

A WELCOME STRONGER THAN SHAME

VIDEO ONE

Shame is something we all experience. It's the sense that we're somehow *wrong*.

You're brushing your teeth and suddenly you remember that thing you said... You wince— why are you so cringe?

The comments someone made about your legs nag at you, and you hate looking at them in the mirror.

Your friend asks to borrow your phone. When you unlock it, it's open at *that* website and your stomach drops.

You walk through life with a nagging, restless sense that you're screwing everything up and your friends, family, and lecturers are disappointed in you.

Shame is a sense not of 'I've done something wrong', but 'I *am* wrong'.

All of us have an idea about the kind of person we are, or *ought*, to be; shame is what we feel when in our own view, or in the view of others, we don't measure up. For some the feeling comes in particular moments of embarrassment or criticism. For others, it's a simmering feeling that frames how we see all of our life.

The causes of shame are complex. It's messy. This feeling of being *wrong* and unlovable finds its root in many places: things that other people have done to us, expectations put on us by family or the wider culture, internalised expectations we put on ourselves, or things we have actually done wrong. In the mess it can be very hard to untangle what is true.

In the historical accounts of Jesus' life, we meet a woman whose story is controlled by shame. For twelve years she's been the victim of a disease that has given her uncontrollable menstrual bleeding. Tragically, she's spent all her money at the hands of doctors – but her symptoms keep getting worse.

In her culture, such bleeding made you 'unclean'. If anyone touched her, or anything she'd touched, they'd be made unclean too.

In her community's eyes the woman is categorically inferior: she's poor, likely unmarried and childless. The memory of invasive doctor's hands and the constant job of keeping her clothes clean made her feel dirty. The money she's desperately spent, to no use, made her feel stupid. The lack of human contact made her feel unloved. Her story is one of shame.

As we meet this woman, she's hiding. She approaches Jesus for help, but does so hidden in a crowd, approaching him from behind. Hoping not to be seen.

It's a feeling we can relate to. Our natural instinct in the face of shame is also to hide. We hide behind happy Instagram stories. We hide behind impressive looking busyness. We hide in being loud extroverts, or reclusive introverts. We hide behind gossip and judging others. We hide behind everyday distractions.

We go to great lengths to hide our shame from other people, hoping not to have to look at it ourselves.

Yet that's our biggest problem.

Though hiding feels like the best thing to do – it's the very thing that gives shame power. We desperately want to hide. But freedom comes when we do what we fear the most: allow our fears, insecurities, and most tender feelings of inadequacy to be *seen* by another.