

Prophecy 108b (The Transformation of Shame into Life)

Ezekiel 16, Isaiah 54

The Prophets (no. 9 in the series)

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

[Opening song: "I Am a Rock" by Simon & Garfunkel]

Prayer

So, Lord Jesus, we claim the blood of the Covenant over your Sanctuary. And we ask that you would cause us to preach your Word, our Lord Jesus. And in his name, Amen.

Message

Today's sermon is really a continuation of last week's sermon. In last week's sermon, I explained some things about the text, and then had everyone close their eyes as I read all of Ezekiel 16.

Through Ezekiel (whom God calls "Son of Man"), God speaks to Jerusalem. (And as you know, we are—or the Church is—Jerusalem.)

- He tells Jerusalem of how he found her: an infant abandoned in a field.
- How he spoke life into her.
- How she grew, and became beautiful, but she was naked and bare.
- And so, he covered her nakedness, entered into a covenant with her, and clothed her with beauty... and yet, she trusted her beauty and "played the whore with any passerby"—both nations and idols.
- How she then sacrificed "his children" to those with whom she "played the whore."

"How sick is your heart, declares the Lord," in verse 30.

And then he says: "Because your...nakedness [*ervah*] was uncovered in your whorings with your lovers... I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness [your *ervah*] to them."

Because you uncovered your nakedness to them; I will uncover your nakedness to them.

That seems like a strange thing to say, until you think it through, realizing that the word translated “nakedness” is probably best translated: “genitals.”¹ So, it makes some sense, but it’s also a bit... terrifying.

He then tells Jerusalem that her sins are worse than the sins of Sodom, and twice as bad as the sins of Samaria (from whence we get our word “Samaritan”)... and a good Jew wouldn’t even speak the name “Sodom.”

Then, v. 52: “So be ashamed [v. *buwsh*], you also, and bear your disgrace [n. *kalimah*: normally translated “shame”], for you have made your sisters, (Sodom and Samaria) appear righteous”

v. 52: “Be ashamed, you also, and bear your [shame], for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

⁵³“I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, ⁵⁴ that you may bear your disgrace [*kalimah*: shame] and be ashamed [*buwsh*] of all that you have done, becoming a consolation [comfort] to them. ⁵⁵ As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. ⁵⁶ Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, ⁵⁷ before your wickedness [*rah: evil*] was uncovered? Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and for the daughters of the Philistines, those all around who despise you. ⁵⁸ You bear [*the penalty*] of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the LORD.

⁵⁹“For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, ⁶⁰ yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. ⁶¹ Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed [v. *kalam*] when you take your sisters, both your elder (Samaria) and your younger (Sodom), and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. ⁶² I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, ⁶³ that you may remember and be confounded [v. *buwsh*: ashamed], and never open your mouth again because of your shame [*kalimah+pane*h: shame face], when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.”

Now that’s an utterly stunning chunk of Scripture!

The promise to redeem Sodom and Samaria and Jerusalem is so profoundly beautiful, but I stopped part way through the reading last time to ask you how you were doing, for although it’s so hopeful, it also includes an awful lot of shame and a lot of shaming—apparently at the hands of God. He appears to shame Jerusalem by causing her former lovers to uncover her nakedness [*ervah*] in v. 52. And then it seems that he shames her again, but in a very different sort of way in v. 63, when she *remembers something*, and he *atones for all that she’s done*.

It’s a lot of shame and shaming, and it seems that some of the shame doesn’t go away—he says, “You’ll never open your mouth again—[I guess, against Sodom and Samaria]—because of your shame.”

Now, if you are like me, you've been a little confused about shame.

I hear us say things like:

“God loves you; he would never shame you.”

“You are enough, you are sufficient, you are not a wretch; don't give in to shame.”

And I think I've spoken at times as if shame is evil, but if God says, “Be ashamed,” perhaps it's not always evil, to feel shame.ⁱⁱ

After our “Chew the Fat” meeting last week, I asked John Pyrc how he had heard guilt and shame defined in the counseling and prayer ministry he's a part of. He replied, “At the most basic level, guilt says, ‘I did something bad.’ Shame says, ‘I am bad.’ It's hard to imagine Jesus saying to someone: “You are bad... or evil”ⁱⁱⁱ

And yet in Matthew Jesus says, “Make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree evil and its fruit evil... How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of the good treasure brings forth good. And the evil person out of the evil treasure brings forth evil.”^{iv}

Well, my experience of Peter Hiett is that Peter Hiett brings forth good and evil, which means there's a good Peter and an evil Peter. But all that God makes is Good, right? And God makes everything, right?

That means, the good Peter is the real Peter. And the bad Peter is the “not real” Peter, even though I think he's real.

So, when “I” am ashamed of “me,” maybe I'm ashamed of my false Self... and so, I hide my false self, and pretend that he doesn't exist. But just in doing that, I actually make him exist like an empty space in my being that I feel as shame... non-being in my being, that I feel as shame, maybe.

I'm just saying that shame is confusing, and our language about shame is confusing. And I suppose that is because the Bible's language about shame is confusing.

In Ezekiel 16, God says to Jerusalem to “be ashamed. Bear your shame, so, you will comfort Sodom and Samaria, and never open your mouth again because of your shame.”

And yet in Isaiah 54, God says to Jerusalem, “Sing oh barren one... and cry aloud... Fear not, for you will not be ashamed [v. *buwsh*]; be not confounded [v. *kalam*: shamed] for you will not be disgraced [v. *chapher*: ashamed]; for you will forget the shame of your youth...”

So: You will never open your mouth because of your shame, but you will sing praises having forgotten your shame.

In the New Testament, it might get even weirder. Jesus and Paul make it really clear that we are to “judge not, that we be not judged,”^v which to me sounds like, “Don't shame people.”

But then in 1 Corinthians 1, Paul writes, “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”^{vi}

That clearly implies that you have been called to a ministry of shame, for just the fact that you are a weak fool whom God has chosen should shame the proud people all around you. So cheer up—maybe it's working!

Well, I'm just saying—we seem to define shame in all sorts of confusing ways. And the Bible talks about shame in all sorts of confusing ways. So maybe we can't fully define it with words, and yet we all know it, for we feel it in our flesh every day... And now, I'm going to remind you.

So, close your eyes, take a deep breath, and find yourself. Now say to your adult self: "You are just fine, ...so please don't shut down."

And now, find your junior-high-self and say to that self, "I love you, but it's time to grow up; no snickering."

OK? Now I want you to meditate upon your *ervah*... your "nakedness." Not someone else's *ervah*, your own *ervah*... your private parts.

How do you feel? Frightened, embarrassed, nervous, guilty, hopeful, disappointed, sad, excited... confused?

I couldn't help but notice: You all covered them before you came to church this morning... Thank you... But why did you do that?

Now I want you to think of everything you have done with them, or didn't do with them, that you wanted to do with them. —Now, that's really "a private part" of you, isn't it?

Jesus said, "Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."

You can open your eyes now.

That thing that you were just feeling is called "shame." At least that's how the Bible defines shame.

Genesis 2:25—the first place the word shows up in Scripture—"The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Gen. 2:25)

But then something happened: The man and his wife came to know something, then felt something, then covered something, and hid themselves from God and from each other. That thing that they were feeling is called "shame."

Twenty-one years ago, my mother was dressing my five-year-old son Coleman, and his older sister Elizabeth happened to be in the room. Coleman insisted that they both leave. Mom said, "Oh Coleman, come on; we don't need to leave."

He said, "But you'll see my private parts."

Ten-year-old, know-it-all Elizabeth said, "Coleman, we used to change your diapers all the time, and we saw your private parts all the time."

Coleman yelled, "Yah, but that's different! That was before I knew I had 'em!"

So, here's the question: Did God, or does God, want my son Coleman to know that "he has them"?

And here's the parallel question: Did God, or does God, want the Adam and the Eve (the "mother of all living") to know that "they have them"? Because that knowledge has caused some trouble. Are those private parts good or evil? And what was God thinking? Why did he make us... them... like that?

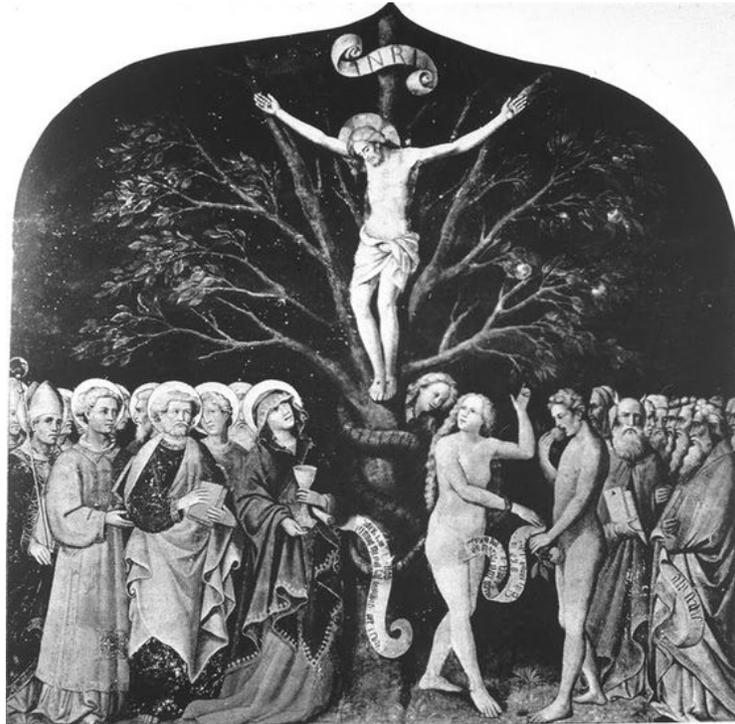


Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

So, I'm showing you this picture once again. It's a man hanging on a tree in a garden. The garden is at the beginning of time and at the end of time and it exists right now in the sanctuary of your soul. It's not less real than this world; it's more real than this world.

The man on the tree is the Good in flesh and the Life. He is also called Wisdom—Wisdom is like living knowledge. So, if you took his life, you would gain knowledge of Good and evil... but it would be dead.

Yet, if you received him who is life, you would have: "Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption." You'd be known by Love.

The man on the tree is also called the "eschatos Adam." That can be translated "last Adam" or "ultimate Adam." He is the perfect image of the invisible God. He is who it is that you are to become—he is your judgment.

And now you can perceive that as a threat—"Become Jesus or else." Or you can perceive that as a promise—as Francois Du Toit says: "Jesus is not another religion; Jesus is what God believes about you." Jesus is God's judgment *of* you... and maybe *in* you.

The man on the tree is the "*eschatos* Adam," which makes all of those people at the base of the tree, the "*eschatos* Eve." In other words: They are Jerusalem; they are humanity. In Hebrew, they are Adam... the first Adam. They are the Bride, and the man on the tree is the Groom. When they surrender to his Love in the Sacrament of the Covenant, they even become his Body—One Body filled with one Spirit, the Spirit of God.

But in this picture, they are not one Body. This is a picture of the Sixth Day of Creation, for on the Seventh Day of Creation, it is finished—they are all one—and everything is Good.

So, what's wrong with the people in this picture?

Well, this is hard to talk about, for we'll be talking about the edge of time and eternity, and what's wrong with these people is also what's right with these people.

That is, we will be talking about shame; we need to talk about shame. And we need to talk in a way that the Church hasn't really talked for 1500 years.

- We need to start in Genesis 1, rather than Genesis 3.
- We need to start with God's success, rather than our failure.

In Genesis 1, God creates everything, beginning to end; "big bang" to the end of the ages.... and at the end of the ages, the endless Seventh Day, everything is Good, and it is finished, perfected, completed.

But in Genesis 2, everything is not completed, and all is not good. For God says something is not good... and God is still creating Adam. That means it's the Sixth Day of Creation. And if you're not finished and not entirely good... it's still the Sixth Day of Creation for you, too.

So, what is not Good?

Well, it's something about Adam that's not good. But of course, Adam doesn't know this, for Adam—humanity—does not yet have the knowledge of Good and evil (which is the knowledge of God and not God), and therefore Adam cannot love God in freedom, for he does not know who God is. Adam is alone and incapable of Love; God is Love.

And this is exactly what God says in Genesis Chapter 2 verse 18. Before The Fall, while man exists with God in a paradise garden, God—who is Love—says, "It's not good [and not good is bad]...it's not good that the Adam [humanity] is alone."

You see: Something is seriously wrong with Adam. He doesn't seek God, so he doesn't know God, and he can't love God. God is Adam's "Helper," His *ezer* in Hebrew. *Ezer* is a masculine noun that never refers to a wife in all of Scripture, but over and over again, it refers to God.

Adam can't seem to find his Helper. So in Genesis 2:18, his helper says, "It's not good that the Adam is alone. I will make a helper fit for him." At that, God puts the Adam to sleep and divides the Adam in two.

Eve is still not Adam's Helper; she's actually just more of Adam. And Adam is not much of a helper for Eve... Adam and Eve still can't find their Helper.

But God had planted this tree in the middle of the garden, one tree that looks like two, or two trees that look like one, in one spot. You see, this is the tree... and on the tree is the Helper—the Helper made fit, or about to be made fit, for Adam, who is Humanity, that is Jerusalem, that is the Bride of Christ.

So, what's wrong with the people in this picture?

Well, humanity is alone, and she can't find her Helper. Her Helper speaks, in fact he's always speaking—nothing would exist if he were not speaking. Her Helper is always speaking, but she doesn't know that his Word is Good, for she has no knowledge of Good and evil.

In fact, on the tree, her Helper actually prays, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." But they will know. The night before, he prayed, "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." They will know evil and die; but if the Good will know them, they will live—have life.

So, what's wrong with the people in this picture? What's wrong with humanity?

Humanity doesn't have faith in her Helper. Humanity does not trust God, so humanity cannot love God—which means humanity is not yet finished in the image of God. God is Love.

- It's not that some are the image of God and some are not the image of God...
 - It's not that some are good and some are evil...
 - It's that all are part good and all are part "not good"—which is bad, that is, evil...
- ...It's that all are unfinished.

So, what's wrong with this world?

[Image: On screen is a one-frame cartoon depicting God baking in the kitchen with a box of "Earthquik" on the counter. God holds a pan with the world in it, smells it, and says, "Something tells me this thing's only half-baked."]

It's half-baked.

And, what's wrong with the people sitting next to you?

They are half-baked.

So, how do we get fully baked?

[Image: Previous artwork of *Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man*, previously shown]

Well, that has everything to do with the Helper made fit for you. And everything to do with those parts of you that you cover when you feel shame...

So last time I asked you: What is shame?

And we said, isn't it an awareness of your need for help? And what you are ashamed of? Isn't it a place where you need help?

And what is Salvation?

Well, isn't it getting help from your Helper?

And what is Sin?

Isn't it trying to get help from the wrong helpers, or in the wrong way?

And why would we do that?

Well, we obviously don't trust our helper or his Word; in fact we take the advice of a snake.

And what does the snake say?

"You don't need help; just help yourself"

"Take fruit from the tree and make yourself in the image of God."

And that's exactly what we do, every time we take knowledge of the good, think that we make ourselves good, then feel proud, and more alone.... which is more "not good."

And that's exactly what Jerusalem did that Friday, when we took the life of the Good in flesh in a garden on a tree that we now call the cross.

[Image: Still image of Jesus on the cross from the movie *The Passion of the Christ*]

The growing knowledge of that fact is why you feel shame. Shame is not simply a theological or psychological concept you can learn about in some book. Shame is a growing knowledge in the depths of your being that you are incomplete; you cannot complete yourself; you need a helper.

You are right now being tempted to cover that place of shame with fig leaves, self-justifications, works of the flesh, ego, arrogance, and pride. And you are right now being romanced into surrendering that place of shame to your Helper—romanced by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And now let me share with you the Good News.



Although Coleman dressed himself alone for twenty years, there is one person with whom he's willing to share his private parts. (Now remember: "In Jesus's name: No shutting down.")

There is one person with whom Coleman is willing to share his shame. And she, my daughter-in-law, Natalie, is willing to share her shame with Coleman. And here is the utterly shocking Good News! She is attracted to Coleman's place of Shame...And he is thoroughly attracted to her place of Shame. And when they share their places of shame, they experience that communion of shame, not as shame, but *ecstasy*—and in that moment, neither of them feels so... all alone.

And it gets even better: Something may just come of this communion of shame—and if it does, I will call that something, "my grandbaby."



Now, some of you just shut down. *In the name of Jesus, no shutting down.*

Why did you shut down? Let me guess.

Maybe...

- You want what Coleman has, but it hasn't happened, and the fact that it hasn't happened has broken your heart; you're utterly disappointed in God, but you try to cover it up and act like it's all OK... but I just brought it up.
- Or maybe you want what Coleman has, but not in the way Coleman has it. Maybe you are attracted to members of the same sex, and you just can't help it. You're not sure what's wrong or right (and I'm not entirely sure what's wrong or right), but you are deeply disappointed in God, try to cover it up, and act like it's all OK... but I just brought it up.
- Or maybe you were happily married, and you tasted what Coleman has, but you were unfaithful, or your partner was unfaithful, and everything blew up—you're deeply disappointed in yourself, and a bit scared of God; but you just try to cover it up and act like it's all OK... but I just brought it up.

- Or maybe you've been violated and abused. It was not your fault, but the pain and the shame are just too much to bear. So you cover it up and act like it's OK... but I just brought it up.
- Or maybe you've been married for 38 years, and you turn 60 this summer, and your body's old, and things don't work like they used to work, and it makes you sad; but you try to cover it up... but the Word of God keeps bringing it up.
- Or maybe you're just like Coleman, but now the honeymoon is over, the thrill is gone—you think "there's got to be more," and so you're tempted to stray, and feel ashamed that you might, and so you cover it up: You cover up your lack of faith in love and pretend to love.

Maybe you lack faith—faith that Love is Good, and his Word is Grace. You try to have faith. You fake faith. You pretend to trust, but you don't trust. And so, you feel ashamed, and you hide that place from God, convinced that God would reject you if he only got a good look at you and that place in the depths of your heart.

You feel ashamed and rejected, and so you look for solace in other helpers like possessions, addictions, power, and fame... but, it's only more shame.

And so you tell yourself, "I am a rock; I am an island. And a rock feels no pain and an island never cries..." But you do cry.

So now, let me share with you the Good News.

God is attracted to... that place—that place that you try to hide. He is attracted to you and to that place, like a young bridegroom is attracted to his bride and her place of shame. I'm saying that God finds your lonely, battered, broken, and empty heart to be profoundly sexy. And when you offer that heart to other lovers, his heart is lonely, battered, broken, and empty, too—it's empty for you.

It's not about genitals. They are a sacramental representation of that place in which you need help.^{vii} (That's what circumcision is about—not genitals, but your heart.)

It's not about genitals— It's about the empty place in your soul that we sometimes call shame. It's not about genitals— God made Adam, male and female, before The Fall, to give us a sign, nurture a hope, and cause us to seek our helper.^{viii}

You actually do need help, serious help. You actually are inadequate, insufficient, and wretchedly alone. In fact, apart from your Helper, you can do absolutely nothing... including asking for help.

Your Helper is your wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; He is Faith, Hope, and Love in you; He completes you. He helps you by giving you himself.

But he will not rape you... and so he romances you, in the hope that you would surrender to love, surrender your shame, and bear the fruit that is Life.

And that is how your shame is transformed into everlasting joy.^{ix}

In Ezekiel 16:60, God says to Jerusalem:

...I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. ⁶¹ Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, [both Samaria and Sodom], and I give them to you as daughters.

Jerusalem's arrogance is revealed as shame, and then it is transformed into compassion for Sodom and Samaria.

Once you get in touch with your need for grace, you will have grace on everyone around you. You will forget your shame, and yet you will be fueled by your shame—You just won't experience shame as "shame," but rather an ecstatic communion of joy.^x

You'll sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me," and I'll sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like... you," and we'll all sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like us!^{xi}"

Zephaniah 3:19 · "I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise."

See, there's a purpose for shame; it's how God manufactures joy and even how he manufactures you and those around you.^{xii}

In Ezekiel 16, God says to Jerusalem, "I will give Sodom and Samaria to you as daughters." I don't think that means they will only be *like* daughters, but they will *be* daughters—mothers give birth (with a lot of labor) to daughters.^{xiii}

In Galatians 4, Paul writes, "The Jerusalem above... is our mother."

You are actually born from the pain and shame of those who have gone before, those who have surrendered their shame to the Word of God and born the fruit of God that is now Christ in you—which is the real you.

Paul writes that the Jerusalem above is our mother..,and then he quotes Isaiah 54, which immediately follows Isaiah 53,which is a description of the cross:

...he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Next verse: Isaiah 54:

**1 "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear;
break forth into singing and cry aloud,
you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than the children of her who is married," says the Lord.**
**2 "Enlarge the place of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords
and strengthen your stakes.**
**3 For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your offspring will possess the nations
and will people the desolate cities.**
**4 "Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded [shamed], for you will not be disgraced [ashamed];
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.**

**⁵ For your Maker is your husband,
the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.**

[Image: On screen shows previous artwork as above—*Mystery of the Fall and Redemptino of Man*]

When you feel ashamed and try to cover your shame from your helper, you take knowledge from the tree in the middle of the garden in order to justify yourself with works of the flesh. It might look good for a time, but you crucify the life, and everything dies. The works of the flesh are faithlessness, licentiousness, idolatry, competition, envy, anger, etc., etc... ^{xiv}

But if on the other hand...when you feel shame, you surrender your shame to the One who gives you his life on the tree in the middle of the garden, he will implant his life like a seed in your place of shame. It might look messy for a time, but you will bear the fruit of life that is life—you will literally give birth to the Son of Man in you and your neighbor.

You see the work of the flesh really is work. And the fruit of the Spirit is literally the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is Love (and God is love), love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faith...^{xv}

And see that's the thing that Adam lacked in the garden, even before The Fall. Surrendered shame is how you are made in the image and likeness of God.

And you see, that changes everything about every moment of every day. The way you change is not by taking knowledge and trying harder. The way you change is by surrendering shame and trusting Mercy.

That's why I hope you come to worship: Not to receive information that you can apply to your life... but to surrender your shame and receive the Word of Grace.

That's why I hope you have some sort of small group: Not so you can share information and hold each other accountable—that's death. But so you can confess your shame, and then look each other in the eye, and speak the Gospel—"You are thoroughly loved and entirely forgiven." That's the Gospel. That's the seed. And that will get y'all pregnant.

And that's the only hope for saving your marriage: It's not trying to change or demanding that your spouse changes. It's all about revealing your battered, broken, and lonely heart; your shame. And then if your spouse reveals her battered, broken, and lonely heart—it's not about fixing it, but speaking a Word into it: "I forgive you, and I long for you to forgive me..."

That Word is not your Word, that is God's Word spoken through you into the most sacred of all places—the place of surrendered shame.

You want to know my shame in recent years? I don't know how to make a church grow. I used to be known for that: a church that went from 60 to a few thousand. Now I think I shrunk a church, from a few thousand down to 60...

A while ago, I said to my wife, “Honey, pray for me: I feel like I keep digging holes—because Jesus has asked me to dig holes. I keep digging holes, and Jesus comes right behind me, just filling them in.”

She said, “Hmm. I just heard Jesus say, ‘But Peter, that’s how you plant trees.’”

Do you suppose that Jesus is walking behind us, dropping a seed in every place of surrendered shame? Actually, he is the Seed—the promised seed.

Pretty cool, but this does leave us with a final question: Does God shame us... or put us to shame?

Maybe you have to expose a place of shame to fertilize that shame. But like I said, I’m convinced that God will not rape us. But maybe he does take us to places where all of our walls start to crumble, and the armor we have constructed begins to fail.^{xvi}

“I am shielded in my armor; hiding in my room; safe within my womb.”

“I touch no one and no one touches me...”

You know why I used to take my kids camping? So they would get scared and snuggle up next to me in the tent. You know why I took my girlfriend to see *Alien* on our sixth date? So she would feel vulnerable and hang on to my arm during the movie. Was that evil of me? I don’t think so, and it resulted in four children, and a whole lot of life.

In the middle of Ezekiel 16, God puts Jerusalem to shame. Babylonians invade, breach the walls, and Jerusalem’s defenses crumble, but she still won’t surrender her shame to the One who is Love.

At the end of Ezekiel 16, the One who is Love says:

**“...I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. Then you will... be ashamed...
...You shall know that I am the Lord... and be ashamed, when I atone for you for all
that you have done.”^{xvii}**

[Image: Still image on screen of Jesus on the cross from *The Passion of the Christ*]

He will not rape us. But have we raped him? Have we twisted the truth, taken the life, and abused the Good?

There might be one thing wrong with this picture. It’s pretty clear from what we know of ancient history that Jesus was crucified naked... and it wasn’t sexy—we did it to shame him. And yet, it was there and then that he was made fit for us. But even so, we did it to shame him.

“For the joy that was set before him,” writes the author of Hebrews, “He endured the cross, despising the shame.”

So, what was the joy that was set before him? Well, that’s easy: It was communion with you, in the Sanctuary, of his covenant of Grace.

Communion

And so, in Jerusalem, at the edge of time and eternity, our Helper took bread and he broke it, saying, "This is my body given to you. Take it, eat it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me. And he took the cup, saying, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you and do it in remembrance of me."

[Peter takes communion] — In your place of shame: Life.

BENEDICTION

So Father, we just confess to you—(just pray this along with me right now)—Father, we confess that you're scary. God, you're scary. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you're scary to us...because you're good. And we're not entirely good. And we're becoming aware of that, and so we're tempted to shut down, to put up our walls, to put up our defenses. (In the silence of your heart, you can say, "Yup—that's me. I do that." That's called confession.) And this is the Word of Grace: You are forgiven, for you always have been and always will be thoroughly loved. So you need to sit in the presence of that reality every day. Live there, and your heart begins to unfold like a flower before him. And don't worry, it takes a lifetime. (I talk about this stuff, but I really struggle with this stuff.) And yet it's true. In Jesus's name we pray these things, Father. Amen.

[Video plays: "Fire Down Below" by Bob Seger]

Sorry, but I used to love that song—but I used to think it was a song about hell—and by that I mean "hades," the place we're all tempted to hide —and the fire God, the love of God that burns even down into the depths of hell. And then one day I realized, "No...it's about sex." And now I realize, it's about both. See, we all have one thing in common: Sodom, Samaria, Jerusalem—we each know Shame. But we have all been destined for ceaseless communion with infinite Grace. Your Helper will turn your shame into ceaseless praise.

So in the name of Jesus, believe the Gospel, and don't shut down.
Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ This is a different Hebrew word from the word that was translated "naked" earlier in the chapter.

ⁱⁱ The Ghost made a sound something between a sob and a snarl. "I wish I'd never been born," it said. "What are we born for?" "For infinite happiness," said the Spirit. "You can step out into it at any moment. . . ." "But, I tell you, they'll see me." "And hour hence and you will not care. A day hence and you will laugh at it. Don't you remember on earth - there were things too hot to touch with your finger but you could drink them all right? Shame is like that. If you will accept it - if you

will drink the cup to the bottom - you will find it very nourishing; but try to do anything else with it and it scalds." Almost, I thought the Ghost had obeyed. Certainly it had moved: but suddenly it cried out: "No, I can't. I tell you I can't. For a moment, while you were talking, I almost thought . . . but when it comes to the point. . . . You've no right to ask me to do a thing like that. It's disgusting. I should never forgive myself if I did. Never, never. And it's not fair. They ought to have warned us. I'd never have come. And now - please, please go away!" "Friend," said the Spirit. "Could you, only for a moment, fix your mind on something not yourself?"

- C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* pp.61-61

iii "Bad" and "evil" are usually the same word in Scripture.

iv Matthew 12:33-35

v Matthew 7:1

vi For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. - 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

vii My guess is that how we relate to one thing is probably how we relate to everything. How we relate sexually is probably a good teacher and indicator of how we relate to God (and how we relate to God is probably a good teacher and indicator of how we well relate to everything else). Religion and relationships are one, it seems.

- Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, p. 136

viii 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. -Ephesians 5:31-32

ix That is how you are made in the image and likeness of God.

That is how you leave the sixth day and enter the eternal seventh.

That is eternal life.

x All times are eternally present to God. Is it not at least possible that along some one line of His multi-dimensional eternity He sees you forever in the nursery pulling the wings off a fly, forever in toadying, lying, and lusting as a schoolboy, forever in that moment of cowardice or insolence as a subaltern? It may be that salvation consists not in the canceling of these eternal moments but in the perfected humility that bears the shame forever, rejoicing in the occasion which it furnished to God's compassion and glad that it should be common knowledge to the universe. Perhaps in that eternal moment St. Peter—he will forgive me if I am wrong—forever denies his Master. If so, it would indeed be true that the joys of Heaven are, for most of us in our present condition, "an acquired taste"—and certain ways of life may render the taste impossible of acquisition. Perhaps the lost are those who dare not go to such a public place.

- C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

xi Isaiah 61:7 "Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion. Instead of dishonor [shame] they will rejoice in their lot... they shall have everlasting joy."

xii Clement tells that for the rest of his life Peter fell on his knees whenever he heard a rooster crow and with bitter weeping asked God for forgiveness. I don't believe that story. According to one tradition the cheeks of Peter were marked with furrows down which the tears continued to flow. I don't believe that either. Having been assured of Christ's forgiveness, Peter wiped away his tears and devoted his energy to serving Christ. There is another story to the effect that on one occasion when Peter was preaching to a large multitude—and the sermon was not going too well—he heard a rooster crowing in the distance. He paused for a moment and then preached as he had never preached before. That I can believe. - Armin C. Oldsen, *Speakers' Illustrations for Special Days*, #295, pg. 77

xiii Giving birth is an immense amount of "labor," but when a mother gives birth, although is included a great deal of work, she is very much aware that she did not make her baby—the baby is a miracle, a gift from God. All "good works" are "babies" (fruit) or else they're not really "good work;" they're "dead works."

xiv You see there's a reason that the work of the flesh is work.

And the fruit of the Spirit is literally fruit of the Spirit.

xv It doesn't mean you won't have to labor—giving birth is labor.

But when you give birth, you will know that what you have birthed is the work of God.

^{xvi} "I've built my walls; a fortress deep and mighty; that none may penetrate."
"I am shielded in my armor; hiding in my room; safe within my womb."
Those are great lyrics

^{xvii} In the Gospel according to Luke we read:

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." At that moment, while he was still speaking, a cock crew; and the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter . . . and Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

I had a fairly good relationship with the Lord. I would ask him for things, converse with him, praise him, thank him. . . .

But always I had this uncomfortable feeling that he wanted me to look at him. And I would not. I would talk, but look away when I sensed he was looking at me.

I was afraid I should find an accusation there of some unrepented sin. I thought I should find a demand there; there would be something he wanted from me.

One day I finally summoned up courage and looked! There was no accusation. There was no demand. The eyes just said, "I love you."

And I walked out and, like Peter, I wept.

-Anthony DeMello, Writings selected by William Dych, S.J., *Anthony DeMello* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 54-55