

The background of the entire cover is a grayscale photograph of a person's face, which is partially obscured by a large, irregularly torn piece of paper. The tear reveals a dark, shadowed area, possibly the person's mouth or a deep crease in their skin. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

EDWARD T. WELCH

\* \* \*

HOW GOD LIFTS THE PAIN OF  
WORTHLESSNESS & REJECTION

\* \* \*

# SHAME INTERRU PTED

“Ed Welch finds us hiding in our shame and draws us out to be re-clothed by Christ. He surprises us again with the deep relevance of God’s Word—even Leviticus—to the secret fears that dominate our daily lives. This brutally honest book is for everyone.”

**Mike Wilkerson**, Pastor and Director of Biblical Counseling at Mars Hill Church; author of *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*.

“Shame is everywhere. It is obvious on the faces of those who have been abused. But because of sin, it lies in the depths of every human heart. Ed Welch shines the light of the gospel of Christ into the dynamics of shame and explains how it is overcome in the honor Christ obtained for us through his identification with our shame on the cross.”

**Eric Johnson**, Lawrence and Charlotte Hoover Professor of Pastoral Care, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Director of the Society for Christian Psychology

“This side of heaven, we all struggle with shame and guilt. Ed Welch has served the church well by writing a thorough, practical, Christ-centered treatment of this difficult subject. Your love for Jesus will be greatly increased as you reflect on the way His work on the cross has freed you from the paralyzing effects of sin.”

**Steve Viars**, Senior Pastor of Faith Baptist Church; author of *Putting Your Past in Its Place: Moving Forward in Freedom and Forgiveness*

“In *Shame Interrupted*, Ed Welch reminds us that the gospel really is good news. He provides a candid perspective on the suffocating reality of human shame with an honest courage that is only possible because of Christ’s healing love. Dr. Welch brings the wisdom of an experienced counselor and the resilient hope of a Christ-follower into this compassionate book.”

**Mark R. McMinn, PhD**, Author of *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling*

“Dr. Welch seems to know what the reader needs long before he or she knows and recognizes that shamed people are often hopeless

people. *Shame Interrupted* is not just a remedy for persons caught in paralyzing shame; it gives them hope that it is possible to live a life that feels clean and holy. That is a gift.”

**Jeffrey S. Black PhD**, Chair and Professor Graduate Program, in Counseling, Philadelphia Biblical University; Licensed Psychologist

“This book proclaims a message of hope and healing. Ed Welch calls us to identify with Jesus because he identified with us, and shows that the answer is to turn to Christ for relief from shame, not inward. Ed’s book is a robustly biblical, deeply personal, and powerfully high-octane gospel answer to the universal human experience of shame.”

**Justin Holcomb**, Pastor, Mars Hill Church; Executive Director of the Resurgence; adjunct professor of theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; co-author of *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*

“Ed’s book has immediate application into my own spiritual journey and the women I journey with who are seeking freedom from the shame of their own relational and sexual brokenness. *Shame Interrupted* encouraged and nurtured me in the sweet truths of the gospel that come when we face shame through Jesus Christ and the lens of God’s Word.”

**Ellen Dykas**, Women’s Ministry Coordinator, Harvest USA

“Ed Welch has given the family of God a tremendous treasure in his book, *Shame Interrupted*. Serving for many years as a pastor and shepherd of people, I know firsthand how this issue plagues many in the body of Christ. As always, Dr. Welch has written with loving concern for those who are hurting and with biblical accuracy. That combination makes his handling of this topic a resource that will help people address shame properly and will help those who seek to equip others in this process.”

**Dr. Bryan Hughes**, Senior Pastor of Grace Bible Church, Bozeman, MT

“Welch has given us a profound and comprehensive work on the often neglected topic of shame, addressing the issue with pastoral

sensitivity, biblical acuity, and practical advice. In our world, people are asking less about guilt and more about how to deal with shame in their lives and in their past. This is a great resource for pastors, counselors, and for anyone interested.”

**Rankin Wilbourne**, Lead Pastor, Pacific Crossroads Church, Los Angeles, CA

“With the skill and care of a farmer turning over his soil in spring, Ed manages to unearth the shame buried within the human heart. The title will cause some to shy away with a degree of self-denial saying, ‘I don’t have this problem.’ If you came from the line of Adam, you have this problem. Having taught the Word for many years, I am not ashamed to admit how much I learned about my own heart and the redemptive power of the gospel to set me free.”

**D. Michael Minter**, Senior Pastor of Reston Bible Church, VA

“As someone who has had a long struggle with the demeaning, paralyzing, idol-fueling power of shame, I am so thankful for Ed Welch’s newest book, *Shame Interrupted*. Ed shows us how the gospel of God’s grace not only cancels the legal guilt of sin, but also how it breaks the lingering power of shame. As Jesus works in our hearts, to heal and free us from shame, we don’t become proud triumphalists, but ‘boasters in weakness’—men and women gladdened and gentled by the irrepressible love of our grace-full Bridegroom, Jesus, set free to serve him and love others. This is such a practical and encouraging read!”

**Scotty Smith**, Pastor for Preaching, Franklin, TN; author of *Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel-Centered Faith*

“Ed Welch creates a safe place to deal with shame. Whether your shame is worn as a scarlet letter for all to see, or invisibly written on your heart, he turns shame on its head, showing us how to move away from shame and proudly wear the robes of honor that God himself bestows on us. Whether you are trying to deal with shame yourself or ministering to others, I would encourage you to read this book to guide you in the process of restoring hope and joy to those who hang their heads in shame.”

**Janet Nygren**, Co-author in the *Bringing the Bible to Life Series*; Director of Assimilation at Princeton Presbyterian Church



# SHAME INTERRUPTED

HOW GOD LIFTS THE PAIN  
OF WORTHLESSNESS  
AND REJECTION

Edward T. Welch



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404  
www.newgrowthpress.com  
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Published 2012.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®),  
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Cover Design: faceoutbooks, www.faceoutbooks.com  
Interior Design and Typesetting: North Market Street Graphics, Lancaster, PA

ISBN-13: 978-1-935273-98-1  
ISBN-10: 1-935273-98-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Welch, Edward T., 1953—  
Shame interrupted : how God lifts the pain of worthlessness and rejection /  
Edward T. Welch.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-935273-98-1 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-935273-98-1 (alk. paper)

1. Shame—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BT714.W45 2012

233'.4—dc23

2011034606

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14

4 5 6 7 8

*To*  
*David Powlison,*  
*kindred spirit and friend.*  
*Working side by side is an honor.*





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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am especially indebted to:

—the administration, staff, counselors, and faculty of CCEF. Thank you. There is no way I could do anything without your help, instruction, and fellowship. Roslyn, thank you for quietly picking up many of my responsibilities so I could be more focused on this project.

—counselees who waited patiently for me to understand the experience of shame. This is a start.

—friends who read early versions of this book and gave careful feedback. Thank you.

—Susan Lutz. What a gift to have you edit, clarify, and refine. Once again, thank you for making something I have written much better.

—my wife, Sheri. You were patient (again) when I was preoccupied, and you were always available to listen to ideas. Thank you. I am honored to be your partner and friend.

Over the last few years, I have gradually absorbed ideas from many excellent works on shame in the New Testament and the ancient Near East, so this book is light on endnotes. Here are some of the authors and texts that shaped my thinking:

Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990). This isn't a scholarly study of shame in the Ancient Near East, but Dan put shame on the evangelical map with this book.

David Arthur de Silva, *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SBL Dissertation Series no.152 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). De Silva gives a nice overview of the honor material and helped me see it in Hebrews.

Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Gorman does a great job with Philippians 2. Inspiring.

Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). This book provided a significant boost to my own thinking on shame. Neyrey carefully documents the discourse about honor and shame in New Testament culture and demonstrates how Matthew has this background in mind as he organizes his Gospel. He includes helpful material about worth and value. You can find the entire text online at Google books.

Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005). Sklar wrestles with why the Hebrew word for atonement or covering extends to both sin and impurity that isn't from personal sin. The book is fairly technical but fundamental to the discussion of shame.

Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible* in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (346), D. J. A. Clines and P. R. Davies, editors (New York: Sheffield

Academic Press, 2002). Stiebert offers a helpful warning to those who make shame and honor central, especially in the Prophets.

Richard P. Thompson, “Gathered at the Table: Holiness and Ecclesiology in the Gospel of Luke,” in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, Kent E. Browsers and Andy Johnson, editors (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 76–94. Thompson is one of several scholars to notice Luke’s interest in meals. This article looks at all the significant dining events in Luke.

Shame greatly hurts or greatly helps mankind.

—Homer

# Chapter 1

## THE QUIET KILLER

I hate shame.

I know there is a place for it. Utter shamelessness is not what we are after. I have learned much through the shame I've experienced and there are times when I should experience more of it. But I still hate it. I hate how pervasive it is, how it stalks in disguise beneath so many modern problems. Look under anger, fear, even guilt, and you will find a root of shame. I hate to see the suffering. People are dying from it—some quickly, others slowly. It is the heart disease of this and every era. Shame is Tolkien's Ringwraiths: "The Nazgûl came again . . . like vultures that expect their fill of doomed men's flesh."<sup>1</sup>

I asked a group of one hundred students if they experienced shame. They were an excellent class: ages twenty-two to sixty-eight, male and female, thoughtful, wise, and adept at helping others through complicated problems. Not too many people want to acknowledge shame in their lives, so I didn't expect many to raise their



hands—maybe a few auction-like finger twitches or head nods. But I did begin the discussion with an illustration of shame in my own life, which probably made the class feel a little more comfortable.

“We are going to talk about shame this evening. Have any of you experienced shame?” I hoped at least one person would come to my rescue and leave me feeling less exposed.

Then, as if to guarantee that no one would raise his or her hand, I added, “Debilitating shame?”

Immediately, the entire class raised their hands in unison.

I was hoping for one or two hands. To see so many broke my heart. Who would have thought? It was as if they simply needed a place where it was okay to acknowledge their shame.

I hope this book is a place where you can identify shame, acknowledge it in your life, bring hope to it, and then be humbled—not humiliated—as you receive comforting words and cleansing acts from God. I hope this book is a safe place.

Though the book will start by jumping into a number of descriptions of shame, the answers to shame will unfold gradually because the Bible has so much to say about it. Its words can’t be shared or assimilated quickly. It is a story that builds until you can actually notice beauty—without the sense of foreboding that it will soon be swallowed up by pain and disgrace.

What is shame?

Shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. You feel exposed and humiliated.

Or, to strengthen the language,

You are disgraced because you acted less than human, you were treated as if you were less than human, or you were associated with something less than human, and there are witnesses.

These definitions can get us started. There isn't one mandatory definition or description for shame, but any definition will include certain elements. For example, you can expect images of being an outsider, naked, and unclean. And don't forget shame's public nature. Guilt can be hidden; shame feels like it is always exposed.

Once you identify shame, you can find it everywhere.

A middle-aged man seemed fine to others, though he himself felt like a little boy, stuck in the past, inadequate, small, and worthless. A decent job couldn't erase the words and actions of his parents. Some of the words were all too common: "You will never amount to anything." Those words were bad enough. Now add his parents' indifference to his recounting of his school day, coupled with their enthusiasm whenever his sisters appeared. No wonder he had a lingering sense that something was very wrong with him. That sense is called shame.

Or you can find shame in a recently married woman who feels dirty after a sexual encounter with her husband. She remembers some inappropriate sexual touching by her brothers and wonders what else happened that she doesn't remember.

Sometimes the descriptions of shame in this book will be jolting. For example, "You *are* an outcast" is blunt, matter-of-fact, and a bit impolite. A nicer way to say this would be, "You *feel as if* you are an outcast"; "You *feel as if* you are worthless, though you really aren't." Shame doesn't seem as oppressive when you insert enough *feel-as-ifs*. If you only *feel* shameful, maybe it can be covered over by some affirming self-talk and you'll be good to go: "Don't pay attention to what you feel because it isn't true. You really are acceptable and worthy. Clean as a whistle. Really! Just ignore the fact that you feel naked, contaminated, and rejected. Think positive."

Well, that is not true. Shame is not a mirage. It is very real. A sexually violated woman feels contaminated by what has been done to her, and *she really is contaminated*. A person who has lived with

rejection can't neutralize it with happy thoughts. Shame is like dirt. No matter how it happened, you are a mess and something has to be done about it. When you are dirty, there is *no feel-as-if* about it. Wishful thinking is ineffective. Psychiatric medications, drugs or alcohol, a change in perspective, and self-affirmation are equally ineffective. Shame demands something much more potent than these superficial treatments.

The first steps out of shame will be the hardest. These are the anti-denial steps in which we will put shame into words. You can't do battle with something nameless, and too often shame eludes accurate identification. So we will search for words that bring shame out into the open, where it can be seen and fought against. The words you read in this book, though you might not want to hear them, will be familiar to you; many of them have been your long-time companions. At times they will make you want to turn away, but don't give up; stay with it. Identification is only the first step. It isn't the whole story.

After that, you will hear God's words to the shamed, and you will discover shame's opposite: You are acceptable. You will receive honor, value, worth, even glory, and it will be public.

At first you might be suspicious, as if God's words are too good to be true. Are they just more happy thoughts, more positive self-affirmation? Don't turn away. As those words pile up—as you can no longer deny God's accepting love—you will want to turn toward him and hear more.

Listen for the love, hate the shame, and have no tolerance for resignation. That's the plan.

# Shame Uncovered



We are familiar with guilt. Shame is more elusive. But once you name it, you can see it everywhere. That is one of the goals for the next few chapters—to see it everywhere. You might be tempted to say “Enough already” after the first page or two because it can be painful to rehearse shameful experiences. But you can’t hear good news about shame unless you first identify it. As you do, you will discover that shame afflicts us all.

What is shame?

You are shunned.

Faces are turned away from you.

They ignore you, as if you didn't exist.

You are naked.

Faces are turned toward you.

They stare at you, as if you were hideous.

You are worthless, and it's no secret.

You are of little or no value to those whose  
opinions matter to you.