**SHAME OFF YOU : UNLEASHING UNFORGIVENESS**

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**ED YOUNG**

We've been talking about shame. We talk about shame a lot in our culture. What is shame? **Shame is an emotion of disappointment with ourselves, others and God.**

I was thinking and reflecting on my life as it relates to shame this past week, and like you, I've gone through seasons of shame. The first one that I can kind of remember had to do with my looks. I was young. I, in fact, was real young. I had a problem. You won't believe this, because of the mole on my forehead. I remembered that I would be like, "Mom, I don't want the barber to cut my hair above the mole. Everyone can see the mole." I'm a kid. Insecurity, shame, and I'm sure you have physical issues that you would like to change or tweak.

The next one is kind of hard to talk about. So, my brother and I, one day, we're staying at a condominium in another state because my father was speaking. This local church brought in a babysitter, and this woman invited her marine boyfriend, fiancé to stay and to babysit. This guy was a pedophile, and he tried to abuse, he came very close, sexually my brother and I. I can still remember the fear, the angst of that situation, caught in that condo trying to evade this pervert. In fact, years later, I still had nightmares about the situation. This guy tracking us. Shame. Maybe you're like, "Ed, I'm tracking with you." I have been abused. I have been taken advantage of. I have some physical issue that I'm insecure about.

The next season of shame occurred when I was in college. I played basketball for Florida State University. Now look at that picture. Everything shrinks and sags. I don't know when it happened, but my butt just fell off one day and my shoulders. Where are the shoulders? At Florida State, I was known as a baller. I was a good player in high school, good enough to receive a D1 scholarship, and I was good enough to play. In fact, right there, I won a starting position at Florida State. But sadly, I just didn't really take advantage of the opportunities given to me against Auburn, against Minnesota, against the University of South Carolina. So, I really felt shameful about that.

I gave up my scholarship after my sophomore year, and that's when I felt called into the ministry. And I sometimes look back and think if I would've hit all those shots I normally hit, I would've probably tried to chase the basketball dream and I definitely would not be here today. I can tell you that. But I'd be lying to you if I said, no, no, I didn't deal with shame because I come back to Houston. I mean, "Ed's the all-star high school basketball player. I mean, he's playing D1. I bet he's lighting it up for Florida State." No, my average was 0.6 per game.

I was ordained into the ministry and my first pastoral assignment was reciting the Lord's Prayer at the 11 o'clock service. I'm so nervous, I'm like visibly shaking. Public speaking. People are afraid to speak publicly. It's the number one fear after that is death. Isn't that funny? Public speaking then death. So, I'm speaking publicly. I've never done this before. I'm, about 22, 23 year old. I'm doing the Lord's Prayer. When I say I'm doing the Lord's Prayer, I repeat the Lord's Prayer and stop, and then everyone repeats it with me. For example, our Father who art in heaven. Our Father who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Hallowed be thy name.

I had this prayer written down; I was so scared. I'm rolling and I'm hearing all of these people repeating after me, and it just caused me to freeze up. I forgot the Lord's Prayer. I couldn't read it. I just stopped and the entire church starts mumbling and then laughing. "He'll never be like his dad. He's a dumb jock. After all, he played at Florida State." I felt awful. Every eye is on me, and I made the walk of shame, here's the real walk of shame, down the steps, and I happened to sit on the front row by my mother of all people. I never sat by my mother in church. As people were laughing, she turned to me in her Mississippi accent and said, only what a mother can say. "Your voice sounded so good up there." I said, "Thanks, mom. I just botched the Lord's Prayer in front of thousands of people." I felt shame for a long time about that.

Another season of shame, and this is kind of difficult to talk about, but I want to, has to do with the tragic death of our daughter, LeeBeth. She died literally in my arms of alcohol, binge drinking and Adderall. I had no idea what grief was like. It's mysterious, and some of you know what I'm talking about. In a weird way, this year has been more difficult than the first year. Just full disclosure. I'm not trying to whine or complain because God is good, but also too, there's still anger, regret, which means to turn it over and over. That's what the word regret means. There's still a lot of unanswered questions that I have about myself and about God. Why did you let that happen? I've written 17 books. Throughout my books, I've talked about marriage and family and quality time and quantity time and all of that.

I'm just going to tell you, every time I walk into Fellowship Church, especially on Sundays, I'm walking into shame because I'm supposed to have it together. We're supposed to have the perfect family. We don't. And you don't either. But that shame is real. LeeBeth used to sit right there, every service. And I think about, “Man, Ed, you should have been a better father. Maybe you spoke too much. Maybe you were too soft or too critical, or where did I mess up?” And Lisa and I have these discussions a lot.

Speaking of speaking, Lisa and I over the last several days were out of the country speaking. A group brought us in to do some leadership work with 50 pastors of some of the largest churches in North America. While we were there, we tried to communicate with people who don't speak English. That's kind of fun. I found myself talking louder and then kind of changing the way I even communicate. It's hilarious, isn't it? I don't speak another language. My brother does. He's fluent in Spanish and he knows Vietnamese, a little bit of that. Yeah. Anyway, not me. Not me. I barely know English. I said, “I know what I'll do, I'll download the Rosetta Stone app.” Whoever thought about that has made a fortune, haven't they? That subscription-based app every month. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. The language of the Devil is “shamese”, and I'm afraid we've downloaded this app. We've done the Rosetta Stone thing, and I'm afraid that I know the language, and so do you, so maybe I am bilingual. “Ed, can you believe that mole on your overhead? Ed, what that guy did to you. Ed, I mean, you were known as a baller, and you failed miserably for your one shot?”

Sounds like Eminem. One shot. You know? I'm not an Eminem fan, but the dude can rap, I'll tell you that. He needs Jesus, doesn't he? I know he is old school, but man, can you imagine if Eminem knew the Lord?

So, then I'm thinking about, all right, shame. I'm thinking about when I botched the Lord's Prayer. I think about the regrets. I wish I could take a mulligan many times in my parenting, in dealing with LeeBeth, especially on the last day of her life. Why didn't I take her to the hospital right when I found her? Why didn't I call the right people? I wish the paramedics would've got there sooner. I wish Lisa would've been in town, but she was seeing her mother who was dying at the time. Regret remorse. We all deal with it don't we?

I've been saying around here, who is sitting on your bench? You might be going, "What?" Don't worry, I'll explain. The answer to sin, guilt and shame is the real F-Word. Is it just me, or have we just taken the F-Word to another level? Everywhere you turn and go, F-Word, F-Word, F-Word, F-Bomb. F-Bomb. Social media, everybody, F-Bomb. You know the little letters, all that stuff? The mean. Oh, you know what that means, it means the F-Bomb. And then you try to watch a show, let's say on Netflix, F-Bomb, F-Bomb, and let's F-Bomb some more.

Then you got the athletes who act like alpha males and so many of them aren't. "Oh man, F-Bomb, F-Bomb, F-Bomb." Wow, you are really tough. As I tell my friends who don't know the Lord, you must not have sex very much. Because you talk about it all the time. That's like me going, "What in the sexual intercourse are you doing, man? You're just a sexual intercourse. And that's a sexual intercoursing thing." Do you see how absolutely stupid that is?

But Jesus came along and said, "Let's talk about the real left word. Forgiveness. Forgiveness."

What is the answer to sin, guilt and shame? Brené Brown will say authenticity. She'll say empathy, vulnerability. That's okay. But our secular sociologists and psychiatrists and glassy-eyed gurus, even Dr. Phil, are clueless regarding dealing with shame.

Jesus was the only perfect person who ever lived. So obviously his teachings are perfect even with my damaged emotions, even with your damaged emotions. This is the answer. I'm not saying other people can't give us some insights, but they don't have the horsepower. They leave us asking questions. “Okay, Brené, vulnerability, empathy, and then shame is gone?” No.

I love Dobermans. We've had several of them. Anybody have a Doberman here? Okay, that's all? God bless you in the back. Thank you. Hands are going up everywhere. The reason I got a Doberman is this crazy story I'll tell you again. How many of you guys were not here last week? This is church. We have video cameras and security watching you. How many weren't here? Go ahead and raise your hand. Okay, that's okay. That's cool. We've figured out we have about 40 to 50,000 people that come once every six weeks. Anyway, that's another other subject. What would happen if they all showed up? That's what I want to know. Okay.

I told this story last week, let me tell you again. I'll give you the cliff notes. I was pumping gas years ago by this busy intersection. It was one of those... You know those fake gas stations that's really a liquor store, but they have a couple of pumps out there? You know what I'm saying?

I'm just pumping gas and I see this guy, 50 something. You know, 50 something's, how we run? You know what I'm saying? So, had this Doberman with him, they crossed the busy intersection. Then he walked right by me and took the leash and tied the Doberman to this park bench. I'm looking at the dog going, I'm going to get a Doberman one day. I was figuring out how to present that to Lisa after maybe doing some chores around the house and kind of, "Honey, would you mind?" And guys, we talk in a higher tone when we want something from our wives. "Would you mind if I looked at some Dobermans?" Have you ever noticed that? When we talk to our wives, we talk high, in a higher tone. It's weird, but we do, we do, admit it.

So, this Doberman, I don't know why, he got startled. "Arf, arf, arf, arf." That was a good bark. I'm glad this is a two-way conversation. He got startled. I don't know what made him go crazy, but you saw the whites of his eyes, the teeth, and he takes off with such torque, rips the park bench. And this was even recorded in a newspaper back in the days when we had newspapers, when people read them. Ripped the park bench out of the cement, and he's making a beeline toward the busy traffic. I'm going, oh no, I'm going to see a collision of colossal proportions. This dog ran like Derek Henry through a defensive line, stiff arm doing the Heisman, faking. He's slinging the bench, bam, into a Suburban, bam, into a minivan. Total chaos.

So, I've got to ask you, are you like that Doberman? "Arf, arf." Are you slinging shame? Specifically, who was sitting on your bench? Someone who abused you. An ex-spouse who betrayed you. Someone who literally stabbed you in the back on a business deal. Someone who stole from you. A parent who was absent. Maybe one that was too demanding and too harsh. I'm going to ask you who was sitting on your bench? Because God does not want us to be leashed up to unforgiveness, sin, guilt, and shame.

Jesus told the story, and I talked about it last week, but let me get a little bit deeper. He told the story, a parable, if you will, about “the merciful servant” in Matthew Chapter 18. **What is mercy?** **Mercy is when we don't get what we deserve.** Say that with me. When we don't get what we deserve. I'm glad I remembered that. I'm glad I didn't pull the Lord's Prayer thing again. I was a little bit nervous because I have no notes or anything. I just had to come up with that. That's the biblical definition of mercy when we don't get what we deserve.

When I sinned against you, and obviously this is true with God, I've created a debt between myself and God and between myself and you. A debt. Really? Yeah. That's what Jesus said. And some of us are like, "Okay, Ed, you don't get it, man. Someone owes me, bro, or girl, someone owes me. Debt, yeah. They come crawling back and they going to apologize to me. I am not going to release them. You got the wrong guy, the wrong girl. You have no idea of the pain." You're right. I don't know. You don't know my pain either. Jesus does.

The cross was the ultimate instrument of shame. Jesus took all of our shame, obviously our sin, our guilt, our shame. He experienced it so we could walk in freedom. Debt, **D-E-B-T**. What is debt? It's a **Debilitating Existence, Begging For Transformation**. Let that settle in. When I'm in debt to God, others, or I think someone owes me, that's how I roll.

Jesus launches into this story, Matthew chapter 18, about debt, about this guy who was unmerciful. This high roller had all these servants working for him, let's say servant “A”, servant “B”, and servant “C”. He brings in the bean counters. You got to have bean counters. Brings in a covey of lawyers. Got to have lawyers, don't you? Then he starts settling his accounts. "Okay, okay, okay. Come on guys, let's go." "Ah, sir. Servant “A” owes you $10 million." That's what the lawyer says. And the accountant goes, "No, no, no. It's $10,000,053." Thanks. That was funny, too.

"Bring servant ‘A’ in." (Matthew 26-27) "Whoa man, this is terrible. I owe $10 million. I'm in debt to the high roller, the king of bling. I'm sorry. I'll do anything to make it up. I'm good for the 10 million." This guy's a servant. It'd take him a hundred lifetimes to pay it off. "I'll pay it off, please." Back then, you couldn't file for chapter 11 or chapter 13. They could sell you, your wife, your family down the river, put you in the chains. So, this high roller's like, "You know what? You know I'm going to do? I am going to forgive you. Debt is canceled. $10 million." "And $53." "Thank you. It's gone. It's done. The note is burned. I forgive the debt. The debt is canceled."

Mercy is when we don't get what we deserve. Did servant “A” get what he deserved? No. I would say, "No. $10 million?" So, the unmerciful servant, (Matthew 18:28-30) this is why we call him the unmerciful servant. After being forgiven, goes and finds somebody that owes him about $20, chokes him out, brings him to the prison. Then the high roller, the king of bling finds out, and he opens up a can on servant “A”.

**Matthew 18:32-34 (NIV-84), 32“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”**

And then we have verse 35. I call verse 35, Dirty 35. I wish this was not in the Bible. Are you feeling me? Turn to your neighbor and say, "I wish this wasn't in the Bible." I would like to rip this page out, but here we go. This is Jesus talking. People go, "Jesus was so compassionate and loving. He's all about love." That's true, but he spoke the truth in love. Sometimes the truth hurts.

It's like I told you a while back, my grandson, Thunder, just had his bath, had his pajamas on. He was fresh, ready for bed. He tried to walk down the steps and play in the sand again. Here's what I told him, just like this, "Thunder. No, you just had a bath. You can't play in the sand." "You're mean." I'm afraid a lot of us come to church and we read Dirty 35, "God, you are mean."

**Matthew 18:35 (NIV-84), “This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”** That's nasty. That's dirty.

**UNLEASHING UNFORGIVENESS IS UNCOMFORTABLE.** It's not easy. Everything in our world is made for forgiveness. It's uncomfortable. Not only is it uncomfortable, **UNLEASHING UNFORGIVENESS IS UNUSUAL**. People just don't do it. I love to hear the pseudo apology from these celebrities and athletes. They've committed some heinous crime. They've committed cosmic treason. "I want to apologize if I've offended you." And then all of the talking heads on all the sports networks, "Oh, was that incredible, man? He was so real. That Tom Brady, LeBron, they're so awesome." They did not apologize. That's not an apology. They're still in control. "Oh, I'm sorry if I hurt you." In other words, you're an emotional basket case.No, real forgiveness is looking at someone in the eye, "I am sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" Man, that'll change some marriages right there. That'll change some businesses right there. That'll change some teams right there. "Will you forgive me?"

**UNLEASHING UNFORGIVENESS IS UNCEASING** This is tough. This is deep, man. Never stops. **UNLEASHING UNFORGIVENESS IS UNEMOTIONAL**

"Well, I'm just going to wait. I'm just going to wait, and when I feel it, I will forgive. I really will because I have the love of Jesus and compassion. I've been saved, and I'm sanctified and justified. I'm just going to wait, and when I feel a quiver in my liver, then I'll forgive him or her." You will die, so will I, and decompose in this position waiting. You will never, n- n- n- never, no, no, no, never ever feel it. And I've been in that position before. I would've waited until I feel it. So, this is tough.

Here's your homework. It's only five things. I'm going fly through this to wrap this series up, because God does not want us leashed up to unforgiveness. He wants to free. You and me we're made for freedom, not for bondage. We're made to cancel debt. God, you've canceled debt. And now, I've got to cancel the debt. It doesn't mean I have to like the person, doesn't mean I have to vacation with the person. Doesn't mean I have to have coffee with the person. I release them. Watch this now, forgiveness is more for the offended than the offender.

Five things, Number one, **NAME YOUR SHAME**. Let me name drop. I went over to Hulk Hogan's house years ago and talked to him. Here's what Hulk Hogan said to me, "Ed, there's no shame in our game, brother." That's a good line, isn't it? No shame in our game. So, we turn and we name the shame. And more often than not, it comes back to a person.

Number two, **OWN YOUR SHAME.** This is a shocker. Take responsibility, because if you're like me, I really like to blame people on my bench. I do. I'm sure you're not that way. "It's because of my uncle. It's because of the marine pedophile. It's because, God, you made this mole on my big, honking forehead is because I failed as a parent.” That's “shamese”. We need to say, like I've said many times to the devil “no comprehende”.

Number three, **ASK YOURSELF THE CRITICAL QUESTION,** and this is ironic. “Do you want to be healed?” Jesus, asked someone that question. Do you really want to be healed? Because some of us, shame is our identity. We like it. It's who we are. It's our identity.

Number four, **UNLEASH EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE SITUATION** Release them. Sometimes you don't have to release them every minute. I have these thoughts of shame, but I'm learning how to say, “God, you've forgiven it and in your omniscience, you've forgotten it.”

The last one, number five, **UNLEASH YOU.** I've forgiven them, but I haven't forgiven myself. Yeah, I thought about that because I've said that before. I'm like, but then I think that's not biblically correct. Because if God has done the forgiveness work, which Jesus has already done, the unleashing, then obviously I've unleashed myself. So that's really retreading something that's already been taken care of.

The Doberman caused all of this collateral damage and horns were honking. Parts were flying. His master came out of the fake gas station, chased him down, called him by name. "Thor, Thor, Thor." Unleashed the leash from the bench and led him to freedom and safety.

God is chasing you down. You think you're chasing God? No, no. He's chasing you down. He's calling you by name. He's calling me by name. He's unleashing us right now by the power of the Holy Spirit. Cancel the debt, release insecurity, inadequacy, insufficiency. Release the pain and the turmoil. Release it. Release that coach, release that person, release that ex-spouse because the master led that Doberman to safety and to freedom. And that's what God has for you, my friend.

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for this message. And as your heads are bowed and eyes are closed, if you're here and you've never asked Jesus Christ to come into your life, as I said a second ago, the good news is he's done the forgiveness work. He's paid the price for your sin, your guilt, your shame, something that we don't deserve. It's grace, it's mercy. All you have to do is just simply, if you want to give your life to Christ, to become a follower of Christ. It's not about religion, it's a relationship. You can start this relationship right now by praying these words after me. Just simply say God, because that's who he is.

You say, God, I to the best of my ability believe in you. And I believe that you sent Jesus Christ to pay the ultimate price, to shed his blood on a cross for my sins. And then three days later, rise again. And I admit to you what you already know, that I'm a sinner. I have sin and guilt and shame. And right now, I ask you, Jesus Christ, to come into my life. I receive your forgiveness. And right now, Jesus, by his grace and mercy, he's releasing all of your sin, all of your guilt, all of your shame.

If you prayed that prayer with me in a second, we're going to tell you what to do because of that. There's another group here, and if you're like me, you've been a Christian for a while. You know Jesus Christ personally, the Holy Spirit is in your life, but you've not allowed the Holy Spirit of God to sink into those damaged emotions, into those cylinders of shame and insecurity and sin and guilt. And you still have people sitting on your bench. It's time to release them, isn't it?

Just simply say, dear Lord, I release, and then you fill in the blank. This might be a daily occurrence for a long while because the devil is going to bring those situations back. But churches think of the freedom we have. It's right there for us. All we have to do is allow Jesus to unleash unforgiveness.

Thank you for this time. Lord, I thank you for our great church. I thank you for healing my shame and damaged emotions, and I thank you for this process. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.