

MARKERS OF SHAME

What would it be like for you to take a courageous step toward freedom right now—getting honest about your past and contemplating signs of residual shame lurking in your spirit today? Here's a list of some of shame's markers. Each comes not from a textbook but from my own journey of battling shame. Which of these reflect an area where shame has wounded—and locked down—your spirit?



- **Wrestling with identity—or self-hatred.** We struggle to know and accept who God has created us, uniquely, to be. Some of us even secretly battle self-hatred. Serious followers of Jesus can hate themselves. I know . . . because I did.
- **Tormented by voices from childhood.** How can we hear the Father's voice—"You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased"—when the voices from our past never stop shouting their shame?
- **Constantly looking for approval.** Everyone needs encouragement, but shame addicts us to outside affirmation because we're not sure how to receive God's reassuring words of love deep in our hearts.
- **Critical of others.** Our internal critic relentlessly spouts false beliefs to our hearts—I'm damaged goods. If I'm my true self, people will not want to be my friend. I don't fit with anyone, anywhere. In turn, we give this same criticism to others.
- **Arrogance.** Sometimes those who brag, boast, and even bully others do so to subconsciously hide the deep shame they feel but aren't sure how to handle.
- **Difficulty in relationships.** Often this is because we subconsciously put pressure on a spouse, child, or friend to fill the emptiness inside—which only the love of God is designed to fill.
- **Never at peace—constantly driven.** Staying busy keeps the shaming voices at bay. We're scared to slow down because if we do, we'll be forced to deal with our pain.
- **Struggling with addiction.** Not just alcohol, drugs, or sex but anything, including work, money, success, recreation, relationships—even spirituality—that takes over our life in a futile attempt to put salve on hearts broken by shame.
- **Disappointment in our relationship with God.** Shame causes us to doubt God's love and believe he looks at us with constant disapproval. Why would we want to spend time with him if we're convinced we will never, ever measure up?