

The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves

Curt Thompson, MD
InterVarsity Press, 2015

Reviewer: Chaplain Chris Morris

Genre: Non-Fiction, personal growth and wellbeing

Scope: Supporting personal spiritual formation by understanding human shame through the lenses of interpersonal neurobiology, psychiatry and biblical theology.

Dr. Curt Thompson is an American psychiatrist who founded the Center for Being Known. The Center creates resources and training tools to educate Christians and faith leaders about interpersonal neurobiology and our spiritual formation. Interpersonal neurobiology is an emerging field of study that combines biological research on the brain with psychology of the mind and human relationships. The key insight is that the human mind is not the creation of the brain organ alone but develops in the context of relationships. The theory greatly impacts our understanding of personal growth and spiritual formation. Thompson has written four books to date: *The Anatomy of the Soul*, *The Soul of Shame*, *The Soul of Desire*, and *The Deepest Place*.

Thompson introduces the human experience of shame through the examples of clients seeking out psychological help. Using these stories as a starting point, he defines what shame is, how it works and how our enemy has weaponized it to isolate us from healing intimacy with God and others. He maps out the mechanism of shame on our self-understanding and then builds a roadmap towards resisting the false stories of shame. The centerpiece in this equipping book is a beautiful, original, exegesis of Genesis chapter 3 as a story of the human experience of shame and its impact. The rest of the book teaches us how to tell the true story and live in recovery from the soul of shame.

The book is quite accessible and easy to read however the author's expertise is somewhat downplayed. Instead of really exploring the brain and its chemistry in an illuminating way and how exactly our relationships wire our neurons, the author focuses on the worldview which results from these inner workings.

As a chaplain, I witness the effects of shame every day. In a very real sense, shame and its products are the battlefield chaplains face. As we strive to communicate God's love through presence and witness, we are resisted every step by the voice that whispers "you are not enough". Shame infects us all, leading to broken relationships, deteriorating mental health, and spiritual malaise. It affects me as well since I am living in my own shame stories which get in the way of me stepping up and serving God well. I need to recover from and resist shame to be a better chaplain, all the while recognizing how it affects those I meet. Together we seek mutual transformation and growth without shame.

I recommend this book to any chaplain who wants to grow their understanding and empathy for those in their care. The information, tools and techniques put forward can also be part of chaplaincy conversations, allowing people to draw closer to God. Finally, we can all benefit from shining the light on shame and learning how to retell our own stories in a healthier, more honest way.

4.5 stars

