

Week Four

## The Toxic Force of Shame | Genesis 3; Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75; John 21:15-19

What is shame? Some people believe it's the most painful emotion we have. It is an intense bodily feeling, almost like an altered state of being – as if you are cut off from the world around you. It develops out of experiences of rejection or punishment, and at times even from too much neglect. Some people have shame so embedded in their sense of self that they live with a consistent narrative of not being good enough. And they may or may not even be aware of this belief.

Usually, guilt is different from shame because the motivation behind it is to make amends – it is not that you are bad yourself, but you regret doing a bad thing. Guilt can thus actually motivate us towards positive change. Fortunately, shame can be healthily shifted into feelings of guilt. This process involves sharing the source of shame, then taking steps to repair what went wrong. We can continue to express our emotions in a healthy way, modelling what it looks like to take responsibility for something we did, but with the awareness that our actions do not change our status as beloved in the eyes of God.

We have all, unfortunately, internalised much more brokenness and sin than we have internalised His holiness and faithful love. Personal feelings of shame are a great example of how much room there is to grow in understanding just how wonderfully God views those He loves.

### Opening Questions

- 1 / Share one childhood incident when you did something wrong that you felt guilty about.
- 2 / Have you ever experienced being rejected or neglected? How did it affect you?

### Bible Study & Questions

**Read Genesis 3, Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75 and John 21:15-19, and discuss the following questions:**

- 1 / Compare Adam and Eve's reactions in Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:8-13. What caused their reactions and emotions? What does that tell you about the root of shame?

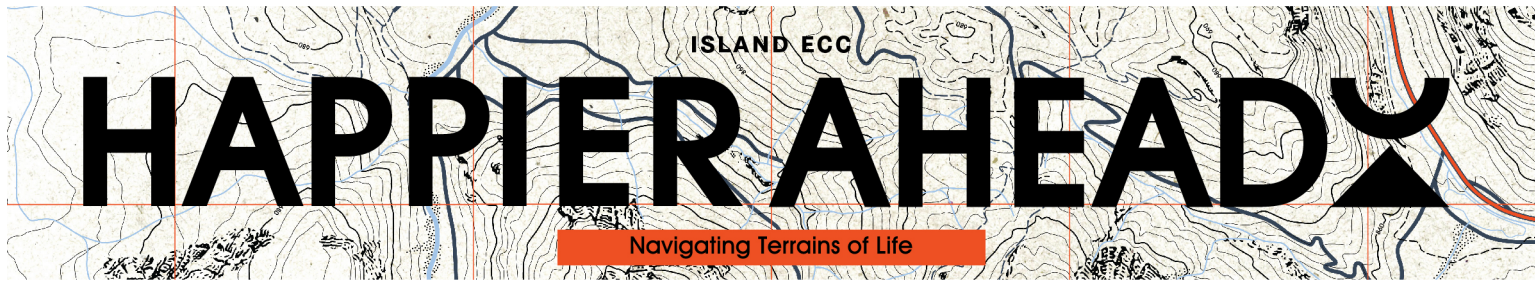
*Note: "Shame" was not part of the original design when God created the world. "Shame" is a consequence of sin and affects all mankind and all relationships, including our relationship with God.*

- 2 / What is the significance of God's action in Genesis 3:21? What does that tell you about God's approach toward sin and shame?  
*Key ideas: provision and care; sacrifice and atonement.*

- 3 / Compare Peter's responses in Matthew 26:33-35 and Matthew 26:69-75. How did Peter's reactions and emotions change throughout the story?

- 4 / John 21:15-17 took place after Jesus' death and resurrection. How did Jesus restore Peter? What does that tell you about the cure to shame?  
*Key ideas: forgiveness, commissioning, love.*

- 5 / What are some common elements that appear in both the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Peter? What characters of the Triune God stand out to you in these stories? How does this help you with understanding and processing shame?



## Prayer Activity

When we find ourselves wrong, sometimes our tendency is to “hide” or “conceal” (like the Bible stories above) which aggravates our shame. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a healthy way to approach shame and guilt which can motivate us towards positive change as we fixate on God’s holiness and love. The following prayer prompts may be helpful as we process guilt and shame:

- Praise God for His steadfast love (Psalm 36:5-9)
  - Confess our wrongdoings and ask for His forgiveness (1 John 1:9)
  - Trust in Him and surrender our fear (Psalm 34:4-5)
  - Allow God to transform and renew us (Romans 12:1-2)
  - Declare our identity as children of God (Romans 8:14-16)
- **Group Idea:** Read each of the above passages and then pray as a group on the topic. For example, read Psalm 36:5-9 as a group, and then have the group pray about God’s steadfast love.