

Lesson 3: The Fear of Exposure

Lead quote in handout—from *Losing Our Virtue* by David Wells, “At the root of all experiences of shame is the sense that we have been exposed and uncovered. We know ourselves to be something other than what we hoped. And this revelation often comes when others come to see, accidentally and without warning, a side to us about which we feel vulnerable and embarrassed. We feel as if we have been wounded by what they now know, so the fear of scorn is part of the experience of shame, as is anxiety” (Page 133).

In the first two lessons we considered the fear of man, and the fear of the Lord. For the next two lessons we will consider more specifically how we fear man. We begin by considering our fear that others will expose us for who we really are. This is a common and fundamental way in which we fear other people. We will really only scratch the surface of what it means to fear exposure. This struggle is most clearly traced back to the Fall in Genesis 3. Shame and separation from God were some of the immediate results of Adam and Eve’s sin. With this shame and separation comes the fear of being exposed by God and by man. Left unchecked, this fear of being exposed can be a driving force in our life, rather than the biblical force of a life lived by faith in the Son of God.

Think of how deeply this fear is woven into your life and experience. There are cultural assumptions that often drive how this fear is demonstrated. For many in the western world, one of the greatest fears is personal failure or the exposure that you won’t live up to expectations of those around you. The western culture is lived very independently. However, for someone raised in a more communal society like China, India, or Taiwan, there is more of an impetus to avoid bringing shame, not upon self, but on the family or associated community.

The most graphic demonstrations of this fear are on display in media coverage of scandals and exploitations. These demonstrations speak to our deeper, personal fears of shame and exposure. We find a perverse pleasure in learning of the shame of other people. The same fear that causes us to cover and hide also leads us to uncover and expose others. I confess that I am guilty of this in my own life, especially when I am confessing sin. Often times, when I confess sins to other, I perversely and sinfully hold out hope that they will say, “I struggle with that too,” rather than having hope in Christ. Can you see how twisted this is? To confess sin to others with the hope that they will acknowledge guilt as well. Deep down we all have shame and we hate to be alone in our shame, which I think drives us to expose others.

What ways do you seek to cover yourself? In what ways do you expose others in order to preserve a better image of yourself? The purpose of considering our fear of being exposed is to identify the why and the how.

I. Why do we fear being exposed?

1. We are sinful; therefore, we will fear exposure.

Genesis 2:25 says, “**And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.**” Just 7 verses later in 3:7 we read, “**Then the eyes of both of were opened and they knew they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.**” What happened? What we define in scripture as “The Fall” – the single greatest event that afflicted the entire human race. With the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin entered the world and with sin came the shame for sin. Sin is

described in the Bible as the breaking of God's law (1 John 3:4) and falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This drives an infinite wedge between God and man. And that sin produces shame.

2. Because of sins that we have committed.

Shame is a necessary consequence of sin because sin fundamentally is disgusting, morally reprehensible and utterly unacceptable to God. Therefore it was appropriate that Adam and Eve felt shame, they should have felt the need for covering, they should have felt exposed because what they did was that wrong. With the entrance of sin and shame, the temptation to hide and cover that shame arose as well. The temptation to cover, to hide, to retreat inward, to build paper walls of personal self-protection are now an everyday temptation because of our sin and the corresponding shame.

3. Because of the sins of others against us.

Ed Welch puts it well, *"Everyday is Halloween. Putting on our masks is a regular part of our morning ritual, just like brushing our teeth and eating breakfast. ... Underneath the masks are people who are terrified that there will be an unveiling. And, indeed, the masks and other coverings will one day be removed. If we feel exposed by people, we will feel devastated by God ... one way to avoid God's eyes is to live as if fear of other people is our deepest problem—they are big, not God."*

This is what we do day in and day out as we attempt to avoid being exposed. Why do we do this? To put it plainly, it's a form of self-exalting, or self-demoralizing pride. We are either too focused on maintaining the perceived image of who we want to be, or the actual image of who we are. The root is the same: We don't want who we are to escape the boundaries of control. This is a problem because it denies God's all seeing gaze and it denies the grace that is found when true and honest fellowship exists among the saints. Our hearts are sinful, self-promoting and self-focused. We are always looking to spin or disguise every piece of self-revelation in order to avoid other's knowledge of who we are.

II. How does shame and fear of exposure relate to other fears of others?

- We feel exposed and vulnerable

We fear shame and exposure not only because of our own sin, but because of the sins of others. When we are the victims of other people's sin, we feel exposed and vulnerable, depending on the nature of the sin committed against us this feeling and fear can be accentuated.

- We might fear physical harm (Lesson 5)

In two lessons, we will look at the fear of physical harm. Many times, this fear of being exposed will be tied to that fear, many times this type of fear will be a persistent temptation to those who have been sinned against, particularly in physical or deeply emotional ways. More starkly, with the person who maybe has encountered physical abuse in the past. There may be a fear of future physical harm from other people.

- We fear being rejected

There may be a fear of rejection because of what a spouse or parent did. They feel rejected because of that experience and fear being rejected in the future because of that experience. They have been

sinned against, so there is shame attached to that and a fear of experiencing that same feeling of shame and exposure in the future.

We should not be discouraged that there is no hope for overcoming and obeying as we look at the various ways sin can weave its way through our lives. Instead, as we see the way sins and fears can be entwined, we should be encouraged as we start dealing with one fear that begins to overflow into other areas of our lives.

The Bible is full of the plight of fearful, shameful humanity seeking self-covering to avoid exposure of sin, while also recording the pursuit of a holy, gracious God seeking to save that same sinful humanity through the cross of Christ. We will reflect more on this later on.

III. How do we demonstrate fear and try to avoid being exposed?

First, I think it's helpful to acknowledge that we try to avoid being exposed. Just like Adam and Eve, we spend a lot of time seeking to hide from the gaze of God and from the gaze of other people. We build fences for a reason: there are socially accepted norms for what is appropriate to display or communicate in public, but we often times move past the appropriate and wise to the controlling and sinful. We seek to make ourselves look better to other people, to hide from and cover what we really are.

For example, think about the last job interview you had, or the last resume you put together. Were you honest? How about the last mistake you made and were found out by someone else. How did you react? Was it with humble ownership of fault or frantic denial of responsibility? These are important indicators for us as we discern whether we truly Fear God or fear being exposed by man.

1. We escape to idols rather than fleeing to God

We seek to escape to avoid exposure. In our attempt to avoid being known, we build for ourselves idols to hide and escape. These false gods offer a perceived safe haven for us as we attempt to flee from the true Jehovah and the reality of who we are. We seek to find comfort in that thing in order to comfort what is a sin or weakness or vulnerability in our life. The problem with escapism is that we become ashamed of the things we hide or take refuge in. What about for you? Do any of these describe idols or ways to avoid exposure in your life?

Making an idol of work—Many people slave away at work to “make a name” for themselves, only to waste precious moments of their life away, hiding behind fading accomplishments.

Image-management—The game is about managing perceptions, even if those perceptions are not connected to truth about a person. People are treated as images and personalities to be crafted, not moral beings with responsibilities to God and each other.

Drugs/Alcohol—whether we're talking about illegal substances or abuse of alcohol, these things provide an avenue to escape, to avoid exposure because of fear to face reality.

Pornography/sexual fantasy/lust/romance novels/movies—these things provide escape, they seek to provide sexual pleasure apart from the vulnerable and committed context of marriage. Could it be that you're enslaved to this because you fear the exposure that would come from biblical marriage?

Tragically, engaging in these things only heightens shame and fear: it grants the very thing it seeks to escape.

Eating disorders—often fueled by shame about the body the Lord has given to you or used to feel a sense of control that seeks to minimize vulnerability.

As I have said, the tragic irony is that each of these things that is used to escape exposure, actually increases our fears and experience of shame. We have a reason to feel shame and it is right to want that shame removed, we simply look for insufficient things to cover us. As Jonathan Leeman once said, *“We seek to hold up and hide behind pebbles, when Mount Everest is provided to us through Jesus Christ.”*

Discussion Question: What are your tools of avoidance? What are ways you have found helpful to fight the temptation to avoid exposure?

Regardless of what they are, next time you are tempted to use one of these or another thing for escape, instead pray and confess your desire to escape something, your fear of something being exposed, talk with another brother or sister about this.

2. We seek to expose others

In our fear of exposure, we don’t just cover and hide and escape ourselves. The great irony is that we often find a pleasure in seeing others uncovered and exposed. My shame is diminished (at least in my own mind) when compared to that of someone else. How do you know if you struggle with this?

Here is a quick diagnostic: what is your heart response to someone confessing sin to you? Or a case of church discipline is brought up? Are you grieved, sorrowful and moved to compassion or are you self-righteous, perversely happy and indignant or maybe you breathe a sigh of spiritual relief that you aren’t as bad as others? The latter two imply a heart that delights in the exposure of others. Read Luke 15 and compare your heart to the Pharisee and the publican.

This uncovering of others is demonstrated in the increasing voyeurism within our culture, which is aided by, but not derived from, new technologies that make it possible for you to uncover a multitude of items about another without ever leaving the comfort of your own bedroom. Let us be fearful of knowing the public sins of others better than private sins of our own hearts. The Scriptures are very clear on the deceitfulness of unconfessed and unmortified sin.

David Wells says in his book *“Losing our Virtue”*, *“Television and the movies have tilted the scales away from privacy toward exposure, away from bodily modesty toward public nakedness ... we want to see the family whose son was murdered. We want to watch their grief, and we think we have a right to know what they know and to see how they are feeling. And in movies, the American public wants to see nudity and wants to watch people having sex. A sense of shame that once would have stood guard over what is private and intimate is now largely gone, routed by our inclination to share and our voyeuristic hunger to watch.”*

5 Ways that we tend to cover up and hide, for fear of exposure

- 1) Before God: This is obviously the most **foolish** relationship to flee from. While our sin gives us reason to desire covering, it is foolish to think we could actually run from the gaze of the Lord. This often takes the form of **not praying**. Prayer is the most basic exercise of our faith. Prayer

inherently acknowledges God as God, and creature as creature. We hide from God often through prayerlessness, or even worse we heap up empty phrases thinking we are being honest before God. If you struggle with this, I encourage you to go to the Psalms. David is a great example of exposure and honesty before God.

- 2) In private: What are the things you are doing right now that no one else knows about and you are embarrassed for another person to know? Maybe it's not something you'd consider as serious. It's the fact that you don't keep your room or house in order, or your lack of personal disciplines. In what ways are you fearing that those things may be exposed, what are you doing to hide those things in your life? In what ways is your private life different from your public life?
- 3) At home, in close relationships: In our closest relationships, where there are great degrees of sharing and vulnerability and honesty, there is also a greater temptation to fear exposure and shame. The closer you become to a person, the more you can fear that they will one day see you for who you really are. When hiding and covering characterize a marriage, intimacy and communication are undermined or destroyed. Are there sins that are easy to confess to God, but not to another person?
- 4) At work: What are the things you are hiding from your coworkers or boss? Maybe it's that gnawing fear that you will be found out to be incompetent, so you spend every moment seeking to cover and polish your performance. This can obviously be more difficult when you work for a boss that doesn't tolerate any mistakes.
- 5) At church: Welch says, *"More often I overhear people who talk as if the church were their enemy. Sometimes these people have been hurt by people in the church and then make a decision not to be hurt again. They generalize from the specific case to the entire church: If one person hurt me, then the church hurt me. At other times, we act as if the church is an enemy because of our own sense of shame. In other words, since we can see the things in our lives that shame us, we assume that others see them too. Usually, however, we treat the church as an enemy because we have not been taught by the Scriptures."*

How many people have you known, maybe yourself, that have viewed church as an enemy, maybe because of a bad experience or because of a particular person? Be instructed by the Scriptures, don't let previous experiences or teaching tempt you to see the church as a place to hide and avoid exposure!

IV. Shame and the fear of exposure in our world today

I would like to make a quick observation regarding our shame and fear of exposure in our culture primarily as it relates to social media. It is an interesting world we find ourselves in, with the advent of advanced communication tools, media, and easy access to travel, we have at once become more connected, yet more fragmented. We have "friends" on **Facebook**, "followers" on **Twitter**, and "whatever you call them" on **Instagram**. And there are so many other options to connect socially: **Tumblr, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn**, and more. There is an appearance of closeness and relational knowledge. But, there is little accountability and little to no commitment.

We have seemingly infinite opportunities to relate to others and yet we have never felt more disconnected from real relationships and community. The problem is that we control the flow of

information about ourselves and most frequently we post only what will get the most likes, the most retweets, or what will garner the most comments. We build a digital image of ourselves. Let me reiterate the need for discernment about what is appropriate about posting. Do not leave this class and think you need to confess the sins on your Facebook page.

Once again, **David Wells** brings the insight, *“There is considerable pressure for people to adapt to each new situation, to reconstruct themselves, to reach into the world around them in order to extract some meaning for themselves, some sense of who the ‘I’ is. The emptiness of the internal narrative is concealed behind the surface appearances. Irving Goffman speaks of modern people as often staging their own characters. By using the ‘techniques of impression management’ they are able to shape who it is that they want to be perceived as being. And style plays an important role in creating this impression.”*

Monitor your heart as you utilize social media, something that is not inherently bad, but like so many other things can be so quickly distorted. The point is not the technology, but the heart that desires to hide and mask.

V. Examples of shame and fear of exposure in Scripture

Adam and Eve, as we have seen already. In Genesis, the immediate consequence of sin was shame and exposure. We were not created for sin.

David/Bathsheba/Uriah (2 Sam. 11)—David and Bathsheba’s sexual sin followed with intense fear of exposure, and David begins a dramatic and devastating covering act. He attempts to get Uriah to have sex with his wife in order to cover the fact that David had impregnated her. When that doesn’t work, he orders Uriah to the front lines of battle in order to have him killed. We also see in Uriah the height of shame that the innocent spouse suffers as a result of adultery; it is not just the one who sins that is exposed.

In God’s kindness, he gives us in David an example of one who feared exposure and who after being confronted with his sin, deals with his shame and sin in a biblical manner. We see his response to these events in Psalm 51. His response in Psalm 51 is instructive to us in how we deal with our fear of exposure. We seek cleansing in Christ, instead of avoidance or alternative coverings. (*Read Psalm 51*)

Two chapters after the account of David and Bathsheba, **Tamar** (2 Sam. 13) was a tragic example of one who felt intense shame because of the sin of another. The daughter of David, she was raped by her brother Amnon. We see her response: *“Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went”* (v. 19).

Throughout Proverbs we see that those who seek wisdom rightly avoid the exposure and shame that accompanies folly ... particularly, note the shame and grief that parents experience when their children are foolish. **Proverbs 17:25**, *“A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him.”* There is a sense of shame and exposure that accompanies foolishness.

Job is an example of one who felt and had truly experienced intense exposure and shame, not as a result of his own sin, and yet continued to trust the Lord.

Perhaps the most tragic result of giving into the fear of exposure is when we are **ashamed of Christ**. Jesus says in Luke 9:26, He says, **“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory.”**

VI. What's the solution to overcoming this fear of man in exposure?

1. The gaze of God

There is nothing that we can hide from the Lord—the constant gaze of God.

“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.” (Psalm 139:1-4)

How silly is it for us to hide from God? This is a good thing if you are a Christian. Your loving, all-good, all-powerful, sovereign Heavenly Father is always watching over you and working all things for your good. There is nothing your Heavenly Father doesn't know about, and doesn't care about. God is your Father, not a weary taskmaster, who has known you and loves you. If you haven't been born again, it is a terrible thing that God is all seeing. God is not your Father, He is your Judge. All of those little things you consider small such as white lies, sexual immorality, gossiping, are sin in His eyes.

Are you sure you and God have things “worked out?” God will call you to account for your sins and you will be rendered guilty and a recipient of punishment, His holy and just wrath. This is an eternal separation from God.

2. The Gospel of Jesus Christ

This is the great remedy for fighting the fear of exposure. In the gospel, we have One who has been exposed for us.

“He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

This is good news because before a holy all-knowing God, we are totally revealed and exposed. But God sent One, full not of sin and deceit, but full of Truth and Grace. His name is Jesus Christ. What I am proposing is not a boost of self esteem, but to realize that before God, apart from Christ, we have reason to be ashamed of our sin. But the **hope we have** is in the penal substitutionary death of Christ. With the Gospel, Jesus died for you with full knowledge of all of your sins: past, present, and future. It is by His wounds we are healed. Meditate more on your desperate condition before God, and how God has looked upon your helpless state and shown you mercy in the Cross of Christ.

If you fear being exposed, repent of those sins and trust in the finished work of Christ. If you are struggling with the shame of past sins, have confidence that when Christ died, He died for that sin. What God intends to do, He will do. In this case, what God has intended to do, He has done.

3. The familial fellowship of the local church

Jesus should be believed, trusted and followed in the local church, especially as it relates to this sin. Living in Christian community helps us live this out—accountability and transparency before others, as we build these open and transparent relationships with other Christians we begin to lose our fear of man. **Welch** says, *“When we think of ourselves as alone and isolated, we will always be prone to fear other people. Isolation and the fear of man are close companions. Yet when we truly understand that*

God has called us to participate in a larger family (i.e., the church), we are free. Church begins to feel a little more like a family sitting with us in our living room. Better yet, we feel like a family sitting together at the feet of Jesus, sitting around the throne. With family, there is no self-consciousness, no embarrassment, no fear” (page 198).

In our next lesson we will discuss, “How do we fear people? We fear people will reject us.”

Questions or Comments?