

Topic One: Title: The Powerful Grip of Shame,

Questions:

1. Why do you think it is so difficult to talk about feelings of shame and embarrassment?
2. Discuss a time in your life when someone tried to shame you or make you feel less than? What happened as a result?
3. Discuss Biblical references to shame and share how Bishop Rob helped you view shame in a new light.
4. Discuss the difference between shame and remorse.
5. Discuss whether you think feeling ashamed might sometimes be a good thing.

Topic Two: Shame Makes Us Want to Go Into Hiding

Questions:

1. How did Bishop Rob's story about his father in the dermatologist's office touch you?
2. Share a story when something similar may have occurred to you. Did you recover from the injury, or does the painful memory still have a grip over you?
3. How may the pressure a parent puts on a child produce feelings of shame and inadequacy rather than confidence or motivation?
4. How can parents provide rules and guidelines that lead to motivation and confidence rather than feeling of shame and unworthiness?
5. How might you take steps to reconcile with someone who shamed you or apologize to someone you treated poorly?

Topic Three: The Relationship Between Narcissistic Vulnerability and Unmet Needs in Childhood

Questions:

1. What did you learn about narcissistic injury as it connects to your own childhood experiences?

2. How does understanding that we all have some narcissistic injury based on unmet needs in childhood help you develop a greater degree of compassion for yourself and others?
3. How do repeated attempts to “prove” self worth by over doing or over-extending eventually lead to stress overload, burnout, or disappointment, and how might this become a vicious cycle?
4. Discuss how *over*-protection of a child (“helicopter parents”) can create just as much injury to one’s sense of self-worth as the neglectful or abusive parents.
5. Discuss examples of how you can set fair, firm and consistent limits without shaming an individual.

Topic Four: Describing the Three Types of Narcissistic Injury

Questions:

1. Discuss the three narcissistic types that Patricia outlined. Do people come to mind that fit one of the three profiles?
2. Please share a personal encounter that you may have had with one of the three narcissistic types that left you confused, upset, or at a loss around how to handle the situation.
3. Invite group members to give you their own reflections, feedback, and/or suggestions as to how to resolve the situation or let go of frustration or confusion that may remain.
4. How might the “over-helpful”, martyred type of narcissistic injury or the distancing “Nay-sayer” create as much havoc within an organization or church community as the grandiose type?
5. Discuss your reflections on how this expanded view of the three defense patterns has helped expand your understanding of narcissistic injury.

Topic Five: Explaining Narcissistic Entitlement

Questions:

1. Discuss how “narcissistic entitlement” can be created by parents gratifying their children to the point that the children believe that they deserve special treatment.

2. How does a privileged mindset presume a diminishment of others needs and concerns?
3. Reflect on times in your life where you expected special treatment or acknowledgement and didn't get it. What was your inner dialogue and/or behavior after you experienced feeling slighted?
4. How do you think that our schools and institutions reinforce entitlement, special status, and privilege?
5. Christian teachings preach against entitlement and privilege; yet how do we see people's desire for special status play out in church communities?

Topic Six: Explaining the Process of Healing from a Psychological and Spiritual Perspective

Questions:

1. Share your understanding of what you see as the difference between spiritual direction and psychotherapy.
2. How and why is it important for clergy to know when to refer to a therapist rather than offering spiritual counsel?
3. Discuss your reaction to what Patricia spoke about in terms of therapy meaning "soul healing". How might that shift your assumptions about receiving help from a therapist?
4. How can making a commitment to focusing on the repair of psychological injury actually help with deepening our spiritual practices and spiritual maturity?
5. How might spiritual practice open up feelings of vulnerability, trust, and healing of wounds?

Topic Seven: How might people come together to create a buffer against the pressure of narcissistic behaviors?

Questions:

1. Share your own ideas, strategies, or successes around what you have implemented to bring people together in large or small ways within your community.

2. List ways that your community group can link with other community groups to create greater leverage and impact around limiting the harm of narcissistic individuals?
3. How can we utilize spiritual techniques to “take a pause” and re-center ourselves before speaking?
4. Discuss possible spoken or unspoken dynamics that play out within your community, organization, family that undermine a feeling of safety?
5. In terms of creating an organization that feels “safe”, identify some of your hesitation or fears around speaking up against narcissistic behaviors.
6. What might Bishop Rob’s suggestion of joining in a small group spiritual practice by sharing what is really broken in our lives help create a buffer against aloneness and buried feelings of shame?

Topic Eight: The Two Hands of Non-Violence

Questions:

1. Discuss your reactions to the technique of the Two Hands of Non-Violence.
2. Practice statements that convey the message of saying, “please stop.” Then practice conveying a statement that invites your partner to remain in connection, without watering down your statement to “please stop. (Role play this scenario with a partner.)
3. What are other non-violent, reconciliation strategies that you have used to invite people into a dialogue around listening and remaining in connection?
4. Discuss how some of these practices may help you move through your fears or hesitations around delivering difficult information when you are in the middle of a conflict or painful situation.
5. How does these strategies fall within alignment of scriptural values and directives?

Topic Nine: Shame and Resilience

Questions:

1. What do you think Patricia meant when she said it is hard to kill the human spirit?

2. How might the concept of resilience create hope in your own person life?
3. How does a safe and trusting community increase each individual's capacity for resilience, and how does community support help individuals discover, access, and manifest their own unique gifts and talents?
4. What parts of your own authentic self had to go into hiding because you heard early messages around unworthiness and/or discouragement? Share some of those messages and invite group members to reflect back to you their own message of encouragement to you.
5. How might you use Bishop Rob's Benediction in your own life: "Live without fear, do not be afraid, your creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you with a power and presence that is stronger than death."
6. Discuss resilience in light of the power of the resurrection.

Topic Ten: Is there a better word for human brokenness than sin?

1. Discuss whether you think the concept of sin has created or reinforced feelings of shame and unworthiness within the members of our religious institutions.
2. Share an experience where you felt shamed, criticized, or were told that you didn't belong by a church institution. How has that affected your willingness to participate in a religious or church community moving forward?
3. What other words could you substitute for human brokenness that would capture the *reality* of our imperfections and limitations without being triggered into feelings of shame?
4. Discuss beliefs or behaviors you may have that trigger messages that you are unworthy of God's love.
5. How can the *concept* and *reality* of limitation actually play a part in staying on a spiritual path?
6. Discuss how to hold the tension between our resilience and our limitations.

Topic Eleven: What does a recovering narcissist look like? Are there steps to get there?

Questions:

1. Reflect on how you may have changed or matured as a person after you took steps to repair, understand, or forgive infractions that occurred to you in the past?
2. Discuss why you think it is difficult for many people to apologize or ask for forgiveness for past mistakes? (What might this telegraph to you about their degree of narcissistic injury?)
3. How could admitting a mistake or apologizing for hurting another's feelings actually be a step in healing one's own shame or narcissistic injury?
4. *If you feel comfortable with your group*, share something that is troubling you or something you can't resolve. As group members, reflect what you heard to be this person's dilemma or struggle.

*Note: This is a mirroring response, a simple way that we can help people feel seen and heard. It is tempting to give advice or lead people away from their dilemma. Advice giving shifts away from "being with" a person. Mirroring is a way of joining the person, which makes them feel less alone.

Topic Twelve: What is the connection between confession, shame, and repentance?

Questions:

1. What were your earliest experiences of confession? (It could be within an organized religion, or it could be with a parent, teacher, or anyone in a position of authority.) How did you feel about the act of confessing, and how did you feel afterwards?
2. How does Bishop Rob's explanation of confession as "a rite of reconciliation" change your ideas about confession from something that triggers or reinforces feelings of shame into an opportunity for *healing* feelings of shame and unworthiness
3. Discuss the idea of confession as "soul repairing" through a ritual that offers us reassurance and unconditional love.
4. How might we view the act of confession as a pivot point, a way to change behaviors, beliefs, and patterns, rather than having it simply serve as a wish for "cheap grace"?

5. Discuss the connection or relationship between the act of confession, the capacity for self-reflection, and the willingness to believe in the power of forgiveness?