

Over a year ago, I went to an art museum in Knoxville, Tennessee, with my mom and grandma. One of my grandmother's friend's sons (Richard Jolley) had a massive blown glass installment, so we went to see it in person. It was impressive.

After admiring the blown glass, we walked through the rest of the museum. There were a bunch of awe inspiring paintings. A few stretched from floor to ceiling with intricate details. Others seemed to morph as you moved closer or farther away from them. The talent displayed in that building was phenomenal.

Surprisingly, the flip side was also true. Right next to a painting of a young woman and her daughter which was full of gentle whimsy while still a clear image; was a simple white canvas with paint apparently inadvertently splashed across it. Of course, next to the splatter painting was an excessively garrulous elucidation of the painting and what it represented, written as an exhaustingly ostentatious, involuted, pronouncement. (See what I did there? And How exhausting that one sentence was to read? Imagine three massive paragraphs like that talking about paint splatters on a canvas and you'll understand my point.)

All I could think was...the audacity!

It blew my mind that someone could set aside all of their responsibilities in life and focus entirely on painting for a year (information gathered from the description plaque), only to produce a work as simple and nonsensical as that, and then, instead of feeling like they wasted their time, think, "This is a masterpiece and it belongs in an art museum!"

But then it hit me... in a way... they were right. There it was, their "masterpiece" sitting in an art museum in the same room as paintings which required a type of talent, dedication, practice, and hard work that only the likes of Michelangelo could compare. Somehow, for some reason, the art world agrees that the splatter painting was in the same league as the rest.

I started to wonder if maybe it was me, not the artist, who was doing something wrong. Was I misunderstanding something about life which other people had grasped?

Maybe there was something I could learn from their audacity...?

A few days later I was relaying these sentiments to my friend Emily Havens and she said, "It sounds like you might be struggling with shame."

I responded in confusion, "Shame? No, I don't think so...I mean, I hardly ever get embarrassed by anything. Growing up with my dad (an incredibly embarrassing man in all the best ways) kind of worked that out of me."

But then Emily explained that maybe I was misunderstanding what shame was and we decided to do a book study by Brené Brown on shame in order to dive deeper into the idea. (Brené Brown is today's leading expert on shame.)

It turns out I was misunderstanding shame. Shame isn't the same as embarrassment. Shame is the idea or belief that I am not worthy.

"Shame is that warm feeling that washes over us, making us feel small, flawed, and never good enough." -Brené Brown

Based on that definition, yes, I was struggling with shame.

My painting skills aren't perfect so I'm not worthy to have people see my paintings. My writing skills aren't perfect so I'm not worthy to have people read what I write. I'm not perfect so I'm not worthy of having God choose to use me to advance His purpose in the world.

My fear to share my art and my writing stemmed from shame, and it has held me back in many important avenues in my life. I am behind on my path to reaching my full potential because of my shame. My shame appears to have even held me back on my walk with God.

In order to receive God's gift of salvation, we have to be aware of how much we fall short. No one asks for help if they think they can do it themselves. So, it stands to reason that we, who have acknowledged our shortcomings and asked God for help, may struggle with feeling unworthy after salvation as well. Honestly, it'd be weird if we didn't.

I was looking at myself in the hypothetical mirror and seeing all of the ways I fell short of God's holiness. All the sins I struggle with, all the mistakes I've made—both willful and accidental. How little I actually know about the Bible, compared to how much I could know if I was more dedicated in my studies. If God were to look at all of His children, lined up on a bench, I couldn't see any reason why He would choose to put me "into the game". It was illogical to think He would want to use me to further His purpose on this earth.

But, God foresaw this as a struggle we would face and addressed it in His Word. The Bible makes it clear that after salvation, we are meant to walk confidently in who we are in Christ. We are meant to set our shame, our unworthiness, aside and view ourselves the way God now views us, which is exactly how He views Jesus.

"Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence." Ephesians 3:12 (NLT)

(Also see: Romans 8:1; Romans 8:17; Romans 8:37; Romans 8:39; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:13–14)

It's not about our abilities or worthiness, it has never been about that. It's about Jesus' abilities and worthiness.

So, if our usefulness to God isn't based on how awesome we can be, but is in fact based on how awesome Jesus is; and Jesus's awesomeness shines even greater through us when we are weak, then God can use me just as I am right now, flaws and all.

It doesn't make sense for me to waste time with shame. I am not being judged on my worthiness, but on Jesus' worthiness. So, if I allow shame to hold me back, it is like saying, Jesus isn't worthy or Jesus isn't capable.

If we have faith in God's Word and that God never lies and always keeps His promises, then shame has no place in our walks with Him.

It is by faith we are saved; and it is also by faith that we live our lives as useful tools in God's hands. I have faith that I am worthy to be used by God, because Jesus succeeds where I fail. He overflows where I lack. Jesus makes me worthy.

I am worthy because I am in Jesus and Jesus is worthy.

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