importantly, shame had been hindering my relationship with God. Layer by layer, Jesus started setting me free from so much shame.

Years later, when I was told that my testimony was too much for those women to hear, that old, familiar voice of shame came rushing back.

"*Your story would be too much for them*."

What does "*too much*" actually mean? It seemed to confirm what I already feared. I had spent years keeping my past to myself, because I was afraid people would reject me or not feel comfortable around me anymore.

Being told that my testimony would be too much, especially when I knew many of those women, brought back all of those fears again.

Isaiah 50:7 says, "Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame".

Shame is something that we were never created to carry. Sometimes we carry shame around for mistakes we made in our past or words

spoken over us. Other times we can carry shame for things that have happened to us against our will.

Sometimes it's there (and has always seemingly been there) and we may not even know why.

No matter the reason, God does not want us to hold onto it, because it is extremely toxic.

ARE YOU CARRYING SHAME?

I talk to people all the time who carry so much shame, and they can have great difficulty talking about it…especially to God.

If you feel like a failure or experience great condemnation because of something that happened to you or something you have already asked forgiveness for in your life, this is a barrier between you and Jesus that He wants to remove.

Shame is when we perceive ourselves as being flawed or permanently marked by something. It can come from something we did, something that happened to us, or words spoken over us.

Ultimately, shame is based on false beliefs that we accept as truth about ourselves. Shame speaks to us in ways that are contrary to who God says we are.

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."
Psalm 139:14 (ESV)

If you feel buried in shame, it can be very difficult to truly believe that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Instead, shame can cause you to believe there is something wrong with the core of who you are.

Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing”.

SHAME IS DIFFERENT THAN GUILT

Many people see guilt and shame as interchangeable, but they are quite different. Guilt is based on an action and says, “I feel so guilty for doing that.” Shame, on the other hand, is directly tied to our identity and says, “I am a failure.”

Shame becomes attached to our identity, which is why I think it can be so difficult to recognize sometimes. Some of us have carried shame around with us for practically our entire lives, so we have never known any different (yet!).

When I first started sharing my story with others, I felt so much shame. I was so afraid everyone would look at me differently. I felt like there was something defective with me, and I was sure I was alone in what I had been through.

Years earlier when I was wrestling with temptation and sexual strongholds, I can now look back and realize that shame kept me from confessing to someone what I was going through. (I’m glad I kept pushing forward, because Jesus now uses the very same things I have been healed and set free from to help others receive the same.)

SHAME WANTS TO STAY HIDDEN

In Genesis 2:25, God created Adam and Eve, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (ESV). It wasn’t until Genesis 3:6-10, when Eve took the fruit, ate it, and gave some to Adam, that their eyes were opened, and shame entered the picture:

“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. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

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. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself” (ESV).

Many of us have experienced shame from what we have done in our lives. When we take these things to Jesus and ask Him to forgive us, He will wash us as white as snow.

How many of us continue to hide, though?

When we hide from God due to shame, the hold it has on us just keeps growing.

In what areas do you feel “less than”?

How has shame been affecting your own life?

Shame can come into our lives in many ways. It can be due to words spoken over us, traumatic life experiences, something we have done, or even whispers of our own thoughts or of the enemy.

CAN YOU RELATE TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

- Do you avoid certain circumstances repeatedly, rather than deal with them?
- Do you feel incapable of doing anything, paralyzed, or unable to get free?
- Do you feel trapped by invisible walls around you?
- Are you performance-driven?
- Do you beat yourself up for even the slightest mistakes?
- Do you let people treat you terribly because you don't think you deserve better?
- Do you run from relationships, especially with God?
- Do you struggle with strongholds secretly?
- Do you feel buried in what you have done (or keep doing)?

SHAME AFFECTS US IN MULTIPLE WAYS

Thoughts can go through our minds, such as:

- I am the only one who deals with this.
- I could never tell anyone. I need to hide this.
- This must just be who I am.
- There is something wrong with the core of who I am.
- I caused that person to abuse me. Part of it felt good. It was my fault.

- I am defective.

SHAME IS A BARRIER TO BUILDING INTIMACY

Shame is a barrier to building intimacy with Jesus and building close, healthy relationships with other people. It's also a barrier that prevents us from seeing ourselves the way God created us to be.

We cannot have a close relationship with someone we are hiding from.

The good news is, Jesus can remove the shame that is in the way, and He can remove the shame that keeps you going back for more of what you promised yourself you would stop doing a long time ago.

Jesus can also remove the shame that has been preventing you from seeing yourself the way God does. He has done this for me, so I can know he can do this for you.

IT IS SAFE TO REVEAL YOUR HEART TO JESUS

Jesus doesn't shame us like people sometimes can, and He doesn't shame us the way we can shame ourselves.

Coming out of hiding and into His presence can be scary, but I promise you

He will never shame you. He won't back away or be overwhelmed what you will tell Him. He isn't disgusted by you, either.

He loves you and wants all of you. *He sees you as the person He created you to be.*

There is incredible freedom and healing when we can discover and embrace who He created us to be. There is no room for shame there.

SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

If you are wanting to break free from shame, here are a few steps you can take. You don't need to do all of this this in one day. Write down what the Lord shows you and what stands out that you want to remember:

⇒ Take some time to quiet your heart and mind. Go to a place that's peaceful for you, if possible. Pray and ask God (out loud) if there is anything you have been believing about yourself that is not true.

You do not have to dig for an answer or try really hard to hear from Him. Sometimes you will recognize Him speaking to you right away, and other times He may show you a little while later. It's ok if you don't hear from Him right away. The more relaxed you are, the easier it is to hear Him.

Take note of any emotions that come up when you are still. I am not someone who will tell you to ignore your emotions. Certainly, you don't want them ruling over you, but emotions are excellent indicators of what is going on inside of you. They are important.

⇒ Once Jesus shows you something that you have been believing about yourself that is not true, ask Him to show you the truth.

⇒ You can also repeat this exercise by asking Jesus if you are believing anything about Him that is not true, and what the truth is, instead.

⇒ Practice being vulnerable with Jesus and by sharing the details of your heart with Him. This can take time if you are not used to doing this. You can do this little by little, if you need to. This used to be terrifying for me. Write it down first if that helps. Even just one sentence at a time.

⇒ Don't skimp on this last one. It's important! Can you "see" yourself free from shame? Picture what your life will look like. What will you look like? What will your relationships be like? What will you be

doing? What will your relationship with God be like? Can you see it, yet?

We often break free from shame layer by layer. It's a process (I know. I don't like that word, either!). Once you recognize the "voice" it has, it will become easier for you to reject the lies that come with it.

Continue taking this to Jesus, and listen to what He is speaking to you.

Jesus wants to repair and heal your heart. It might feel like it's too late, but that is not true. Jesus wants your heart. He wants all of you.

Shame doesn't belong on you. It's too heavy and is exhausting you. You weren't meant to carry it, and it's not who you are. Jesus knows who you were created to be, and He wants to show you who this is. (It's so much better than you may think!)

WHAT WE FOCUS ON GROWS

Like I mentioned earlier, sometimes it can be easy to put all of our focus on what we are trying to overcome, but do you know that what you focus on grows?

Keep your focus on Jesus, even if it becomes tempting to dig for answers, more freedom, and healing.

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Matthew 6:33

As you begin to experience measures of freedom, continue building

intimacy with Jesus. Keep sharing your heart with Him (out loud).

As you become aware of when shame-filled thoughts are running through your mind, you can reject those thoughts and grab a hold of the truth quicker each time. If you have a more challenging day and feel like you got run over by shame, please do not condemn yourself. It's a learning opportunity. You can then continue on the road of grabbing a hold of your true identity.

This is a sample prayer that you can make your own. Please feel free to change this and fill in words that resonate best with you and your own situation:

"*Lord, please continue to reveal to me the ways shame has been affecting my life. I release this shame to you, Lord. I break ties with the lies it has been speaking to me. I ask that in place of this shame that every portion of me is filled with you and your promises. Show me who you created me to be. I receive what you have for me, and I trust you are restoring me. I have been fearfully and wonderfully made by you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."*

I'm praying this guide will be instrumental in your journey of seeing yourself as you were truly created to be. I would love to hear how this has been helpful for you! If you have any questions or comments, please let me know.

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