

SOLID MAN

strong • present • confident

Pillar Three

Living With Intention

Group Exercise #9

Question #2: Who am I?

Defeating Shame

Men's Integrity Group

#9 SHAME, VULNERABILITY AND SECRETS

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame can't survive.”

— Brené Brown

It's not the shouting of pornography that gives it so much power over men. It is the whispering of the lie.

William Struthers, *WIRED FOR INTIMACY*

The next three exercises address the question of “Who am I?”. This question reveals the process of discovering your identity; who you truly are. In our externally referenced life we were living for the acceptance and by the expectations of others. We've lost our sense of self, who we really are. We've lost our True Self or maybe never have known our True Self in the first place.

Most of us live with our False Self running the show. The False Self is a made-up version (False Narrative) of the true you which you present to the world in order to be accepted. Since we lost our true identity, we have lost our integrity and inner frame.

In order to live a solid life you must shed your False Self, find out who you truly are, and begin to live your own life as you, your True Self. A man must answer the second Core Question; “Who am I?” in order to live a life of integrity.

Core Practice #2 - Remembering

We all have forgotten who we really are. Remembering helps you to rediscover your True Identity and identify the True Narrative of your life.

As you develop the practice of remembering who you are, you will find out who you really are and settle the unanswered questions that have rattled around inside of you your whole life. You will discover that you are good enough and acceptable.

Remembering requires that you re-center your identity on internal realities rather than from externals. This is the process of differentiation. Differentiation is an important concept here as you develop a solid sense of self. You will build it by answering the five questions, becoming whole.

With this exercise you will identify the False Names that you have been living with your entire life, then you will go through the process of finding out your True Name, which defines your true identity. You will develop your “Maximus” statement to carry with you your entire life.

Men's Integrity Group

Understanding Shame

Understanding Shame and Vulnerability is foundational to building integrity into your life. Carl Jung called Shame the “swampland of the soul”. The path toward becoming the human you want to be must go through that swamp.

Shame is unavoidable if you want recovery, integrity and life. You must face the fears that Shame represents, spend time to understand them and walk through them to the other side. This will most likely be one of the most courageous experiences of your life.

Or it may come out of desperation, that's good as well. Regardless, in this process, you will diminish Shame.

Shame

The root of Shame plants itself deep into our identity. It would have us question our worth, value and intuition. Shame spirals us into cycles of numbing, avoiding, silence, passivity and fearful withdrawal from life. Shame drains our confidence and strength, taking us out like a sniper, out of nowhere.

The essence of Shame is the inherent belief that something is wrong with you, you don't measure up or you are unacceptable. Dr. Curt Thompson says it this way, “You. Are. Not. Enough.”

Shame and guilt usually are mentioned in the same sentence. However, they are worlds apart. Guilt is actually a good thing working on our behalf to lead us to maturity. Guilt is centered on our behavior.

☞ **Guilt says, “I made a mistake.” Shame says, “I am a mistake.”**

Shame tells you that there is something deeply and profoundly wrong with you. Shame is highly proportionate with addictive behaviors. Men who struggle with integrity in any form, struggle with significant feelings of Shame.

☞ **Shame is a “universal” condition for humans. We all have it in varying degrees.**

When we live in a cloud of Shame we never feel like we are good enough. Shame continues to tell us that we are unworthy of love and belonging.

Because we feel inadequate for love, we continually try to prove our worth or gain acceptability through being a “nice” guy, acquiescing and pleasing others.

☞ **Shame is the main cause of the “Externally Referenced Life”.**

Men's Integrity Group

We will do anything to try to fit in, and since we believe something is wrong with us, we cannot be our true selves. So we wear a mask or lie, and do anything to have some kind of acceptance or belonging. But it all eventually crashes down.

What messages have you received in your life that said you are a mistake?

Petri Dish of Shame

Remember doing science experiments where you took a Petri dish home and left it in some part of your house? You may have forgotten it and your mom found it months later! A beautiful concoction of greens and browns with fuzz and ooze.

Dr. Brene Brown says Shame is like mold in a Petri dish, it needs a certain environment in order to thrive. As mold needs a warm, damp, undisturbed environment, Shame thrives in isolation, secrecy, silence and judgment.

☞ The Four Horsemen of Shame; Isolation, Secrecy, Silence, Judgment.

In order to gain strength and resilience against shame you must break the bonds of the Four Horsemen of Shame. In essence, you must do the opposite. For Isolation, you must begin to build relationships with other men who are open to real, authentic conversations about life.

To break Secrecy, you must come out of hiding, shine light on your life and actually tell safe men your story and your secrets. To beat Silence, you must begin to use your voice and speak about who you are, what you want and what makes you come alive. Judgment is crushed under the power of Empathy. Place yourself with others who are willing to say, "Me too."

Under these conditions, Shame shrivels and creeps back into the shadows from whence it came. To gain integrity we must crush the Four Horsemen of Shame. There is one posture which will defeat Shame every time; Vulnerability.

In what ways have you kept the Four Horsemen of Shame thriving in your life?

Men's Integrity Group

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is seen as weakness in our culture. Placing yourself in a position of risk where you are at the mercy of others is insanity to most men. Vulnerability is openness, transparency and exposure.

It is leaving yourself open to attack, indefensible. At first glance, the last thing any man in our world would intentionally allow himself to be is Vulnerable.

Contrary to the cultural viewpoint, Vulnerability is one of our greatest allies in the quest for integrity, solidness and healthy relationships. Vulnerability is actually a display of true strength and manhood.

Vulnerability is the true show of strength.

A man who is unable to be vulnerable is actually showing weakness and fear. He believes he will die or be hurt if someone rejects his true self. A strong man can open himself with courage and confidence, knowing he can withstand anything, even rejection or an attempt at shaming.

I believe the most powerful action any man has ever taken in the history of mankind was also the most vulnerable – Christ allowing himself to be crucified. The action of choosing to open yourself to the potential of harm often seems like a pathway to death, but it actually opens you up to greater things in life.

Vulnerability feels like certain death.

Vulnerability feels like death because we think if we are exposed and people see the true “me” then I will possibly be rejected. My external mask or self-protective walls will be seen for what they are. Even though this feels tragic, having our method of hiding exposed for what it is, is actually a gift that will open our lives to true living.

Once we are able to begin to live from an authentic place, as we allow the truth of who we are to be seen (which is vulnerability), the opposite of our fears happens. We discover that good people around us actually want to be closer to us and they actually enjoy being around us.

Vulnerability is the pathway to intimacy.

In your closest relationships, allowing yourself to be vulnerable results in relational closeness. Many of us have been closed off our entire lives because of shame and the belief that if I talk about inner struggles and experiences that I will be seen as less than or not enough. This belief has kept us from experiencing the depth that relationships have to offer.

Men's Integrity Group

☞ **Vulnerability is THE antidote to Shame.**

The more we show up in our lives and allow ourselves to be seen, the more we defeat the power that Shame has held over us. We begin to actually see that we will not be rejected, but accepted and loved more than we ever knew possible.

This exercise is designed for you to challenge the hold Shame has had on your life. It will require you to open up to the men in your group and let them see some of the most shameful thoughts and experiences you've had.

☞ **Defeating Shame will take courage.**

A side note; there are people in your life who are not "safe". These are people who will use your vulnerability to advance your Shame or to "get you" at a later date when you least expect it.

It is important to know who these people are in your life and have strong boundaries with them. It is ok to be closed off to them. This is actually why it is so difficult to be vulnerable with people who care about your heart. Since I have had unsafe people who have caused me pain, I am very reluctant to open up to those safe people around me. This is why it feels vulnerable. This is why it is such a challenge with tons of gravity.

☞ **To defeat Shame, you must open yourself up to others.**

What obstacles in your life keep out vulnerability and transparency?

What could you begin to do today that will open you up to vulnerability?

Shame Structure

There is something we all do to keep from being vulnerable. We build what I call the Shame Structure. It is supposed to keep us safe from abandonment.

As we move through life with Shame having a strong influence on our lives, we naturally construct a personal system which keeps us from being truly seen for who we are, since we don't believe we are acceptable as we are. We will hide behind masks built with accomplishment, material things or chameleon style fitting in.

Men's Integrity Group

One of the best illustrations of how someone builds a Shame Structure is the Wizard of Oz. Remember how Dorothy and her friends are met with the giant head, the mean look, the booming voice, the smoke and fire. When Toto pulls back the curtain, we find out he is just an old fart from Omaha.

His structure is built so everyone sees what he wants them to see. The big head, gears and levers are all an elaborate structure to be seen as great and powerful. Every one of us builds a similar structure to keep our true selves from being seen.

Your structure may include figuring it out, getting it right, being smart, winning, getting good grades, dressing like a Goth (or whatever), strong muscles, money, following a certain band, a political perspective, a religious perspective, having it all together, seeking perfection, looking good, dressing well, withdrawing, quietness, being boisterous or having the newest technology or nice things.

Consider what things you have put into place during your life to keep yourself acceptable for belonging and protected from embarrassment or Shame. Then a significant part of your journey is to begin to dismantle your structure. You must identify all the major parts and then commit to doing life differently; to begin to allow your true self to be seen and to get yourself out there.

What are the major components of your Shame Structure?

What could you do to begin to intentionally allow yourself to be seen?

The Inner Critic

The questions about our identity taunt us like messages from a raspy voiced demon; “You suck”, “You’ll never amount to anything”, “Quitter” or “Idiot”. Sometimes this inner critic voice actually sounds so clear and real it is like someone talking directly to you, “Who do you think you are?”

Most of us hear a voice that seems to be at the center of our shame experience. This voice can be direct or subtle. The voice has been called the “Inner Critic”, the “Voice of Shame” or the “Shame Attendant”. The Shame Attendant is as though you have a butler who is always with you to remind you of your mistakes and inadequacies.

Men's Integrity Group

Sometimes people will identify that the voice is the voice of a certain person in their past; Mom, Dad, Grandpa, a bully or a coach may be the voice. Some people consider that it is the voice of the devil who is said to be the "Accuser of the Brethren". So his voice seems real and the spiritual battle for my soul is real.

However, the voice makes itself known in your life it is important to recognize it and then identify the lies that are being said. If we believe the lies of the Shame Attendant, we will never be able to live in strength and confidence. You must learn to actually talk back to the voice. Tell it that it is lying to you. Tell it that you are not going to listen to it anymore.

What or Who has the Voice of Shame sounded like to you?

In what ways have you been able to silence the voice?

Dis-Integration

Shame has this ability to wrap you around the axle and totally paralyze you. What Shame does is it causes your inner world turmoil. But not just turmoil, it will completely dis-integrate all of your inner resources.

This entire program is designed to bring you and other men into living lives of integration, where your inner resources are working well to guide you through life with confidence and freedom. But Shame can disrupt your integrated self in a heartbeat. Shame throws all your internal resources in to disarray.

 Dis-Integration shuts you down - locks you out.

You may remember moments when you were caught off guard when someone asked a question you did not know the answer to during a presentation. It could have been any other time when you were exposed as inadequate. Or when as a grown man your mother says something that sends you to your childhood.

It's like you are exposed and so everything in you locks down. You lose your memory, your confidence and you feel like a little kid. You just want to run.

When this happens, your memory, your identity, your heart, your soul and even your body seems to shut down.

Men's Integrity Group

You are so frozen from the sudden exposure that as you try to talk through your cotton-mouth, your mumbling seems like alien mutterings. Sometimes you pull through and gain composure, but the feeling is something we all have experienced.

This is dis-integration. It is as though your integrated self has been destroyed by a grenade. All your good parts are strewn all over the landscape. This is what Shame does, it sends us flying head over heels. Often it takes some good work to get your heart back.

When have you experienced the dis-integration of your heart?

What have you done to get your heart back, what works for you?

Replicating Fear

At the root of fear in the life of most people is the fear of abandonment or rejection. It is the fear of being outcast or never belonging. This is at the core of shame.

Shame is an issue because every human wants to feel wanted, included and loved. Shame communicates to you that you are not worthy of these things.

As I have mentioned in other writings, this is what the idea of hell is. Hell is separation from God, others and even from yourself. Whether you are religious or not, the idea of hell represents our greatest fear and it is always hiding in the background. It is essential that we recognize this central fear so we can navigate Shame with wisdom and awareness.

This is the most despicable aspect of shame. Shame will actually cause you to create the thing you fear the most. So here is how this circle works. We start with a Fear of Abandonment/Rejection, then we assess ourselves as not worthy (Shame), then since we don't see ourselves as ok, we engage in relational behaviors that keep ourselves from being truly seen (because we don't believe we are good enough), which finally and eventually results in rejection or broken relationships, even abandonment.

Our behaviors which keep us from being seen are hiding, withdrawal, silence, wearing a mask or being a chameleon. We try to please others to try to make them like us. We will even compromise our moral compass and our sense of self to keep up the image that we are worthy of relationship.

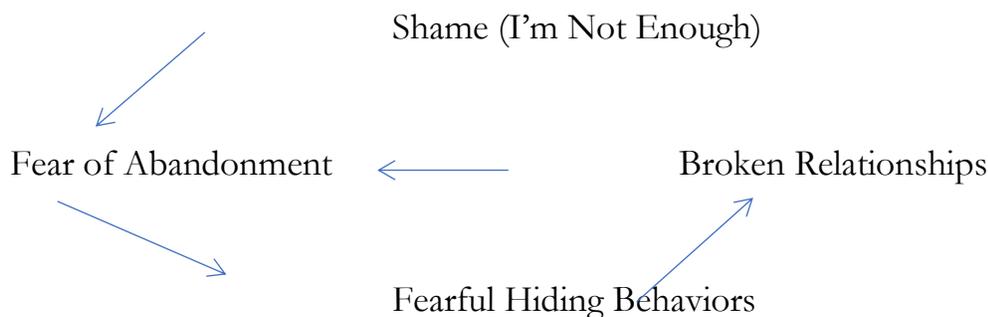
Men's Integrity Group

But since I am not allowing my true self to be in these relationships, eventually this creates separation and my fears are realized. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is a truly despicable aspect of Shame. Shame is not your friend and will never put you on a good path. As nice as the Shame Attendant's voice may seem, it will always lead to difficulty.

Shame makes your fears come to life. We end up with that which we fear the most, abandonment.

In what ways have you lost your moral compass or even your Self by fear?

Replicating Shame Cycle Diagram



Notice that we start with the feeling that something is wrong with me or that I am not enough. When I think this I believe I am not acceptable and fear abandonment or being alone. So I hide or live behind a false mask and my true self is not seen.

This results in broken or shallow relationships. And that is the equivalent to abandonment. This is a very sick and devious cycle that most of us rotate in and out of.

To break this cycle we must first believe we are good enough or just ok. Then as we are more comfortable with being alone, we can engage in relationships as my true self. “You” can actually show up in your own life. When this happens, relationships are more likely to thrive.

Men's Integrity Group

Sometimes your relationships don't thrive, but that is because you are clearing out unhealthy people out of your life. People that don't accept you for who you are, are not real friends. So the more you are open, authentic and real, often results in their discomfort and the relationship may not last.

What is your greatest fear that you seem to continue to replicate or create a scenario of the self-fulfilling prophecy?

In what ways have you seen yourself replicating your fears?

Defeating Shame

Since Shame is one of our primary enemies in becoming a Solid Man, it is essential to defeat its influence in your life. As long as there remains a sense that something is wrong with you, you don't measure up or you are unacceptable, you will continue to plod along with a huge part of your life left unresolved.

Resolving Shame is a process and you will never completely rid yourself of, but you can diminish it greatly.

Understand how Shame has built its presence in your life. What does it look like? What forms has it taken? What is involved with my "Shame Structure"? Take the time to learn about your enemy and learn how it takes you out of the game.

Identify Shame without self-condemnation or judgement. Notice it and then let it go. Shame wants you to dig deep into why it is there and how it works. That is just giving it the attention it wants so it will spiral you into its grip. Just notice it, "There it is again." And move on. Don't give it attention.

Give yourself time to move from 'Knowing' to 'Believing'. Andrew Bennett, a British Politician said, "The longest journey you will ever take is the 18 inches from your head to your heart." This is that journey. You know what I am saying about the fact that you do actually measure up and are completely acceptable.

 I know it, but do I believe it?

Men's Integrity Group

But do you believe it? Not yet. Continue to remind yourself of the truth every time you find yourself self-criticizing or second-guessing yourself. Get your heart back each time and eventually you will begin to realize you've shifted your "muscle-memory" to actually believing the truth.

Allow yourself to be open and vulnerable with appropriate people. This is probably the most difficult part of defeating Shame. Speaking about your story is profound in its power. You will be pulling back the curtain so people can see your inner world. It is like putting your guts out on the table. This is essential to tell your stories to your people.

You will find that healing begins to happen to all who are involved, the story-teller and the listeners. That is why the next section is so difficult, but necessary. Have courage, be bold. Defeat Shame.

How difficult has it been moving from knowing the truth about you to believing it?

Secrets List

This may be the most difficult exercise you will do in this group. And it is the most vulnerable. And since it is at the front end of your group experience, it will take tons of courage. You can do this.

☞ **Men who struggle with a lack of integrity are not honest men.**

The general rule of Shame is this, "If you really knew me, you would not accept me." So we isolate from others and continue to live in Shame. In our isolation and Shame we collect a number of secrets that we hold inside.

These are things that we believe if people knew about we would no longer be acceptable. Lies become overpowering and keep us locked in a prison of self-deceit and loss of personal integrity.

Breaking the bondage of hiding, secrecy and lies requires that you remember, identify and speak your secrets to others in a safe environment.

This list will be difficult and take some time. Do what you need to do in order to remember; pray for help, take time in silence or whatever you need to do. This will require that you visit some difficult places in your soul. Sometimes we have told ourselves a distortion about a secret and we begin to believe the distortion.

Men's Integrity Group

It is time for the Truth; trust that the men will handle it well. It may feel daunting, but like always, take courage and be strong. List all the secrets that you have held in your life, even if you have revealed them to some others. List any secret no matter what it is, regardless whether it has to do with sexuality or not. Some of the most powerful moments for men are when they reveal shameful secrets they have held onto for their entire lives.

These secrets may be lies you have told, things you have done or things you have omitted to share that no one will ever know about. Your secret may be the fact that when you were eight you shot a play arrow into a dove nest and killed some chicks, you told no one and have been holding that your entire life. Or that you went to a strip club when you were on a business trip. Or it may be that you have fantasies about things that seem shameful like women's shoes, dogs or other men.

Maybe it was something you did with a neighbor kid. Or it may be an omission like; I have never told anyone that I have struggled with _____. Every one of us has a list of things we have held. We believe if anyone knew these things I would not be accepted. The opposite is true.

What does it feel like to consider sharing these deeply held secrets?

Make a commitment today to keep a posture of openness and vulnerability in your close, emotionally safe relationships. You'll learn about building your Mount Rushmore with good men in your life.

Keep your commitment to be open with those men. Remember that shame thrives in secrecy, so be open and get it out into the open.

Secrets are sharing some of the most vulnerable parts of your history with others. It is allowing yourself to be seen and known. It is essential to share your "regular" history as well with those close to you. Your experiences, accomplishments, times you overcame obstacles, things you like or dislike are all parts of your history as well.

 Sharing your history is the path to being known.

In any relationship, it is essential to share the significant part of your story. Sometimes this is more difficult than sharing secrets because it opens up tender or sacred spaces in your life. Sharing these vulnerable parts of your history opens up any relationship to more connection.

Men's Integrity Group

I commit to eliminating shame in my life through openness, honesty and vulnerability, telling my story.

Signature _____

Group Presentation #3

Start with sharing some of your history. What have been some of your most influential experiences? When have you overcome obstacles or accomplished something? What was it like growing up for you?

How has Shame had an influence in your life?

Describe the parts of your Shame Structure and what can you do to break it down?

Secrets List

If has been a secret, list it here. With each secret, tell who you have kept it from. Remember that you will also find that your list may grow as you remember from week to week. Update the men during your check-in if you remember any more secrets.

List at least ten Secrets. Tell the men. Be Brave.

<i>Secret</i>	<i>When it happened</i>	<i>Who I Kept it From...</i>
---------------	-------------------------	------------------------------

How will you begin to live with openness, honesty and vulnerability in your life?

Men's Integrity Group

In what ways have you changed with being closed and secretive in your life permanently?

What was important to you in this exercise?

Books and Resources

Anything by Brené Brown. *Daring Greatly*, *Gifts of Imperfection* or *Rising Strong* are all books that will speak to shame. She also has a couple TED talks that are spot on, where she talks about both shame and vulnerability.

The Soul of Shame by Dr. Curt Thompson. This is a deeper look into shame from a Christian perspective. Dr. Thompson give some profound insight to the depth shame has on ourselves and communities.

John Bradshaw has some older, classic videos about shame on Youtube. Even though the talk he did were in the 80's, they are as profound now as then.