INTRODUCTION
I studied honor and shame in Central Asia (rural, undeveloped, Muslim), so wonder if my understanding of shame transfers to an America audience. But, shame is a significant undercurrent of American culture, yet rarely addressed.

The sermon series “We’ve Got To Talk” addresses taboo issues like sexuality, immigration, and mental health. These topics are taboo because they are represent minefields of potential shame. Consider the ways human sexuality could induce shame: abuse, infertility, singleness, widowhood, rejection, dysfunction, homosexuality.

PROBLEM: HUMAN SHAME

The Nature of Shame
By its very nature, shame is what you don’t want other people to find out. The simple definition of shame is ‘when other people think bad about you.’ So if you hide it, then other people won’t find out about it, and you have nothing to be ashamed of!

What is shame? Think back to high school, and the group you were in? What was that group like? How did that group get you to behave or look a certain way? There was peer pressure and group loyalty, the threat of rejection. That was shame at work.

Shame runs two reels:
1- “Who do you think you are?”
2- “They’re going to find out!”
   • You can’t comment in the meeting, they are going to find out who you are!
   • Look at your height, your house, your skin, your clothes, your degree. Who do you think you are?

Shame is the intense pain of feeling unworthy, disconnected, and unlovable, before people and before God.

Types of Shame
Shame can be confusing, because there are 2 types of shame.
1) Good shame (well-placed shame) - God uses to convict and guide us.
2) Bad shame - Toxic, destructive shame of disgrace and defilement; humiliation and disconnection. This disgrace shame defines your core identity and worth in unbiblical ways.

**Shame vs. Guilt**

Guilt says, “I made a mistake, so I must confess it, to get it off my chest.”
Shame says, “I am a mistake, so I must hide it, so others don’t find out.”

**Sources of Shame**

1) Accidental Issue: tripping as you get on the stage, or showing up at your work Christmas party wearing jeans and everyone else has formal clothes. Your heart drops, you want to hide, you fear being seen – that is shame.
2) Victim Shame- Abuse, humiliation, rejection, subjugation.
3) Inherited Shame – Things we were born with: our body, our family reputation, our hometown. Satan uses so many things to violate our worth.

**Shame and Expectations**

*Shame is the failure to meet expectations.* You can’t live up to the ideal, you are not who you are supposed to be.

Men have 1 expectation – maintain respect, power, and control. Bring home the bacon, and don’t ever fall of your white horse. We are told to “be a man!”, and expected to know exactly what that entails.

Women are supposed to be everything all at the same time: have a Hillary Clinton career and Martha Stewart home, perfect kids and the appearance of somebody without kids. If you can’t be all these impossible things, you want to hide it.

Brene Brown explains:

“There is a constant barrage of social expectations that teach us that being imperfect is synonymous with being inadequate. Everywhere we turn, there are messages that tell us who, what and how we’re supposed to be. So, we learn to hide our struggles and protect ourselves from shame, judgment, criticism and blame by seeking safety in pretending and perfection.”

Shame puts down deep roots. Shame is like a bumper sticker, easy to apply but painful to remove. Shame is an inescapable pit, but God in his grace and salvation heals shame.
SOLUTION: GOD’S HONOR

Creation
The first reference to shame is the final comment of the creation account. “The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” (Gen 2:25). God originally intended for people to live free of shame! We were crowned with glory and honor. (Ps 8:6).

Fall
After Adam and Eve ate the fruit,
“Then their eyes were opened, they knew they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.”
Covering and hiding are the trademarks of shame.

Genesis 4-11
After the fall, people experience shame, not shalom. Shame begins to destroy humanity.
1. Sensing rejection before God, Cain kills Abel.
2. When Noah’s nakedness and drunkenness was exposed by Canaan, Noah curses his own son with shame.
3. At Babel, the whole world attempts to create a name for themselves and exalt themselves – human efforts to address shame.

God Honors Abraham
God adopts the shamed, covers their disgrace, and endows a new honor. God tells Abram, “Leave your country, your family, all your status. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” In the Bible, “bless” often means honor (as in Mt 5). Abraham is the first of many people, who God commits to bless with honor and worth.

God Honors Israel
Ezekiel 16 summarizes Israel’s story in terms of honor and shame.

‘Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. "No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born."’ Ez 16:3-5
Israel was nobody. Their parents were pagans, they were orphans, scorned and shamed. But God sees them and takes notice.

"Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord God. "And I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands, and a necklace around your neck. "I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. "Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. "Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you," declares the Lord God.” Ez 16:8-14.

Israel is somebody! Beauty, splendor, glory, honor – all bestowed by God, by grace.

**God Restores Israel’s Honor**

Israel then boasted in God’s gift, and became prostitutes among the nations. This shames Yahweh, and Israel, so Israel are exiled in Babylon.

But even in exile, God looks upon them again and offers comfort through Is 54:4-5.

"Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; Neither feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; But you will forget the shame of your youth, And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. "For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth.

**Jesus Honors People**

Jesus struck the definitive blow to shame through his compassionate ministry of grace to the marginalized. The Samaritan women, the lepers, the bleeding women, the demon-possessed, the Gentiles, prostitutes, the tax-collectors, were all stigmatized and marginalized by society, but welcomed, honored, and graced by Jesus. Then at the cross, the great symbol of public rejection and disgust, God endured shame, taking upon himself our shame.

> He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with afflictions; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our afflictions He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried.” Is 53:3-4

Our shame was conquered at the cross, and it is utterly defeated. Jesus is now highly exalted in the heavenlies, sitting at the right hand of God, with a name above every name!

**Biblical Salvation**

God not only forgives people of their sins, but he removes shame, restores dignity and community. When the dark clouds of shame threaten, the Great Redeemer always shows up.
Throughout the Bible, God removes shame, restores honor, and reverses status.

**APPLICATION: OVERCOMING SHAME**

How do we plug ourselves into this narrative? How do we work with God in overcoming shame?

#1 - Despise Shame (Don’t let shame influence your self-identity)

Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame. Despising shame means calling shame a despicable fool unworthy of our attention. Shame often bluffs as if it has two aces and we should just fold and go home, as if it could bully us. Shame only controls and defines us when we live in fear of it. We must shame shame and expose its weaknesses. These verses help us despise false shame.

- “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” Romans 10:11
- “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” And nothing shall separate us from the shame-obliterating love of God. – Romans 8.
- The prodigal shamed himself, his father, his whole community, then comes home empty-handed and covered in pig-filth. Everything about his screams “SHAME!!” He gets a bear hug, new clothes, and a feast where he is the guest of honor. The father’s radical love banishes all semblance of shame. We are no longer orphans, but son’s and daughter’s, with the full inheritance and acceptance.

God’s acceptance and grace banishes shame. God, the only person whose opinion matters ultimately, thinks the world of those in Christ. He initiated the relationship and he declared us worthy. He wants to conquer your shame, more than you do. He is on our side!

The KKK terrorized and bullied Negros by simply driving through the community, and instilling fear. MLK recounts:

> “Ordinarily, threats of Klan action were a signal to the Negros to go into the houses, close the doors, pull the shades, or turn off the lights. Fearing death, they played dead. But this time they had prepared a surprise. When the Klan arrived – according to the newspapers “about forty carloads of robed and hooded members” – porch lights were on and doors open. As the Klan drove by, the Negros behaved as though they were watching a circus parade. Concealing the effort it cost them, many walked about as usual; some simply watched from their steps; a few waved at the passing cars. After a few blocks, the Klan, nonplussed, turned off into a side street and disappeared into the night.” (The Autobiography of MLK, Jr., p 95)

Shame terrorizes the human soul. We fear it might expose our weaknesses. There is no reason to be terrorized by shame. When shame threatens, we can sit on the porch and wave at it with a smile. It is false and illegitimate. Despise it!

But dealing with personal shame is only half of the equation. Shame is also an external reality that shapes our relationships.
#2 – Banish Shame (Don’t let shame influence your actions towards others)
Shame begets shame. When people feel shame, they transfer it to others. If I’m lower, then I will lower others to appear higher. Social scientists are realizing how shame begets various types of shaming violence: domestic abuse, bullying, honor killings, gang activity, terrorism, and ethnic conflicts. Those are the high-profile crimes, but the same shaming tendencies are at play in each of us. The status derived from my work day influences my family relationships. I deal with my feelings of shame, by shaming others, making them feel less.

Even Christians transfer their shame. But the ethics of the cross means laying aside those shaming tactics, freeing bearing any sense of shame because it doesn’t mean anything. God’s eternal honor trumps it all.

#3- Reject Shame (Don’t let stigmata influence your perceptions of others)
The gospel also says I can associate with anyone, and not feel shame. But this isn’t always the case, because shame often shapes our perception of others.

Why is it that we can sit next a man who sleeps around, and not be bothered by it? But if a homosexual male sits next to us at church, we feel uncomfortable. We associate that person with shame, and think we might get infected if we get to close. The church is notorious for stigmatizing certain classes – as if they didn’t already have enough shame heaped on them – we add another scoop to the pile by keeping them at a distance.

The cross removes the shame of others, not just my shame. For Paul, “I’m not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom 1:16) meant he was free to associate with Gentiles since God has welcomed them into His family. He was not talking about evangelism, he was talking about relationships with the stigmatized. Paul could fellowship with the ‘impure’ without feeling embarrassed or unclean himself.

If we allow shame to shape our relationships, we miss out on what God is doing.

CONCLUSION
God is honoring the shamed,
accepting the rejected,
blessing the cursed,
exalting the lowly,
freeing the exiles,
healing the sick,
cleansing the defiled,
dignifying the disgraced.

www.HonorShame.com
God is on a mission to restore lost honor, so that he can be praised for all of eternity as the Ultimate arbiter of honor and grace and value. We participate in that mission as we overcome personal shame in our selves, fight structural shame in society, and proclaim (in both word and deed), God’s radical, shame-obliterating love!

**Reflection Questions**

1. What is your response to shame? What are we doing with our shame? Where are we taking it?
2. How does shame affect you, and your relationships?
3. Are there people we are hesitant to associate with due to a stigma we falsely project?