

*What to Do When
You Are Feeling
Shame:
A Guided Exercise*



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Precious sister!

I am so happy you are here.

The lies of shame often go deep and are often believed at a young age.

No one gets through life without believing some. Without being trapped by some. It's just part of life and being human. So, don't get down on yourself. You are in excellent company.

When you start identifying the lies that you believe, the lies that shape your actions and thoughts, and then smash them with the truth, freedom comes.

And it is exciting!

And that is what I want for you.

Blessings on your journey to process and release and heal from shame.

You are brave to go on this journey.

This journey will be hard and yet so rewarding. You will find out truths about yourself that may feel icky. You may need to think you need to be perfect for others to love you (yes I believed that), but when you see it for the lie it is and latch onto the real truth, freedom will come.

The truth really does set us free.

Above all, give yourself compassion, empathy, and grace. They are healing powers. And it is what God gives us in bounty, overflowing, if we let him.

We may think he is judging us and condemning us and keeping a score card on us, but the opposite is true. He is waiting for us to turn to him. He is waiting to help us. He is ready to come running towards us and give us a big hug and offer us a feast, just like he did the prodigal son.

The lies we believe about ourselves, "I am unlovable unless I am perfect," we often foist upon God. We think he looks at us through the same lies we look at

ourselves though. That he holds us to the same expectations as we hold ourselves.

But the truth is he is the most loving, empathetic, forgiving, and grace giving person you will ever encounter.

If you don't believe me, learn about him. Study his attributes. Learn his plan for you. Pay attention to how Jesus treated people. Read the parable of the prodigal son. And download the [Know Your Identity: 31 Ways God Sees You free PDF](#).

You and I are the prodigal son.

These guided exercises that follow are things that have helped me deal with past and present shame. They are my gift to you.

Of course, they are not the only way to process and deal with shame, but they have worked for me and been helpful.

I pray they help you on your journey.

When going through these prompts, your answers can be written down, journaled, prayed, or done in your mind or out loud.

You can do them in order, or out of order. You can do a few, or all of them. Find what works for you.

Blessings and healing on your journey!

Remember: You are a precious blessing to this world!

Theresa

What to do when you are feeling shame.

Shame is a liar.

It lies about our identity. Who we are.

It likes to take what we believe and twists it into a half lie.

Whispering various lies again and again, until we don't remember the truth and think we are the defective ones.

We have all fallen for and believed the lies of shame. It's part of being human. But the beauty is we can replace the lies of shame with the truth.

Which brings us freedom. Joy. Peace. Confidence.

One way to address shame and heal from it is to learn about shame. How it works. What is its goal. How it attacks us. Ways we are shamed. What shame feels like. And more. [This page was created with this in mind.](#) It has a question and answer format at the bottom and addresses many questions you may have about shame.

Shame also likes to link one event to another event. And then another. Weaving a convoluted cobweb. If we pay attention, we will see a pattern to our shame. The lies it promotes, and the things we feel shame for.

If our teacher shames us for our art picture in 4th grade, we may feel that same identity lie wrapped in shame bubbling up as an adult when someone questions our newly painted living room. Or tells us we have no creativity. Or asks why we planted our flowerbed with so many colors.

When this happens, we can process our shame and with these steps:

1. Be aware of when you feel shame bubbling up inside you. It can be shame from something new and recent. Or shame from long ago. When you feel shame spreading over your thoughts and emotions, process your emotions and thoughts (then or later when you have some time).

Ask: What am I feeling and why? Does this remind me of other times I felt shamed? What am I trying to hide and not show others? Why? What lies am I believing about myself? Do I see a pattern here? What is it?

Fill in the blanks: I feel . . (emotion). . . . because . . . (what happened/ action or words) . . . and it is making me think that (the lie or mistruth you are thinking about yourself).

To be able to identify shame and know when we are feeling it, we need to learn about what shame is, its mission, how it affects us, and what it feels like. Need more information? [You Are Not Meant to Live in Shame](#) and [The Symptoms of Shame and the Four Ways It Makes You Feel. Everything You Need to Know About Shame: Including How to Heal From It](#)

2. Look at what you believe or think about yourself. Often it is not true. Shame likes to [attack our identity](#), who we are (what we often cannot change), not what we do (what we can change).

To identify some of the messages you believe about shame, [take the Shame Quizz](#). Don't worry, it is totally confidential.

Look at what you are feeling about yourself. Is it true? Would my best friend or God say it is true? Am I really defective, or just being human? How much truth is there to what I am feeling or believing about myself?

We need to quit thinking not being good enough at everything makes us defective. That a weakness means we are defective. That not having talent in an area or not being good at something or not achieving our goal makes us defective. Not enough. A failure. Often it is the way we are judging ourselves that makes us feel shame. We can be bad at something without feeling shame. Or make a mistake without feeling shame. Or not accomplish our goal without feeling shame. Aren't we sometimes the person causing ourselves shame? Can we hold ourselves accountable and still give ourselves grace and empathy and see ourselves as not having to be like everyone else or good at everything?

3. Is this something you should be feeling shame over? It is not uncommon for us to feel shame over something that is not ours to feel shame over.

We may feel shame about our parent's divorce, our kid's mistakes, our poor childhood, past abuse. But all those things were done by others. They choose those actions, not us. These things affect us, but they are not our fault or something we chose to do. They may be the triggers or actions that initiated the lies we believe about our identity and self. They may have caused us to feel shame and think something was wrong with us. But we don't have to carry shame about them any longer.

Carrying shame that really belongs to others, happens to all humans. Often because [we misinterpret the event / actions / or words at the time](#). But now that we are older and wiser we can look at these events / words / or actions and realize that we have been carrying shame that was not ours to carry. Knowing this can help us release our shame and break old patterns and beliefs.

Should I be carrying the shame I am feeling? Can I go back and reinterpret the action / situation / or words in a different way that can allow me to release and put down the shame (more on this later)?

There is a big difference between guilt and shame. Shame is often something done to us, while guilt is something we did. Shame links to our identity and who we are, while guilt is about our actions.

4. Identify the lie or message that shame is telling you. Does this lie or message tie into one of your core beliefs? "I am weak if I need help." "My feelings and needs don't matter." "I must be perfect for others to love me." Etc. Identify the lie and then find the truth that will smash the lie.

The lie: I must be perfect for others to love me. The truth: No one is perfect. I love others who are not perfect, and others love me in my un-perfectness. My value does not depend on my actions, or me being perfect, but in my being a human being. A child of God who he declares is lovable and valuable.

We often pick up and adopt shame messages from our upbringing, society, family, friends, work and school environment, etc. They may not be tied to an event or specific incident. We may have just absorbed these spoken and unspoken messages. These shame messages, though, cause us shame when we fail to uphold them. Our mom may have always been busy and telling us not to be lazy. The shame message we may have heard is that "I am lazy if I relax. Stop before the work is done. Or play very much." Which means this message or life belief can cause us shame when we try and relax. Or when we have nothing to do on vacation. It can cause us to overwork and not enjoy rest.

The lie: I am lazy if I relax or do nothing. Therefore, I must be productive and busy or I am lazy. The Truth: Everyone gets tired and needs to rest. Resting is not lazy, and it can make us more productive. I can rest and still be productive and a valuable human being.

5. Time to talk to yourself. Now that you have gathered the above information, it is now time to put it into perspective.

Talk (write / journal) to yourself as your best friend would, or how a loving God does. Address the incident and your feelings, emotions, and beliefs about yourself.

Maybe you remember the art teacher shaming you and now you are feeling shame about comments about your living room paint color. Remind yourself (in the voice of your best friend or God) that you had a right to draw pictures that made you happy as a child. You were doing the best you could. The art teacher, though, did not have the right to shame you and your art in front of all the class. That was her choice, not yours, and she was being a bully. You did nothing to deserve her treatment. Not drawing the kind of picture, the art teacher was looking for does not make you a bad person or a bad artist and uncreative. Nor does painting the living room a color another person does not like. People like different colors and not everyone will like your choice. And that is okay. It does not say you are bad, or can't chose colors. They can think what they like, but you are going to keep enjoying the color you painted it. God loves you whether you are creative or not. And your worth comes from being a valuable human, not form your artistic talents or what others think.

6. Look at the person who shamed you with new eyes. Often the event has [more to do with the person who is shaming you](#), than with you. They are taking their frustration, anger, bitterness, or unhappiness out on you. Not because you deserve it, but because you are handy and they can.

The art teacher, you learned as the school year went on, was a stickler for only a certain type of pictures. The art had to look a certain way, or she didn't like it. It had nothing to do with you as a person. She saw your picture and took her frustration out on you. It was her bad, not your bad. Maybe she even felt like a failure because you did not understand her instructions or what she wanted.

This does not excuse the art teacher, the way she acted, nor the hurt it caused, but if you can see you were NOT responsible for the teacher's actions and words, that instead she is responsible and choose to act that way, than you will NOT feel so ashamed and realize others are in charge of their own actions and words.

7. Look for the experience. Instead of thinking this defines you ("this makes you a bad person"), look at what you can learn from it ("next time I can take a different approach").

Thinking about the art teacher and the hurt her comments caused, can help you be more careful with her words. You can develop empathy for others. This experience can help you sympathize with others.

You can learn to NOT take responsibility for the actions and words of others and think their response is your fault and only if you had . . . (drawn a better picture) . . . than it all would have been avoided. (None of us have this much control over others or situations. See the lie here?)

8. Have empathy for yourself and if possible, the other person. Empathy is one of the best cures for shame.

Give yourself empathy (and that little child you were), for being shamed by the art teacher, for believing the lie that something was wrong with you. For thinking that something is still wrong with you if others don't like your paint choice. Speak to yourself kindly and out loud if possible. "Oh honey, there was nothing wrong with that picture or you. You used to love to color and draw and it made you so happy. And then the art teacher shamed you and you thought something was wrong with you. But nothing was. She just didn't like your picture."

If you are able, look at the person who shamed you with empathy.

"Art teacher, you must have been pretty unhappy with something to treat me like that. I bet you learned to shame others because someone shamed you. Art doesn't have to be a certain way; it can have variety. How much different art would have been if you had learned that art didn't have to all be the same way. Controlled. Because I bet you treated your life and self the same way. Trying to control it instead of enjoy it."

Remember that seeing the past through new eyes or the person's eyes does not take away the hurt you felt. It does not make it right. Or lessen the impact. But it does help you process and release the emotions they invoke and put the experience in a different context where it will not be so powerful.

9. Think about what you need to release. Old outdated attitudes. Bitterness. Anger at yourself. Let them all go. They are just hurting you, not the other person.

Remember to release yourself. Punishing yourself does not motivate you to change or do things differently in the future.

10. Think about what you would do differently. Knowing what you now know about yourself and the other person, how could you react if something similar happens again? Play it out in your mind and enjoy having control over the situation and your reactions to their words this time around.

Maybe you would set a boundary. Speak up. Or hold your tongue because of the uselessness of speaking up, but in your mind you speak up and label the incident for what it is. ("There goes Mr. Critical again. Putting me down to inflate himself.")

Maybe you decide to say, "It's not a color everyone likes, but I sure like it," when the next person comments on your living room paint color.

11. Share with a trusted other. Be vulnerable. When you talk about something, it stops being a secret and it loses its power over you. Sharing with a trusted person helps you gain a different perspective and see the event or person in a different light.

We may feel we are the only person this happened to, when in fact there are often lots of other people in the same category. Able to relate to the situation or the feelings we experienced.

Often when we talk to another person, they bring up things we hadn't thought of. "That was inappropriate of the art teacher," our friend will say, and we will after all these years realize she is right. And now see the situation differently.

12. Ask God for healing from shame. Allow him to be a part of each of these steps. He cares about your hurts and pain and wants you to process these and move past them.

Talk to him about your shameful experiences. Write letters to him. Imagine him picking you up and comforting you.

These steps may be done all at once, or over time. They can be written down, journaled, prayed, or done in your mind or out loud. Sometimes answers will come to you weeks later. Or you will see a connection with a different event at a later date. And sometimes a conversation with another person will provide an ah-ha moment and tie into something you were processing weeks ago.

To avoid shame in the future.

Once we identify the lies, we commonly believe and the traps they often topple us into, it is easier to avoid being shamed in the future. Or at least not falling so deeply into the pit of shame.

Remember to celebrate your progress. Change takes time and effort. If we catch the lie we were believing after being shamed, even two weeks after the incident, that can be celebrated progress.

After time we may get it down to two days. More progress.

Eventually, we will be able to see the lie tied to the feelings of shame the same day. And one day, as it is happening.

All is progress and needs to be celebrated.

A few more tips for dealing with shame and avoiding future shame are given in [the last section of this post](#).

But here is another biggie. Another part of the equation.

When we **see the situation as more about them, then ourselves**, we will not feel so much shame.

To some effect, we cannot be shamed if we don't allow ourselves to be shamed. If we separate ourselves from the shame that they are trying to place on us.

Let me explain.

You set your cherry pie on the table. Proud of your attempt. Ready to hear gushes of praise.

Instead someone sniggers. "That doesn't look edible. What kind of pie is that?"

You can feel shame and think you are not capable of making a pie that looks like a pie, or you can decide this is more about them. You can label them as teasing you, being rude, or taking their bad day out on you. **If you see their comments and actions are more about them (then you), you won't feel so ashamed.** But if you process it as something is wrong with me. "I can't make a pie. They know more about pies than I do," then you will feel ashamed.

When we allow them to be responsible for their words and actions, and hold ourselves accountable for our words and actions, we will feel less shame.

Want to know more about shame?

Theresa wrote a series of 11 posts on shame. *From Shame to Grace: How to Erase Shame From our Identities*. You can find them here.

[We Are Not Meant to Live in Shame](#)

[There is No Shame in Feeling Shame](#)

[How the Lies of Shame Cause Us to Think We Are the Defective Ones](#)

[Environments Where Shame Thrives](#)

[The Symptoms of Shame and the 4 Ways It Makes You Feel](#)

[12 Ways That Misinterpreting Events Causes Shame](#)

[Shame Versus Guilt: What's the Big Difference](#)

[Combat Shame by Knowing Your True Identity](#)

[Why We Use Shame on Others and Ourselves; 6 Eye Opening Reasons](#)

[Shame: Recognize It, Heal From It, and Walk in Freedom](#)

[Everything You Want to Know About Shame: Including How to Heal from It](#)

[Shame Assessment: A Quiz to Discover How Shame May be Affecting You](#)

If you want more information about replacing lies with truth, check out this post:

[How to Replace the World's Lies with God's Truth](#)

Brene Brown has a number of books and resources that deal with shame and overcoming shame. Here are a few:

[Brene Brown | TED 2012 Listening to Shame](#)

[The Power of vulnerability: Teachings of Authenticity, Connection, and Courage](#)

[Brene Brown on Empathy](#)

About the Author



Theresa Boedeker has learned that shame's grip is smashable with God's truth. He never shames us, but loves us. Her passion is to help other women find freedom from shame. She wrote a series all about shame on her blog, <https://www.theresaboedeker.com>, where she encourages women and unwraps life with words.

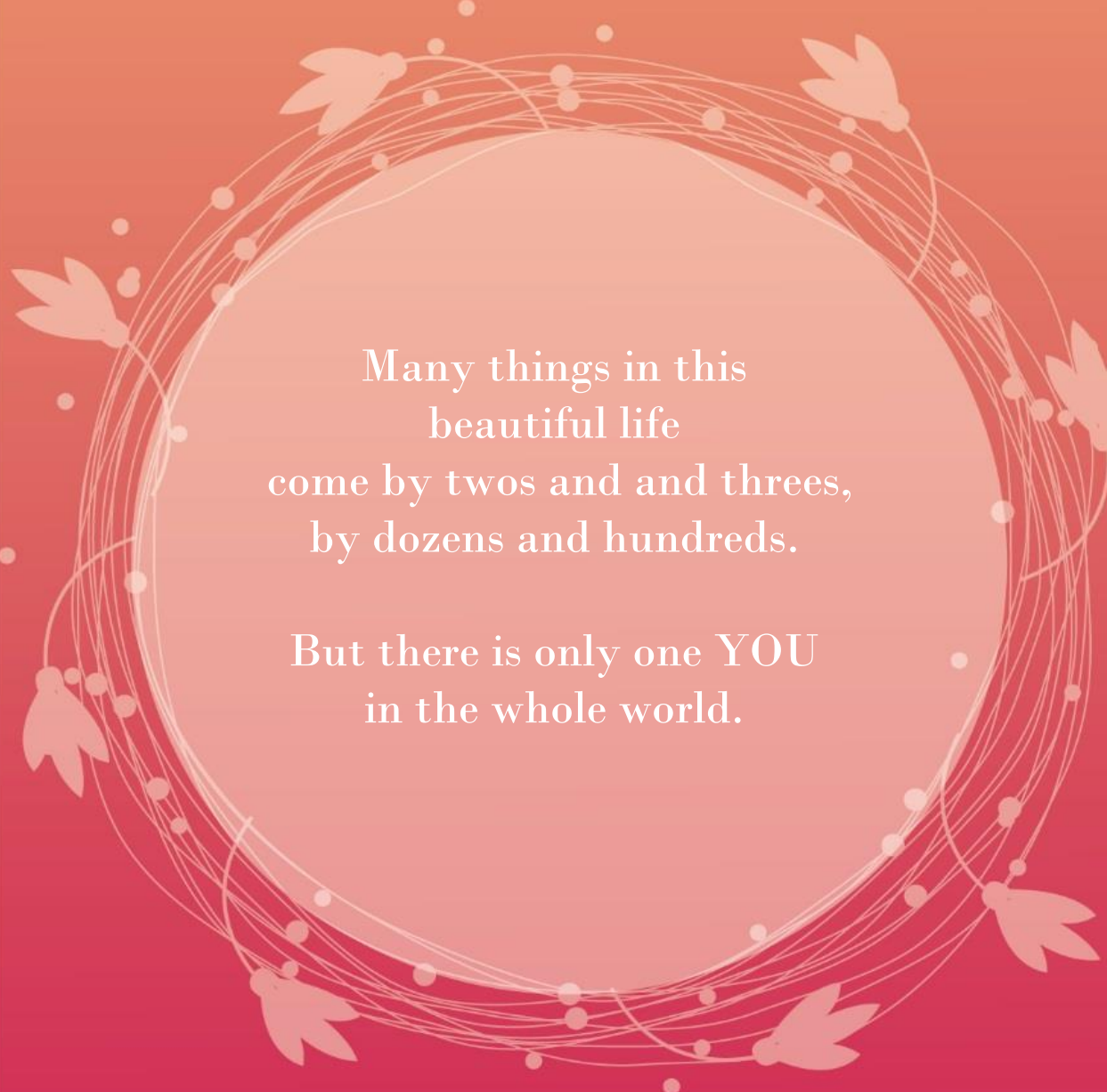
She likes to tell stories, write, and laugh, but not necessarily in that order. People, flowers, being outside, and doing creative things bring her joy. She lives in Missouri with her husband and has two children and a bird.

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Come say hello. She'd love to meet you.

If you have any suggestions on how to make this PDF better, please let me know at theresaboedeker@gmail.com



Many things in this
beautiful life
come by twos and and threes,
by dozens and hundreds.

But there is only one **YOU**
in the whole world.