



SHAME

&

Glory

**How Jesus Heals
Our Self, Desires, and Emotions**





*Shame and Glory:
How Jesus Heals Our Self, Desires, and Emotions*

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Introduction: Shame and Glory

'You're saying that my desire for pornography is really a desire for God? I've never thought of it that way before.'

You might raise an eyebrow at that idea, too.

But doesn't it make sense? Sure, superficially, that young man may have wanted a quick fix of sexual pleasure. Or even a way to fall asleep more quickly, given the stress he was under. He felt ashamed about that. But more fundamentally, he wants intimacy; to be the focus of someone else's deep attention; to be respected; to be treated with care by someone who could call his strength forward. He may have even wanted relief from the other stresses in his life, and the fears that led him there.

In other words, he wanted the loving, personal God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. Porn use was only a presenting symptom.

Maybe you desire to be the center of someone else's attention and affection. Directed towards romance or friendship, that desire may have caused you some trouble: unwieldy expectations; relational competition and conflict; codependence; hurt feelings. But what if that desire's real root and aim is – once again – the loving, personal God revealed in Jesus?

Maybe you desire impact and significance. Directed towards money or power, you may not like the person you're becoming, or have become. You might not see much hope for the world at large – or for humanity, especially if people's motivations are just like yours. By itself, those desires might lead you into pride, fear, anxiety, anger, and discouragement. But what if your desire for meaning flows from a God who desires His own healing, justice, and goodness for His creation, and especially for human beings, whom He loves?

If we believe that our desires and motivations are fundamentally negative, then we will have a tendency to hide them. Or, if we learned to deploy a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in college, to radically critique the author for his subconscious and unflattering motivations, which happen to be plain as day to us, and then we carry that suspicion over into real life, you might find it hard to trust others or forgive them. You might find it hard to trust yourself. Or, if we were criticized so much when we were younger that we believe our fundamental self is bad, we will tend to hide our true self from others, and maybe from God. If Mom or Dad left the family when we were little, or if we were abandoned by others, we may tend to feel like our core self is worthless, and that we need to work really hard to keep others around us. All of those postures are postures of shame.

When we feel shame, we hide. Like Adam and Eve hiding themselves behind fig leaves and the trees of the garden, we hide things about ourselves: tears, struggles, fears, motivations, stories, and even what feels like our true selves.

In the Christian story, God heals human shame with His *glory*. Glory at its deepest level refers to *God revealing Himself*. Hence, Jesus prayed that the Father would *glorify* Himself through him as the Son (John 17:5). He wanted the Father to be *revealed* through him. Then, because Jesus indwells us by his Spirit, Paul rejoiced in 'Christ in you, the hope of *glory*' (Colossians 1:27). He wanted Christ to be *revealed* in believers because that was the great Old



Testament ‘hope’ which the prophets yearned to see. Referring to the Corinthian Christian worship service, Paul also spoke of a wife being the ‘glory’ of her husband (1 Corinthians 11:7). That is, when a wife prayed or prophesied, even speaking an authoritative word from God, she *revealed* something about the quality of her marriage and the quality of her husband. Glory is not a commodity that God hoards all to Himself. He is not a ‘glory hog.’ Quite the opposite. He *glorifies*, or *reveals*, Himself through human beings who bear His image. That was His purpose from creation. Speaking of that creation order, Psalm 8:5 says, ‘You crowned him [the human being] with *glory* and honor.’

Now that might come to you as a surprise. Some Christian preachers speak of ‘glory’ as if it were a commodity like ‘praise deserved.’ Psalm 115 even seems to use the word ‘glory’ in that way: ‘Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your Name give *glory*’ (Psalm 115:1a). And Chris Tomlin turned that verse into a popular worship song, *Not To Us*. But when we read the whole Psalm, and keep in mind its context as a prayer during Israel’s exile – since Psalms 107 – 150 as a unit express hope that God will restore Israel from exile – we find this: the Israelites wanted God to deliver them from exile for the sake of His name, because they knew they had not done things that made them ‘deserve’ rescuing (e.g. Ezekiel 36:22 – 23).

So Psalm 115 was a plea for God to rescue Israel for the sake of His name, character, and promises: ‘Because of Thy lovingkindness, because of Thy truth’ (v.1b). Psalm 115 also asks for God to renew His blessing on Israel, increase their children, and by implication of calling God the ‘Maker of heaven *and earth*,’ make their garden land fruitful once more (v.13 – 15; 16b). In other words, Psalm 115 expects God to reveal Himself as life-giver and promise-keeper in Israel’s midst. So God would give His Name *glory*, or *the weight and power of revelation*, through what He does for Israel. God’s glory is when God appears, makes Himself seen, or otherwise reveals Himself (Ex.16:10; Num.14:22; Isa.40:5).

Furthermore, the Hebrew word for ‘glory’ (*kabod*) also carries the idea of ‘heaviness,’ or ‘weight.’ As God reveals Himself in and through a person, that person becomes more *real*. In English, we say, ‘He is heavy,’ or, ‘She is a person of substance.’ Those idioms are probably influenced by Judeo-Christian ideas. The great writers J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis both used this connection in their writings. In Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*, the more evil you became, the more insubstantial, ghostly, and wraith-like you became. Lewis also used the positive sense in his essay *The Weight of Glory*, which I’d highly recommend.

Biblically, as God reveals Himself in us, we become more *substantial*, and more *real*. So the antidote to our *shame* is God’s *glory*, rightly understood. We don’t need to hide the self. We want to reveal ourselves, tactfully and appropriately of course, even as we confess our sins, because we *reveal* God at work in us. God made us as human beings to bear His weight of *glory*.

In the *Star Wars* movies, Luke still saw good in Darth Vader. When the Emperor was assaulting him with force-lightning, Luke still felt compassion in his father. So he called out to him, pleading for his help. As the Emperor sent the last barrage of lightning from his fingertips, Vader turned. He took the last ounce of goodness in himself – the compassion he felt for his son



– and renounced his long, tortured path down the Dark side of the Force. He seized the Emperor and hurled him down the reactor shaft of the Death Star.¹

What if God still sees the good in us? What if that good in us is actually His gracious activity? What if all of our selfish choices still cannot completely mar the image of God in us? And what if God works in us by appealing to that part of us which can still respond to Him?

Let's find out, shall we?

¹ George Lucas, in J.W. Rinzler, *The Making of "Star Wars, Episode III: Revenge of the Sith"* (LucasBooks, 2005) says: "Children teach you compassion. They teach you to love unconditionally. Anakin can't be redeemed for all the pain and suffering he's caused. He doesn't right the wrongs, but he stops the horror. The end of the saga is simply Anakin saying, "I care about this person, regardless of what it means to me. I will throw away everything that I have, everything that I've grown to love—primarily the Emperor—and throw away my life, to save this person. And I'm doing it because he has faith in me; he loves me despite all the horrible things I've done. I broke his mother's heart, but he still cares about me, and I can't let that die." Anakin is very different in the end. The thing of it is: the prophecy was right. Anakin was the chosen one, and he does bring balance to the Force. He takes the ounce of good still left in him and destroys the Emperor out of compassion for his son."