

READING
COMPANION &
SMALL GROUP
DISCUSSION
GUIDE



WEEK 5
October 18 - October 24

PART 2
*Shame &
Loneliness*

SHAME (DESCENDANTS GUILT, EMBARRASSMENT, PERFECTIONISM)



One of the deceiving things about Shame is that it hides in the darkness between the Fear of 'making' a mistake and 'being' a mistake. Guilt, Embarrassment, and Perfectionism linger in the shadow of Shame.

Fear becomes the driver when we go on a Guilt trip, using it as a metaphorical hammer to beat up ourselves (or others) for past mistakes, especially when we erroneously believe that somehow we deserve it or that it pleases God.

Perfectionism is the pretty cloak we wear to conceal our Shame. It's one of the primary purveyors of the not-enough syndrome: 'I'm not enough, so I need to conceal who I believe myself to be.'

SHAME (DESCENDANTS GUILT, EMBARRASSMENT, PERFECTIONISM)

READING COMPANION

Think about these questions as you read. Journal the questions and “aha” moments that come up for you



Where does “I’m not good enough” show up in your life?
What experiences or messages shaped that belief?



What “armor” hides your shame/fear of being judged:
perfectionism, defensiveness, superiority, or pretending
you’re fine? What are you afraid others might see without it?



Have you let something you’ve done define who you are?
How could you take responsibility while still seeing yourself
as worthy of love?



Where does worrying about others’ opinions keep you from
expressing yourself or pursuing what you want? What does
that protection cost you?



Without needing to prove yourself or get everything right,
what would you feel free to try, say, or enjoy?



What would you tell a child or friend who felt unworthy of
love after a mistake? How could you offer yourself that
understanding?

LONELINESS (DESCENDANTS FEAR OF VULNERABILITY AND PRIDE)



Loneliness is a five-sensory human condition, not a spiritual one. The soul only knows its oneness with the Wholeness from which it came.

When our fear of loss escalates, it can understandably increase our sense of Vulnerability, which in turn drives us into isolation and often right into the waiting arms of Loneliness.

Our tendency is to avoid the messenger of Loneliness by ignoring it or numbing ourselves to its presence rather than allowing it to reveal itself as our teacher. When we do this, Loneliness wins. What we resist, persists.

We know that Loneliness creates an emotional void, a sense that we are isolated and separate from the whole of Life... Aloneness, however, is standing in that very same void, but with an entirely different perspective, knowing that while it might appear we are “alone,” we are not lonely because we know in truth we are never alone. Even in our darkest times, there is a Light burning within us.

By Dennis Merritt Jones

LONELINESS (DESCENDANTS FEAR OF VULNERABILITY AND PRIDE)

READING COMPANION

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When have you felt lonely around others? What connection was missing? How did your explanation affect whether you reached out or withdrew?



How do shame and loneliness reinforce each other? Does feeling not good enough make you withdraw? Does loneliness seem to confirm that belief?



What would you like someone to know about how you're really doing? What would help you feel safe enough to share?



What makes time alone nourishing rather than lonely? What activities or spiritual practices connect you with yourself and something larger?



When have you felt accepted and able to be yourself? What made that possible, and how could you invite more of it?



What connection would you enjoy more of? What small step could you take without waiting to feel more confident, interesting, or “together”?

WEEK 5 - SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Small Circle Agreements

Confidentiality

I help create a safe environment by maintaining confidentiality.

Right to Pass

It is okay not to share.

"I" statements

I speak for myself and remember that I can never know someone else's experience.

Change your mind as often as you like

Stay open to new ideas and new revelations from our shared wisdom.

Be Present

I listen to others compassionately, respectfully, and appreciatively.

Notice our own reactivity and assume good intentions

We take responsibility for our own reactions and meet each other with love.

Advice-free zone

I practice sacred listening and refrain from giving advice.

Opening Affirmation: *I bring my real self to this group. I can meet what I discover with kindness and listen with care to the experiences of others.*

Check-in:

- Are you noticing messengers show up? What are you doing with that awareness?
- What was your experience of exploring Shame and Loneliness this week?

Discussion Questions:

- For each chapter, what stood out for you?
- Pick a question from the reading companion and share your answer.
- From your reading / Sunday talk - what inspired, frustrated, confused or clarified something?

Closing: *Each person shares one positive takeaway from the group meeting today.*

Closing Affirmation: *I am worthy of love and belonging as I am.*



Week 5 Practices: As you try these practices, notice what freedom feels like.



Notice the armor. When you hide, defend, or try to be perfect, ask, "What am I afraid someone will think of me?"



Respond with kindness. Notice a harsh thought about yourself. Try the words you would offer someone you love.



Make room for connection. Reach out to someone you would enjoy talking with. You don't need to have everything sorted out first. Remind yourself - I am worthy of connection. I am enough.



Write to your younger self. Choose an age when you felt ashamed or not good enough. Tell that younger person what you understand now and what they needed to hear.



Fill the holes - draw a rough outline of yourself. Draw holes and label the things you feel are not enough. Now fill in the holes with your pen, and label what you filled the wholes with.



Map your connections. List the people and communities in your life. Where do you feel known? Where do you perform or hold back? Where do you hide? Circle a trusted connection and note what you'd like them to know about you.

For next week: Read Chapters on Uncertainty & re-read a chapter that could use your attention.

FALL PROGRAM RESOURCES



<https://www.unitypaloalto.org/when-fear-speaks-listen>

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