

Deceived by Shame, Desired by God: Women of Wisdom Series

Cynthia Spell Humbert

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Christianity and psychiatry in recent years have taken

cautious steps toward an alliance. Crossing a chasm of mutual distrust hasn't been easy. The author, who has served as a Christian counselor and therapist at the Minirth-Meyer Clinic in Dallas, makes a contribution toward bridging this gap by focusing on building, or rebuilding, a troubled woman's sense of self-worth.

Shame, she writes, "is a paralyzing emotion in which the afflicted person believes irreparable damage has been done to the deepest part of the soul." Eve, in the Garden of Eden, knew shame after she ate the Forbidden Fruit. Today, as then, applying a fig leaf or a bandage or a happy face cannot heal internal wounds created by abuse, addiction, lost love, or any one of a catalog of causes. Parents, acquaintances, or even the church may be the source of shame and low self-esteem. Rebellion and "crossing over God's line" can follow, with sin producing more shame.

Not all shame can be attributed to sin. A person struggling with shame-based thinking and a critical conscience can fall into a false guilt, for morally neutral human failures such as locking the keys in a car or burning the dinner casserole or forgetting to send a birthday card.

In trying to "find a way back home," many choose the wrong paths-roads that lead away from God and deeper into self-abusive behaviors. "Restoration can only come through understanding and accepting the healing unconditional love and grace of God," Humbert asserts. Using Bible passages and case studies, she works her way through that catalog of causes, showing how in each situation God's love is available to the person seeking it. She claims to see the Scriptures "from a truthful and liberated point of view rather than a rigid point of view." After considering the many faces and places of shame, the author turns to "a plan of hope and glory," citing the great value of human life. A modern parallel to the parable of the prodigal son (in Luke 15) is told in the concluding chapter, in which Jesse, a young woman with all the accoutrements of a rich life, squanders it and-broken, weak, aware of her sinfulness-finally returns home to a loving father.

The book's format will work well for group study, with questions and Scripture references for further investigation included for each chapter. The book's message is: it is not too late to turn things around. Christ's finished work on the cross can give hope and strength to break the cycle of sin and shame.

BEN JOHNSTON (November / December 2001)

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