

Any man who has felt deeply ashamed of his own moral failure will be able to relate to this article on the toxic effect unnecessary shame can have on the recovery process.

Shame On Me

By Joe Dallas Copyright 2003

***"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."
-Job 42: 6***

In January of 1984, I had my crises of truth. I was a Christian who'd backslidden into destructive sexual behaviors, and the conflict between my sexual and spiritual desires reached its peak. That was the beginning of my recovery and - oddly enough, the darkest time of my life.

All my porn had to go, of course. I had my cable service turned off, cancelled my subscriptions to erotic publications, then located another place to live in another city. Only then did it hit me that I'd ruined everything good I'd been given. By indulging in my sins, I'd abandoned a fruitful ministry, a loving family, great potential - all wasted in a public, shameful way. And the more I thought about it, the more I sank into a bottomless disgust with myself. I began sleeping through the days, then waking up horrified at myself, remembering what I'd done, each time seeing it in a worse light. I'd cry, thrashing around in my bed in fits of weeping and moaning.

***The poet Robert Bly wrote:
"Where a man's wound is,
there he finds his genius."***

As part of my "penance", I called all my old friends to apologize and tell them I'd repented. I could only find a few, but one of them permanently interrupted the "I Hate Joe" cycle I'd gotten myself into.

When I got him on the phone and told him what was happening with me, the dam burst and I poured out my guilt, the miserable state I was in, and my fear that there was no future for me.

***"Don't you think all this energy
you're putting into self-pity could be
put into doing something useful
with what's left of your life?"***

"Well, Joe", he said, "if banging your head into the wall is going to build up the Body of Christ, please keep doing it. But if it won't, don't you think all this energy you're putting into self-pity could be put into doing something useful with what's left of your life?"

"That shut me up.

"And", he continued, "who knows but that someday, after you get through all this, you might have learned something worth passing on?"

I'd been drowning in shame, beating myself up but accomplishing nothing worthwhile in the process. I determined that night to find something more useful to do with my pain. And oddly enough, it was that very pain which led me into my own counseling, and then into a desire to become a trained counselor, and finally into the opportunity to work with hundreds of other men who'd made mistakes so similar to my own.

"Where a man's wound is", the poet Robert Bly wrote, "there he finds his genius."

Be sorry for your sin, by all means. But don't wallow in shame. Instead, take the time to prayerfully consider how God can convert your worst failures into useful opportunities. You just might be amazed at the genius lurking behind the wound.

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**GENESIS COUNSELING, 17632 Irvine Blvd., Suite 220, Tustin, CA 92780
(714) 508-6953**

jdallas@socal.rr.com

For more information, contact us at www.joedallas.com