

Appendix 4

Addressing Shame Overload

sLi Class Discussion

1. What is “Shame Overload”?
2. How does shame overload affect our clients?
3. What are the ramifications if we don’t deal with this?
 - a. Program or shelter participation
 - b. Parenting issues
 - c. Stabilization

The following material is a compilation of much research over years including the sources listed in the bibliography. Although we may not agree with everything the last author listed includes in his extensive work, his ideas are worth considering. Most of the material is written as you would present it to your clients but I always need to check things out for my own healing and growth before I expect to see impact in those I work with so you are best served if you review the material first as if could apply personally.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE, by Robert S. McGee, published by Rapha, 1990 (second edition).

SHAME ON YOU!, by Sara Hines Martin, Broadman Press, 1990.

THE WOUNDED HEART, by Dr. Dan Allender, Navpress, 1990.

LETTING GO OF SHAME, by Ronald and Patricia Potter-Efron, published by Harper and Row, 1989.

LIFE RECOVERY GUIDES, by Dale and Juanita Ryan, published by Intervarsity Press, 1990.

WOUNDED BY SHAME, HEALED BY GRACE by Jeff VanVonderan

“THE LOSS OF SHAME,” Audio cassette program by Malcolm Smith, Box 29747, San Antonio, TX 78229.

“ADDICTION AND SHAME,” video by John Bradshaw

“Shame Overload”, sometimes called Toxic Shame or binding shame, is a condition where a pile up of shame has resulted in behavior issues and erroneous thinking. Toxic shame is a sense of being uniquely and hopelessly flawed. Toxic shame leaves a person feeling different and less valuable than other people.

Jeff VanVonderen in his book developed “The Shame Profile” listed in the left column. The right column addresses some of the results of these characteristics you may see in your clients.

Jeff VanVonderen’s Shame Profile	Implications for shame bound clients
You have a “shame-based” identity	Sees self negatively
You are highly performance-conscious	Try harder
You are unaware of personal “boundaries”	Can’t say no – people pleaser
You martyr your own needs	Being needy is seen as selfish, needs were made to be shameful things
You are frequently unaware of your own feelings	Stuffed – avoid pain at all costs
You are wounded	Must conceal these wounds, often results in feelings of abandonment, emotional desertion
You are tired	Survival is a lot of work
You have incredible “radar”	When you grow up in a place where the main preoccupation is external behavior and how things look you become an expert at noticing how things look. Since it’s been your job to keep everyone satisfied or at peace (except yourself), you’ve become an expert at reading people’s nonverbal signals and following the unwritten rules.
You have a tendency toward addictive behavior	Missed the parental blessing, looking for love in all the wrong places
You can’t tell what normal is	Sometimes uncomfortable in healthy environments
You have a difficult time trusting people	Huge trust issues, begins with no right to depend on others ... moving to perception there is no one to depend on
You are possessive in relationships	Can’t afford to lose. Lose would indicate self failure
You have a high need for control	

When we become shamed, everything about us is shame – feelings, actions, identity.

A shame bound person may either be more than human

- Controlling
- Perfectionism
- Playing God
- “human doing instead of human being”

Or less than human

- Abusing
- Tormenting
- Violating
- Slob
- Underachiever

When I am shame bound, I transfer my interpersonal shame to others, I present a false self, acting out roles, being a clown.

How does shame overload affect our clients?

- Presence of toxic or binding shame prevents feeling or benefiting from healthy shame. Healthy shame is needful in order to be ok with human limits
- Usually connected with significant relationship
- Motivation for self destructive behavior
- Shame is either dealt with or passed on

Behavior is “try harder” or “give up”, “cover-up” or “drop out”

What are the ramifications if we do not deal with this?

Program or shelter participation

- Control issues/
- criticism/
- blame/
- responsibility/
- guarded lest I ever be unguarded

Parenting issues

- Shame the is not appropriately released is passed on to the next generation

Stabilization

- Strong tie to addictive behavior, desire for mood altering drugs Shame medicated by addiction and acting out generates more shame

Shame is not the same as guilt

Before addressing the stored up shame we need to help the clients understand the difference between shame and guilt. The origin is different and the solution is different. Next comes the understanding of the difference between real guilt and unreal guilt.

The following charts help to explain this to clients

Guilt happens when I violate what God says	
Guilt happens when I violate my value system	
Guilt says I made a mistake	Shame says I am a _____
Guilt says I did something wrong	Shame says I am _____ and _____

Solution		
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There is a difference between Healthy shame and toxic shame

Not all shame is bad or to be avoided. Without shame we would not understand our need for a Savior. We would not change our ways when we have gotten on a wrong path. But healthy shame is quite different from the Toxic shame.

Think about what you know about other toxic materials. Vitamin A is very healthy in the amounts we need but if we overdose we can develop a disease called Hypervitaminosis A. Too much of a good thing is not good. Nuclear power is a great benefit to our lives unless it is put to toxic levels. Sun rays are healthy when absorbed in moderation.

Healthy Shame	Toxic Shame
Embarrassment	Feel flawed
Humility	“No good”
Correction	Can’t admit mistakes
Let’s me know I have limits	“I am worthless”
I make mistakes	“I am a mistake
I know I am not God	
Gives me permission to be human	

Why should I bother with the process of releasing shame?

Until I deal with toxic shame, I can’t/don’t experience healthy shame
 Until I deal with toxic shame, my relationship with others is affected.
 Carrying toxic shame causes wrong motivation in my life...

Do-gooders, over committed, trying to make self ok, try harder life style

Until I deal with toxic shame, I will be paralyzed with a fear of failure.

The next page is a diagram to help clients understand the origin of their toxic shame buildup and what happens if they continue the build up. Not listed on the chart but useful in conversations is to explain how each of these sources of toxic shame are appropriately removed:

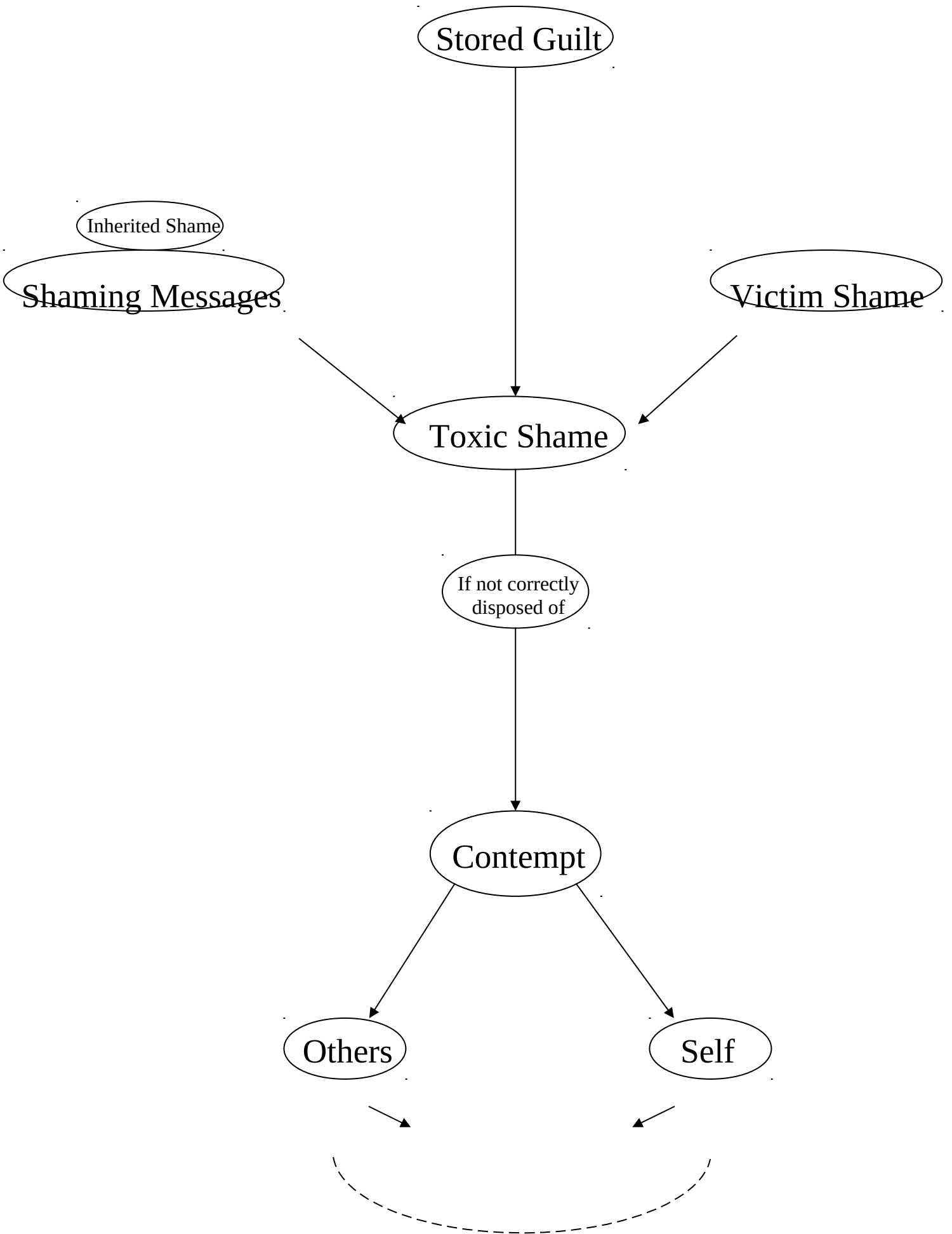
Stored real guilt – ask for forgiveness and rely on the Savior’s sacrifice

Stored unreal guilt – stop believing a lie

Inherited shame – hand it back, it does not belong to you

Victim shame – seek healing by replacing lies with truth... it is not your sin nor your responsibility.

Seek help for any of these that seem to have a grip on you through prayer and wise godly counselors



WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED BINDING SHAME?

Shame means I wear masks. I have the feeling of needing to always be on guard lest the real truth be exposed. Shame is about fear of exposure. Shame shows up in hiding, withdrawing, feelings of depression and low worth. Typically the person is always looking down, talking without making eye contact. You often observe blameshifting and excuse-making. Sometimes stored shame translate into anger and rage expressed without provocation.

Shame is not guilt. Guilt is a God-given thermometer that tells us we have done something wrong that needs to be corrected. Guilt is about our misplaced our need to seek and receive forgiveness. Shame is about guilt that got misplaced or stored.

Shame is an uncomfortable word. Shame is seldom talked about – we avoid thinking about it and certainly avoid acknowledging it. We are usually ashamed of having shame issues and so the very nature of shame perpetuates itself.

STRATEGIES WE USE TO NOT HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE SHAME

Any method that we would use to numb-out allows us to not think and not feel. This might be abuse of mood altering substances. It includes any of the myriads of addictions. Some of the less suspected strategies would include the following:

1. Withdrawal – the wearing the masks
2. Escapism – ex. Workaholism
3. Paralysis – ex. “stuck”
4. Flattering energy
5. Perfectionism – (can’t make any mistakes)
6. Criticism
7. Rage
8. Exhibitionism – ex. “the clown”
9. Arrogance

STORED SHAME PREVENTS RELATIONSHIP

Shame changes how I see myself and consequently how I think others see me. Here are some examples of how the commonly used defenses would aid in preventing relationship:

1. Practicing withdrawal would give me a way out when I sense you are getting so close to me that you will discover my inadequacies.
2. Denial would prevent me seeking help in anyway that would make me look needy or helpless, ie. going to counseling would make me appear crazy; asking for street directions would make me look inept.
3. Perfectionism would keep at arms length any honest practical friend that ends up suggesting any need for change in my life.
4. Rather than be in touch with feelings of inadequacy, rage is an easier response to any meaningful relationship (parent-child, husband-wife) where my position may be seen as being threatened.
5. Exhibitionism as a defense prevents relationship by adding more opportunity for shame making experiences
6. Putting others down (a form of arrogance) as a technique for not dealing with one’s own shame drives deeper wedges in relationships with others as I add to their shame buckets.

RECEIVING AND GIVING SHAME MESSAGES

A “shaming message” is a comment, a look, or an action that communicates to someone a negative statement about their identity. It is a negative statement about who they are...their worth as a person.

Samples of Shaming Messages
*A disdainful look *”You’re an idiot”
*A slap on the face *”You don’t belong here”
“I am useless”

Shaming messages include a need to increase ones control over the one receiving the message. When I shame myself, I am usually feeling out of control (not experiencing the “fruit of the Spirit,” the God-given self control). When I shame another, I am sometimes feeling too controlled by this person or the situation and in an effort to readjust that out-of-control feeling, I put them down in an effort to boost myself up.

Part of the healing process then is going to include both a proper understanding of control and a healthier self concept.

The opposite of a “shaming message” is not just a compliment. A compliment can be a statement about what a person does rather than about who the person is. The opposite of a shaming message is a message of honor or respect. It may include a compliment about the person’s character or personality.

Samples of compliments
“You do nice things”
“You are pretty”
“You sing great”

Samples of honoring statements
“I like you for who you are”
“You’re a beautiful person”
“The message of your music blesses me”

T F *I will feel better about myself if I diminish others.

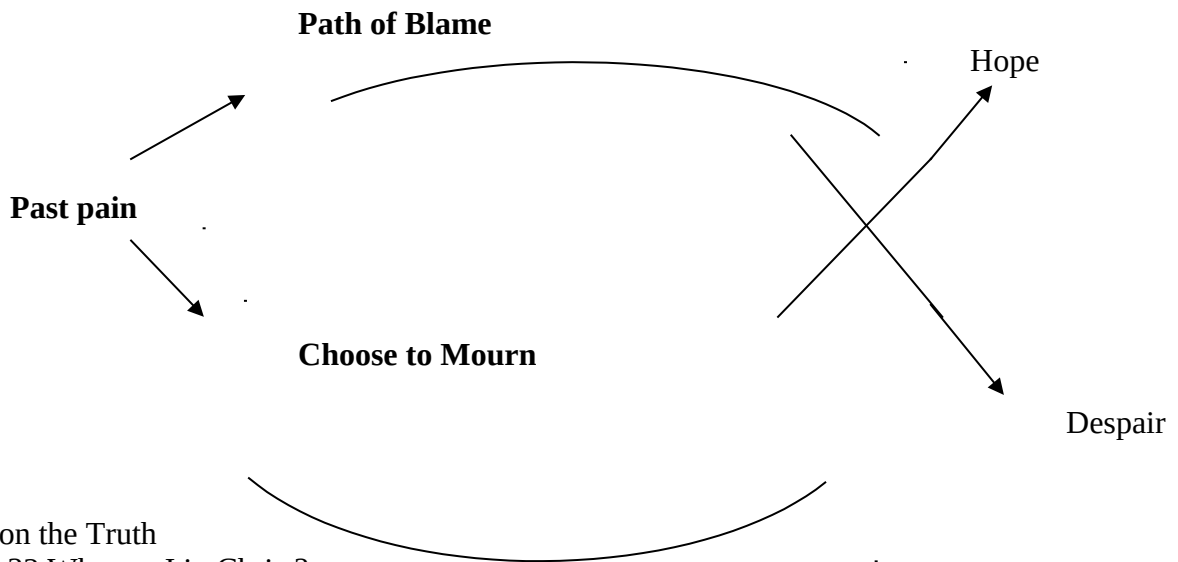
When I cut down an important person in my life, I am making a statement about me. My parent, my child, my spouse or other family member is part of my own belonging, my identity. My friends are part of my own reputation, my sense of choice in life. My boss or my employees represent my sense of my own wisdom or responsibility. To cut down others translates internally to personal put downs. To honor these same people translate to sense of personal respect.

HOW DO I STOP INTERNALIZING SHAMING MESSAGES AND MOVE TOWARD THE FREEDOM OF SELF RESPECT AND OTHER RESPECT?

1. Shame must be acknowledged whenever it happens
 - A. Shame from my own sin needs to be exposed to the Lord. (Psalm 32:3-7)
 - B. A shaming message must be identified and labeled as such.
Ex. "When I heard you say ... I felt shame like you were making a statement about my worth as a human being."
2. We learn to distinguish between healthy shame and attacks on our identity and worth.
Ex. (Self talk) I made a mistake but I'm not a mistake.
3. We need to identify the strategies we use to deal with shame on the surface and confront those strategies when we catch ourselves engaging in them. (See list of strategies)
4. Rekindle your wonder about yourself. Ask questions.
Ex. What influenced me to think this way?
What trained me to respond to others this way?
What positive quality do I have and like about myself that causes these problems when done to an extreme?
5. Get back in touch with WHO you are from God's perspective.
(1 Timothy 4:4; Colossians 2:10; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 1:4, 18, 2:5, 10)

Steps to Releasing the Shame

1. Acknowledgement
2. Hope Ps. 43:5 Romans 5:5 Hope does not disappoint or put us to _____
3. Claim promises – Replace lies with truth Romans 10:11 Whoever _____ will not be ashamed
4. Learning to be like Jesus and despise (refuse) the shame Heb. 12:2, Is. 50:6-7
5. 2 Cor 4:2 Renounce taking on shame from guilt and wrong doing 2 Cor. 7:10 Godly sorrow vs. _____ sorrow
6. Choose mourning (Mt. 5:4, Ps 30:5, 126:5,6) over _____(Is. 58:9 Gen. 3:12, 13)



7. Focus on the Truth
John 8:32 Who am I in Christ?
1 John 2:28 in _____ with Him I will not be ashamed

SELF ASSESSMENT

(From The Search for Significance, by Robert S. McGee,
Published by Rapha, pp. 105-107.)

Read each of the following statements, then choose the term from the top of the test which best describes your response. Put the number of that term in the blank beside each statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Always	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Very Seldom	Never

- ___ 1. I often think about past failures and experiences of rejection.
- ___ 2. There are certain things about my past which I cannot recall without
experiencing strong, painful emotions (such as guilt, shame, anger, fear...).
- ___ 3. I seem to make the same mistakes over and over again.
- ___ 4. There are certain aspects of my character that I want to change, but I don't
believe I can ever successfully do so.
- ___ 5. I feel inferior.
- ___ 6. There are aspects of my appearance that I cannot accept.
- ___ 7. I am generally disgusted with myself.
- ___ 8. I feel that certain experiences have basically ruined my life.
- ___ 9. I perceive of myself as an immoral (dirty) person.
- ___ 10. I feel that I have lost the opportunity to experience a complete and wonderful life.
- ___ Total (add up the numbers you have placed in the blanks)

Interpretation of score:

If your score is...

57-70

God has apparently given you a very strong appreciation for His love and unconditional acceptance. You seem to be freed from the shame that plagues most people. (Some people who score this high are either greatly deceived, or have become calloused to their emotions as a way to suppress pain.)

47-56

Shame controls your responses rarely or only in certain situations. Again, the exceptions are those who are not honest with themselves.

37-46

When you are experiencing emotional problems, they may relate to a sense of shame. Upon reflection, you will probably relate many of your previous decisions to feelings of worthlessness. Many of your previous decisions will also be affected by low self-esteem unless you take direct action to overcome it.

27-36

Shame forms a generally negative backdrop to your life. There are probably few days that you are not affected in some way by shame. Unfortunately, this robs you of the joy and peace your salvation was meant to bring.

0-26

Experiences of shame dominate your memory, and have probably resulted in a great deal of depression. These problems will remain until some definite action is taken. In other words, this condition will not simply disappear one day; time alone cannot heal your pain. You need to experience deep healing in your self-concept, in your relationship with God, and in your relationship with others.