



ASHAMED?

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...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

After the apostle Paul's conversion, he left the life of persecutor, becoming persecuted as he lived for Jesus. If we, too, live for Jesus like Paul did, the following will give us something to reflect on.

Many of us live with illnesses or problems considered shameful by others. Sometimes, as many of you know, this shame that's laid upon you is more painful than the illness itself. It can cause severe emotional problems. Consider how dying on the cross must have been for Jesus.

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Being hung on a cross to die was the most shameful and painful form of punishment during Roman times. Jesus died hanging on a cross, treated as a sinner, carrying the guilt of all humanity on him. Think of what that must have meant to this man we know for his holiness, goodness, and perfection! Think of what he must have felt!

My thoughts turn to how we who experience the shame of stigma have much to learn from Jesus' experience. Stigma held towards those with illness and disability is, of course, not nearly as horrendously painful as what Jesus went through. Yet it's cruel, especially when we consider that the stigmatized person has done nothing wrong to deserve it.

Among many things, shame brings with it disrespect, humiliation and contempt. Isn't that what happened when Jesus was hung on the cross? I'm not undermining the horrendous pain Jesus underwent, yet it does bear a resemblance to what some of us deal with. Those who are familiar with such treatment will understand a little about Christ's suffering. Along with this understanding, a better closeness to him can develop.

What can we learn from Jesus when we look at his response to the cross?

The Bible says that he scorned the cross's shame. He shrugged it off. Ignored it. The work Jesus was doing for his Father was far more important than worrying about such things. That work was all Jesus focused on. As Christ's follower, God's work was what Paul focused on as well. Shame that others put upon him did not distract him. Hardships, including imprisonment, did not distract Paul. He kept going. He persevered.

Though Jesus knew he would die an excruciating death, the Bible says that "*for the joy set before him*" he endured it. Jesus always remembered the good it would do for mankind. His heart and mind were full of love. Reminds me of something I wrote in my journal recently:

"You can withstand much if you know there's a purpose for it."

What kind of hardships are you, the reader, going through? What might it lead to? Something of value? And if so, are you willing to give yourself to it wholeheartedly? If you are following Jesus and if you're inspired by Paul, you will have good examples to follow.

Can you endure being looked down on and thought ill of? Can you shrug off the shame, realizing it comes from the ignorant and proud? It's not from God. It comes from the world, and is thus not worthy of your attention.

Consider Jesus and how he lived and loved and suffered. Consider what he went through and how he endured. Join with him—to your best ability, following his example. If you have decided to follow Jesus, don't live for yourself alone. Live for something better. Something much better. Live for God and what he calls you to do.

If you keep your eyes on Jesus this won't be hard to do. Your life will be more meaningful than you could ever have imagined.