

## **“My Secret—Secret Shame”**

Today we finish the series called “My Secret.” We’ve talked about how we are only as sick as our secrets and how God’s desire is for us to be healed, to have life. The central passage for this series has been Proverbs 28:13. It says, **“Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but those who confess and renounce them find mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, TNIV)**. That’s what this series is about. Finding mercy, finding freedom, finding healing in God’s presence.

This week, we are going to talk about something that’s maybe heavy for a lot of people. We are going to talk about our secret shame, those things that we carry that maybe we have never told anyone before, or the things that maybe we have only told a few people, the things that we hold very close to our heart, the things we are deeply ashamed of.

I also want to mention for the last the website that Lifechurch in Oklahoma City started called [www.mysecret.tv](http://www.mysecret.tv). They created it as a way for people to find a place to let go of some of their baggage. It’s only for people over 18, but it’s a safe place to confess anonymously and take a step toward freedom.

Today, we are going to talk about confessing our secret shame. Because when we are ashamed, we tend to hide, and isolate ourselves, and allow the source of the shame to eat away at us, and that is not living.

To get a picture of shame, let’s look at the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible—Genesis 2:25. This story gives us a great reference point on what shame does. It tells us that before there was sin, there was no shame. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden without sin, the Bible says, **“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25, NIV)**.

Imagine that for a moment—not what it would be like to be naked! Imagine what it would be like to not have any secrets. No skeletons. No guilt, nothing that we’re afraid of somebody else finding out. Imagine the freedom of no shame. Paradise. But it all comes to an end. God sets up some boundaries and says, “Don’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.” Satan does what he does, he tempts them. They eat, they break their trust in God. They sinned, and with sin entered shame.

Verses 7-8, the Bible says, **“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’” (Genesis 3:7-10, NIV)**.

It’s interesting how shame causes us to separate, to isolate, and to feel very, very desperate. And this shame hiding thing starts early. I remember as a little kid, thinking I could cut my own hair. I mean, the barber made it look so fun and easy. I pull a stool up to the counter in the bathroom, I get the scissors and start chopping away. I was old enough to realize that the first few cuts didn’t look so good, so I tried to even it out, which meant more hair off, which meant more evening out. I remember at some point thinking, “I’ve run out of hair to cut. I’ve really messed this up. Mom is going to be mad. I had better hide the evidence.” There was an empty Kleenex box in the trash so I stuffed all the hair in that. I honestly remember thinking that hiding the evidence was enough. That if I hid the hair clippings, everything would be fine. I bop out to the kitchen and can’t understand why my mom is shrieking!

Question. What are you ashamed of? What are you ashamed of? It may not be that big a deal to someone else, but it is a big deal to you. This would be a good time to look at the cycle of shame. Three things ... the first is this. **You take part in something deeply painful** This could be something you do to someone else that causes them pain. Or it could be something you do to yourself. It could even be that someone does something to you that causes you pain.

Maybe you are ashamed of the debt that you have allowed to accumulate in your life and how you got there. Maybe you are ashamed of the fact that you lie often, or you cheat. Or maybe you are ashamed of the way you look. You can’t believe what has happened to your body over the years, and you have allowed it and you look at yourself and say, “Uh! How could anyone be attracted to the way that I look?”

Maybe you aborted a baby or had an affair, or had some kind of dirty, sexual past that you would give anything to change, but you just can't and the shame just weighs you down.

Maybe you were the victim of somebody else's abuse, and the odd thing is, even though you were the victim, you still own the guilt. It's not your fault, but you feel like it was. You may have been molested by someone that you loved or trusted and you feel bad about that. You feel dirty. It wasn't your fault and you know that intellectually, but still emotionally, you just can't seem to get over that.

Maybe your greatest dream was to have an awesome marriage and you ended up divorced, and you feel like for the rest of your life you are going to be carrying around that big "D" mark on your forehead, and you're ashamed of that.

For some of you, you started a business, or in a career, and the business failed or you got fired, and you feel shame.

It could be that you are addicted to something that's gotten a hold of you and you can't let it go. I don't know, maybe you are a Paris Hilton fan and you carry that burden. It just doesn't seem to go away.

It could be that you did something to someone. You humiliated somebody in school, or on the job. You look back and feel shame weighing you down. I don't know what it would be. What is it that you are ashamed of?

The first phase in the cycle of shame is that you take part in something painful. Second phase is this: **You connect what happened with who you are.** You connect what happened to you or what you did with who you are. That's the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is, "Well, I did something bad and I feel guilty about it." Shame is, "I am bad." Guilt says, "This was something I did that I am not proud of." Shame is, "I am a horrible person because of what I did." It's connecting something on the outside with who you are as a person, and the evil one loves when you own it that way.

It would be like this, "Well, so and so, he rejected me, so I am worthless. I am nothing. I failed. Therefore, I am a failure. I failed at my business or I failed at my marriage; therefore, I am a failure." It's internalizing it. It's, "After what I did, how could God ever love me. I am bad. I am dirty. I am no good."

The first thing that happens is this, you take part in something deeply painful. Then, you connect what happened with who you are. Third, is that **You become a prisoner tormented by your past.** Because of what happened, you feel this deep sense of separation from God, or separation from others and a very, very real sense of desperation. "I'll never get over this. My life will never be the way it could have been or should have been. I'll never have a good marriage. I can never recover from this. No matter what I do, I'm always marked. Try as hard as I want, because I am bad, I will never have everything that God wants me to be. I'm trapped. I can't get out. I'll never fully recover. Shame. Desperation. What am I going to do? The sense of I'll never, never get through it. This deep dark shame."

Another scripture we keep coming back to is John 10:10. This is where Jesus said, "**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full**" (John 10:10, NIV). The thief, the evil one, Satan, your spiritual enemy, wants to take you on a shameful cycle to paralyze you, to take you out, to destroy your relationship with God, with people, so that you hate yourself. You've got to understand that the stakes are incredibly high.

Let me show you the stories of two people. You'll read their stories in full this week, so I'll just give you the bullet points. These are two people in scripture who basically did the same shameful thing, but when it came out into the light, they responded very differently, and had drastically different results. The people are Peter and Judas. Both of betrayed Jesus, both basically deserted him and turned their backs on him. Both realized what they had done and the shame came. But they each dealt with their shame differently.

Judas betrayed Jesus by selling him out. By telling the people who wanted Jesus dead that he would hand him over for a price. They paid Judas, he did his part and then realized what he did. He was overwhelmed with shame and tried to give the money back. He began to internalize, "I am a horrible person. I can never recover from this," and he went out and hung himself.

Peter, had sworn he would follow Jesus to the bitter end and die with him if need be. But when push came to shove, Peter bailed out. Abandoned Jesus when the religious leaders showed up. Later Peter denies even knowing Jesus three times. Three times he says, "I don't know the man." Then he realizes what he has done and the shame comes crashing down. But, but, instead of internalizing it, he actually allowed himself to look into the eyes of Jesus to accept the forgiveness from Jesus. Instead of letting the shame kill him he found a way to move forward, and Peter would eventually lead thousands in connecting to Jesus.

Look at the results. Same basic sin. One ends in death, the other ends in changed lives. Can you see how high the stakes will be for you? The thing that's eating away at your soul could be the very thing that motivates you to invest your life in the cause of others. There was no person on earth better qualified to preach about forgiveness than Peter because he had received it. And perhaps, the very thing that you are ashamed of today could be the thing that brings you, and others, freedom.

The evil one wants you to believe you are what you did, or you are what someone did to you, or you are what you are and you cannot change. The truth is, you are not what you did. You are not what someone did to you. You are who God says you are.

Let's break free. How do we break free from the cycle of shame? Two things. **Embrace that you cannot change the past.** The first, we need to embrace is this: No matter how hard you try, no matter what you do, you cannot change the past. You can never change the past.

Craig Groeschel tells a story about when his family moved into a new house. Somewhere in the move, they lost their little daughter's teddy bear, Grandpa Bear. It was her favorite, favorite, favorite bear. They looked everywhere for days but one day Craig realized that Grandpa Bear was gone. He writes, "I sat down with my little precious girl, looked into her eyes, and I said, 'You need to hear this, sweetheart. Grandpa Bear is never, ever coming back.'" She cried and she cried. But when she faced it, she was able to start the healing process.

May I say respectfully and with all of the love that I know how to, for some of you, Grandpa Bear is not coming back. No matter what you do, your marriage may be over and it is gone. Your innocence lost. You cannot bring your baby back. You can be with your child again one day, but you can't bring your baby back. Your business is not coming back. The friendship you destroyed is not coming back. The one thing that you would give anything to change, no matter what, if you could change, you would do anything to change it, and you cannot change it. You cannot bring it back. You have got to embrace that.

As I thought about this last week, I wondered of all the things I'm ashamed of in my life, what's appropriate to tell in this setting. This came to mind. When I was in Boy Scouts a friend and I took it upon ourselves to bully another kid. His name was Larry. He was our age but he was goofy and overweight and had a mouth full of braces that made him talk funny. He was a prime target and we picked on him until he broke, until he wept. And when he would pull himself together, we'd go after him again.

It makes me sick to my stomach to think about, sicker to tell you about it. Here's what I have to do. I have to embrace that God has forgiven me. Maybe you need to embrace that as well. If God has forgiven you, then maybe you need to forgive yourself. For some of you, you may need to recognize it wasn't your fault. Embrace the fact that you cannot change the past, but you can allow God to forgive you, and you can, if you need to, forgive yourself. That is where we start.

That's the first thing we do to overcome shame. The second thing that we do is this, **Embrace that Christ can change the future.** we recognize that we can't change the past, but that Christ can and wants to change our future. No matter how bad it is, how dark it was, how heavy the shame the guilt and the regret is, we have the awesome promise from Romans 8:28, "**We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**" (Romans 8:28, NIV). All things.

Do you think that all things includes the dark things, even the things that we are ashamed of? The things that we would give anything not to have done or not to have experienced? Listen, God can bring something good out of all these dark things. Here's the power. Just like Judas and Peter, who basically did

the same thing. Judas allowed it to take him out all the way to death. Peter, on the other hand, faced Jesus, received his forgiveness, forgave himself, and went on to impact the entire world.

Can you see the swing and the difference? Christ can and wants to change your future, and he can take the lowest point of your life and use it for something good. The very thing that you despise could become a platform for you to help others.

Years ago, a woman made an appointment with me to talk. Usually when people don't tell what they want to talk about, it's pretty heavy stuff—it was and she's given me permission to tell her story. She came to my office, we small-talked for a little bit. I knew she wasn't there to small talk so I asked her, "What's on your mind?" After a long pause, the tears started to flow. She told me the story of the abortion she'd had years prior and how the regret, the remorse of that had never, ever left her, and just about the time she would put it behind her, she get broad-sided and the shame would smash down again.

Essentially she was doing what this series is all about, confessing to God for mercy and confessing to someone else for healing. And in those moments the real healing began. I told her then that God could take this grief and this shame and do something amazing with it. That God would use her to help others, if she let him.

And she let him. She's now a counselor at Lifechoices. And when another woman made the same appointment with me, and cried the same tears, and carried the same shame, she was there to walk through that dark time with her and I'm sure with others.

So here you are, hurting, dark. A counselor said it this way, "You are on a trapeze of shame. There is no net below you and you cannot swing yourself to safety, but God is sending you his own trapeze and the only way you can take it and get to safety is to let go of the shame and grab hold of God with both hands." Today is the day you let go of it. You can't change it, but God can use it. Confess it to him. Confess it to his people and let him have his way.

Let's close with this verse from the Old Testament. It's Job 11:13-17. Internalize it. Hear it. Own it. Experience it. **"If you devote your heart to (God) and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear. You will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by. Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning" (Job 11:13-17, NIV).**

What the evil one meant for harm, the God of all grace and power can and will use for good. "He who conceals his darkness of sin will not prosper. But those who confess and renounce can find mercy."

I pray that what we've learned in this series not only gives you some immediate relief from dark secrets that fester, but that you and I now have the tools to bring things out into the light for the rest of our lives so that we live the life that really is life. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's pray. "God, we ask that in Your holy presence, you would bring healing..."

*I thank Rev. Craig Groeschel, Senior Pastor of Lifechurch.tv for his resources in this series.*