

The Most  
PRICELESS  
GIFT



Norma Donovan

**M**ost of my life I lived under the veil of shame. More than any other obstacle, shame has kept me from being close to the Lord. It has prevented intimacy with others and has hindered me from being the person God created me to be.

In his book *The Search for Significance*, Robert McGee defines shame as “a deep sense of inferiority.” He goes on to say, “Shame often prompts us to view ourselves as victims. Some of us try to compensate for gnawing feelings of shame through passivity, refusing to invest any part of ourselves in relationships and responsibilities. Some of us develop facades; we are afraid if people really knew us, we would experience hurt and rejection.” In *Unmasking the Jezebel Spirit* John Paul Jackson writes, “Shame is the sense of feeling fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not measuring up to standards.” The dictionary describes shame as dishonor

or disgrace; being without grace.

**Shame is the sense of feeling fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not measuring up to standards.**

In the pages of this booklet, I'll explain the factors that made me believe I was disgraced and the coping mecha-

nisms and masks I used to keep my true self hidden. Then I'll explain how I was rescued from shame and how my life was transformed when I unwrapped the most priceless gift I've ever received: grace. If you've ever felt too bad to be forgiven, too messed up to be loved, then this message is for you. Throughout these pages you may see glimpses of yourself in my story. If so, you will also find hope for being set free from shame.

# My Painful Past and Its Effects on Me

**“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up;  
do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the  
desert and streams in the wasteland.”**

**Isaiah 43:18-19**

I was born in Phoenix, Arizona almost sixty years ago. My parents took good care of my needs. They were affectionate towards me and frequently told me they loved me. While I felt loved by my parents, I wasn't so sure they liked me.

I know my parents desired to give me what I needed emotionally. However they couldn't give me what I required for emotional connection and intimacy because they didn't possess it themselves. One of the principles God taught me which helps me become compassionate toward those who've hurt me is: You can't give away what you don't possess. If you asked me to give you a million dollars, no matter how much I would love to do that, I know I can't.

I don't possess a million dollars. Like-

wise, when we are hurt and wounded, even though we'd like to treat others in a healthy way, we are unable to do so if we don't already have it in us. We can only give away what we own or possess.

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what you don't possess.**

My Dad had little time to spend with his daughters, between selling real estate and visiting with his gun collector friends. He was very moody. His emotions dictated his

actions. Being an alcoholic, his behavior was unpredictable. I never knew what mood he'd be in and that made me feel fearful and insecure. Dad was also very critical and rarely offered words of affirmation.

I always wanted to be "Daddy's girl." Time alone with my Dad was uncommon and usually centered around his interests, not mine. I got the message loud and clear: I was not worthy of my Dad's attention.

As a child shyness and stuttering made me feel less acceptable. Then there was my appearance—my Syrian heritage gave me a large nose. Kids used to make fun of me, saying I looked like Jimmy Durante, a famous actor with a huge nose. Being a bit on the chubby side didn't help my self-esteem either.

Even though I couldn't articulate it at the time, I believed the following lies or false beliefs about myself:

*I have to be perfect, or at least look like it, for people to like me, so I'd better stuff my negative emotions.*

*I have to do more and be more in order to be acceptable.*

*I must not be important enough to my Dad for him to spend time with me.*

*Like my Dad, God doesn't want to spend time with me and He also rejects me.*

*God's love must be earned through my performance.*

*In order to feel okay about myself, I must have everyone's love and approval.*

Shame can enter into our hearts and minds when we choose to sin. The sinful choices others make against us also inflict shame. If your parents were not physically or emotionally available to you, shame

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walked into your heart. Shame also enters through the doorway of abuse: physical, sexual, verbal or emotional.

Wrong perceptions of ourselves are another avenue where shame can permeate our thoughts. Have you ever said these statements to yourself or heard others say them to you?

*“You just don’t get it and never will because you’re stupid.”*

*“You’ll never be as talented or as smart as \_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“Why try? You know you can’t do it.”*

*“You’re not good enough.”*

*“You don’t fit in.”*

Failure in relationships, work, or ministry can be another entrance for shame. Unfulfilled dreams, desires, expectations and loss may make you feel disgraced and different. Forms of defectiveness with our physical looks or having an illness or handicap can bring shame upon you. Rejection also makes us feel as if we don’t fit in.

### **Time for Reflection:**

1. In what ways can you identify with my past?
2. How have you experienced shame?
3. What circumstances in life made you feel defective as a person?
4. Identify any lies you’ve believed that have held you captive under shame.

# How I Coped with Shame and Hid From It

**“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”**

**Genesis 3:8**

Feeling like the forgotten child, I desperately wanted to be noticed. My ticket to acceptance was performance, so I became Miss Goody Two Shoes. I always tried to obey my parents, to attain the brownie points I needed to get their attention. My heart may not have always been submitted, but I did my best to look obedient. However, I wanted to feel valued because I was their daughter, not because of something I did or didn't do.

Achievement became another way I performed. I was involved in numerous extracurricular activities in high school, holding various positions. An undergrad degree wasn't enough, so I attained a master's degree. I became overly committed in ministry to the point of emotional burnout. Unconsciously I did this in order to be accepted by my

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family, friends and myself. My identity was in how well I performed, not in who I was as a person. Shame led me to get my worth from 'doing,' not from 'being.' It only encouraged me

to judge others who were not measuring up in my mind.

I pretended to be who others wanted me to be because I was afraid if they knew the real me, what I thought

and felt, I would experience rejection again. It's hard work to perform or to pretend to be like someone else in order to be accepted. You can never let down and be free to be yourself. Sometimes you can perform and pretend so much that you forget who you really are.

I also grew up believing I needed to be "user-friendly." Whatever someone asked me to do, I would do. Rarely did I offer my opinion, instead I readily agreed with theirs. In order to be liked and accepted, I became a people-pleaser. I did whatever I could to avoid rejection, fearful it would lead to abandonment and loneliness.

I covered up my true self with perfectionism. To prevent flaws from being exposed, I tried to appear perfect, always doing the right thing. My perfectionism was my attempt to hide from my true self, because I didn't think I was good enough. Even though I was a born-again believer, I became a modern-day Pharisee. I was legalistic, bowing down to God's rules to win His approval and acceptance. I thought if I went to church, spent time daily in God's Word, prayed often and ministered to many, then I would

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**The root of shame is pride.** receive not only God's stamp of approval, but man's. The root of shame is pride and looking and acting religious only fed my pride.

Another way I hid from shame was by wearing the cloak of a rescuer. I needed to be needed and was overly responsible and co-dependent on others to make me feel important. Busyness kept me from feeling and dealing with

the pain from my past. I would stay so busy I would numb out emotionally so that I couldn't feel my loneliness.

The last way I covered my shame was through addictions. I turned to food to give me comfort. Books became my friends to keep me from feeling lonely. Even healthy, good things can become unhealthy when they turn into god-things or idols. If something has your heart, attention, affection, time or money and controls you more than God

does, it's an idol. Doctors Clinton and Sibcy, in *Attachments*, say this: "Even positive addictions and rituals like studies, sports and religious activities, can create a false sense of closeness in which habits and things replace our need for relationship."

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Typical emotions related to shame are fear, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. You think something is wrong with you. Experiencing rejection makes you feel lonely. You compare and compete with others, hoping you'll end up on the top rung of the ladder so you feel better about yourself.

People who live under shame are usually thin-skinned, not able to handle criticism, and they become defensive. They develop a victim mentality and blame others instead of taking responsibility for their mistakes.

Ashamed people are self-focused and display selfish love. They play it safe in life and don't take risks. They may even procrastinate because of fear of failure.

An acronym for **SHAME** is **S**inners **H**iding **A**ll **M**istakes **E**veryday. And that's exactly what I did. Covering up became the norm for me. Adam and Eve's first reaction to



their sin in Genesis 3:8 was to hide from God. The progression is the same today as it was in the Garden of Eden. Sin leads to shame. Shame causes us to fear. And fear makes us hide our true selves.

**Sin leads to shame.  
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And fear makes us hide  
our true selves.**

**Time for Reflection:**

1. How do you hide or cover-up your true self from shame?
2. How have you coped with shame?
3. What masks do you wear in order to be more acceptable to others or to God?

# Rescued from Shame Receiving God's Grace

**"I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me  
from all my fears. Those who look to Him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame."**

**Psalm 34:4-5**

**D**eliverance from shame was a process and it began with two words. As I was leaving a counseling leadership retreat, an older woman hugged me goodbye and said, "You're special." I replayed those words over and over again in my mind and began to believe that truth.

A few days later I attended a seminar at a church in California on emotional burnout. On the last day a worship leader came in and sang quietly while people were being ministered to. While waiting to say goodbye to the women I had met, the worship leader came over to me and said the Lord was asking him to do something. I encouraged him to obey God. He then proceeded to play his guitar and sing Jesus Loves You. I wept.

After the worship leader sang over me, he gave me a couple of word pictures which began to break my shame and restore my honor. He said I was under a shower and the water was cleansing me of sin and shame. Then he saw that water running down a dirt road and it pooled at the foot of the cross. His next word picture had Jesus sitting at the head table at a banquet. I came in and sat down at one of the tables in the back of the room. Jesus got up, came over to me and had me sit next to Him at the head table.

A year later at another counseling leadership retreat, while the counseling pastor and his wife were washing my feet, they prophesied that I was “Daddy’s Girl” to my heavenly Father. At the sound of those words, I began to weep. What I had desperately desired with my earthly Dad was prophetically proclaimed by my heavenly Father.

Looking back at the process God took me through, I see there are six steps to becoming free from shame. The first one is: *Sins need to be confessed and repented of while forgiveness needs to be received and given away.* A close friend once said, “The only way to feel better is to feel bad first.” We need to feel convicted of our sin first and then repent: turn away from sin and turn toward God, seeking His forgiveness. Luke 13:3 commands us to repent. “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” When we “confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to purify us of all unrighteousness.”

**There is no sin too great  
that God cannot forgive.**

(1 John 1:9) There is no sin too great that God cannot forgive.

Then we need to forgive those who have sinned against us. When you forgive your offenders, you’re cancelling their debt. You’re letting them off your own personal hook, even though they are not off God’s hook. It’s been said that “forgiveness is a gift you give yourself, for when we forgive others, we are setting ourselves free.” On the other hand, “Not forgiving is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.”

The second step to being set free from shame is *to realize our righteousness is solely based on what Christ has done, not on anything we could ever do.* Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved by faith, and

this is not of yourselves. It's the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast." We need to grasp and unwrap God's gift of grace. Getting a grip on grace is the turning point to becoming free of shame. It's by faith alone that we receive and open up His gift of grace. We can't do anything to save ourselves. No level of perfection, or performance, could ever give us eternal life, nor peace and contentment on earth.

God's grace is the gift that unlocks the prison door of shame. Shame keeps us as slaves, while God's grace transforms us into His sons and daughters. God's greatest manifestation of His grace is the cross and it's there our shame is nailed.

What do you base your worthiness on? Do you base it on your good works or on God's work on the cross? Romans 5:8 says God demonstrated His unconditional love for us, not while we were performing at our very best, but while we were at our worst—sinners. The cross is proof that God the Father loves us just as we are. If we don't receive God's grace, then in essence we are saying what Christ did on the cross was not good enough. When I was living a life of performance it's like I was telling God that it's the cross plus what I did that could get me into heaven, which is false. Shame causes us to focus on ourselves, while the cross causes us to focus on Christ.

**Shame causes us to focus on ourselves, while the cross causes us to focus on Christ.**

**Replace the lies you believe with the truth.** *The third step to be delivered from shame is to **replace the lies you believe with the truth.** We become what we think and believe, causing our actions to line up with*

our thoughts. We can't live beyond what we think about ourselves. Tell yourself the truth which is found in God's Word.

<b>LIE</b>	<b>TRUTH</b>
I am rejected and worthless.	I am accepted in the Beloved and chosen by God. (Ephesians 1:6, 1 Peter 2:9)
I'm a victim.	I am victorious in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)
No one loves me.	God loves me so much He sent His only Son Jesus to die for me. (John 3:16)
I'm stupid.	I have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)
I can't do anything right.	I can do all things through Christ. (Philippians 4:13)
My sins are too great to be forgiven.	I am redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. (Colossians 1:14)

The fourth step to live without shame is *base your identity in who God is and who you are as His sons and daughters*. We need to find our value in God's unconditional love and acceptance along with His finished work on the cross, rather than others' conditional love and our pitiful performance.

*Grieving your losses and understanding the hurts within your heart* is the fifth step to being rescued from shame. Restoration can only begin when we acknowledge our hurt.

When I stuffed my emotions it only delayed them coming to the surface for the world to see.

Lastly, to free yourself of shame, *put your hope in God, the one who wants you restored and transformed.* God desires to use our hurts, addictions and shame to bring us to Himself. Psalm 25:3 says, "No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame."

We all have a choice regarding shame. We can choose to live under it, playing the victim and trying to cover it up by wearing various masks. Or we can choose to receive God's grace through faith. We will never be good enough based on what we do. We become acceptable by Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Grace entered the world when Jesus Christ was born.

When you live a life without shame, you will be free to be who God created you to be. Your life will be marked by intimacy with God and others. Fear, pride and selfish ambition will all have less power over you. Your identity will no longer be in your position, performance or possessions. You will be empowered and God will receive greater glory.

So what are you waiting for? Choose to unwrap the most priceless gift you'll ever receive, God's grace. Thank God for all He's done and begin to walk in your freedom, no longer hunched over under the cloak of shame, but with your head held high.

**Choose to unwrap the most priceless gift you'll ever receive, God's grace.**

**Time for Reflection:**

Will you unwrap the most priceless gift you will ever receive, the gift of God's grace?

# Arriving at Your Eternal Destination

**“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’  
and believe in your heart that God raised Him from  
the dead, you will be saved.”**

**Romans 10:9**

Some of you reading this booklet may have a desire to get to know God personally and to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, but you may not know how to get there. Recently, my husband and I were in Costa Rica and how grateful we were to have a GPS. The Global Positioning System gave us specific directions to get to where we needed to be and it kept us from getting lost. If I were to be your spiritual GPS, directing you on the coordinates it takes to become a born-again believer, I would give you the following instructions.

First, you need to repent and have genuine sorrow for your sins. Realize that running your life independently of God is a dead end street. Turn away from sin and turn to God, humbly confessing any known sin and asking God for His forgiveness. In Luke 13:3, Jesus says, “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (II Corinthians 7:10)

**Running your life  
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The next coordinate is to by faith, totally commit all that you are and have, to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Instead of being the ruler of your own life, humbly submit to God. When you follow this coordinate, God’s Spirit takes up residence inside of you, to live through you.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:31) “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

Thirdly, thank the Lord for His forgiveness of your sins, becoming His child and for His new life which now lives within you.

You know you've reached your destination when God's peace envelopes your heart, you

no longer enjoy sinning, and you have a desire to obey Jesus Christ and do His will. You can now enjoy the trip of a lifetime, which directs you to the final destination of living eternally in heaven with your Lord and Savior!

**Thank the Lord for His forgiveness of your sins, becoming His child and for His new life which now lives within you.**

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If you have made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, we'd love to hear from you. We invite you to contact Restoring Hearts Ministry to receive more resources to further your spiritual growth.

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Most of my life I lived under the veil of shame. More than any other obstacle, shame has kept me from being close to the Lord. It has prevented intimacy with others and has hindered me from being the person God created me to be.

*What keeps you from being close to the Lord?*

*What hinders you from being the person God created you to be?*

If you've ever felt too bad to be forgiven, too messed up to be loved, then this message is for you.

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designed to heal wounded hearts and set captives free for the sake of deepening intimacy with God and others

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