

ECF 2nd October 2022 John 4:4-18: Guilt & Shame: Will I ever be good enough?

18 year old Joshua Dobson from Rochdale in England, was wanted by police for stealing a car, driving while disqualified and for filling up with fuel without paying.

But when officers searched for him at his home, he was nowhere to be seen. That was, until officers noticed that a large teddy bear was breathing. When they opened it up, they found the teenager hiding inside.

In a Facebook statement, the police said that he'd now been stuffed behind bars, although they hoped that he has a bearable time inside!

Now I guess that most of us haven't tried to hide inside a teddy bear, but it is not just criminals who feel that need to hide from our guilt.

Many of us struggle with the feeling of guilt that tells us that we've did a bad thing and the accompanying feeling a shame that says we're a bad person. Maybe from

- The words we've said, that as soon as they come out of our mouths, we wish we could take them back.
- Or the temptation we gave in to or the selfish or cruel actions that we're ashamed of.
- Or even just the thoughts and attitudes in our heart that if everyone could see, we'd run from in shame.

And these feelings can haunt us for years. On a website someone asked, "I did something terrible when I was a child. I've changed but I just can't forgive myself and it's tearing me apart, what do I do?"

And then there's the guilt and shame that we might carry from what others have done to us. Logically we know that someone else was to blame. But it can be so difficult to shake off that feeling that in some way it was our fault, that it happened because of who we are. It leaves us feeling unclean, unworthy and unloveable.

But there's good news for us. Whether we struggle with guilt and shame because of the wrongs we have done, or the wrongs done to us, if we regularly ask will I ever be good enough, there is an answer.

John 4:4-18: "Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

1. An Unlikely Couple

If you were looking for a husband or wife today, then you might go out to social events, to the pub or night club, or try an online matchmaking service. But in the Bible, a good place to look for a wife was a well. In the Old Testament that's where

- Isaac's servant found his master's future wife Rebekah.
- And Jacob met his future wife Rachel.
- And Moses met his wife Zipporah.

There's a pattern. When a man meets a woman at a well in the Bible, we often expect a wedding soon!

But this passage is surprising, because the woman at this well outside the town of Sychar was not marriage material –

certainly not for someone like Jesus.

a) Wrong Race

She was the wrong race. Jesus was Jewish and she was a Samaritan and [“Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”](#) John 4:9 There was a historical hatred between them that went back 1000 years.

b) Wrong Religion

She was also the wrong religion. The Samaritans had wrong ideas about how to worship God. This woman referred to it in John 4:20: [“Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”](#)

c) Wrong Reputation

But that’s not all. She also had a wrong reputation. Jesus said to her, [“You have had five husbands.”](#) John 4:18. We’re not told the reason for these marriages:

- She could have been tragically widowed five times, but that is unlikely.
- More likely is that she had been guilty of unfaithfulness five times.
- Or that she had been rejected by five unfaithful men who divorced her.

And at the present, she was living an immoral life, as [“The man you now have is not your husband.”](#) John 4:18

This is probably why [“It was about the sixth hour.”](#) John 4:6, when she came to the well. This is midday. A time in that part of the world that is far too hot to fetch water. The only reason you go then is to avoid everyone else.

Because of her reputation, she was living as an outcast in her community. Excluded, shunned and mistrusted.

d) Wrong Response

Maybe that’s why, when Jesus asked her about her marital status, she tried to hide it. [“I have no husband.”](#) John 4:17

In a sense it was kind of true. She wasn’t married at that present moment. But it also hid a whole load of guilt and shame, from the wrongs done to her and the wrongs that she had done. She’d been so used to hiding from others, that she felt that she had to hide from this stranger.

Now our lives are very different from this woman’s. Our issues might not be so obvious to others. But we all know the tendency to try to hide our faults and failings. Try to look better than we really are. Hope that nobody can really see what we’re like inside.

In the Garden of Eden, before they rebelled against God, Genesis 2:25 says of Adam and Eve, [“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”](#) They had nothing to hide and nothing to fear from each other. They were open, vulnerable and intimate with each other and with God.

But after they sinned, [“They realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”](#) Genesis 3:7 They felt exposed in each other’s company and so they covered up. They hid from each other. And from God. They [“hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”](#) Genesis 3:8 Of course that was impossible. But in guilt and shame they desperately tried to hide.

2. An Unconditional Love

Guilt and shame separates and isolates us from others. It makes us want to hide. But amazingly, Jesus overcame that isolation for this woman.

He knew all about her. That was her testimony as we’ll see. But this didn’t put him off. Instead he deliberately sought her out.

a) Reaching Out

[“He had to go through Samaria.”](#) John 4:4. That wasn’t because it was the only way to go. Most Jews would have taken a long way round, to avoid this Samaritan area. But not Jesus. He had to go through that Samaria, because he wanted to meet this woman.

He also made sure he was alone, [“The disciples had gone into the town to buy food.”](#) John 4:8 Not that it took 12 men to do that. But Jesus knew they would’ve only got in the way.

And it was Jesus who initiated this conversation by humbly asking this woman, [“Will you give me a drink?”](#) John 4:7

She was shocked at this. Later on, you can read that the disciples were also shocked by this. It was not the done thing in those days. Rabbis taught that [“One should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with his own wife, and certainly not with someone else’s wife, because of the gossip of men.”](#)

But Jesus didn’t care about the criticism of others. He didn’t respect the social taboos that would’ve kept them apart. Instead he organised his travel plans and orchestrated this whole incident, just so that he could speak with her.

So this is a love story, but a very different one. Not a love based on who she was, where she was from, or what she had done. But rather a love based on his unconditional love.

- He saw her through his eyes of love!
- A love that gave her significance.
- A love that saw her as valuable and precious and worth being criticised and misunderstood for.

b) Rescuing Others

And this is the great news of the gospel. [“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”](#) Romans 5:8 Whoever we are, wherever we are from, whatever we have done or has been done to us, whatever other people think of us – Jesus loves us.

This is why he went to the cross. When Jesus died he took the punishment for our sin, so that we could receive his perfect record of righteousness. He died under God’s judgement, so that we could be declared right with God forever.

So Jesus didn’t come to reward good people. Instead he came for sinners like you and me. He came for people who’ve messed up, who are haunted by guilt and shame, who are hiding from others.

And for people who think they’re good enough on their own. This was like Nicodemus, the deeply religious Bible teacher that Jesus met in the previous chapter of this gospel. He too needed Jesus’ unconditional love. He too needed to hear that [“God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”](#) John 3:16

3. An Unbelievable Offer

He needed the same gift that Jesus offered the woman at the well. He said to her, [“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”](#) John 4:10

She didn’t understand what Jesus was offering. She thought it was a supply of water so she wouldn’t need the well. But Jesus was talking about a gift that would satisfy her greatest need, her deepest longing.

She’d never experienced that kind of life. The first 6 men in her life could never offer her that. But in front of her that day was a seventh man, the only perfect man, the one who was fully man and fully God. The only one who could offer her life to the full, a life of real significance, satisfaction and security. A life of eternal relationship with God himself.

And that is the answer to our deepest need too. On our own, well never be good enough. Whether we see ourselves as respectable and religious like Nicodemus or rotten and rejected like this woman, we all stand guilty before God because we’ve all fallen short of his standard.

But Jesus came to offer us the unbelievable offer of eternal life. A gift that is so incredible and yet he offers it to us for free, as a gift of his grace. All we need to do is turn from living our own way and put our trust in Jesus alone for all that we need.

4. An Unavoidable Change

And if we do, it will change our lives. Listen to how it changed Matheus’ life. [Video: Matheus, What’s the Story](#)

It is an amazing story. And it reflects how this woman’s life was changed. It took time for her to realise who Jesus is. But as Jesus revealed himself to her, God opened her heart. And her life was radically transformed.

a) Compassionate

[“Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come.’”](#) John 4:28–29 Earlier she’d tried to avoid the people of her town. But now she went to them because she desperately wanted them to experience what she had!

Instead of desperately seeking for love in the wrong places and wrong ways, she became someone who expressed real love to others.

That's what Jesus' unconditional love does. ["We love because he first loved us."](#) 1 John 4:19 It is his love that sets us free from the jealousy, anger, hurt and resentment. Free to love.

b) Unashamed

And it is his acceptance that frees us fear and that helps us to accept ourselves as we are. She said to this town, ["Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"](#) John 4:29

This woman had been hiding from her community, ashamed of what they knew about her. But now she was no longer controlled by her past. She openly and honestly went to tell them about the one who knew all about her and yet wanted her!

If we know that we're accepted by God, then we don't need to hide our faults and failings because we know, ["There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."](#) Romans 8:1

So it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of us, or even what we think of ourselves. We are valued, accepted and forgiven by God!

This woman went to her town compassionate and unashamed. And as a result, ["Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony."](#) John 4:39

People couldn't ignore the change that had happened in her life. And as a result they too put their faith in Jesus. And so from being an outcast from her community, she became an effective evangelist to them.

Conclusion

So today,

- We don't need to be haunted by our guilt and shame.
- We don't need to try to hide what we have done.
- We don't need to be afraid that we will never be good enough.

Jesus loves just us as we are. He died for all the wrongs done to us and the wrongs we have done. And so if we put our trust in him, then we can know his complete forgiveness, his total acceptance, his eternal salvation and live in the freedom and joy of knowing that we belong to him.

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