

It's not missing from the Bible. It's missing from our lives.

THE MISSING COMMANDMENT LOVE YOURSELF

HOW LOVING YOURSELF THE WAY GOD DOES
CAN BRING HEALING AND FREEDOM
TO YOUR LIFE

JERRY AND DENISE BASEL



SHAME AND THE LIES WE BELIEVE



*I have never known who I really was because my whole life
I have been wearing a mask, performing for and trying to
please others. My mother even made me dress up with full
makeup and my hair done to go to the mailbox—because
“you never know if someone will see you.”
—A teen during her recovery from anorexia*

Understanding Healthy Shame

Many people misunderstand shame. Let's get an accurate understanding of shame in its two forms: healthy and toxic.

Shame often results from having done something that is embarrassing, disgraceful, appalling, or discrediting. Maybe you made a mistake at work that negatively impacted your department. Many people knew that you caused the problem. It was just human error, but you feel ashamed nonetheless. This type of shame in its appropriate form lets you know that you have limitations and will make mistakes.

Or maybe you told a lie, or took a less-than-stellar shortcut on your report, or vented your personal frustrations on your spouse. You knew it was wrong, but you did it anyway. Such actions should also produce a feeling of shame. Healthy shame allows you to feel pain or sorrow when you violate God-designed ways of loving yourself and others. Shame over sin—

or “missing the mark” of God’s ways—is intended to bring about the good fruit of godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9–11).

Healthy shame is often used interchangeably with the term *true guilt*. Feeling this type of shame leads us to make things right with those affected by our actions. When possible, we can work to correct the results of what we’ve done. In the case of a relationship, we can seek reconciliation and restoration. Even if we cannot reverse the results of our action or lack of action, we can still take responsibility for it. Most importantly, we can acknowledge to God that we’re truly sorry for what occurred. Asking for and receiving his forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and then forgiving ourselves, lets us move forward with new hope.

All of the above are reasons why God, through the Holy Spirit living in us, lets us experience and process healthy shame.

Toxic Shame

Ungodly *toxic shame* is much different from healthy shame. It is one of the most prevalent and harmful issues that we address in counseling. Toxic shame robs us of the life that the Father intends for us to experience. It interferes with living passionately as lovers of God and our fellow humans.

Toxic shame reveals itself in multiple ways. It commonly manifests as a hopeless, painful belief that a part of us is defective, bad, phony, inadequate, or a failure. We may experience a sense of worthlessness, of having little or no value. We feel isolated and alienated, different from and less than others. We judge ourselves and become an object of our own contempt.

Through self-shaming, we become our own tormentor, gaining ground for the Enemy. Little about us satisfies or pleases us; we can, however, always find plenty to criticize. Judging ourselves by ideal standards, we doom ourselves to repeatedly prove the obvious: that we can never “do it good enough.”

Our self-judging blocks genuine conviction by the Holy Spirit, and thus, true repentance and change.

Besides causing us to feel defective or inadequate, toxic shame also convinces us that others can see through us, past our false front and directly into our defects. In response, we may physically withdraw from people, or we may emotionally hide by projecting a facade that protects our true self.

Toxic shame makes us afraid to share our inner self, because if we do, we may not be accepted for whom we really are. Instead, we often learn to project an image of what we think others want to see. Exposing our true self seems too naked, too vulnerable. The risk of rejection is too great, the fear too formidable. Thus, we learn a crucial rule for life: *Avoid shame at all costs.*

Faces of Toxic Shame

Ask yourself the following questions (and in addition, ask those closest to you how they would answer them about you):

- Do I become defensive with others?
- Am I critical of myself and others?
- Is my self-talk negative, condemning, and merciless?
- Am I a perfectionist?
- Am I performance-driven, a human doing versus a human being?
- Do I fear closeness and intimacy, craving it yet fleeing from it?
- Do I isolate physically—or emotionally, shutting down or stuffing my feelings?
- Am I controlling of others?
- Do I have difficulty identifying or expressing feelings?
- Am I a people-pleaser, longing for approval and recognition?
- Do I have difficulty trusting others, including God?
- Am I sensitive to criticism, even when it's constructive?
- Is it hard for me to admit I am wrong and say I am sorry?
- Do I need to be right in order to feel better about myself?

- Do I have difficulty making decisions?
- Do I find myself trying to prove I am okay by working harder or doing more?
- Do I struggle with addictive behaviors?

A “yes” answer to any of these questions points to a wound of shame.

The Controlling Side of Toxic Shame

Some of our clients do not relate to the symptoms of toxic shame that we’ve just identified. Yet these people struggle in significant ways in their relationships with God and with others. As they look deeper into the reasons behind their difficulties, toxic shame surfaces—but in a different form. We call it *controlling* or *aggressive shame*, but it is shame nonetheless.

This kind of shame allows no room for feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, or failure. Personal strength and self-will dominate. Feelings, good or bad, have little place. Such an individual may present as being demanding, rigid and inflexible, in control. They may appear to disregard the needs and opinions of others. Their objective is to succeed, to look good, to be right, and get it right. With this type of shame, open, honest, and vulnerable relationships are difficult to achieve. But unless you are in a close relationship with someone influenced by controlling shame, you would not know of the relational consequences it produces.

Great, unseen fear underlies such a person’s external drivenness. It is not overt fear, such as a fear of heights or a fear of public speaking. Rather, it is a deep-seated, core fear, such as the fear of not being in control; the fear of not having what it takes to succeed; the fear of failure, which points to a core of insecurity. But this kind of person has learned to compensate for their deep issue of shame in a way that conceals it. What might be more evident is his or her need to assert control, resist control, or both.

While such individuals typically exhibit few feelings, the one emotion they do often display is anger, and others are well aware of it. Anger

is an important emotion, and it generally points to other feelings such as loss, disappointment, hurt, and betrayal. But anger can also be used as a defense to deal with deeper levels of fear and insecurity.

Since such people are often successful in the ways that society views success, many often applaud them. But the motivation behind their success is shame: making sure that the deep-seated feelings of inadequacy are never seen by others—nor by them.

The truth emerges, however, when the measures of success get stripped away. Failing health, financial failure, marriage problems ... losses of various kinds begin to accumulate. When the losses exceed the strength of a person's defense mechanisms, then the strong, external false self that conceals the shame-based identity begins at last to decay and fall away. Now real healing can commence. Unfortunately, by this time, considerable damage in important relationships has already occurred.

Toxic Shame Produces Pride

Toxic shame results in either of two forms of pride. It may be the pride that says, "I can do this. I can survive and overcome and be victorious and show you that I am someone." Or it is the pride that says, "I am so inadequate and so defective that I can never be healed and I'll never change." This latter kind of pride is often termed *the pride of the worm*. The person is saying, in essence, that he is too big of a problem—even for God.

Although it may sometimes be important to confront pride from a spiritual perspective, we find it more important and effective to deal with the underlying fear—since *fear is typically at the base of pride*. According to 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." A proud person—which is to say, a fearful person—needs love to fill the places in her where fear lives. We believe that God's ultimate goal is to bring his love to those deep places, and thus it is our goal as well.

The Internal War over Our Identity

As believers in Christ, we are defined by God as holy and righteous—as *saints*. This is how God sees us. Yet I (Jerry) have battled greatly over the years to see myself in the same way. Why? Why is it easy for some to accept their new identity in Christ while others like me find it so much more difficult?

Denise and I believe that much of the reason lies in whether, as a child, a person received the messages that were necessary to establish the foundation for accepting and embracing themselves and others.

In my case, missing pieces in my development as a child convinced me, deep in my heart, that “I am me and I am not okay” rather than “I am me and I am okay.” This wasn’t a matter I gave serious thought to before reaching my conclusion; children do not have that kind of cognitive ability. Until age five, children are really just bags of feelings. Their world revolves around what they feel and perceive. Their sense of worth and value comes through their hearts and spirits, not their minds. So as I continued to grow, I struggled with a shame-based identity—not feeling good enough—and it set me up for a great deal of fear and anxiety. I wanted not only to do well and be good, but even more, to avoid doing anything that made me look bad.

When I gave my heart to Jesus in my early thirties, I had no overwhelming emotional response, but I knew that something had changed inside me. I had experienced a heart change, something that became even more evident as the weeks went by. The problem was, this good news didn’t immediately get to all the places in my heart. I knew in my mind, and to a degree in my heart, that I was now “clean, forgiven, washed, and accepted,” but the deep and foundational lies that form destructive, toxic shame still needed to be dealt with.

So while I now had a perfect Father who loved, cherished, embraced, and accepted me no matter what, I still had to face the core shame that fought against this truth. Within me, a war was raging. I still had fear and anxiety, but now it related to my performance in my relationship with

God. I wanted God to be pleased with me, but even more, I wanted to avoid feeling that he was somehow *displeased* with or disappointed in me. Not until a couple of years later, when I submitted to the process of finding the wounded boy within me and bringing him to the Father, did this core shame get resolved. Theologically, the inner work I experienced is called *sanctification*.

Seeking Validation: “Will You Stamp My Ticket?”

When our core identity is shame-based rather than centered on the truth of who God has made us to be, we often struggle with the need for validation. At the most basic level, when something is valid, it is true. If something does not measure up or meet established criteria, then we would say it is invalid.

Over the years, we have worked with many men and women who have struggled with invalidation and their resultant lack of feeling okay with themselves. In some, this shows through their constant need for affirmation and approval. In others, it manifests through a hardened exterior, a wall—their way of trying to persuade themselves and those around them that they are legitimate, competent, or *somebody*. Either way, the most revealing symptom of invalidation is an inability to experience and maintain intimate relationships with others and with God.

A few years ago, during a time of personal ministry, the Lord dealt with my (Jerry’s) heart about my struggle with invalidation. As I sought the Father for his insight, an image came to my mind. It was of me driving into a parking garage and receiving a ticket from the machine upon entering. A representative of the business I was visiting subsequently stamped the ticket for me, and I presented it to the attendant later upon exiting the garage. My validated ticket meant I was approved and therefore didn’t have to pay.

I knew immediately what the Lord was showing me. One of my struggles in life has been to know that I am truly valid—that in my deepest part, I’m okay. This was particularly evident many years ago. Without realizing

it, I frequently had my ticket out, hoping that someone would validate it to make me feel that I was alright. Not until I came to be a believer in Christ did he begin to reveal the power of invalidation in my life.

I am grateful for the profound work that God has done in this area over the years; yet during that personal ministry time, he revealed my need for an even deeper level of healing. I no longer held my ticket in my hand, but I did have it tucked away in my pocket. And in some circumstances—a disappointment, for instance, or a personal failure—I could still find that ticket and be tempted to hold it out for external validation.

This revelation helped me to submit my heart to God for further healing. I felt pain at the time, but today I no longer have a ticket to be stamped. Even better, the Father showed me that his stamp was already on me—VALID.

The Causes of Toxic Shame

As mentioned, our core identity—how we see and feel about ourselves—is formed very early. Various circumstances affect its development, but it is most significantly influenced by our primary caregivers, typically our father and mother, and also by teachers, siblings, and others who have a significant impact on us in childhood.

As children, we may be exposed to shaming messages that have a profound effect on us later in life.²⁷ These messages may be spoken to us, but they may also be communicated without words. They are simply learned in the environment. For example, your parents may never have told you, “Don’t cry,” but somehow you learned that crying was not a good thing to do in your home. Maybe you knew that crying would give your mother or father a reason to “really give you something to cry about.”

These unspoken shaming messages can be transmitted through a glance, a frown, a stare, a gesture, a kick, or a slap in the face. My (Denise’s) grandmother used to “bing” my cousins in the forehead with a spoon. Any of these actions can convey the same message of shame, which the child may internalize as being true about her very being.

Of course words, too, have a powerful impact. Shaming statements that children commonly hear include these: Shame on you. You should know better. How stupid can you be? Children are to be seen and not heard. Don't ask questions, just do as I say. Big boys/girls don't cry. That didn't hurt. You need to always look good. Don't betray the family. You'll never amount to anything.

The Polish side of my (Denise's) family liked to use the German word *dummkopf* to get a shame message across. The synonyms are extensive: stupid, idiot, blockhead, dodo bird, dope, dumbbell, imbecile, dummy, dunce, nincompoop, and plenty more. Just remembering some of the times I was called a dummkopf evokes an old, familiar "I'm bad" feeling in my stomach. Other painful labels damage children just as badly: worthless, whore, loser, screw-up, mistake—just to name a few. These are difficult messages for anyone to overcome.

In addition, the *absence* of affirmation, acceptance, affection, protection, and a sense of belonging communicate an equally devaluing message to a child, from which a core of shame develops. Children need to *hear* the words "I love you." Children need to *feel* the affection and appropriate touch and nurture from their parents or caregivers. Children don't understand that when their parents withhold affection and affirmation or inflict any type of abuse, it reveals something sadly missing in the parents, not something hopelessly flawed in the child.

Keep in mind that we're talking about a belief system which solidifies between the ages of two and four. On top of that, our personality is firmly established by the age of seven. Negative issues can, of course, affect a child beyond these formative years, but for the most part, only traumatic events such as the death of a loved one, divorce, sexual abuse, and the like, will dramatically shape a child's personality after that.

The Impact of Shame in a Dysfunctional Family

When one or both parents harbor undealt-with toxic shame, it affects everyone in the family. A child who doesn't sense that his mother or father

loves him experiences overwhelming rejection and emotional abandonment. To deal with this pain, the child will find ways to cope. Often he learns to shut down his emotions as well as his needs.

Children growing up in dysfunctional, shame-based families learn three cardinal rules: Don't talk. Don't trust. And don't feel. A child doesn't talk because there is no place where his thoughts, opinions, and interests will be listened to, understood, and validated. She doesn't trust because she learns that being vulnerable and opening up to others gets her hurt so she decides that she can safely trust no one but herself. And a child doesn't feel because feeling is too painful.

Children who grow up in dysfunctional environments often also learn three additional rules: Don't hope. Don't plan. And don't dream. These rules speak for themselves.

As children progress from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, the rules they operated under as children in order to survive remain in place. Automatic responses and reactions in relational situations do not just go away, even when an individual becomes a believer in Christ. The rules that govern a wounded heart block our ability to feel the love of God the Father as well as the love of others. Eventually, though, these emotional handicaps begin to take their toll. We come to a point where we need to reach out for help both to God and to the helpers he places in our path. At last, we begin to unlearn the core lies we have lived by. Our unhealthy patterns start breaking down, and we can move forward with our healing.

Kristen, a precious young woman, wrote the following letter to her younger self during her counseling weekend with us. We could feel the almost tangible healing love that the Father was pouring into her wounded, shamed self as she read aloud to us. It was a moment of transformation in her life story.

Dear little Kristen,

I am writing to you because I want to affirm you and validate things in you that never were [validated] before. I want to tell you that you are free to be you. You are fully accepted. You are

not weird. You were not made to carry the burdens of others. Lay those down at the feet of Jesus. It is not your job to manage the anxiety in the room or to buffer the conflict. All you have to do is completely and fully be you.

Little one, it is good to cry, to share, to express. Don't quench that. You don't have to be strong for anyone. You have a Father in heaven who will be strong for you. You have been given the ability to think deeply and analyze. You are "not too much" for anyone. You are perfect the way you were made.

I am sorry that I have avoided you, rejected you, and denied you. I am sorry that I have never considered you before. You are so young and are starving to find your place in the world. Please know that you are perfect the way that you are and that you are not too much for me. You are beautiful, without flaw, lovely in fact. You have nothing to measure up to and nothing to prove to me. I love you, I love you, I love you.

Love,
Me

The Lies Shame Tells

As you may have surmised, distorted beliefs or lies about ourselves, others, and God lie at the core of toxic shame. As I (Jerry) began to realize the presence of shame in my own life, I had to deal with lies that were influencing me at a deep level. They and their resultant shame didn't start with anything I did—I was too young. They rode in as a result of wounds in my parents inflicted by their own families of origin. I didn't want to believe these lies, especially once I knew what Christ had done for me and how the Father viewed me. But my best efforts to refute them were often inadequate.

A key aspect of healing from toxic shame is identifying the lies that we operate from and coming against them with the truth of Scripture.²⁸

This is just one aspect of dealing with toxic shame, but it is an important one. We ask our counselees to honestly assess what they believe about themselves in such categories as self-worth, rejection, sense of belonging, guilt, and physical and personality traits. Do any of the following statements apply to you?

I don't belong. I will always be on the outside looking in.

My feelings don't count. No one cares what I feel.

I am the problem. When something goes wrong, it is my fault.

No one will ever care about me just for me. If you knew the real me, you would reject me.

Even when I do my best, it is not good enough. I can never meet the standard.

I have to plan every day of my life. I can't relax.

I need to be passive in order to avoid conflict that risks other's disapproval of me.

I must wear a mask so that people won't see who I really am and reject me.

Other lies show up more in our relationships with others and with God. Do any of these apply to you?

I have to guard and hide my emotions.

I cannot give anyone the satisfaction of knowing they have hurt me.

The correct way to respond if someone offends me is to punish them by withdrawing or cutting them off.

My value is based totally on others' judgment about me.

If I let anyone get close to me, I may get my heart broken again, and I can't risk that.

I am out there all alone; no one will come to my rescue if I need help.

God loves other people more than he loves me.

No matter how much I try, I will never be able to please God.

You may already know in your mind that a given statement isn't true. But a rational, intelligent answer isn't what counts here. Rather, ask yourself, "Does my life follow in the direction of any of these lies, especially when I'm not doing well emotionally?" Stated another way, "Do I struggle on the inside with any of these unhealthy thoughts and feelings?"

IMPORTANT! As we address the lies at the base of toxic shame, remember that *we are not dealing only with emotional issues but with spiritual ones as well*. The lies that exist in our hearts form spiritual strongholds or arguments that set themselves up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:5). When we acknowledge these lies to the Father and speak his truth to our hearts—the message *he* wants us to believe—we take the first step in demolishing the stronghold those lies have had on us.

Yet while refuting the lie is important, it is not enough. We can address the problem logically, but a logical argument will not change the heart. If true healing is to occur, the love of the Father has to get to the places—often very young places—where the injury occurred.

During my sessions with a pastoral counselor many years ago, I (Jerry) became aware of lie-based, childhood wounds that drove my adult behaviors. It was a critical revelation. I wasn't just crazy; my problems existed for a reason, and knowing this brought me relief. It also gave me hope for healing. If these things were written about in emotional healing books, then I wasn't the only one with a problem, and people really did get healed.

But had I stopped with that knowledge alone, my deeper heart healing would not have occurred.

The Bible describes the complete healing process like this:

[Jesus] will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything *true* in its proper place before God; everything *false* he'll put out with the trash to be burned" (Matthew 3:11–12 MSG, emphasis added).

Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, the gospel of Luke reveals the blueprint for Jesus's transformation project in our hearts and lives:

Make the road (our destiny) smooth and straight (with the incredible good news that God is *with* us and *for* us)!

Every ditch (of our past) will be filled in (every lie removed and all shame covered by God's grace),

Every bump smoothed out (our fears leveled and trust established),

The detours (our sinful choices) straightened out (with a glimpse of our destiny before us),

All the ruts paved over (Jesus prepares a new way for our true selves—our child-of-God selves—to be reborn). (Luke 3:5–6 MSG, parentheses ours)

This is an appropriate place to share a follow-up report from one of our clients, Stacie, after a two-day counseling retreat that transformed her heart:

Shortly after my trip to see you all, I visited my dad and mom. My six-year-old daughter Kinsey was with me. I was surprised as to how emotionally hard it was to go home and be with my parents. I felt vulnerable and slightly pissed off. One evening while we were there, Kinsey was fiddling around with an old sheet on the floor. She was using it like skates and was gliding around dancing. My dad says to her, "What are you doing? What would make you do that to that sheet?"

Now normally, I would immediately get on to her, because she had upset my dad. However, I looked at my dad and I said to him, "Dad, she's not doing anything wrong. She is just doing what kids do—having fun." And do you know what he said to me? "Oh, OK."

That's it! That's all he said! What an amazing moment for me!

Lots of stuff rolled off with that one interchange! First of all,

I was able to defend Kinsey—which also means I was able to defend that little girl inside of me as well! Secondly, I'm excited that I was able to recognize that Kinsey was just being a kid and enjoying the freedom to play. This is an ongoing challenge for me, but I believe I am getting better at it.

After we got back from my parents house, I had another interesting experience with Kinsey. While we were riding in the car, we had a conversation about food. She doesn't like to eat her veggies, so I told her no dessert if she doesn't eat her veggies. As the conversation went on she started to cry and said to me, "I feel like a rotten egg. Nobody wants to eat me!"

Wow, that one took me for a loop. Immediately one of the messages on shame that I heard when I was at your place came back to me: "There is nothing you can ever do to make God love you less—nothing—N-O-T-H-I-N-G!" So I pulled over and stopped the car. I got out, went to Kinsey in the back seat and hugged her. I was able to tell her she is not a rotten egg and I would choose her! I would eat her up! (So silly I know!) Then, after a few more minutes of hugs, we continued on our way.

Stacie had previously shared with us that during the times when she needed to discipline Kinsey (who was already crying in advance), a part of her wanted to just hold Kinsey. But she felt that she needed to spank her because it was her job to teach her daughter about sin. Now she is seeing that what she needs to teach Kinsey most of all is about *love*.

How Shame Taints Our Relationship with God

Toxic shame exacts an exorbitant price in our lives. It costs us love, friendships, acceptance, hope, and connectedness. Worst of all, it robs us of an intimate relationship with God. Shame causes us to see the Father through distorted lenses and thus inhibits us from receiving the love he has for us. Instead of enjoying simply *being* with God as the overflow of

a love relationship with him, we wind up performing for God in order to please him and earn his love. Then when we finally get burned out or depressed, we complain, “I did all these things for God and got no reward. He must be disappointed with me.”

Shame keeps us locked in this mentality and fruitless cycle. In our daily walk with God, we find ourselves comparing other people’s blessings and gifts to ours; their healing to ours; the fruit of their work to ours. We see others as having God’s favor, but not ourselves. Others get the words and help from God that we wanted; they experience the love of God in more manifest ways than us. We feel rejected, abandoned, worthless, alone, ashamed, and beaten down. The core message haunts us: *There must be something inherently wrong with me that God doesn’t hear me, see me, speak to me, touch me, or bless me.*

A Moment of Reflection

In closing this chapter, we would like to share a powerful poem that we have adapted for use in counseling. It brings home the power of what we have been describing in this chapter. The stark truth in the last verse hits especially hard: destructive shame robs our identity and thwarts our destiny.

MY NAME IS TOXIC SHAME

I was there at your conception.
You felt me in the fluid of your mother’s womb.
I came upon you before you could speak—
Before you understood,
Before you had any way of knowing.
I came upon you when you were learning to walk—
When you were unprotected and exposed,
When you were vulnerable and needy,
Before you had any boundaries.
My name is Toxic Shame.

I came upon you before you could know I was there.
I severed your soul.
I pierced you to the core.
I brought you feelings of being flawed and defective.
I brought you feelings of distrust, ugliness, stupidity, doubt—
Feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, and unworthiness.
I made you feel different.
I told you, “There is something wrong with you.”
I soiled your godlikeness.
My name is Toxic Shame.

I am the internal voice that whispers words of condemnation.
I live in secrecy—
In the deep darkness of depression and despair and loneliness.
I sneak up on you.
I catch you off guard.
I come through the back door,
Uninvited, unwanted.
I am the first to arrive to tell you, “You’ll never measure up.
You’ll never belong.”
My name is Toxic Shame.

I come from caretakers who abandon, ridicule, abuse, neglect,
reject, and ignore.
I am empowered by the shocking intensity of a parent’s criticism,
The cruel remarks of siblings,
The jeering humiliation of other children,
Your awkward reflection in the mirror,
The touch that feels icky and frightening,
The slap, the pinch, the pointing finger that ruptures trust.
I make you feel hopeless,
Like there is no way out.
My name is Toxic Shame.

My pain is so unbearable that you must pass me on to others
Through control, perfectionism, contempt, criticism, blame,
envy, judgment, power, and rage.

My pain is so intense,

You must cover me up with masks, addictions, performance,
rigid roles, anger, defenses, and religion.

I twist who you are into what you do and have.

I murder your soul and you pass me on for generations.

I destroy your identity.

I erase your destiny.

My name is Toxic Shame.²⁹

P R A Y E R

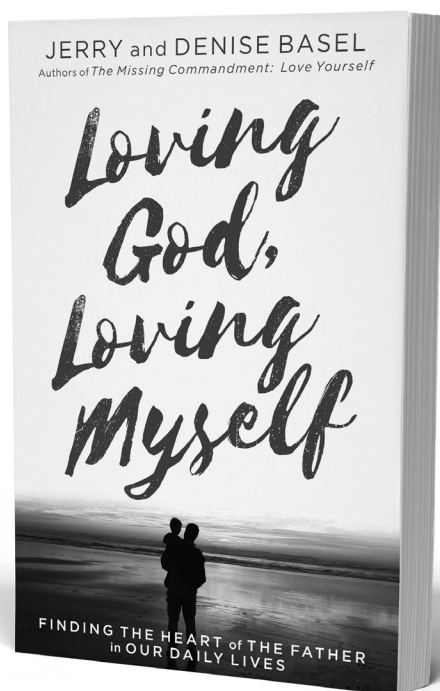
Father, I want to be whole. I want to view myself the way you view me and love myself the way you love me. Lord, if there is any destructive, toxic shame within me that hinders my ability to do so, I ask you to reveal it to me. I ask this so that I can ultimately walk in the freedom that you desired for me when you sent your Son Jesus in order to restore all things—including me.

I want to be free of the lies that still affect me and influence my ability to love you, myself, and others. And I know that if you reveal this type of shame in me, it is already your plan to ultimately heal me from its effects. Please have your way in me. Thank you for your love. I ask all of this in the name of your Son, Jesus, amen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Review the questions in the section on “Faces of Toxic Shame.” To which questions did you answer yes? Did you previously relate these symptoms to toxic shame?
2. How do you describe the difference between healthy shame and toxic shame?
3. Shaming messages can be spoken as well as silently communicated through a look, a gesture, or a frown. What shaming messages do you remember from growing up? Are there any messages you internalized that we have not included?
4. In the section on “The Lies Shame Tells,” which statements reflect the way you feel or what you heard? How would your life be different if those lies were silenced?
5. How has toxic shame affected your relationship with God?
6. Reread the poem, “My Name Is Toxic Shame.” How do the faces of shame that it describes affect you? You may want to record some of your thoughts in your journal.
7. Ask the Father to heal your identity and restore your destiny—the destiny he knit together in your mother’s womb.
8. Pray the closing prayer from your heart.

THE HEALING JOURNEY CONTINUES . . .



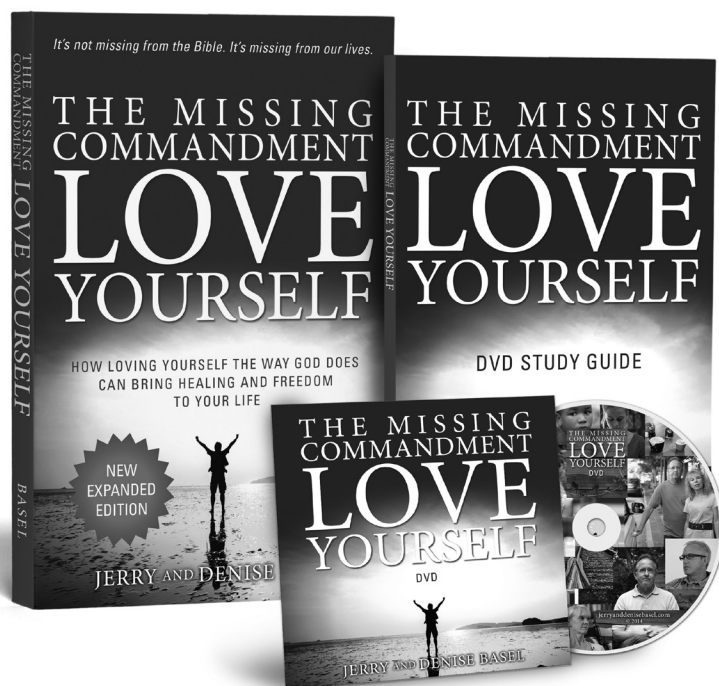
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THE MISSING COMMANDMENT LOVE YOURSELF

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"Loving Me Just For Me"

When we "love God because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19), it enables us to fulfill the greatest commandment—to "love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves" (Mk. 12:30-31). However, even when we know this in our mind, we may not *feel* God's love in our heart. Why? Often, it is because we didn't receive enough love, affection, belonging, and guidance growing up.



During a counseling session, when we are trying to help a client identify the barriers to experiencing God's love, we often ask, "When you were growing up, how did you know that your mom and dad loved you?" Many times we hear something like, "I don't know. I just knew that they did."

So, if you believe that, "Of course my parents loved me," then answer the questions below and write down specific memories about your home when you were growing up. Ask the Holy Spirit (the Counselor) to empower you to see the truth (as he sees it) more deeply and more completely.

I remember feeling loved by my dad/mom when . . . I remember feeling very special and valued as their son/daughter when . . .

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