

Coming Home: Confronting Guilt and Shame

Scripture used: [Luke 15:20-24 \(NLT\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Continuing our “Coming Home” series inspired by the parable of the Prodigal Son, Pastor Hurmon teaches us how to confront the twin emotions of guilt and shame, which often run along a continuum. In our companion scripture - [Luke 15:1-2](#) – the Pharisees were upset when Jesus welcomed “notorious sinners” and even ate with them.

These sinners broke Jewish laws and laws of morality - yet they were drawn to Jesus. Jesus’ affirmation of love was contagious, which made it threatening. The antidote to guilt and shame is God’s love. Guilt is an overwhelming feeling of having done something wrong. Shame is a sense of being inherently flawed or defective. God intends for us to find healing from guilt and shame in His love.

KEY POINTS

- 1. The Gospel argues for redemption.** In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father represents God. The Eldest son is like the religious leaders. The younger son is the notorious sinner. The younger son hits an all-time low when he realizes that no one cares about him, no one will give him anything. He could just die, and nobody would be paying attention. This is what made him come to his senses, because he realizes his father’s “hired hands” have food to spare. Food becomes a symbol of his father’s abundant love, not only for his family and his entire household. The father’s plate runs over with love.
- 2. Guilt and shame are productive if they move us toward the Father.** The younger son is very contrite: “I have sinned, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired servants.” The son’s embarrassment and dishonor is met by his father’s powerful and unconditional love. God covers us with honor, and when we encounter the Father’s love, guilt and shame have done their job and are no longer needed. The Father literally interrupts the son’s repentant speech. The son is smelly, dirty, starved, flawed. He walks a long distance to return home. The father is on the lookout for him. The father comes out. He doesn’t let the son go through his well-rehearsed script, but immediately welcomes him effusively, and puts a fine robe and ring on him. With grace and forgiveness, he publicly bestows honor on his son.
- 3. Guilt and shame are toxic when they move us away from God or away from others (through hiding or blame-shifting).** Sometimes life experiences, such as abuse or trauma, drop us in a figurative “hogpen” where shame and guilt become embedded in our lives. These experiences send toxic messages to us: “It must be my fault. There must be something wrong with me. I don’t deserve love. I am a mistake. I am unworthy.” Trauma is hard to shake - it trails you. Pastor Hurmon shared his own story. He knew shame, from his family circumstances and his physical scars. As a child growing up in rural Louisiana, he initially acted out as a way to cope with his differences, his scars and “ugliness.” His low point was flunking school and disappointing his grand-aunt who had invested everything in him. After a fight, in a bathroom, he opened his heart to the love of God, and asked God to work a miracle in his life by the time he graduated from high school. Three years later, there was a total turnaround, as he was an honors student, college-bound, and on a trajectory that honored his adopted parents. What amazing grace at work in our lives! This is the message of the cross. Examine your feelings, confess them. Realize that the power of guilt and shame is often irrationally strong. Leverage the good news of Jesus. During the Calvary, the Roman legionnaires and the crowd shamed, spit on, and nailed Jesus to the cross naked. He, the most righteous, became sin and suffering and shame for us, so that we could become the righteousness and honor of God ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).

DISCUSSION

- 1) HEAR** - What is an instance of childhood shame or guilt (that you feel comfortable sharing with others) that stayed with you for many years?
- 2) UNDERSTAND** - Consider [Luke 15:20-24 \(NLT\)](#). Have you had an experience of God’s love that reflects the son’s experience - being honored and declared worthy when you felt unworthy? What are the ways that the Father (representing God) put his own honor on the line for his son? Have you experienced God doing this for you? What have you learned about healthy ways to process guilt and shame now?
- 3) DO** - Allow your guilt and shame to move you toward God. Break the power of shame by finding someone safe and trustworthy to share with. Receive the forgiveness that God offers. Join us next Sunday as we conclude the series, “Coming Home.”