

Dropping The “Good” Image

5th Step – Lesson 1

“We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

1 Timothy 1:12-17 -- I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

- A lot of people (Paul had probably been one of them) go through life thinking, “I’m basically a good person,” and they pour a whole lot of emotion and energy into keeping that image alive. What makes you afraid to admit that there’s something seriously and fundamentally bad about you?
- It would have been very hard for Paul to keep on trying to prop up that image of being a good person, since he had become known throughout the Christian community as a vicious Christian hunter. But he could have tried. Have you ever gone to great lengths to explain away what was bad about you?
- How did that kind of denial affect you?
- Paul says here that God’s love and acceptance, and the power of Jesus’ death on the cross, is directed at sinners, not “good people.” How has that helped you to quit trying to convince yourself how good you are and admit your wrongs?
- How has it helped your relationship with God to admit your wrongs?
- How has it helped your recovery to admit your wrongs?

I'm Bulletproof, Spiritually Speaking

5th Step - Lesson 2

Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

When you're in your old, insane mode of thinking, what happens when you start to realize how messed up your life is and how messed up you are?

- Do you go into denial about how bad it is?
- Do you quickly promise God and yourself that you're going to change?
- Do you launch yourself into some panicky self-improvement program?
- Do you start hating yourself and punishing yourself?
- What else?

Look at how God helped Isaiah out of that way of thinking:

Isaiah 6:1-8—In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

God was letting Isaiah know, "Holy people aren't in any trouble in the presence of God; and Isaiah, I say you are holy." How has God helped you to realize how Jesus has made you holy enough to be in his presence?

The live coal, which should have burned Isaiah's lips, didn't hurt him any more than it hurt the seraph's hand. God's grace made him "bulletproof." How does God's grace help you when you start to feel the shame and embarrassment of your messed up life?

God let Isaiah know that his messes didn't disqualify him from being God's spokesman. How does God's grace change the way you look at Twelfth Step-type stuff? ("Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics...")

Jesus Is The Answer For Shame

A Bible Study On John 8:2-11

5th Step - Lesson 3

A lot of people live in a constant state of feeling shame. For these people there is almost always a voice in the back of their mind telling them things like,

- “You’ve messed up again; you’ll never get it right.”
- “You can’t go back to church and be with decent people any more, after what you’ve done.”
- “When you were abused and mistreated, you really deserved it.”
- “You’re no good anyway, you might as well live that way.”

Those messages in a shame-filled person’s mind are very often a repetition of messages she heard from parents and other people in authority as she was growing up, messages like, “You were a mistake, I never should have had you,” and, “You’re stupid; you never get anything right.” When a person has been beaten down with that kind of undeserved shame, she’s going to have a hard time dealing with real guilt over real sin in any kind of healthy and godly way.

Jesus isn’t in the business of beating people down; he’s in the business of picking them up with his love and forgiveness. As God the Holy Spirit brings you into a closer relationship with Jesus, you’re going to see yourself more and more as the infinitely valuable object of God’s love.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

- Think of something that has brought you shame. What does it feel like to think of that thing?
- What would it be like to find out that the thing that has caused you shame was wiped off the record, as if it had never happened?

John 8:2-11 – At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In verse 3 this woman's secret sin was publicly announced by these religious leaders. What is it like to have people find out about some secret sin?

2. In verses 4-5 the religious leaders made it clear that they believed people fell into one of two categories: "good" people, like themselves, who deserved to live, and "bad" people, like this woman, who deserved to die. What sorts of things have you seen people use to judge who's "good" and who's "bad?"

Have you ever been judged this way by people who thought they were better than you?

Have you ever judged **yourself** the way these religious leaders judged this woman?

3. The religious leaders expected Jesus to either join them in their condemning this woman or to try to bend the rules for her. Instead, verse 6 says he bent down and drew doodles in the sand, the way people doodle on paper when they're bored. What does this tell you about how Jesus feels about shaming and judging?

4. Look at Jesus' reply in verse 7. What is he saying about the idea that the world is divided into "good" people, who deserve to live, and "bad" people, who deserve to die?

5. Look at Jesus' conversation with this woman in verses 10-11. Jesus is telling her that no one had the right to shame and condemn her--that even he himself refuses to shame and condemn her. Compare this with what the Bible says in Hebrews 9:14 – "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" What does this tell you about what God has done about any shame you're living with?

6. Notice, in verse 11, that Jesus tells this woman to start living a changed life only **after** he tells her that he's not going to shame or condemn her. How would **freedom from shame** be a better start for living a new life than **fear of shame**?

CLOSING PRAYER: Take this time to turn your shame over to Jesus for forgiveness and healing, and to turn yourself over to the Holy Spirit for the power to live a new life.

Naming My Problem

5th Step - Lesson 4

When we're talking about what's wrong with us, there's a temptation to keep things kind of vague; for instance, saying, "I admit I sometimes drink a little too much," instead of saying, "I am an alcoholic," or saying, "I haven't been a perfect father," instead of saying, "Here are some mean and irresponsible things I've done to my children..."

But the Fifth Step says, "We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." Naming our problems is an important part of turning our problems over to God.

Psalm 32:1-5 – Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Luke 8:30 – Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

"We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

"Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better." – *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Chapter 5: "How It Works"

- What are some ways we avoid admitting "the exact nature of our wrongs"? (For example: "I admit I'm a sinner" "I admit I'm not perfect and I've made mistakes") What happens when we avoid being exact?
- Q: What if I know something's wrong but I'm not sure of "the exact nature" of my wrong? A: Be as exact as you're able to be. (What helps you be exact about naming your problems?)
- How does it help to know that we're already forgiven and accepted by God?
- How does it help to know that God can do something about my wrongs, that I'm not hopeless?