ABSTRACT

UNGUARDED: FREEDOM FROM SHAME FOR EXPAT WOMEN

by

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Guardedness is the plague of the International Church; guardedness rooted in shame is a prevailing cause of spiritual disease. Shame is universal in human existence, encouraging secrecy, isolation, and pretense—antitheses of authentic relationships. Bestselling authors like Brené Brown and Curt Thompson confirm the widespread impact of shame's effects. Expat living compounds the proclivity for hiding shame because moving to a new culture facilitates concealment behind a mask of spiritual maturity, emotional health, and personal freedom. Sadly, a façade of transparency is no transparency at all.

This study examined a one-day workshop with four sessions aimed at helping Christian expat missionary women recognize and overcome guardedness rooted in shame. Sixteen women from the Da Nang International Fellowship participated, representing eight countries on five continents. The workshop highlighted information about shame, its origin, and characteristics. Two shame-nullifying strategies were identified: connection in vulnerable, empathic relationships and the development of redemptive bias (attitudes that promote connection and transparency).

The study found that workshop participants increased in key areas of knowledge about shame and the need for connection. One significant area of change in behavior evidenced women engaging in more connected relationships as a result of the workshop. The researcher concluded that guardedness rooted in shame is a common reality in the

International Church, and that give a safe space to share their experiences, Christian

women will embrace vulnerable relationships and begin development of redemptive bias.

UNGUARDED:

FINDING FREEDOM FROM SHAME FOR EXPAT MISSIONARY WOMEN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Chapter

Guardedness is an entity that defies pictorial representation but resonates with most everyone, for we are all prone to hide our flaws, struggles, sorrows, and weaknesses. This chapter introduces a project that has been lifelong in the making. Spiritual formation is a process. One level of freedom leads to an awareness of the need for more. Release from one area of past pain sheds light on further darkness that still needs illumination. As Christian believers, recipients of immeasurable grace, what holds us back from the freedom to connect with others authentically without fear? This project brings into focus one chief cause: guardedness.

In addition to a personal introduction of the author, this chapter describes the problem of guardedness within the context of international ministry. The purpose and rationale for the project are the cornerstones of the chapter, with the definitions of key terms and the Research Questions to be addressed in this project. The chapter also includes an overview of the project itself and the interpretation of data, including the study group, methodology, interpretation of data, and a brief description of the instruments used to gather information. Finally, there is a brief description of the application of this study to the larger body of Christ and succinct summaries of the remaining chapters.

Personal Introduction

I live in a land of good-byes. Having served in Da Nang, Vietnam for over ten years, I know of only one other couple who has been here longer than our family. Expats who come to minister in our city are old timers if they stay for a couple of years. Many

know when they arrive that they will stay for a year, some for less. In my experience with the international church in multiple locations, such a scenario is not unusual. We are people on the move, and we tell ourselves that the ease of social media outlets will keep us connected long after all of us go our separate ways.

My story is not so different from other expat ministers that I know, except in one respect: I stayed. Our family of seven (my husband, myself, and 5 daughters ranging in age from 5–9 years) moved to Vietnam in 2008, where my husband is the director of Orphan Voice, a nonprofit that serves impoverished children and families. For four years I invested myself in homeschooling our daughters, supporting the work of Orphan Voice, and falling in love with the people of Da Nang International Fellowship (DIF), the one government-approved English-speaking international church in the city. After the leadership learned of my calling and pastoral work at churches in Kentucky and Virginia, I was invited to become the Associate Pastor in 2012 and was named Lead Pastor in 2017.

DIF is a remarkable community. Expats from around the world come to Da Nang to serve the Kingdom in a variety of ministry, business, or community development endeavors. Our numbers represent six (6) continents and a wide array of ages, professional experience, and theological backgrounds. While such diversity adds vibrancy to a global vision, it also reinforces barriers. Fear of rejection is common to the human experience. Expats feel that risk at a deep level because the expat community is the only community available to them. Words like authentic, vulnerable, and unguarded fly in the face of longtime conditioning for best foot forward, position of strength, and the appearance of spiritual maturity.

I am connected to the gathering of souls at Da Nang International Fellowship and to ministering expats with whom I share a call to go into all the world. Our paths in time and space may not intersect for an extended time, but we can create opportunities to leave long lasting marks on one another's maps. Opportunities that facilitate inner freedom and wholeness can translate to deep relationships and fruit in the kingdom of God. My hope is that this project might provide a useful milestone marker that will open doors to greater fulfillment in life and ministry.

Statement of the Problem

Guardedness is the inability to open one's heart to deep connections. It is the compulsion to self-protect at the expense of authentic relationships and ministry. Persons in ministry are arguably some of the most guarded people on the planet. Shame is a common cause of distance, even isolation. For the person serving overseas in a foreign culture among strangers of differing cultures, the ominous specter of internal disconnection looms even larger and more threatening. Added to these personal demons of dissociation and inadequacy are the expectations, requirements, and qualifications of denominations, sending agencies, and financial partners. It is no wonder, then, that the international church community must confront and address guardedness. Longtime counselors to pastors, missionaries, and kingdom servants worldwide, Eric and Rachel DuFour call guardedness "the plague of the international church" ("Emotionally Guarded People"). Much like disease, guarded, self-protecting persons unintentionally pass on this spiritual and emotional pathology. The results are as catastrophic to the vitality of the international church as the plagues of world history.

Guardedness can grow from a number of roots. For the purpose of this project, one prevalent source is addressed: shame. While it is no surprise that this habitual impediment is kept hidden from public display (often at great effort), it is possible that a person may be unaware of its pervasive presence in personal, daily life. The unresolved presence of this burdening quality drives one away from vulnerable and empathic relationships. Moreover, for the person desiring to serve the kingdom of God, shame prevents to transformational ministry.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop on overcoming guardedness rooted in shame.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior among the among Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four session workshop on overcoming guardedness prior to the retreat?

Research Question #2

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior among the among Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four session workshop on overcoming guardedness following the event?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the one-day, four session workshop on overcoming guardedness had the greatest impact on the observed changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior among the participants?

Rationale for the Project

Unguarded living is the daily experience of freedom from burdens of self-protection born of shame. Unguarded living releases a person to share fully in relationships, to be one's self, and to rest in God's restorative forgiveness. Unguarded ministry truthfully, humbly, and willingly offers the help received from one's own hidden pain or struggle. Living unguarded is a foundational element for a dynamic relationship with Christ, internal peace, church vitality, spiritual maturity, and substantial ministry.

Created by God, persons have individual worth and potential. Biblical history, however, shows that from the very beginning it was "not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2.18). God's passionate call, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3.9), demonstrates the proclivity of fallen human beings to withdraw from meaningful relationships in the face of anger, regret, or shame. Christian missionaries recognize that their primary relationship is to God Himself. Hence, David's anguished declaration, "Against You, You only, have I sinned…" (Ps. 51.4). Persons can never be fully present and rightfully related to others until they are first fully present and rightfully related to God through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the roots of personal guardedness must be addressed at an intensely personal, spiritual level.

In the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth provides insight into the establishment of personal connections despite differences. Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi forge a

deeply committed relationship in the face of their distinct identities. Without a shared culture, ethnicity, or social standing, Ruth and Naomi overcome their dissimilarities to become a committed, united, and vulnerable family in a deeper sense than the bonds of legal relationship.

Human beings are hardwired by the Creator God for connection to others through meaningful relationships. Whether through family, work, or social network, persons have a universal desire to know and be known. Guardedness keeps relationships at varying degrees of periphery. Ironically, the guardedness one thinks will facilitate acceptance and camaraderie actually serves to disengage and isolate. Christians in general, and international missionaries in particular, diligently work to present a flawless mask of wholeness. It is a façade to be sure, but one carefully maintained and preserved. The degree to which the pretense relinquishes its hold is the same degree to which connection is made to others in the community.

Around the globe, the International Church (IC) cannot fulfill its God-given purpose through persons who resist authentic relationships. Without the connections made possible by vulnerability, ministry is pretense. Even worse, a leader tends to replicate his own strengths and weaknesses. To knowingly minister from a guarded, self-protected heart is to provide the next generation with disciples skilled and affirmed in masking (or denying) their own vulnerability. "It was for freedom that Christ has set us free," wrote the Apostle Paul, "therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5.1). Many words describe the concept of guardedness. At the core, the chief thing it is not is free.

Definition of Key Terms

Expat: An expat is a person who lives in a country that is not their country of passport. Most commonly, an expat would identify themselves as living in a foreign country.

International Church (IC): In this study, an international church (IC) refers to a local church fellowship comprised mostly of expats who may or may not have a denominational membership connection. Expats generally come together in the international church because of shared language and a desire to support one another in mission.

Guarded: A cognitive, spiritual, and relational condition characterized by an inability to form and maintain close personal relationships in which transparency is evident. A person who is guarded withholds emotional availability and most often fears that the things they guard will become known to others.

Vulnerability: The internal strength to know and be known in relationship. Vulnerability is courageous because of the possibility of rejection or misunderstanding.

Shame: The constant experience of feelings of inadequacy, unlovability, and unworthiness most often related to feeling of never being enough.

Connection: Emotional ties to other persons in which there is authentic and empathic communication of thoughts and feelings. It may be described as being known.

Redemptive Bias: A propensity of mindset toward qualities of Christian virtues and confidence (such as faith, sacrificial love, hope, integrity, and upright character).

Delimitations

This study included sixteen expat women serving in ministry at the time of the intervention. The sample group was diverse in age, family situation, nationality, denominational attachment, length of expat service, and ministry responsibility. All were serving in Da Nang, Vietnam. The age range of participants was 28–70 years. Nationalities represented by the participants include the United States, England, Australia, Philippines, Ireland, Thailand, Vietnam, and South Africa. Most participants came to Da Nang after raising their own support for international ministry; none earn their livelihood through a missionary-sending organization or denomination. All were regular participants at Da Nang International Fellowship, with varying lengths of time in Vietnam ranging from five months to twelve years.

Review of Relevant Literature

The recognized innate human need for connection touches many disciplines, organizations, professions, and social issues. In addition to a theological foundation, this project draws from authors and practitioners in the fields of medicine, social science, psychology, counseling, and human development.

Cutting-edge authors related to overcoming guardedness include social researcher Brené Brown, social neuroscientist John Cacioppo, and founder of the Center for Being Known, Curt Thompson.

The project utilized interviews and materials from current practitioners like long-time missionary counselors Eric and Rachel DuFour. the online community Velvet Ashes, and founder of Equipping Lydia, Laura Baber Beach.

Research Methodology

The intervention for this study was a one-day workshop entitled Unguarded: Finding Freedom from Shame for Expat Missionary Women. Four sessions included one on each topic of Shame, Vulnerability, Connection, and a biblical case study of unguarded living. Participants completed pre- and post-event questionnaires. Sixteen expat women from Da Nang International Fellowship participated in the workshop.

About six weeks after the completion of the event, participants met in one of two focus group opportunities to discuss the changes in their own knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding guardedness rooted in shame, as well as to identify the effectiveness of individual workshop sessions or components. Twelve of the sixteen women were able to attend a focus group session.

Type of Research

The study utilized pre- and post-event questionnaires and a focus group. The format for testing the principles derived from research was a one-day, four-session workshop entitled Unguarded: Finding Freedom from Shame for Expat Missionary Women, which focused on guardedness rooted in shame.

Participants

The participants were drawn from among the women at Da Nang International Fellowship, which has many expat attendees. Nations represented in the group were the United States, England, Australia, Ireland, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and South Africa. The participants possessed diversity in age, family status, and the amount of time they have been living in Vietnam.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through pre- and post-event questionnaires exploring knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding issues related to guardedness rooted in shame. A focus group identified aspects of the training event that were most and least helpful in facilitating unguarded living.

Data Collection

All participants completed pre- and post-retreat questionnaires related to their personal knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of guardedness and shame. The pre-event questionnaire was completed on the day of the workshop, as the initial activity of the first session. The post-workshop questionnaires were completed at the focus group session. Two focus group times were offered because of the differing availability of the participants. One met on a Saturday morning in a private room at a local restaurant. The second met on a Monday evening at the home of one of the participants because the planned restaurant location closed unexpectedly on the day of the meeting. Four women were traveling outside Vietnam at the time of the focus groups, but each completed the post-event questionnaire via email. The focus groups met about six weeks after the workshop for a discussion of changes in the women's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to guardedness rooted in shame and the impact of the workshop components that influenced those changes.

Data Analysis

The project was an intervention with both qualitative and quantitative research methods utilized. The pre- and post-event questionnaires provided statistical, quantitative

information, including the mean and standard deviation. The focus group contributed important qualitative information that guided the interpretation of the questionnaires.

Generalizability

To varying degrees, the practice of guardedness is a challenge for every believer. If one accepts the premise that human beings are biologically wired for connection to one another, then it follows that the decision to remain hidden, invulnerable, and distant thwarts that innate, God given need.

Moreover, authentic ministry flows from authentic living. The degree that one conceals, denies, or ignores shame is proportional to guardedness that prevents enduring ministry. Serving Christ on a foreign field heightens the ability to remain guarded insofar as the minister moves from culture to culture, without allowing deep connections to shape his or her own life. For the life of the international church, guardedness poses a deadly threat. In reality, the menacing hazard of guardedness in the western church is just as real.

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Project Overview

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The project was a one-day, four-session workshop entitled Unguarded: Finding Freedom from Shame for Expat Missionary Women, which focused on the topic of guardedness rooted in shame. Sessions included information related to the universal experience of shame, vulnerability, connection, and the biblical examples of unguarded living found in the lives of Ruth and Naomi in the Book of Ruth. Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature from theological, social science, and medical researchers and practitioners framing the discussion of guardedness rooted in shame, shame management, vulnerability, life-giving relationships, and the role of redemptive bias. Chapter Three provides an overview of the format and schedule of the training event. Chapter Four

evaluates the finding of the pre and post-event questionnaires and the focus groups.

Finally, Chapter Five reviews the study, as well as sets forth strategies for living

unguarded in expat ministry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The end goal of this project was to identify strategies to help expat women in

Christian ministry experience an increased level of unguardedness in relationships while

serving on a foreign field. The project addressed shame as a predominant root of

guardedness. Expat women serving Kingdom purposes cannot fulfill that purpose if they

live from an inward premise of shame. Guardedness grounded in shame is a chief cause

of the withholding of authentic connection in relationships, a malignancy to the

international church.

This chapter surveys literature from categories of spiritual discipleship,

psychology, social work, medicine, theology, and missiology on topics related to

guardedness including spiritual formation, shame, physical health, fulfilling relationships,

and missional advancement. Beginning with a biblical foundation from the lives of two

expat women in the Book of Ruth, the chapter then expands in focus to include research

from books, periodicals, public presentations, and personal interviews. The chapter

concludes with an overview of findings and proposals for the design for the project's

purpose and content.

Biblical Foundations

Guardedness is a form of pretense marked by concealment and unavailability to

others. It prevents authentic friendships and fuels its own poisonous roots, a primary one

being shame. While many Scriptures regarding God's purposes for abundant life are

applicable, the biblical foundation outlined here comes from a study of the lives of two

expat women in the Old Testament. Within the terse telling of the Book of Ruth, the stories of Naomi and Ruth provide all expat women of faith principles and promise in the call and the challenge of choosing to live unguarded.

Unguarded living flows from an unguarded relationship with the living God.

Immediately preceding the Book of Ruth, Judges closes with an ominous summation of the times: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in. his own eyes" (Judg. 21.25). Into this picture of national lawlessness and upheaval comes the story of two women in need of protection, provision, stability, and hope. Their story is a bridge to the Israelite monarchy that will soon be established in the books of Samuel, though at the time they could not possibly have conceived of their pivotal importance in history (Mansfield 6). Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are names of prominence for even casual students of the Bible. Yet embedded within the story's fabric of tragedy, migration, struggle, suspenseful uncertainty, and joyous ending is the indisputable involvement of God Himself. In the entire book, only two events are directly attributed as the doing of the Lord: the provision of food after the famine in Bethlehem (Ruth 1.6) and the conception of Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4.13). Arguably, however, the central theological foundation of the book is "God's continuous, hidden all-causality and his cosmic role as rewarder" (Hubbard 69). This theme is underscored by Naomi who also attributes her personal tragedies as the doing of the Almighty (Ruth 1.13, 20–21). Such intimate, integral involvement in the lives of His people is compelling evidence of relational involvement, which is borne out in the attitudes, words, and actions of both the key women in the book.

In the person of Naomi, one finds a woman who gives expression to emotions both raw and real. Much of her adult life is marked by hardship and loss. A famine drove Elimelech, Naomi's husband, to lead his wife and two sickly sons from their ancestral home of Bethlehem, the house of bread and praise, to the land of Moab, God's "wash pot" in Ps. 108.9, or "garbage can" (McGee 13). Three verses in chapter one cover the next ten years: Elimelech dies (Ruth 1.3), the sons marry Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth (1.4), and then both sons also die (1.5). The next nine verses reveal Naomi's character: faith rises in her heart when she hears Lord has ended the famine in Bethlehem, and she resolves to end her days as an ex-pat in the land of Moab and return home.

Both daughters-in-law set out on the journey with her, but her love and concern for them causes Naomi to press them to return to their Moabite families where their chances for remarriage are more hopeful. In selfless concern for Orpah and Ruth, Naomi prays that they will find "rest" (Ruth 1.9). Found twenty-one times in the Old Testament, this word "connotes permanence, settlement, security, and freedom from anxiety after wandering, uncertainty and pain. It is primarily something which only Yahweh gives" (Hubbard 105). In essence, Naomi prays that the two women will be rescued from her own predicament while recognizing that this rest can only be received from the hand of God.

One characteristic of relationship is the progress of peaks and valleys. Living relationships are not static; they ebb and flow, give and take, harden and soften, constrict as one withdraws from the other only to soften and reunite. A one-dimensional view of Naomi may judge her for spiritual doubt, bitterness, or even faithlessness. Far from it! In

Naomi, women of faith find an example of an authentic heart laid bare that rejects pretense, self-protection, and appearances: guardedness. "Like Jeremiah, Job, and the psalmists, she stood open and honest before God in her suffering. If Ruth modeled devotion, Naomi modeled utter honesty" (Hubbard 127). Moreover, Naomi is "an outstanding woman of faith, courage, and kindness" (Mansfield 46). She is unwavering in her devotion to Yahweh, beloved by her Moabite daughters-in-law, esteemed by the women of Jerusalem, courageous in returning to an unsecured future in Jerusalem, and anchored in her identity as a "daughter of Rachel and Leah and Sarah" (Chittister 67). Even her summation of God's purposeful affliction in her life testifies of the existence of an inextricable faith relationship. Hubbard writes, "by holding Yahweh responsible for her losses, Naomi affirmed his participation in the events. Thus, despite appearances, things were not out of control; if he is at least involved, Yahweh might very well straighten things out. In sum, bitter complaint cloaked firm faith" (113).

The Book of Ruth shows its namesake to be another example of unguarded living rooted in unguarded relationship with God. Unlike Naomi who was born an Israelite, Ruth chooses the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be her own in the face of terrible probabilities. As a Moabite, Ruth's prospects to flourish in Bethlehem are negligible. Deuteronomic law excludes Moabites from the congregation of Yahweh (Deut. 23.3). Ruth's declaration to be joined to Naomi expresses more than loyalty or respect. In the face of poverty, ostracism, and "perpetual widowhood," Ruth chooses the God of Israel as her own (McGee 34). Ruth emphatically declares, "…where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried" (Ruth 1.16–17).

Having lived in the family with Naomi for ten years, Ruth is ready to make a definitive choice between her native roots in Moab and the spiritual roots of the God of Israel. Orpah's tearful choice to remain in Moab implicates the premise that Ruth's determination is more than allegiance to Naomi. Like Ruth, Orpah is a widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi who sets out for Bethlehem. Perhaps nearing the border of her homeland, Naomi urges both her daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers' houses. Orpah eventually opts to stay in Moab. Joan Chittister surmises, "It is an honorable choice and a safe one. It clings to what is, in the hope that it can be good again" (3). Orpah's love for Naomi is heartfelt and their parting sorrowful. The journey to a new life in Bethlehem requires a relationship with one who issues a higher call.

Further evidence of Ruth's personal commitment to life as a follower of Yahweh is her use of the provision of gleaning outlined in (Lev. 19.9–10). Moreover, the hand of Yahweh is seen in the life of Ruth through the prayer of Boaz for God to reward her (Ruth 2.12), in Boaz accepting acknowledgment of kinship by Naomi (Ruth 220; 3.2), and in the words of Boaz (Ruth 3.12), and Ruth herself (Ruth 3.9). Near the end of the book, the women of Bethlehem shower upon Ruth one of the greatest possible compliments, saying to Naomi that Ruth is "better than seven sons" (Ruth 4.15). Of their affirmation, Hubbard writes, "The ancients strongly preferred sons to daughters. Hence, to say that one woman was worth seven men was the ultimate tribute—particularly in a story so absorbed with having a son" (273).

In the challenge to unguarded living, the principal women of the Book of Ruth testify to the vital foundation of an unguarded relationship with God. This truth is more than the sum of personalities. The story relayed in the book as a whole is a powerful

summons and guide to expat women to experience a new level of unguarded living that provides the soil for fulfilling relationships, ministry, and legacy. While the thought seems somewhat simplistic, there is not a plainer way to state the fact: women who would experience freedom from simmering anger, abiding regret, or inherent shame (all symptoms of guardedness) must first believe that such freedom is possible. Hebrews 11.6 reads, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Woven throughout the story of Ruth and Naomi is a factor of hope and trust that frees both women to relate to God in different ways, in unguarded ways that are consistent with their own personalities, histories, giftings, and experiences.

Unguarded living stems from redemptive bias which can be intrinsic or chosen.

Christian women serving overseas likely have a personal relationship with God. Still, the international church (and moreover, the global church) suffers from a plague of guardedness (DuFour "Emotionally Guarded People"). Within the Book of Ruth, an unspoken yet evident phenomenon persistently arises. Both Naomi and Ruth display redemptive bias that underlies their attitudes, speech, and actions. For Naomi, this bias is largely intrinsic through her Jewish heritage. Still, Naomi must choose to embrace her heritage of faith. In contrast, Ruth appears to choose the underlying propensity of her attitudes and behaviors.

As previously addressed, the unvarnished honesty of Naomi in attributing her distress to the hand of God reveals a deep-seated belief that Yahweh can reverse the circumstances. Faith in the goodness and ability of God is a powerful redemptive bias. Minimizing the reality of her pain or loss would keep Naomi guarded from the very

people and situations that come to affect her recovery and blessing. Acknowledging the depth of injury (proportional to the contentment and happiness of the thing lost) is imperative to becoming "really ready to move on with life, to move beyond what has been to what can be, to let go. Anything else is mere survival, the grinding out of days without delight and without expectation" (Chittister 13).

Throughout the narrative of Ruth, Naomi exhibits a deep-seated trust in Yahweh. She recognizes that God Himself has ended the famine in Bethlehem, which ignites an unstoppable determination for the aging widow to make the journey home. Rather than appeal to the city elders to enforce the redemption of Elimelech's birthright, Naomi waits as if to see what God is doing and how He will remedy her desperate situation. Clearly, her concern is not only for herself but for the young daughter-in-law who has bound herself to Naomi, irrespective of the consequential hardship. The inherent faith of Naomi's heritage provided a foundation for her bias. Still, Naomi made many choices that embraced trust and hope. Her redemptive bias actualized her own healing, as well as impacting the course of history.

Interestingly, it is Ruth's chosen redemptive biases that have the greatest influence upon the course of events recorded in this short book. Ruth chooses attitudes of redemptive bias resulting in courage and vulnerability: she willingly and trustingly puts her life in the hands of Yahweh of Israel. Throughout the story, Ruth lives from the starting point of this bias, shown in part by her peaceful dedication to Naomi, her submission to Yahweh's laws of gleaning, her appeal to Boaz as her kinsman (Ruth 3.9), and her patient waiting to learn the outcome of his meeting at the city gates (Nelson 145).

Perhaps the most prominent bias of Ruth is described in the Biblical concept of *ḥesed*, most often translated mercy, kindness, or lovingkindness (*Strong's*). More than just a traveling companion from Moab to Bethlehem, Ruth shows that she intends to care for her mother-in-law, provide for her, and be her family. Despite the dim future prospects for marriage, children, prosperity, and community, Ruth's *ḥesed* toward Naomi becomes the foundation of her behavior. It is a choice she makes again and again, from her initial commitment to stay with Naomi (1.16), through her labors in gleaning to provide food (2.3ff), to following Naomi's direction to go to the threshing floor, and finally in presenting her son into Naomi's care (4.16). Like Naomi, Ruth's redemptive bias sets the stage for the realization of her heart's desires. Hubbard writes, "Though rare, risky, and restrictive, the practice of loyal, compassionate devotion—in a word *ḥesed*— pleases God so much that one may reasonably expect repayment in kind from him (1.8; 3.10). Such reward is the generous gift of a sovereign Lord who graciously chooses to honor human *ḥesed*. Only those who do it may receive it" (74).

While some may dismiss the importance of redemptive bias, the story of Ruth and Naomi, as well as life experience, prove that humans make innumerable choices every day. Those decisions often are rooted in unspoken convictions (or biases). Blessed is the person whose heritage builds a foundation that makes faith an obvious option. In the end, however, the joyous word of hope to all is that one is not a slave to a personal temperament, history, or culture. Science suggests that human beings "have a natural optimism bias wired" into them (Leaf 14). A heritage of faith in God would strengthen that natural proclivity, as in the case of Naomi. Still, absent such a tradition of faith, a bias is a fluid entity and can be chosen and developed, as in the case of Ruth herself.

Unguarded living fuels a willingness to change even though the outcome is unknown

Life is a journey, ever dynamic, developing, evolving, and adjusting. Regarding the biblical story of Ruth Chittister writes, "Ruth lives on in Hebrew Scripture to remind us that origin and destiny are not the same thing" (89). While change is often uncomfortable because of uncertain outcomes, unguarded living removes barriers that anchor persons to fearful inertia.. Unlike a loss which is forced upon a person, the option of change can be resisted or embraced (17). In the narrative of Ruth, all the named women reveal their preference to affirm a new life situation or rather, to reject the unknown for the familiar.

Both Naomi and Ruth accepted enormous risk to move forward. History completes their story, but in the living out of those events, the women were determined to advance into an unknown future. Unguarded living fuels a willingness to change even though the outcome is unknown.

Orpah was a Moabite woman who also loved Naomi as a mother-in-law. In the opening verses of the book of Ruth, Orpah also refuses to let Naomi travel to Bethlehem alone (Ruth 1.10). Her resolve is short-lived, however, and within a few verses, the text states that she returned to "her people and to her god" (1.15). Chittister writes, "The great spiritual question then, becomes what to do when change comes demanding courage and finds us shivering in the cubbyhole of our souls, sure that life changed is life ended" (19). To be sure, the safer choice is to turn back to what is known than to forge ahead into an uncertain—but most likely, bleak—future. Having made her choice to stay in Moab, "Orpah walked off the pages of the Bible, never to be heard from again" (Reiszner 32).

"What people do at times of change becomes the mark of their mettle" (Chittister 19). Naomi's mettle then, is good stuff. Naomi faces change with faith, courage, and personal engagement. Nothing is said in the Biblical record of Naomi's input or agreement with the move to Moab in the book's opening verse. The text is abrupt: "A man left Bethlehem in Judah with his wife and two sons to live in the land of Moab for a while" (1.1b HCSB). Whether or not she chose it, Naomi had to live the life of an ex-pat in the land of Moab. In short order, Elimelech, Naomi's husband, dies; the two sons marry Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah) and ten years pass (1.3–5). With the news from Bethlehem that the famine has ended, a spark of faith in Naomi is ignited. Reiszner writes, "Naomi, even in her season of despair and loss, in hopelessness and pain, had the wherewithal within her to know when it was time to move on" (25). Her determination to return to her homeland shows a decided unguardedness: no matter what circumstances had brought her to Moab, the time invested there, the graves of her husband and sons, the possible difficulties and embarrassment that may await her, Naomi knew it was time to pack up and go. This one act of choosing to embrace change sets the stage for all the events that follow: Ruth's declaration of faith; the meeting of Ruth and Boaz; the widows' redemption; marriage; the birth of Obed; the ancestral tree of Jesus Christ. "Embracing new life in Christ is a pivot point in a spiritual journey" (Nelson 137). History pivoted on the change initiated by the still-grieving Naomi in the land of Moab. According to Chittister:

> [her example calls] generation after generation of women to begin again whatever our ages, to make life for ourselves, to refuse to wait for someone else to swoop down to make us happy, to fear nothing and risk anything that develops the dream

in our own hearts, to learn to find ourselves in one another and in that way to become of more value to the world around us than we have ever been before, to see ourselves as the carriers of the Word of God still to be said, still to be heard. (Chittister 89)

Undoubtedly, Ruth experiences profound change throughout the book. From the degrading status of a Moabite widow to the great-grandmother of King David, Ruth's humble courageous choice to face life head-on with honesty and strength is an example to all women (and especially to ex-pat women) of the power of unguardedness. Without pretense, concealment, or excuse, Ruth confronts every threat, obstacle, and hardship with quiet decisiveness and resilience. Joan Chittister writes eloquently of her transformation:

Ruth, a character created, we say, by the Spirit of God, in a world that says God does not want such things of women, is transformed before our eyes, becomes a full human being while we watch, aligns herself to another woman and sets off to make her way in the world confident that the God who began this journey in her will see her through to its end. And in the going, Ruth invites every woman in the world into transformation too. It is the spirituality of transformation that brings a woman finally to the fullness of God in life. It is a frightening but a necessary journey for a woman if she is ever to be the person a creating God really means a woman—the separate, unique, ever becoming woman—to be. (27)

It has been said that "Most of the decisions in our life boil down to safety or surrender" (Reiszner 32). For Christ-followers generally, and those called as ex-pats to cross-cultural ministry, safety cannot be valued over surrender, nor self-preservation over self-sacrifice

(33). To be sure, opportunities for change will come. "We are all people wo think ourselves to be steady and then one day find ourselves in flux. We are all Naomi's on the way from the grave, all Orpah's on the way to security, all Ruth's on the way to a strange tomorrow" (Chittister 19). Unguarded living facilitates the transformation of hardship and tragedy to the starting place of the fulfillment of one's heart's desires.

Unguarded living facilitates the transformation of hardship and tragedy to the starting place of the fulfillment of the heart's desires

On the whole, humans do not know how to obtain what the heart craves. Limited by time, space, emotions, and physical senses, the mind labors to devise, strategize, maneuver, and manipulate events to achieve a condition of fulfillment or happiness. Then circumstances change. People do not cooperate. Tragedy obliterates a desired future. Or worse, the realization of a long-awaited goal is a disappointment, resulting in disillusionment and despair. "In this world, you will have much tribulation…," Jesus said (John 16.33). The story of the Book of Ruth affirms unguarded living as a productive substructure enabling a pilgrimage from sorrow to joy.

Unguardedness is marked by vulnerability, authenticity, and hope. Without these qualities, Naomi might have returned to Bethlehem hardened to the possibility that Yahweh could reverse her sorrowful circumstances, or she might not have returned at all, waiting out her days in the miserable recounting of her tragedies to anyone who would listen. In another scenario, an embittered and guarded Naomi could have returned to Bethlehem demanding that a kinsman redeem her immediately. Such action could have provided for her but would have doomed Ruth to perpetual widowhood and 'outsider' status. Naomi's embrace of Ruth as her family, her faithful patience in letting the events

unfold, and her careful concern for Ruth's future all set the stage for the redemption of the heritage of Elimelech and her own prominent presence in the biblical record.

A guarded Ruth most likely would have taken the path of least resistance, returning to her birth family in Moab and wishing for another husband. Even if she chose to return to Bethlehem with Naomi, it is plausible that scheming and jockeying for position would have tarnished her reputation, and almost certainly led her away from the fields of the significantly older Boaz (Ruth 3.10). Instead, the unguarded heart of Ruth let happenstance lead her to exactly the right place—the field of her kinsman redeemer (2.3). Her honesty, industry, and generosity earned a reputation that resulted in the esteem of the townspeople (2.7; 4.15).

In Mark 7.14–23, Jesus states that the condition of the heart determines attitudes that launch behavior. The Aramaic Bible in Plain English translates the admonition of Proverbs 4.23, "Keep your heart with all caution because from it is the outgoing of life." A guarded heart is closed, concealed, callous. The unguarded heart is kept open, available, and tender through determined trust in the One who alone is able to "work all things together for good" (Rom. 8.28). Ruth and Naomi, each in their own way, cultivated such a heart despite events that invited bitterness and despair. History celebrates the result and expat women in ministry benefit from their example.

Beyond the Biblical Foundation

Shame

Shame as Emotion

Shame. The very word evokes a troublesome discomfort and invites avoidance. Shame is widely accepted as a dominant emotion of human beings (Brown; Scheff; M.

Lewis; H.B. Lewis; Thompson). Descriptions like primal, universal, the master emotion, and the like appear again and again in literature attempting to describe this emotion of self-consciousness—embarrassment, pride, guilt, and hubris (Barrett). Moreover, although the use of the word shame has been on the rise since the early 1980s, the word evades definition and recognition for many persons (Stearns 100). Social worker and research professor Brené Brown surveyed hundreds of people regarding emotions they understood in themselves. She states, "The average number was three: happy, sad and pissed off. We don't have a full emotional lexicon" (qtd. in Luscombe).

Shame is often used synonymously, and therefore confused, with guilt. Here again, many authors agree on basic differentiation (Brown; Thompson; Shaw; Probyn; Gaylin; Noble; Stearns). Chiefly, guilt is an emotional response to poor or wrong behavior: "I did something bad." As such, it invites action: admission, apology, restitution, and changed future behavior. Guilt is detected, evaluated, and solved from an inner realization, judgment, and decision. On the other hand, feelings of shame emanate from a belief about one's very self: "I am bad." While the experienced emotion is internal, there is an outside component to shame: a sense of judgment, condemnation, and exposure from outside of oneself (Shaw). Shame is expressed in the internal voice that says there is something irrevocably wrong with a person—that no matter what changes, accomplishments, or success are realized, at a fundamental level, a person is not (and will never be) enough. It is felt "most urgently in groups" and connotes "the fear of being exposed in front of the group" (Gaylin 57–58). Shame's response is opposite to that of guilt; shame turns persons inward toward disconnection and, ultimately, isolation.

Psychiatrist Curt Thompson simply summarizes, "Hiding is the natural response to shame" (qtd. in Moll).

Primal Shame: More Than Emotion

The language of emotion is affect or feelings. Some may deem emotions to be unreliable, temporary, and even unnecessary. Like the little train illustration used by many pastors and teachers to explain salvation: Fact is the engine that makes it go, faith is connected to the fact engine, and last comes along the caboose—feeling. The fact engine is what really matters. The caboose (feelings) at best will be pulled along; at worst, the caboose is expendable and can be discarded if need be. Feelings in this way of thinking, are nonessential and even superfluous. Little wonder, then, that shame is dismissed in conscious thought with words like happy, sad, hopeful, blue, or even guilty. Emotions are frequently deemed fleeting, temporary, fickle, malleable. Conversely, shame "takes residence" (Pattison 93). It is "systemic," aptly described as a "self-sustaining, dehumanizing pattern" (Fossum 16). Shame is more aptly linked to a condition than an emotion.

Shame is distinct from shifting emotions in its ability to produce overwhelming feelings. Some of these include confusion, anger, judgment, humiliation, and fear. Stephen Pattison identifies "chronic shame" in which a person makes a transition from "feeling shame" to "being ashamed" (93). John Bradshaw calls it "toxic shame" (Preface). Left unchecked, shame is recognized as a source of many "complex and disturbing states," like alienation, isolation, depression, perfectionism, control, blame, denial, and even multiple personality disorders (Lee and Wheeler; Shaw; M. Lewis). Curt Thompson says tersely, "Everything that we would call sin comes out of shame" (3).

Further, once shame sets into motion an "on-going state" or "on-going experience,"

Fossum points out that the system will "stay in motion under its own momentum. The

original motivation or need for the behavior is no longer an active dynamic" (13).

The Experience of Shame

Shame, it has been said, is "charged with its own physiology" (Probyn 34).

Scientists now think that mental states, including shame, correlate to specific network

activity of the brain's neurons (Thompson 43). While most everyone can relate to the

deep blush of shame or the avoidance of eye contact, groups and individuals who live

with shame often exhibit common responses or conditions.

In a shame-bound system (for example, a family, a congregation, or a work

environment), there is a cyclical spiral of shame recognized throughout the literature. In

this system, rules require perfectionism with increasing rigidity. There is an escalating

importance of appearance and image. Blame, gossip, favoritism, name-calling, and

harassment undermine relationships as others are judged to be unreliable (Brown,

Daring) . Thus, relationships are continually in jeopardy for the maintenance of personal

emotional distance. Control is a deep-seated value. Typically, corruption is also present

in shame-based groups or societies (Wiher 359). The goal of a shame-based system is

conformity, where members strive to be identified as an accepted member of the group

(Piers & Singer). When a church becomes shame-based through its leadership, rules

replace relationship and there is a high degree of pressure for members to tow-the-line of

allegiance to the hierarchy.

There is a growing body of investigation and analysis of the presence of a shame

culture in groups or organizations. Generation X, now largely the business,

governmental, and educational leaders, "is in great part shame-oriented" (Wiher 365). Millennials too (born between 1981 and 1996) also exhibit indications of a shame orientation in their search for self-esteem. Stearns writes that, "A 2013 report argued that U.S. collegians valued opportunities to enhance self-esteem more than any other pleasure—including sex" (103). The presence of shame undermines basic self-worth, though it remains largely unaddressed.

Arguably, shame-based cultures exist chiefly because of the shame-based individuals that collectively make them up. Here, too, common responses to shame are identified. Shame messages may be delivered through angry accusations or a berating tirade. Generally, however, the most powerful awareness of shame rises from glances, tones, and body language because shame activates the parts of the brain that help us perceive emotion (Thompson). Common shame responses among individuals include looking downward, difficulty in decision-making, confusion, frequent use of self-deprecation, profuse apologies, feelings of powerlessness, rage, and emotional numbness (Levang 81-82).

Simply put, a person experiences shame as the underlying belief (or bias) that he or she is permanently flawed at the core and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging. It may be felt and reinforced dozens of times a day by sometimes subtle, quiet, condemning self-talk. Principally, the response is to withdraw, emotionally if not physically. The withdrawal may or may not include silence. Richard Shaw differentiates here between genders. Men may get 'big'—defensive, loud, angry; women, on the other hand, are more likely to respond by getting 'small'—quiet, non-communicative, almost invisible (43). In whatever way it is expressed, shame chokes off a person's sense of

worthiness and prevents heartfelt connection. It undermines hope that they can change and do better, which may be one reason why shame is highly correlated with "addiction, violence, aggression, depression, eating disorders, and bullying" (Brown, *Daring* 73). Without the possibility of change, a person is left with few options but to cover up what has been uncovered, to deny and hide weaknesses, and to once again resume the state of shame (Noble; Levang).

One might expect that the person experiencing shame would develop strong relationships with others as a way of validating their own worth. The opposite is true. Shame-based persons expect disappointment and rejection from every direction; after all, they believe it is their own fatally-flawed character that results in the shame. Therefore, at a foundational level, they believe they are not worthy of understanding, mercy, grace, or help. They believe that "neither God nor people can be reliable sources of support" because they themselves don't deserve it—the fault is their own, they are to blame (Levang 7). Not surprisingly, such a forlorn view fuels a mounting feeling of powerlessness (Miller & Stiver). Even for the person who longs for reassurance or recognition, shame prevents the flow of vulnerable sharing. "Emotional barriers…act as plaque in the arteries of communication and perception; that is, they stop up the entire artery, not just the location at which they are found" (Friedman ch. 1).

<p align="center">**In the Beginning …Shame**</p>

Several authors began their discussion of shame with the book of beginnings: Genesis (Noble; M. Lewis; Levang; Thompson; Wiher). Curtis Levang says of the account of the Fall in Genesis 3: "Here is the beginning of shame, the tragedy of people hiding from God, themselves, and others" (6). Bradshaw calls shame "the core and

consequence of Adam's fall" (Preface). It is an important distinction that the shame

which caused Adam and Eve to hide was not related to a pronouncement of judgment

from God. In fact, their awareness of shame is noted by "their exposure of themselves to

themselves"—the immediate result of their sin in Genesis 3.7 (Noble). Adam does not

speak to God until v. 10. This means, of course, that shame is not a pronouncement of the

Lord for Adam, Eve or for their descendants. Drawing from the account of the Fall,

Levang identifies what he terms to be three Tenets of Shame (6):

- Faulty beliefs (worthlessness, abandonment, powerlessness)
- Protective action (hiding)
- Deceptive lifestyle

Other responses motivated by shame include avoiding eye contact, continual self-

deprecation, profuse apologies, depression, and explosive bursts of anger (Levang 81–

82). Human beings have been following this pattern ever since the Garden.

In both the Genesis account and in the New Testament, God comes to man. The

Lord initiates contact with Adam and Eve after they sinned (Gen. 3.9). Jesus clothes

Himself in humanity to come as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the

world (John 1.29). Persons respond to shame by withdrawing to hide. God responds to

shame by drawing humans out of hiding and into community, first with Himself and then

with one another (Thompson).

Biblically shame is more akin to nakedness than to guilt (Noble). Shame connotes

exposure—the idea that not only is one flawed and unworthy, but that everyone else will

know it. This emotional exposure "is like being naked onstage and hoping for applause

rather than laughter. It's being naked when everyone else is fully clothed. It feels like the

naked dream: You're in the airport and you're stark naked" (Brown, *Daring* 39). Hannes

Wiher also makes the connection between the linguistic link in the Scriptures between shame and nakedness, as well as between shame and fear (190–91, 196). This, too, is echoed in the writing of Brown who describes shame as "inextricably linked to fear" (*Daring* 225). In addition, even among authors who do not specifically cite the scriptural account of the Fall of man as the origin of shame, there is widespread acceptance that shame is a one of the most primitive, pervasive, and dominate emotions experienced by human beings (Brown; H.B. Lewis; Scheff).

If shame is a result of the Fall, it follows that the answer to its power would be found at the cross of Christ. In Hebrews 12.2, the writer exhorts his readers to fix their eyes on Jesus, "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (NASB). The message of Christ's endurance of suffering on the cross is proclaimed from pulpits the world over. But despising the shame? Not so much. It is not difficult to imagine that Jesus would despise something at the point of His agony: sin, Satan, death, separation from the Father—all come to mind. Most likely, shame would appear further down on a list of things that Jesus would despise at the cross. Yet, there it is. Strong's Concordance defines *despise* (Greek *kataphroneō*) as "to disdain, think little or nothing of" (G2706). John Piper says that in despising shame, Jesus is saying, "Shame…you are worthless. You are powerless." If shame entered the world through the catastrophic fall, like sin itself, shame is rendered powerless through the cross. Like so many other ill effects of the original sin, shame may exist in our world for a time, but it has already been rendered of no effect, if, like Jesus Himself, one chooses to despise it.

Shame's Harvest: Guardedness

Shame minimizes the risk of exposure through withdrawal, disengagement, and shutting down—the essence of guardedness. When a person experiences shame, his or her brain accesses the parasympathetic drive—the flight or fight response resulting in a disintegration with others (Thompson). Maintaining personal emotional distance and always having an exit strategy are expressions of guardedness. Longtime expat counselor Rachel DuFour defines guardedness as an inability to connect emotionally with others, characterized by the building of relational walls to keep others from getting too close (Interview). Fueled by fear, guardedness avoids vulnerability resulting in disconnection and even distrust (Brown, *Daring*). Guardedness could be rightly called a logical consequence of shame (Bradshaw; Brown; Thompson).

Guardedness is characterized by emotional withdrawal, loneliness, and isolation. It is ironic that in an age when the global trend is now more than ever moving to cities (Bakke 123), loneliness is described as epidemic (Natale 1). Researchers and practitioners in medicine, psychology, and spiritual formation note personal disengagement as an underlying issue in a myriad of problems in the lives of individuals, families, churches, schools, and organizations (Bradshaw; Brown; Thompson; Natale; Levang; Cacioppo; Miller and Stiver; Goleman; Schwartz; Gaylin). Henri Nouwen commented on the trend he saw developing in the final quarter of the 20th Century, a trend he called "the road that leads inward" (*Wounded* 28). He raised concern for what could aptly be called guardedness*,* noting an inability (or unwillingness) to express feelings, a proclivity to invulnerability, and busy-ness as an avoidance tactic (71, 72, 90).

Perhaps our labors toward guardedness "protect us not so much from the other but from ourselves" (Thompson).

The Good Side of Shame

Is shame ever good? Shame can be helpful in the same way that pain is helpful in alerting people to injury or disease. Likewise, the experience and identification of shame can signal an area in one's life that may need healing. "Cover their faces with shame, LORD, so that they will seek your name." (Ps. 83.16, NIV) Like physical health, living free of shame is a process. There is a great difference between the desire to be well and the desire to not be sick (Thompson). Wellness, as well as shame-free living, requires change in lifestyle with the implementation of new behaviors. It is rarely easy or pleasant, but it is necessary. John Bradshaw differentiates between shame as emotion and shame as identity. As an emotion, he sees shame as the "foundation of humility" and the "source of spirituality." Shame becomes "toxic" when it mutates to a "state of being" (Preface).

In community, some would venture that the presence of shame can guide a person to better themselves as they conform to the wisdom of the collective group (Gaylin 76). This way of thinking values pluralistic organizations over individualistic ones. The pressure of the group upon the individual members is thought to make everyone better. Thus, shame is "felt most urgently in groups with strong community or cultural identity" (58). Probyn expands this thought, "In shame, the feeling and minding and thinking and social body comes alive…. The feeling of shame teaches us about our relations to others" (34–35). She goes on to support the justify the use of shame for political change, designating many "pride movements" (for example, gay pride; national pride; black pride; etc.) have arisen as a response to shame (100). Still, in these scenarios, the only

good that came from the shame itself was in the rise of a movement that discounted the shame-producing social mores in the first place.

The focus of this project was shame that isolates, disintegrates, and destroys. For good or ill, shame is a primal, universal reality in the human experience—so prevalent that Curtis Thompson says researchers discover it again and again in each generation (Moll). This shame lives in the smallest of life's details, the most common of moments (Thompson 130). Birthed into existence at the Fall of man from God's perfect creation, shame inserts into the human soul the pernicious whisper of want, lack, and fundamental flaw. To the crowning creative work of God in his human beings, shame will always say, "You are not enough. You are not worthy of love." Thankfully, this is not the final word.

Connection

Indispensable Connection

"'It is not good for the man to be alone' (Gen. 2.18 RSV). And thus God created us interdependent, not self-sufficient; social, not isolated" (Bolt and Myers 10). From infancy, humans look for connection—the brain is sociable—automatically drawn to brain to brain linkups by a "neural bridge," which is sometimes called the "neurobiology of we" (Goleman; Crabbe, et al.; Thompson). In fact, research "persuasively suggests that of all the primary tasks of the infant, there is none more crucial than the pursuit, acquisition and establishment of joyful, securely attached relationships" (Thompson 60). To be sure, a significant body of evidence indicates that persons crave connection with others, whether or not they realize it (Brown; Thompson; Goleman; Cacioppo; Levang). Further, Rollo May states, "Every human being gets much of his sense of his own reality out of what others say to him or think about him" (32). If shame is the disease of

withdrawal and isolation, connection is the road to health. In fact, Thompson surmises that "the healing of shame is about connecting with others more than about overcoming shame" (qtd. in Moll).

That physical health is positively impacted through meaningful relationships has long been known. Harvard Health reports, "Dozens of studies have shown that people who have satisfying relationships with family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer." Satisfying personal relationships (or "connections") improve survival rates and recovery from heart attack, organ transplant, and cancer (Brown; Cacioppo; Goleman; Strain; Spiegal; Schwartz). Speaking at Washington's National Cathedral in 2018, Brené Brown said her research shows that "Loneliness is a greater early death predictor than smoking, obesity, and alcohol abuse." Dr. John Cacioppo, called a father of social neuroscience, found a twenty percent increase in early death based on chronic loneliness (Roberts). It was Cacioppo who reported in 2008 that regular church attendance (even after accounting for other life-style effects) reduces mortality by twenty-five percent (Cacioppo and Patrick 261–62). Further, whole communities are healthier when connections among the members are strong. Even in neighborhoods considered to be among the poorest financially, meaningful personal connections resulted in less crime, a reduction of drug use among young people, fewer unwanted teen pregnancies, and increased academic performance among the children (Sampson). Better connections mean better health.

Improved physical health tells only part of the story on interpersonal connection. Knowing others and being known adds purpose and meaning to people's lives. People understand themselves better through the lenses of those who love them, starting with

God. If shame is the lock on the door of isolation, connection is the key to participation.

Connection can be defined as "the energy that is created between people when they feel

seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment" (Brown,

Daring 145). Described by words like attachment, friendship, and belonging, connection

is made possible chiefly by vulnerability and empathy, hallmarks of living unguarded

(Brown; Thompson; Cacioppo; Burns; Stine).

Vulnerability: Connection's Beginning

To be vulnerable is to be open to wounding. It is perhaps the last thing a person

wants to be. Vulnerability is risky, perilous, and threatening. Emotionally, it means one

can be hurt, rejected, or shunned. However, it is just as true that vulnerability is also a

place of healing, acceptance, and belonging. If "our hearts crave connection that God

longs to fill" (Stine 48), then the person struggling with the isolation of shame should be

encouraged that God himself has shown the way be by becoming vulnerable. "God put

himself in harm's way simply by making us" (Thompson 122). The tenet of Christian

faith affirming free will means that God is always at risk to be rejected, maligned,

blamed, cursed, even abandoned. In truth, human beings are vulnerable (absent some

serious emotional anomaly). Denial of one's own vulnerability is perhaps the greatest

hindrance to connection and the liberation from shame's control. Sadly, many people are

conditioned to deny vulnerability under the guise of positive thinking. "North American

Christian culture almost demands that you find a silver lining in the midst of pain, loss or

regret" (Nelson 20). Repugnance toward the very idea of vulnerability prevents its

positive characteristics: tenderness, humility, and gentleness. A person controlled by

guardedness rooted in shame avoids vulnerability. The question is, how can persons come to terms with this elusively abstract quality?

Vulnerability: What It Is Not

In grasping an understanding of what vulnerability is, some explanation of what vulnerability is not can be helpful. While several authors touch on this topic, it is the work of Brené Brown that has the most guidance. First, vulnerability is not flippant or distracted, characterized by 'I-It' interactions in which one person is preoccupied by other activities during the conversation (texting, checking email, perusing a newspaper, etc.). "When other tasks or preoccupations split our attention, the dwindling reserve left for the persons we are talking with leaves us operating on automatic, paying just enough attention to keep the conversation on track" (Goleman, *Social* 106). To the recipient of such long-term distracted communication, the neurological response can lead to "paranoid hypervigilance, protective emotional distance, distrust, and a readiness to fight" (288).

Similar to 'I-It' interactions, vulnerability is not a one-way street in which I want you to be vulnerable, but not me. While such a scenario seems plainly wrong, Brown's research shows that "[v]ulnerability is the last thing I want you to see in me, but the first thing I look for in you" (*Daring* 113). Paradoxically, persons seem to value, applaud, and even admire vulnerability in the life of another person while despising it in themselves.

On the opposite side of the stonewalling silence coin is another misconception about vulnerability: it is not oversharing. Most likely, everyone knows a person who equates authenticity and vulnerability with the telling and retelling (and retelling again) of personal wrongs suffered, hardship endured, or difficult circumstances. Most likely,

the detailed accounts include the names and egregious acts of offending parties. Sadly, the repetition and vivid detail do not provide any healing or movement forward for the teller. "Oversharing is not vulnerability," writes Brown. "In fact, it often results in disconnection, distrust, and disengagement" (*Daring* 159).

Vulnerability takes place best in relationships of growing trust. Deep sharing, especially of shame stories, should take place in an atmosphere of care, where both the teller and the hearer have shared rapport. Offering deeply personal feelings with a casual acquaintance (or even a stranger or a in a group) often causes the hearers to "wince, as if we have shone a floodlight in their eyes. Instead of a strand of delicate lights, our shared vulnerability is blinding harsh, and unbearable" (*Daring* 160). Further, with a current culture that values celebrity and sensationalism, Brown recognizes another façade of vulnerability that she calls "smash and grab" in which a person smashes through social boundaries with intimate information to grab attention (163). Brown also distinguishes between fitting in and belonging. Related to vulnerability, the goal of fitting in would cause a person to appraise the situation at hand and share information in order to be accepted. Vulnerability cannot be calculated or rehearsed in this way. Belonging on the other hand, requires a person to be who they are—vulnerably, unguardedly (231). For those venturing into relationships of vulnerability, answering four questions may provide a guide as to whether a particular relationship can sustain such a treasure: 1) Is there trust? 2) Is there mutual empathy? 3) Is there reciprocal sharing? 4) Can we ask for what we need? (160).

Goleman adds a caution that social media is not the soil of vulnerability. "These virtual others have nothing whatever to do with the people who are just a foot or two

away—to whose existence that rapt listener has become largely indifferent" (*Social* 8). In fact, it is arguable that electronic posts would most often conform to the oversharing or smash and grab categories outlined above. Rather than connection through vulnerability, he aptly calls the result of the growing onslaught of electronic media into virtually every aspect of daily life "social autism." Cacioppo and Patrick noted a growing trend for electronic multiplayer sites because the social cohesion of vulnerable relationships is produced by more physicality—that is, being together (259).

Finally, vulnerability is not weakness. Shame creates a fear of vulnerability which encourages a guarded person to avoid authentic relationships at all costs. In truth, the terms uncomfortable, awkward, frightening, or painful may be fitting descriptions for vulnerability, but its greatest quality is bravery. "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness" (Brown, *Daring* 37). Willingness to honestly interact with others despite the risk of wounding is brave, admirable, and inviting. Vulnerability in one person opens the door for others to take the same journey.

Here again, the account of Naomi and Ruth brings encouragement and insight. Reading their story centuries later, with the benefit of hindsight, one can forget the vulnerability the women must have felt after the deaths of Naomi's husband and sons. How foreboding and perilous their outlook must have been. But their trepidation was not weakness. Rather, it was a God-given opportunity for each of them to enter a new life. God is still giving such opportunities to His servants all over the world. In a memoir of one missionary's experience is a page which could have been taken from Naomi's own diary:

I had to learn the feeling of God's absence to be able to recognize and appreciate his presence. I had to be a faithless servant before I could believe that God's love for me was not predicated on my usefulness to him. I had to learn that answers didn't satisfy before I could experience the relationship that does. I had to hate God's sovereignty before I could rejoice in it. (A. Peterson 231)

Unguarded living is the path to facing life with courage and veracity.

The Road to Connection

Connecting with others in vulnerable, empathic relationships is arguably the most effective way to nullify guardedness rooted in shame. Connection allows persons to process, to reflect, and to grow. In unguarded, vulnerable relationship with others, a freedom is found that invigorates action. "Sometimes I need a teacher, someone to explain…to clarify….But mostly I do not: I need to become what I already know" (E. Peterson 189). Affirming that fact, however, is not enough to experience freedom from shame. The question is: How does one proceed?

Acknowledgment and awareness are the beginning (Brown; Sagarin; Bricker-Jenkins et al.; Thompson; Goleman; Cacioppo; Jordan). Denying vulnerability is not only self-deceptive; it is counterproductive. Persons who discount their own vulnerability experience more pain and confusion in the experience of a shame event than those who have a critical awareness of their susceptibility. Awareness of the feeling of shame alerts one to evaluate the situation more objectively. Particularly when an interpersonal encounter triggers a reaction of shame, four questions can be helpful: 1) Who am I? 2) Who says so? 3) Who benefits from this definition? 4) What must change and how?

(Brown, "Shame Resilience" 48). When one perceives shame, answering these questions can bring healing perspective.

A second component of shame management is to reach out to others. Positive, optimistic self-talk is inadequate. "Telling ourselves we shouldn't be ashamed often only reinforces it" (Thompson 28). Vulnerability and empathy must be embodied in action (Brown; Thompson; Ivey; Goleman; Bolt; Cacioppo). In his book by the same name, Goleman defines social intelligence as "being intelligent not just about relationships but also in them" (11). The focus of reaching out is more than just an avenue to let oneself be known. It is the entry-point for people to know others. Vulnerability is not a one-way street for personal growth and satisfaction in oneself. "Quiet acts of humanity have felt more healing than the high-dose radiation and chemotherapy that hold the hope of a cure" (Schwartz). It can rightly be said that mitigating shame for another person does the same for the doer. To a large extent, behavior determines attitude. Because human biological systems are influenced and even determined by social interactions, empathic acts and words can positively affect a person at a cellular level (Cacioppo; Crabbe, et al.). Intentional acts of empathy strengthen a person. Psychologist Martin Bolt says, "… each time we act, we strengthen the idea behind what we have done. We increase our inclination to act in the same way again. If we want to change ourselves in some important way, we had better not depend exclusively on introspection and intellectual insight. Sometimes we need to get up and do something…." (17). Like Ruth in the Old Testament, living God's *ḥesed* toward others results in the personal experience of the same.

One reason that connection is so potent in defeating the controlling effects of shame has to do with the power of the spoken word. Speaking one's hidden shame somehow diminishes its capacity for control. "You are only as sick as your secrets" is a maxim often used in twelve-step groups like Alcoholics Anonymous. Shame looms largest in silence. In fact, Brené Brown summarizes, "The only way to resolve shame is to talk about it" (*Gifts* 25). In doing the opposite of what an internal 'shame monster' demands (silence), speaking extinguishes that insistent voice and moves us toward restoration in two ways. First, space is made for God to work (Thompson 13). Second, almost without fail, the person who shares their shame annuls the isolation. In a study with hundreds of women, "the participants reported that one of the most important benefits of developing empathy and connection with others is recognizing how the experiences that make us feel the most alone, and even isolated, are often the most universal experiences. In other words, we share in common what makes us feel the most apart" (Brown, "Shame Resilience" 49). These spiritual and personal benefits of sharing one's own story confirm that we are more than animated dust and that we have purpose (Brown; Wilson; Thompson; Cacioppo). Having tasted of God's forgiveness and following a call to serve Him on a foreign field, most missionaries have at least an inkling of the freedom that God has for them if they can reject guardedness. In connection with others, new power is discovered. Within these relationships, many persons find that it is easier to articulate "affirmatively what they want to become rather than what they want to stop" (Kegan and Lahey ch. 9). This is a better platform from which to initiate change.

John Wesley said, "There is no holiness without social holiness" (Maddix). Of course, he spoke not only of programs and efforts to relieve the suffering of the poor and sick but also of the God-given need of persons to be in relationship and the importance of interpersonal connections to our friendship with God Himself. Even to a largely secular audience, Brené Brown echoes this truth, "We are inextricably connected to one another by something bigger than us" (qtd. in Luscombe). Most churches in the twenty-first century do not have to be convinced of the important role of small groups for teaching, discipleship, and fellowship. While the gathering of individuals has many benefits, in overcoming guardedness rooted in shame, not just any group setting will be effective. Holistic, healing connections are marked by transparency, vulnerability, empathy, and trust. "Spirituality cannot be imposed, it must be grown" (E. Peterson 109). And that growth happens best in a community of like-minded, mutually committed, transparent relationships. Henri Nouwen describes such relationships this way: "…when one has the courage to enter where life is experienced as most unique and most private, one touches the soul of the community" (*Healer* 73).

Perhaps the early 'Bands' of John Wesley's design were intrinsically creating this kind of connection. Early Methodism provided group meetings focused on instruction (Societies), in which men and women met together (though seated separately in rows), fellowship (Classes) where mixed genders and ages gathered in groups of ten to twelve persons to pursue "holy love," and deep-level discipleship and accountability groups (Bands) which were segregated by gender, age, and marital status. Table 2.1 is helpful in differentiating these groups.

Table 2.1 Wesley's Small Groups (Maddix; Mobley)

Group Name/Purpose	Size of Each Group	Participants within the Group	Description
Societies Purpose: Instruction	Any size	Men and women (though seated separately)	Chiefly an educational gathering in which the tenets of Methodism were taught.
Classes Purpose: Fellowship; encouragement in discipleship; evangelism	10-12 persons	Mixed gender, age and social standing	Promoted "perfect love" among participants sharing mostly from experience, not primarily Bible study or doctrinal instruction. Allowed those who had not yet made a Christian commitment.
Bands Purpose: Committed discipleship, encouragement and accountability	Usually 5-7 persons	Segregated by gender; sometimes by "season of life" (age, marital status)	Intense commitment to transparent sharing of struggles, temptations, etc. For those who were committed believers.

Wesley called the Bands "close conversations" and they were aimed at developing

Christlike "motive and heartfelt impressions" (Maddix). These groups were characterized

by intimate sharing with unvarnished, straightforward honesty, authenticity, and

vulnerability. The bands embodied the affinity expressed by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop:

"The dynamic of personal relationship is love. Love is a quality of response between

persons. Love can only exist in freedom" (ch. 2). Mutual care was the hallmark of the

groups. In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown lists four questions that signify

vulnerable, empathic connections (160):

- Is there trust?
- Is there mutual empathy?
- Is there reciprocal sharing?
- Can we ask for what we need?

This kind of faithfully devoted group exhibits the qualities outlined by Stephen Seamands

for ministry and life that mimics the intimate relationship of the Godhead: "First, a

commitment to wholeness in our interpersonal relationships. Second, a commitment to

involvement in close-knit small group fellowship. And third, a commitment to healthy

family relationships" (ch. 2). Wisely, John Wesley saw that the health of the community

as a whole was integral to the success of the Bands (Mobley 15). Many would echo the

sentiments of Curt Thompson, who says the very "purpose of shame's healing is to

deepen connections with God and others" (123).

Redemptive Bias and the Possibility for Change

Returning to the examples of unguarded living exemplified by the Old Testament

women Naomi and Ruth, one might ask: What fueled the courage of Naomi who had lost

so much? What strengthened Ruth to follow her heart in the face of cultural isolation and

"perpetual widowhood"? (Hubbard 34) What is the driving force for a person to choose

vulnerable, empathic relationships despite experiences of tragedy, rejection,

disappointment, and hardship? Throughout the literature, two foundational themes

emerge: connection (as discussed above) and a personal focus and belief on realities

different from the visible circumstances—"redemptive biases"— that becomes a part of

one's subconscious process, and are foundational to emotional well-being and

consistency in positive behaviors. If, as Daniel Goleman says, a "negative bias clouds our lenses" as we look at the world (*Social* 300), then would not a positive bias make our vision clearer toward ourselves, others, and the world?

Not surprisingly, the cornerstone for changing one's mind (both cognitively and even physically) and behavioral responses begins with belief that change in one's self and the circumstances is possible. An underlying, predisposed belief—or bias—was specifically cited in Christian and secular literature as indispensable in bringing about lasting freedom from shame's effects (Brown; Kettenring; Goleman; Duhigg; Leaf; Bradshaw; Cappioco; Stine). John Wesley referred to the concept of foundational attitudes as "tempers" saying, "True religion is right tempers towards God and man" (qtd. in Wynkoop ch. 4). For persons of Christian faith, this corroborates what the writer of Hebrews says about the need for an underlying belief on the part of a person who comes to God: "… anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11.6, NIV). Quoting William James (called the Father of American Psychology), Charles Duhigg says "the will to believe is the most important ingredient in creating belief in change" (273). Here, too, connection with others is critical: "Belief is easier when it occurs within a community"—even if that community is only two people (89, 92).

Lest critics dismiss the crucial imperative of a redemptive bias as mere positivity or a personal pep talk, many authors caution against both. "Telling ourselves we shouldn't be ashamed often only reinforces it," says Thompson (28). Positive self-talk alone often undermines efforts to identify essential habits and thought processes that must be named in order to be changed (Thompson; Brown; Duhigg; Leaf). Duhigg calls them

"keystone habits" and says that changing one can "start a process that, over time, transforms everything" (100). The essential element, then, in the success of shame management is to identify controlling biases that reinforce the experiences and resulting behaviors of shame. Recording shame events in a personal log, talking through habitual experiences of shame with trusted friends, personal and shared prayer, and examining one's own predispositions of judgment towards others (there is a propensity to judge others in the areas of one's own weaknesses) are all strategies for identifying areas where a new redemptive bias is needed to replace a destructive predisposition.

The question is, can ingrained attitudes and behaviors really change, or will they forever just be managed by the grit of willpower? The preponderance of literature indicating that "prejudices are fluid" is encouraging (Blair). The essence of the Christian belief of free will expresses the amazing capacity of humans to "imagine future courses of action, deliberating about one's reason for choosing them, planning one's actions in light of this deliberation and controlling actions in the face of competing desires" (Leaf 43). Moreover, there is substantial evidence which indicates that human beings have the capacity to alter the neurological anatomy of their brains through an on-going process of thinking, doing, and interpersonal connection. While the brain was once thought to be "fixed and hardwired machine" (Leaf 19), many scientists and practitioners now report astounding evidence for neuroplasticity—the quality of the brain to be malleable and adaptable (Leaf; Brown; Thompson; Blair; Crabbe et al.; Duhigg; Bolt; Goleman). Caroline Leaf writes, "Neuroplasticity is God's design for renewing the mind" (65). In short, the mind and the brain are not synonymous; the mind has the ability to determine some functions and physiology of the brain. Quoting Nathan Azrin (a developer of habit

reversal training), Charles Duhigg says, "The truth is, the brain can be reprogrammed" (76). Simply put, neurological patterns determining behaviors can be overridden by new patterns. The old neural activity is still present, but it becomes "crowded out by new urges" (xiv). Conversely, shame disintegrates neural networks (Thompson 32). Interestingly, the desired attitude may or may not precede behavior, but whichever comes first reinforces the other. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way, "Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes…You can only know and think about it by actually doing it" (69, 86). In his best-selling book about St. Francis of Assisi, Murray Bodo relays the story of Francis who at one time had a strong disgust for lepers. One day, walking along a road below Assisi, the monk could not avoid a leper walking directly toward him. "Despite his revulsion, he reached out and touched the leper—threw his arms around the leper's neck and kissed his cheek—whereupon Francis's hatred was turned to love" (16–17). A miracle of transformation? No doubt, but one supported by the science of action strengthening the very idea or belief where it originates. The bottom line is that thought and desire are not enough to effect real change. The desired change must be embodied in action. Every action serves to strengthen the idea behind what was done, which in turn, results in further desired actions (Bolt and Myers 17). The results are usually not immediately consistent. Even with thought, planning, and support, studies suggest that the process of experimentation—and failure—is critical in long-term habit change (Duhigg 282). Each successful event, no matter how small, fuels a greater possibility for success the next time. Cognitive neuroscientist Caroline Leaf says it this way: "So our bad choices and reactions were wired in by our choices, and therefore can be wired out" (14).

The third component of establishing new thought and behavior patterns is the support of community—even with only one other person. Like our thought patterns, relationships have the ability to influence one's biology (Goleman 5). Moreover, Cacioppo writes that "we know ourselves best among others" (145). In another evidence of the vital importance of connection, meaningful relationships seem to make change believable as if we can see the confidence we need in the eyes of another person (Duhigg, Thompson, Brown, Leaf, Cacioppo and Patrick, Bolt, May).

The role of community, or relationship, must not be underestimated in successfully establishing new thought patterns that become attitudes permeating all our thoughts and actions. Could Naomi have had the drive of faith to return to Bethlehem as an aging childless widow without the foundation of faith from her heritage? Could Ruth have entrusted herself to the God of her mother-in-law without having seen the life of Naomi express faithfulness to Yahweh? Perhaps possible, but doubtful. On the other hand, there is much evidence to support the that the power of connection is vital to an individual in making real and lasting changes (Cacioppo and Patrick; Bolt and Myers; Crabbe, et al.; Sampson; May). In some cases, "social context determined the outcome of something otherwise thought to be a purely 'physiological reaction'" (Cacioppo and Patrick 115).

The notion of redemptive bias is important because it expresses the recapturing of God's ultimate purpose for people's lives, what John Wesley called "the recovery of the image of God" (Wynkoop ch. 5). If one accepts the premises that shame entered the human experience at the Fall, and that Jesus has made the way to neutralize the effects of that isolating separation at the cross, then it follows that one of those effects is shame's

corruption of the assertions which persons accept about themselves. "Men find themselves locked into an orbit about a center," says Wynkoop. "Sin is love locked into a false center, the self" (ch. 7). Simply put, a spiritual reality (the Fall) brought humans into shame, and it is a spiritual reality (relationship with the One who despised shame) that will bring them out. "We can choose to think the way God wants us to think," posits Caroline Leaf (41). The starting place is the inner life—the condition of the heart. Changes to the inner life and its outward expression can work in tandem, but the inward attitudes cannot be ignored without making long-term change unsustainable (Scazzaro; Seamands; Nouwen; Dawn).

Mission: Why Connection Matters in the International Church

Along with other Old and New Testament Scriptures, Jesus' command in Matthew 28 to "go and make disciples" is a mandate for the global church. There is a church because of this mission, not vice versa (Hammond 11). As believers gather in every corner of the world, Joy Tira, director of Global Diaspora Network, says the International Church is uniquely positioned to be a church the ministers "to, through, and beyond" the diaspora (qtd. in Packer 93). Mike Breen defines mission as "The outward expression of your inward vision" (ch. 7). Guardedness is a threat to the mission of the church, likened to a deadly plague that spreads quickly, silently, and inexplicably. Specifically, two compelling thoughts require expats in the International Church to live unguarded: love for the cultures that are serving and the desire to lead the way for future generations.

Contrary to the spiritual calling to be faithful witnesses of the love of God, the isolation resulting from guardedness causes expats to become critical of the local culture

(Turney 18). How can one love those he or she disdains? Moreover, such judgment

promotes attitudes that disparage local customs and values. Condemnation and

condescension are the language of shame. Shamed people shame people (Thompson 28).

Ironically, persons in the grip of shame tend to judge people in the same areas of their

own failures or weaknesses. As expat servants of the kingdom, harboring a guarded

attitude controlled by shame makes ministry a pretense, or a miserably heavy

responsibility or duty. The awesome joy of being on mission with the Holy Spirit is often

lost. "We stand at our pulpits and lecterns and extend an index finger to suggest that

people tidy up their morality or embellish their piety or get the facts straight. And God is

waving his windmill Jesus arms, calling all of us to grace and mercy and salvation" (E.

Peterson 161). For the guarded heart, there is comfort in making rules, demanding

perfection, focusing on command rather than promise. Focus turns inward, preventing

empathy, which is the ability to perceive a situation from the other person's perspective

and names four defining attributes:

     a) To be able to see the world as others see it;
     b) To be nonjudgmental;
     c) To understand another person's feelings; and
     d) To communicate our understanding of that person's feelings
                            (Brown, "Shame Resilience" 47)

Real ministry flows from an unguarded heart that is free from self-protection and

concealment, that can offer that grace, mercy, and salvation. "Don't go to save the

world," writes Amy Peterson, "go because you want to learn to love it. Go because you

are loved" (248).

     Secondly, "we must be what we want our children to become" (Brown, *Daring*

217). Personal inner health, reconciliation, and freedom are a prerequisite to being

ambassadors for the same (Miller 13). Simply put, we cannot give what we do not

possess. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, we cannot help but give what we do

possess, like it or not (Scazzaro). Particularly for missionaries, the church being

developed for the next generation is at the forefront of thinking. Marva Dawn writes:

> Let every man and every woman among us judge of our life, not merely from that
>
> little narrow piece of it which we ourselves live, for that is but a span; but let us
>
> judge it by its connection with other lives that may come after our own. If we
>
> cannot do all we wish, let us do all we can, in the hope that someone who shall
>
> succeed us may complete the project that is so dear to our heart….We shall be
>
> quite satisfied to do the work and scarcely see the glory, if we may know that, in
>
> another generation, the work that we shall have done shall produce glory to God
>
> which shall be seen among the sons of men…. It is enough for us to do today's
>
> work in the day;….Do it and do it at once, with all your might, believing that God
>
> will find somebody else to go on with the next piece of the work when you have
>
> finished your portion. (ch. 8)

The focus of this project was expat women serving God's kingdom in Danang,

Vietnam. Expat women in Christian service have a particular heritage of faithfulness—

and challenges. While the record of Scripture affirms the full participation of women in

the purposes of God, the western church has discounted their service to a large degree for

at least the past 200 years. Women's missionary roles were largely reduced to supportive

details and their abilities and calling were seen as subservient to those of men (Semple;

Smith). Still, faithful women responded with resilient grace and changed the face of

missions: "Thus the 'women's work for women,' which was originally intended as a side

to the 'real work' of preaching, became as important a focus as the strictly ecclesiastical work" (Semple 231–32). Arguably, at least some of the pioneering women in missionary service displayed redemptive biases like humility, forgiveness, and gentleness—which in turn sustained their selfless service and paved the way for greater roles in missionary ministry for all women. Their predecessor, Ruth of the Old Testament, also did not fit the mold of expectations in her day. Ruth's example reveals the value of women and Gentiles, and the importance of the embodiment of living from a redemptive bias of lovingkindness.

Arguably, the pressures on women who serve abroad are still evident. In one study of thirty missionary families, women reported a significantly higher degree of stress than men (Dodd 112). Some would venture that stress is on the increase all over the globe, with our instant gratification, wired and media-driven culture. Persons who serve as expats face "some stresses unique to cross cultural living, especially in isolated or unstable situations" (Andrews 263). Separation from one's home culture, family members, and friends compounds the burdens of everyday life. One such stress is expectation and even obligation that Christian servants find a silver lining in any and all circumstances—no matter how difficult—a demand that has obvious implications for the reinforcement of shame, silence, and hiding (Nelson 20). While times may be changing, too often the prevailing attitude is that missionaries should never need psychological help. "If they are truly presenting the Gospel to others, they should also be able to receive from the Lord all that is given through His Son, His Word, and His Spirit" (Bobgan 147–48). Similarly, in the training of missionaries, issues of transparency and vulnerability are mainly concerned with the need for the missionary to accept intrusions into personal

privacy (Jones 78). Is it any wonder the International Church is plagued with guardedness?

The current trends of mission service also contribute to guardedness. Historically, mission mobilizers and trainers have promoted cross cultural service as a career and encouraged those who accepted the call to stay on the field until death. Since 1992, the number of long-term cross cultural workers from North America has remained flat, while the number of short-term workers has skyrocketed (Nelson 31). Many mission organizations now have internships offering time commitments to workers as short as six months. A 2012 survey of young adults considering overseas service found that the respondents looked at missionary service as a temporary experience and a long-term commitment to an agency or sending organization as unrealistic and unnecessary (30). This trend toward short-term commitment undermines the formation of deep relationships characterized by vulnerability and trust. Frequently, expat servants remain at one location for only one to two years (Nelson; Dean; Andrews; Bakke). Knowing that your new friends will most likely not be staying discourages investment in relationship building. The health of the expat, the family, and the International Church pay the price for this disconnection. The difficulty for expats in establishing relationships characterized by vulnerability, empathy, and authenticity can culminate in disastrous events for the individual, their family, and the kingdom. Statistics indicate that an astounding sixty-four percent of missionaries, pastors, or church staff struggle with hidden sexual addiction or compulsion. Further, many missionaries who engage in an extramarital affair (derailing their marriages and their ministries) indicate they had no plans to begin an illicit physical relationship. "Their emotional tank was empty. They were looking for a caring listener, a

trusted confidant. Intimacy, the sharing of dreams and feelings, is a serious drug to the body and to the soul" (Means 132–33). The dangers for falling into sexual sin, which in turn serves to take shame to a whole new level of darkness and isolation, are only a part of the story. In the exit interviews of expat workers leaving ministry abroad, one denominational leader reports that the main reason mentioned is relationship problems (Turney 94). Additional surveys and field practitioners testify to the need for meaningful relationships as a critical factor in fulfillment and longevity in service (Nelson; Schubert; Dean). Turney writes, "I am much more aware that it is relationship first, last, and always that really make a difference in ministry longevity and effectiveness" (101). Clearly, fulfilling connections in expat ministry are a critical issue.

<div align="center">**Good News in Missions**</div>

The lack of vulnerable, empathic relationship-building in the International Church (and, in reality, the global body of Christ) can paint a bleak picture. Hope is on the horizon as well. Many ministry leaders around the world recognize the need to attend to their own spiritual health as a prerequisite to encouraging others toward greater discipleship. A first step is to recognize when guardedness rooted in shame has created a divide in personal faith and public ministry. Eugene Peterson recognized such a chasm in his own life. "Gradually," he wrote, "it dawned on me that the crevasse was not before but within me" (1). In the church, in the workplace, or in the academy, leaders come to realize that before they can be an effective influence for good, they had to "be willing to face their own selves" (Friedman Intro). Those who lead must first be transformed. "Inner reconciliation is a prerequisite to being an ambassador of reconciliation" (Miller 13).

In a handbook focused on supporting Christian workers, Drs. Charles and Frauke Schaefer identify an ordered 'cycle of grace' that may be helpful. (See Chart 2.2)

Figure 2.1 The Cycle of Grace (Schaefer)

The cycle in particular order is 1) Acceptance (chiefly by God), 2) Sustenance, 3) Significance, and 4) Achievement (6). Acceptance is foundational because a person can then begin living from a platform of worthiness (key in overcoming shame). That acceptance leads to emotional strength, out of which comes an assurance of significance, which in turn leads to achievement. Attempting to engage the cycle out of order leads to feelings of failure as a person looks for meaning within him or herself (sustenance) or looks for affirmation through significance/achievement (97). The unquantifiable, indefinable, uncontrollable reality of God's amazing grace is widely recognized as a variable in changing the outcomes for expat workers—as for everyone (Nelson; Schaefer; Turney; Peterson; Grigg; Packer; Thompson; Dean). "Giving up false dependence on our own strength, we experience new spiritual vitality by rooting our lives more solidly in God. As we encounter the one true God and know him better, we are transformed"

(Frauke 173). Perhaps most expats serving abroad would resonate with James Nelson's sentiments: "Cross cultural living will lay you bare in new ways. Your sin will be more evident—as will God's grace. You will find and discover new ways to experience being loved by Christ, receiving strength from the Holy Spirit" (145).

Research Design Literature

The qualitative research project focused on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of expat women in mission in regard to guardedness rooted in shame. The centerpiece of the project was an intervention designed as a one-day training event for expat women in Christian ministry. Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were used to determine the perceptions of the awareness of the causes, evidences, and experiences related to shame and guardedness. The training event was a one-day, six-hour meeting utilizing information gleaned from the Literature Review, plus group and individual exercises for the women to explore areas in their own lives which were impacted by shame. In addition to a questionnaire, post-event instruments included a journal activity and a focus group. As outlined by Tim Sensing, careful attention was given to the cohesion between the articulation of the problem addressed in this project with the theology, intervention, and evaluation components (ch. 3). While the attendees of the training may appear to be drawn from a narrow pool, the diversity of nations, ages, life-situations, and ministry responsibilities provided the wide range of perspective necessary to demonstrate inclusivity (Sensing ch. 4). Moreover, because the participants were all part of Da Nang International Fellowship, there was the achievement of Creswell's recommendation: "Focus groups are advantageous and the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information when the interviewees are similar to

and cooperative with each other" (226). The journaling activity was chosen because of

the endorsement of Myers who writes: "Such homework may be instantly helpful or

highly idiosyncratic, but often is counted upon to provide access to the intuitive side of

persons in ministry" (68). Training activities were designed to elicit that feeling of

sharing "a personal narrative" with others, reinforcing the ideas of connection, empathy,

and vulnerability (Savage).

Summary of Literature

If guardedness is the 'plague' of the International Church (DuFour), then shame is

the 'rat' that spreads it far and wide. Ample literature defines shame as a sense of

unworthiness or never being enough, and there is general agreement that connections of

vulnerable and empathic relationships are indispensable in healing, restoration, and life-

long management. In addition, the need for underlying attitudes of faith, hope,

lovingkindness, integrity, and the like must be cultivated as the wellspring of behavior

that enable one to "despise shame," in the words of Hebrews 12.2, making it of no effect

in daily life, which in turn becomes the linchpin of unguarded living. During the review

of literature on this topic, several themes emerged.

First, shame is universal. The presence of shame is inescapable. Shame is both

biology and biography (Brown, *Daring* 75) and undermines "attachment, integration, and

creativity" (Thompson 62). Triggers for shame events in one's life are as diverse and

particular as individuals who experience them. As a result of the Fall of mankind in the

garden of Eden, shame is within every person. Consequently, many authors represented

here contend that shame can be managed, but not eradicated (Brown; Thompson,

Cacioppo; Levang; Noble; Wiher). While the experience of shame is universal, the

triggers for experiencing it are not. Brené Brown's findings supports the research of others that "shame is person- and context- specific and there are few, if any, classic shame-inducing situations" ("Shame Resilience" 50). Finally, the problem of shame must not be ignored. Shame suffocates "creativity, community, and capacity for good and beauty," some of the attributes of God (Thompson 3). Perhaps this illuminates Hebrews 12.2 in a new way: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame…" Because of His view of what was beyond, Jesus endured two things: the cross and shame (Piper). If shame is a primal predicament for humanity, Jesus' death on the cross provides the power to break its death grip.

Most of the literature speaks of shame management or shame resilience rather than shame elimination (Brown; Noble; Thompson; Cacioppo and Patrick; LeVang). There will always be the temptation and the opportunity to allow shame's controlling influence to return—along with the guardedness it instills. Overcoming guardedness rooted in shame is a lifelong work. One expat servant put it this way, "Rebuilding my language of faith became a lifelong—and life-giving—work. It's all been more heart-wrenching and more beautiful than I could ever have guessed it would be" (A.Peterson 248).

A second emergent theme from the literature is that connection is nonnegotiable. "Every great story of faith begins and ends with God" (Nelson 158). If shame began in the Garden with a broken relationship, its ultimate corrective is in the restoration of that relationship. Further, virtually every author represented here recognizes evidence that human beings are biologically and emotionally hardwired for connection in meaningful

relationships. People need one another. In fact, disconnection is "the source of psychological problems" (Brown, "Shame Resilience" 49). Additionally, the management of shame—an important piece of living unguarded—is a life-long process. Fundamentally, the way to release from shame's control is to look in (personal awareness), reach out (to others), and speak up (face your shame head on, and tell it to someone else).

Third, the literature shows that patterns of thinking and behavior rooted in shame can be changed. Both Ruth and Naomi had every reason to be overcome with shame. Naomi returned to Bethlehem an impoverished, aged, childless widow. Ruth was a foreigner in a time and place when heritage was everything. Rather than succumbing to bitterness and hopelessness, each of the women exhibit behaviors rooted in faith, hope, and lovingkindness (what this researcher calls redemptive biases). The sources named here overwhelmingly support the idea that persons can change their minds, their brains, their biology, and their future by cultivating behaviors rooted in the soil of redemptive attitudes. Persons have the capacity to choose their own bias. Attitudes that separate and isolate can be discarded and replaced with hopeful, trustful attitudes (Blair; Burns; Leaf; Duhigg). These redemptive attitudes are best developed within the connections of a friendly community. Research shows that even a "poor quality of the DNA codes was reversed by feeling of love, joy, appreciation and gratitude" (Leaf 35). In other words, redemptive bias impacts one's biology, not just emotions. Furthermore, overcoming shame and the guardedness that springs from it, Thompson says "you must *do* the opposite to make space for God to work" (13).

Finally, the literature strongly supports the premise that issues of guardedness rooted in shame is of critical importance in the work of missions. From the very beginning, God has been on mission. Genesis tells the story of His search for Adam and Eve. Jesus came to the earth in human form. Rather than establishing a codified written form of his teachings, his "concern was the calling and binding to himself of a living community of men and women who would be the witnesses of what he was and did" (Newbigin ch. 5). The Holy Spirit reveals the person of God to individuals in ways each one can understand. Nelson expressed it this way: "You are never more like Christ than when you live cross culturally" (45). The great privilege of missionary work flows from the heart of the Trinity. Stephan Seamands expresses this truth eloquently:

> God is…in his very essence is a missionary God. The Father is the first missionary, who goes out of himself in creating the world and sending his Son for our salvation. The Son is the second missionary, who redeems humanity and all creation through his life, death, resurrection and exaltation. The Holy Spirit is the third missionary, who creates and empowers the church, the fourth missionary, to go into the world. (ch. 8)

Guardedness rooted in shame prevents real mission from happening, destroying authentic, vulnerable, and empathic relationships. Like so many of today's missionaries, Ruth does not fit the mold of expectations of one who would play a pivotal role in biblical history. The story of Ruth and Naomi is a narrative of two women who have multiple reasons to live in guarded lives rooted in shame, but who instead choose to cultivate their family relationship and live in the power of chosen redemptive bias. In the

end, they received and extended *ḥesed* and played pivotal roles in the God's plan of

salvation for the world.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology for the project. Following a synopsis of the topic, nature, and content of the project, the research questions are outlined along with methods used to address them. A description of the ministry context is presented, including specific information related to the participants. Finally, the process and premise of the instrumentation is explained, along with a description of data collection and analysis.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The title of this project is Unguarded: Finding Freedom from Shame for Expat Missionary Women. Guardedness is a preeminent threat to the mission and existence of the international church abroad. Guarded persons withhold deep interpersonal connection from others, which in turn prevents authentic ministry and discipleship. As a root cause of guardedness, shame is addressed in this project through a one-day, four-session workshop outlining causes, evidences, and strategies to find freedom from shame's control. The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop on overcoming guardedness rooted in shame.

The project's workshop covered four topics. First, the definition, causes, and common manifestations of shame were addressed. In the second session, the focus was the indispensable, life-giving antidote for shame management: vulnerable, empathic connection in relationship with others. The third session advocated cultivating a

redemptive bias as a foundational element in unguarded living. The final session

presented a Biblical case study of unguarded living from the Old Testament Book of

Ruth.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior among the among

Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop

on overcoming guardedness prior to the retreat?

In order to effectively evaluate development or evolution in knowledge, attitude,

and behavior, a beginning standard of criterion had to be gathered. The instrument for

this baseline was the Pre-Workshop Questionnaire of twenty-four questions. Eight

questions were focused on each of three areas: Knowledge (#1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and

22); Attitude (#2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23); and Behavior (#3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, and

24).

Research Question #2

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior among the among

Christian expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop

on overcoming guardedness following the event?

About six weeks after the workshop, participants repeated the questionnaire in

order to gather data related to the workshop's impact on the knowledge, attitudes, and

behaviors of the participants related to the concept of guardedness.

Research Question #3

What aspects of the one-day, four-session training on overcoming guardedness had the greatest impact on the observed changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior among the participants?

About six weeks after the workshop, participants gathered to participate in one of two focus group meetings. The discussion identified which experiences in the workshop setting were most effective in bringing about the changes observed through the analysis of pre/post questionnaires, as well as modifications the participants observed in their own lives.

Ministry Context

This project grapples with an intensely practical, real world issue in the life of the international church: the challenge for expat missionaries to live unguarded for the growth of the kingdom. This pragmatic topic relates to everyday life: issues of emotional isolation, self-protection, and imagined self-sufficiency which are largely unspoken, ignored, or worse, admired. The project included a workshop on the needs and strategies for unguarded living by addressing a root cause of guardedness, which is shame. As extensively supported throughout a review of literature, shame is a universal experience that drives individuals away from one another and into detachment and concealment. The prevention of authentic relationship building is disastrous to the fruitful ministry legacy that most missionaries desire to leave for future generations.

Da Nang International Fellowship was an exemplar location for the study. The church was small enough to offer a congenial participant group preferred by Myers (62), while also providing significant diversity among women in age, ethnicity, theological

background, length of time in missionary service, marital status, etc. While the larger cities of Vietnam have experienced a marked expansion of freedoms regarding worship, the central region where Da Nang is located is still closed to public ministry—a reality that highlights the need for trusting relationship connections. Expat missionaries in the city are conditioned to keep quiet about their lives and ministry activities. Tiny Vietnam can give expats the feeling of being lost or invisible—a good place to hide inside the experience of shame.

<div align="center">

Participants

</div>

Criteria for Selection

Participants for the study were selected from among the expat women at Da Nang International Fellowship who are in Vietnam for ministry purposes. Other than these two guidelines, the women were diverse in country of origin, length of time in ministry, theological background, marital status, and age. A public invitation was made to the women at the church through a church-wide email and weekly online newsletter publication. The researcher was attentive to maintaining diversity among the group, and ten women were selected to participate.

Description of Participants

All the study participants were women from Da Nang International Fellowship. As the only government-approved church for foreigners in the city, the hope was to attain a diverse group from several countries, including the United States, England, Ireland, Australia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and South Africa. In addition to the country of passport, the investigator sought to engage women of differing age groups, marital and family status, occupation, and theological background. The age range of participants was

twenty-eight (28) to seventy (70) years, with length of time in Vietnam ranging from five (5) months to twelve (12) years. One half of the women were married.

Ethical Considerations

A written synopsis of the project was provided to women who expressed an interest in participating in the study. Those who pursued participation received a welcome letter, informed consent letter to be signed and returned at the workshop, and a list of follow-up resources for those who may experience distress or discomfort by issues addressed in the questionnaire or the content of the training. A copy of the Informed Consent Letter is attached as Appendix C; the Welcome Letter is Appendix D; and the list of Follow-Up Resources is included as Appendix E.

The protection of the participants' identifying information was of paramount concern throughout the completion of the project. Participant names were not reported in the study documentation. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym known only to the researcher.

Computer records were kept in password protected files, with hard copies locked in a filing cabinet, the key to which was in the possession of the researcher. USB copies of the documents were locked in a safe. Raw data, including pre/post questionnaires and the focus group transcript were never shared or disseminated. After a period of one year from the completion of the project presentation, all electronic files with identifying information were deleted, and the USB containing copies destroyed. Paper copies were shredded.

The project design and significant findings were shared at a colloquium with colleagues and faculty at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Only research results were divulged. None of the raw data, audio files, transcripts, questionnaires, identifying participant information, or notes was ever dispersed, discussed, or shared.

Instrumentation

This study utilized two research instruments: a questionnaire and a focus group. Both instruments were designed by the investigator. The research was devised to solicit spontaneous and candid responses from the participants before and after the workshop event to determine the impact of the event. In addition, the investigator used the research to determine components of the workshop which were effective for the participants.

The pre/post questionnaire consisted of twenty-four questions to establish the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants with respect to guardedness, shame, vulnerability, and interpersonal connection. Questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22 were related to the knowledge of participant, utilizing terms like "I understand…," "I am aware…," and "I think…." Questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23 assessed attitudes with prompts such as "I am confident that…," "I believe…," and "I accept…." Questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21 and 24 appraised recognized behaviors with phrasing that featured action verbs. The pre-event questionnaire was completed as the first activity of the workshop; the post-event questionnaire took place between one and two weeks after the workshop. Following the completion of the post-event questionnaire, the pre and post documents were analyzed for variations within all three sections. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

The focus group met approximately six weeks after the workshop. Study participants discussed particular components of each of the four workshop sessions. The research questions provided the format for the women to speak about their own knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to guardedness rooted in shame comparing their experiences before and after the workshop. In addition, the women were asked to

identify workshop components that were particularly helpful or meaningful to them. The

focus group was audio recorded on the researcher's laptop computer and transcribed

following the meeting. The comments were evaluated to compile the results, which were

disclosed in the section "Best Workshop Practices." The focus group procedural

instructions and list of questions are attached as Appendix B.

Expert Review

Three experts completed a review of the Likert scale questionnaire. Substantive

help was given by Dr. Marilyn Elliott. Through her guidance, questions were developed

to address not only the areas of knowledge, attitude, and behavior, but to be include

questions related to the workshop's main topics of guardedness, shame, vulnerability, and

connection. The questions succeeded in providing a more complete representation of the

changes experienced by the workshop participants. The other two reviewers were

influential in contributing feedback to refine questions for improved clarity. Their

comments and suggestions were incorporated and resubmitted to the reviewers. The final

draft was approved upon the satisfaction of the reviewers.

Reliability and Validity of Project Design

Since the intervention event of this project was a workshop, the chosen

instruments were questionnaires and a focus group. As recommended by Sensing, these

methods preserve a coherence "between the project's problem, purpose, theology,

action/intervention, and evaluation" (ch. 3). From its inception to completion, the project

was designed as a practical ministry experience to help expat ministers overcome

guardedness rooted in shame. As such, instruments that helped evaluate knowledge,

attitudes, and behaviors related to that topic, as well as data collection pertinent to effective event components, were well-suited.

In designing the questionnaire, items specific to each topic (knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors) were dispersed in placement so that responses could be assessed for "internal consistency reliability" (Creswell 170–71). Expert reviewers appraised questions for clarity, variety, and applicability to the goals of the study. Conditions for the initial completion of the questionnaire were controlled, with all the participants receiving the instrument simultaneously, preventing prior discussion or thought about the contents. The repetition of this instrument after the event provided empirical evidence of the degree of change related to the workshop.

The study sought to meet two seemingly contradictory guidelines from Sensing and Creswell. By selecting participants representing a wide range of ages, life situations, home countries, etc., the investigator endeavored to comply with the ideal of gathering a "broad range of perspectives" (Sensing ch. 4). Since the women were all a part of the same international church, Creswell's standard for the focus group was also addressed: "Focus groups are advantageous and the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information when the interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other" (226). Again, information derived from the focus group meeting sought to solicit specific, practical data for a best practices summary of workshop activities. Further, since the only criteria for the study participants was that each was an expat missionary, this study could be replicated in any international church in the world. Given the primal nature and common manifestations of shame, the study materials could be beneficial in any ministry context.

Data Collection

The project was an intervention. A workshop was presented to a group of sixteen participant women gathered from the Da Nang International Fellowship in Da Nang, Vietnam. The women represented different nationalities, ages, life situations, and theological backgrounds. All lived in Da Nang to serve as missionaries, although none came to Vietnam through a missionary sending agency. All raised their own financial support or worked at local jobs. The project set out to determine best practices at a workshop to help the participants overcome guardedness rooted in shame in their own lives.

The method of the research was qualitative, using "a collection of a variety of empirical materials…that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected and interpretive practices hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand." (Denzin and Lincoln 3-4).

The workshop was presented in a single day and included four sessions. Each session was comprised of about thirty-five minutes of content with a thirty to forty-minute allotment for personal reflection or group discussion. Prompts or questions were provided for reflection times. The rented meeting space was made welcoming with plants, tea/coffee and light refreshments, attractive table décor, and a colorful packet of materials for each participant. Music was playing from a play list of music specifically selected for this event (the play list is attached in Appendix C). The play list was utilized at all personal reflection, discussion, and break times as well. Upon arrival, each participant was asked to submit her signed Letter of Informed Consent; additional copies

of the letter were on hand for persons who did not bring the letter with them. After a

word of welcome to usher the women to their seats and an opening prayer, the pre-event

questionnaire was distributed, and participants had a full thirty minutes to respond to

twenty-four (24) statements. The questionnaires were collected and the content portion of

Session 1 (centered on shame) began. Following the personal reflection time, Session 2

(focused on vulnerability) began, concluding with small group discussions. The group

then moved to a restaurant at the workshop site for a group lunch (allowing one hour and

fifteen minutes). Session 3 (highlighting connection) began after lunch, and a ten-minute

break was provided at its conclusion. Session 4 (a biblical case study of living

unguarded) started after the break. Extra time was scheduled at the end of the session,

allowing for both a personal reflection activity, as well as a brief allocation for small

group discussion and prayer. The workshop ended with closing remarks, including thanks

to the women for their participation. (The Workshop Schedule and Outline is included as

Appendix D; materials given to participants is attached as Appendix F.)

About six weeks after the event, the participants convened for a focus group. Two

meeting options for the focus group were offered (the first on a Saturday morning, and

the second on a Monday night). The session began with the administration of the post-

event questionnaire. The focus group then discussed the research questions regarding the

women's experiences in changes of their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in relation

to guardedness rooted in shame. Participants also considered the impact of the

components of the event that had the most influence in effecting these changes. The focus

group was audio-recorded using the researcher's laptop computer. For women who could

not attend the focus group, the post-event questionnaire was delivered and collected by email. The research questions were used as the focus group questions.

Data Analysis

The pre- and post-questionnaires were analyzed by Dr. Janet Dean to obtain statistical data, most notably the mean and standard deviation. Results were evaluated for changes, developments, and similarities in the women's responses. Outcomes were reported in three sections, corresponding to the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors sections. In addition, responses were scrutinized regarding changes in the areas of the workshop topics: shame, vulnerability, connection, and unguarded living. Each question was appraised to determine the statistical significance of the responses, mean, and standard deviation.

The focus group recordings were transcribed and examined to determine the perceptions of the women themselves concerning the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior from before and after the workshop, as well as which workshop activities were most influential in their lives. Transcripts utilized pseudonyms for the participants. Notes from the focus group added information regarding the strength of opinions shared, and the general affirmation (or not) from the group as a whole regarding the impact of the workshop in the lives of the women who participated.

After the data was analyzed, the investigator synthesized results into best practices recommendations for future events and summarized findings for future researchers.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Guardedness has been called the plague of the international church. The project was a one-day, four-session workshop entitled Unguarded: Experiencing Freedom from Shame. Participants were expat missionary women in Da Nang, Vietnam. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behavior changes of the women in relation to guardedness rooted in shame.

This chapter describes the participants who took part in the study. It shares the quantitative data collected from the pre and post questionnaires, the qualitative data collected from two focus groups, and field notes. Finally, this chapter identifies major findings gathered from the data.

Participants

The project included sixteen expat women who attend Da Nang International Fellowship. Participants were recruited for the study through an open invitation through the church's online weekly newsletter and one public announcement during a Sunday morning service. Respondents who were interested in the project received a description of the workshop and an outline of the full process of data collection, including the questionnaires, focus group, and the workshop itself. The women who took part represented eight countries on five continents. All the women completed pre- and post-event questionnaires, and twelve of the sixteen attended a focus group session about six weeks after the workshop. The other four were traveling at the time of the focus group. The ages of the women ranged from 28 to 70 years, with time spent as an expat in

Christian service ranging from a few months to more than twelve (12) years. Figure 4.1

below shows the demographic information for the study group participants.

Figure 4.1 *Demographics of Study Group Participants*

Gender =   16 females (100.0%)

Age =		Frequency	Percent
Average age = 48.56	20-29	2	12.4
SD for age = 14.81	30-39	4	25.0
	40-49	3	18.9
	50-59	2	12.4
	60-69	4	25.0
	70-79	1	6.3

Years as an Ex-pat =		Frequency	Percent
Average Time = 6.34 years	0-2.5 Years	3	18.9
SD for time = 4.24 years	2.6-5.0 Years	5	31.4
	5.1-7.5 Years	2	12.4
	7.6-10.0 Years	2	12.4
	10.1-12.5 Years	3	18.9
	12.6-15.0 Years.	1	6.3

The age demographics mirror the demographics of the church as a whole. Da Nang is a seaside city that offers retirees affordable living costs and many modern conveniences along with the charm of traditional Vietnamese culture. Newcomers who plan to live here are usually age 40 and above. The lack of first-rate medical specialties and adequate public transportation are two major reasons the city's expat population is not larger.

The length of service as an expat indicates the overall commitment of these women to international missions. These statistics relate to a developing trend the church is currently experiencing; as the city grows and offers a more comfortable lifestyle, the number of expats staying for more than a couple of years has steadily risen. In addition, the group included women who have been in Da Nang for a short period of time, while their overall experience in living as an expat is much longer. Passport nationalities of the participants include American, Australian, British, Irish, South African, Thai, Filipino, and Vietnamese.

The tools for gathering the information for each research question were the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires, the comments of the participants at the focus groups, and the field notes of the observations made by the researcher. The women each selected a pseudonym for the purpose of identifying responses to research elements, and those pseudonyms are used throughout this text. Each of these components are discussed in turn for each research question.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What were the levels of knowledge, attitudes and behaviors among the among Christian

expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop on

overcoming guardedness rooted in shame prior to the workshop?

All participants completed the Guardedness Questionnaire (Appendix A), which

measures knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to shame and guardedness before

completing the workshop. The subscales for each of these three components had very low

internal consistency. Questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22 were related to the

knowledge; questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23 assessed attitudes; and questions 3, 6,

9, 12, 15, 18, 21 and 24 appraised recognized behaviors. The *knowledge* subscale had a

Cronbach's alpha of 0.48, the *attitudes* subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.01, and the

behaviors subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.08. The entire measure, across subscales

also showed low internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.20). These particular results

are not surprising, since low alpha scores could be expected since the individual items for

each component of the questionnaire (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviors) did not

solicit responses on one specific area of that component. For example, questions did not

target the knowledge of one key area of guardedness but an overall view. Thus, the more

pertinent data will be in the comparison of the pre- and post-event questionnaires to

determine changes after the workshop. While the subscale scores should be considered

cautiously, means and standard deviations for these three areas are given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. *Means and standard deviations for the Guardedness Questionnaire (n = 16).*

	Total (n = 16) M (SD)
Knowledge	2.92 (0.27)
Attitudes	2.84 (0.30)
Behaviors	2.56 (0.44)

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) found a significant difference across the three areas of guardedness and shame, $F(2, 30) = 5.99$, $p = .006$. To determine the relative strengths, a series of paired-samples *t*-tests then were conducted on the three areas. The *behaviors* subscale scores ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.44$) were significantly lower than both the *knowledge* subscale scores ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.27$), $t(14) = 2.77$, $p = .014$, and the *attitudes* subscale score ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.27$), $t(14) = 2.86$, $p = .012$. The scores for the *knowledge* subscale and the *attitudes* subscale were not significantly different (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. *Means for the Guardedness Scale Subscales (n = 16).*
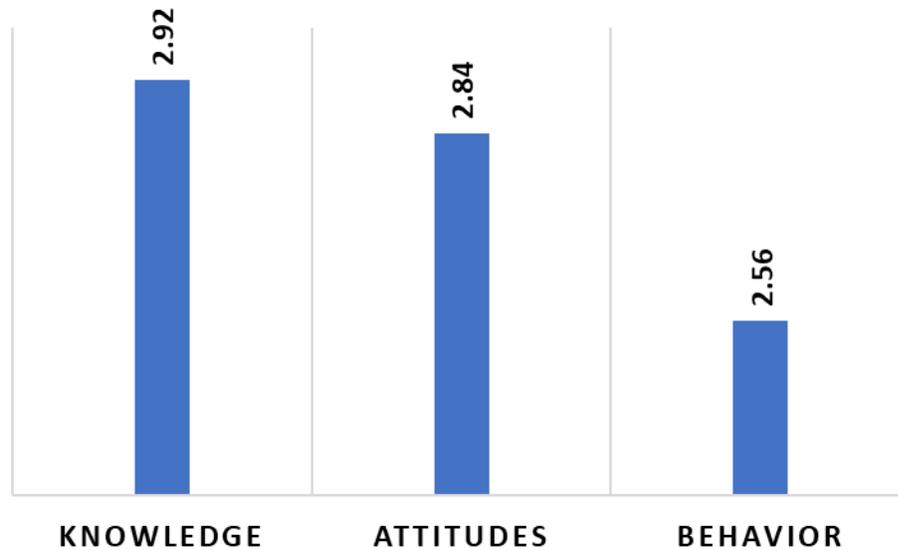
Individual Differences. In addition, in order to better understand any differences between various groups of people, a series of independent samples *t*-tests were conducted. There were no significant differences between those who had been expats for five or fewer years and those who had been expats for more than five years for any of the three areas (see Table 4.2). However, there was one significant difference found by age group, with those under the age of 45 ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.20$) expressing less knowledge about shame and guardedness than did those over the age of 45 ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.26$), t (14) = -2.37, $p < .033$ (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.2. *Means and standard deviations for the Guardedness Questionnaire by Time as Expat (n = 16).*

	Total ($n = 16$) *M (SD)*	5 Years and Under ($n = 7$) *M (SD)*	More than 5 Years ($n = 9$) *M (SD)*	*t (df)*
Knowledge	2.92 (0.27)	2.87 (0.32)	2.98 (0.20)	-0.79 (14)
Attitudes	2.84 (0.30)	2.81 (0.25)	2.88 (0.36)	-0.40 (14)
Behaviors	2.56 (0.44)	2.64 (0.39)	2.48 (0.50)	0.73 (14)

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$

Table 4.3. *Means and standard deviations for the Guardedness Questionnaire by Age (n = 16).*

	Total ($n = 16$) *M (SD)*	Under 45 Years ($n = 7$) *M (SD)*	Over 45 Years ($n = 9$) *M (SD)*	*t (df)*
Knowledge	2.92 (0.27)	2.78 (0.20)	3.04 (0.56)	-2.37 (14)*
Attitudes	2.84 (0.30)	2.80 (0.28)	2.88 (0.33)	-0.46 (14)
Behaviors	2.56 (0.44)	2.50 (0.56)	2.60 (0.36)	-0.46 (14)

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$

Item Analysis. To further explore each of the three areas on the Guardedness Scale, means and standard deviations for each of the items are given in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. *Means and standard deviations for the Items of the Guardedness Scale* (*n* = 16).

Questions	*M*	*SD*
Knowledge	2.92	0.27
1. I understand the difference between shame and guilt.	3.53	0.56
4. I am aware of the interaction between shame and loneliness.	3.56	0.63
7. I understand the roots of shame.	3.38	0.50
10. I am aware of the impact of self-protection on community life.	3.25	0.58
13. I understand that shame has a positive impact on faith development.	2.09	0.93
16. I think that shame begins with a traumatic event.	2.50	0.82
19. I think that whether or not I have deep friendships is of little consequence to the church body.	1.67	0.72
22. I think that shame can be eliminated totally from my experience.	2.38	0.89
Attitudes	2.84	0.30
2. I am confident that God accepts me fully, just as I am.	3.69	0.48
5. I accept that feeling alone is part of being in ministry.	2.13	0.81
8. I believe that people in ministry are required to live an exemplary life.	2.84	0.89
11. I believe that my testimony requires that I hide certain parts of my life.	1.75	0.68
14. I am confident God accepts my human struggles and frailties.	3.75	0.45
17. I feel that if others really know me they will back away from me.	1.88	0.50

20. I believe that shame is the result of my sin.	2.41	0.71
23. I accept that weakness comes with vulnerability.	2.41	1.17
Behavior	2.56	0.44
3. I reveal my feelings to others.	2.91	0.58
6. I am defensive when others criticize me.	2.53	0.72
9. I have secrets in my life that would surprise and shock others.	2.81	0.83
12. I withdraw from others into solitude to protect myself.	2.47	0.62
15. I make new friends easily.	2.63	1.03
18. It is difficult for me to look someone in the eyes when speaking to them.	1.44	0.73
21. I frequently criticize myself internally with thoughts like: "You idiot!" or "You are so stupid."	2.31	0.70
24. More than 3 people at DIF know details of my past.	2.75	1.07

For many of the women, discussion about their pre-workshop experience and knowledge of guardedness rooted in shame began with stories of family and church. The initial comments (literally the first words spoken aloud in the focus group) expressed their understanding of the events in their lives that laid the foundation for their ideas about shame prior to the workshop.

> **Sarah:** I was raised in a very legalistic Pentecostal denomination and there was all these rules. There's so many…you can't do this; you can't do this; you can't do this; that's a sin….I lived in constant condemnation. (FG1, 1)
>
> **Gracious:** As for me, I grew up in a barrio, and that place was, of course--the people in that place were judgmental. Very narrow-minded people….the shame was always there…. I was always scared to be judged by the people. (FG1, 1)

Mezach: So I grew up in a very strict and traditional Filipino way…with a fear of making mistakes.

Tanya: I was raised Buddhist, so I understand shame really well. I learned not to share my emotions…to protect me…because if I were to share things they might use it against me later. (FG1, 3)

Sly: I think for me shame has always been a part of my life…. It's just always been a deep part of who I am. Maybe it stemmed from my grandparents….Just even watching the way they treated my mom subconsciously as a child because I didn't know all the details until I was much older. That was my experience with shame—I've just known it my whole life…. (Fg1, 5)

Further, several of the women recognized the presence of shame in one area of their lives as the condition which led to a host of poor decisions (particularly in relationships), sinful behaviors, and greater suffering in all areas of life.

Mezach: I made a lot of mistakes. But I just kept it to myself. I didn't share …when you make a mistake, they will judge your whole family—not only you. (FG1, 2)

Sarah: …my father found out about it [a sexual assault by the son of a family friend], and he rejected me. He wouldn't speak to me. [The perpetrator] left, but I had graduated and I was working at the time …I had to leave home and go live with my aunt because I couldn't live with the rejection of my father because he wouldn't look at me, wouldn't speak to me. It's how I ended up…marrying him because I couldn't stand the rejection anymore. And I lived a life of over ten years of sexual abuse, of verbal abuse, of mental abuse. (FG1, 6)

Tanya: So, in turn, I rebelled against everything… (FG1, 4)

Gracious: And the one thing I learned is that…when you keep dark secrets to yourself…that will only lead you to more and more painful experiences. [After enduring years of incestuous behaviors from three family members] I had no boyfriend until I was 19, and [even though] we did not do anything beyond our limitations…I saw something happen to us. He was asking me, "Tell me."…and I can't even tell him…I can't even explain to him. We separate ways. He showed me coldness…So what was my solution to that? To have another boyfriend. So it only led to more mistakes….[after a series of boyfriends, she met another man]…September we were a couple. October we were…married. Very fast whirlwind romance. They [my family] know nothing about him. I know nothing about him. I didn't know he was a drunkard. I didn't know he was using drugs….he was like a devil in front of me. That was hell….I was separated from my husband after 22 years. So, I was longing for love. And I told myself, "So here is another person who loves you." And that relationship lasted for 10 years. 10 long years [before] I escaped that…. (FG1, 8, 9)

The women most often spoke of behavioral experiences when expressing their pre-workshop thoughts of guardedness rooted in shame.

Probing more of their knowledge and attitudes prior to the workshop, many of the women recalled specific information from the event. Since their comments relate more to their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors after the workshop (Research Question 2), those will be discussed in the next section. Perhaps the comments of Melody best sum up the prevailing knowledge and attitudes before the workshop:

Melody: I've seen shame as slightly normal…like, common. Everybody has it,

so…I didn't really pay much attention to it. (FG1, 2)

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What were the levels of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among the among Christian

expat women in ministry who participated in a one-day, four-session workshop on

overcoming guardedness following the event?

About six weeks after the workshop, all participants again completed the

Guardedness Questionnaire. Using a series of dependent-sample t-tests, participants'

subscale scores were compared from before the workshop to after the workshop.

Participants' knowledge about shame and guardedness seemed to significantly increase

from pretest ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.27$) to posttest ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.19$), t (15) = -4.11, $p =$

.001. In addition, participants' behaviors related to shame and guardedness were

significantly higher after the workshop ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.30$) than before the workshop

($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.27$), t (15) = -2.43, $p =$ .028. Scores for attitudes did not change.

Means and standard deviations for these three areas are given in Table 4.5 (see also

Figure 4.3).

Table 4.5. *Means and standard deviations for the Guardedness Questionnaire before and after the workshop (n = 16).*

	Pretest (n = 16) M (SD)	Posttest (n = 16) M (SD)	t (df)
Knowledge	2.92 (0.27)	3.15 (0.19)	-4.11 (15)***
Attitudes	2.84 (0.30)	2.91 (0.27)	-0.78 (15)
Behaviors	2.56 (0.44)	2.71 (0.37)	-2.43 (15)*

*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$

Figure 4.3. *Means for the Guardedness Scale Subscales before and after the workshop (n = 16).*
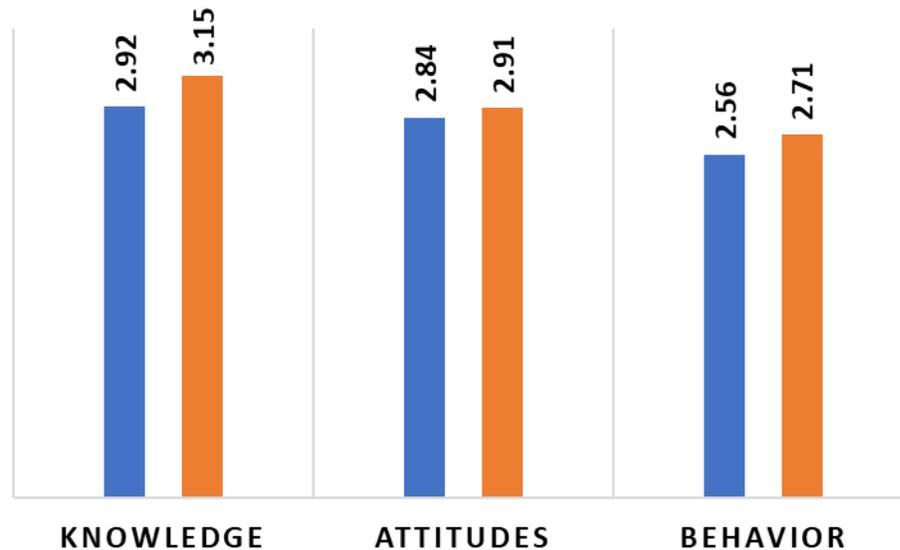
Item Analysis. To further explore changes in each of the three areas on the Guardedness Scale, the means and standard deviations for each of the items at pretest and posttest were compared with a series of dependent-samples *t*-tests. On the *knowledge* subscale, three of the eight items showed a significant increase in scores. None of the

item scores on the *attitudes* subscale significantly changed. Only one of the eight items

on the *behavior* subscale showed a significant increase in scores. The results are given in

Table 4.6.

Table 4.6. *Means and standard deviations for the Items of the Guardedness Scale before*

and after the workshop (*n* = 16).

Questions	Pretest (*n* = 16) *M (SD)*	Posttest (*n* = 16) *M (SD)*	*t (df)*
Knowledge			
1. I understand the difference between shame and guilt.	3.13 (0.50)	3.53 (0.56)	-2.93 (15)**
4. I am aware of the interaction between shame and loneliness.	2.63 (0.89)	3.56 (0.63)	-4.39 (15)***
7. I understand the roots of shame.	2.93 (0.70)	3.40 (0.51)	-2.82 (14)**
10. I am aware of the impact of self-protection on community life.	3.06 (0.57)	3.25 (0.58)	-1.15 (15)
13. I understand that shame has a positive impact on faith development.	2.22 (0.84)	2.09 (0.93)	0.58 (15)
16. I think that shame begins with a traumatic event.	2.75 (0.93)	2.50 (0.82)	1.07 (15)
19. I think that whether or not I have deep friendships is of little consequence to the church body.	1.60 (0.63)	1.67 (0.72)	-0.56 (14)
22. I think that shame can be eliminated totally from my experience.	2.25 (0.86)	2.38 (0.89)	-0.57 (15)
Attitudes			
2. I am confident that God accepts me fully, just as I am.	3.56 (0.51)	3.69 (0.48)	-1.46 (15)
5. I accept that feeling alone is part of being in ministry.	2.38 (1.03)	2.13 (0.81)	1.73 (15)

8. I believe that people in ministry are required to live an exemplary life.	2.84 (0.63)	2.84 (0.89)	0.00 (15)
11. I believe that my testimony requires that I hide certain parts of my life.	2.00 (0.73)	1.75 (0.68)	1.29 (15)
14. I am confident God accepts my human struggles and frailties.	3.69 (0.48)	3.75 (0.45)	-0.44 (15)
17. I feel that if others really know me they will back away from me.	2.06 (0.57)	1.88 (0.50)	1.15 (15)
20. I believe that shame is the result of my sin.	2.59 (0.71)	2.41 (0.71)	0.73 (15)
23. I accept that weakness comes with vulnerability.	2.38 (1.09)	2.41 (1.17)	-0.21 (15)

Behavior

3. I reveal my feelings to others.	3.00 (0.52)	2.91 (0.58)	0.64 (15)
6. I am defensive when others criticize me.	2.66 (0.70)	2.53 (0.72)	1.00 (15)
9. I have secrets in my life that would surprise and shock others.	2.75 (1.07)	2.81 (0.83)	-0.32 (15)
12. I withdraw from others into solitude to protect myself.	2.78 (0.91)	2.47 (0.62)	1.84 (15)
15. I make new friends easily.	2.75 (0.86)	2.63 (1.03)	1.00 (15)
18. It is difficult for me to look someone in the eyes when speaking to them.	1.69 (0.95)	1.44 (0.73)	1.29 (15)
21. I frequently criticize myself internally with thoughts like: "You idiot!" or "You are so stupid."	2.34 (0.70)	2.31 (0.70)	0.27 (15)
24. More than 3 people at DIF know details of my past.	1.94 (0.93)	2.75 (1.07)	-3.31 (15)**

Much of the focus group discussion supports the empirical data about changes in knowledge. Many participants specifically cited the distinguishing of guilt and shame as

new, and helpful information. The comments of a couple participant were echoed again and again:

> **Mezach:** Before the workshop, so I thought there was no difference between shame and guilt—they're synonyms for me. (FG1, 2)
>
> **Cori:** I hadn't heard the difference between shame and guilt before but the way that you broke down how shame is the root of so many things was really eye-opening for me. (FG2, 1)

These comments and many others mirror the results of the post-test which indicated a high rate of change in this particular piece of knowledge from the results of the pretest.

The second item that revealed a significant change between pre- and post-event questionnaires related to the interaction between shame and loneliness. The focus group discussions did not expressly highlight these terms; however, the change in responses in this area of knowledge substantiates the significant behavioral change also noted in the post-test. One key element of managing shame, as discussed at length in the workshop, is the development of connections in empathic and vulnerable relationships. Isolation, loneliness, and friendlessness are the soil in which shame grows best. Several comments echoed this realization:

> **Febe:** Shame is isolated. Because your shame that you feel is always personal. It's yours. And it isolates you. What I learned in the section about Adam and Eve—their first response to the sin was shame. It was not God's response; it was their response. And out of that—the fall—we all feel shame. But you do not have to…feel isolated with your shame. (FG2, 1)

Tanya: I think for me, it's so important to have a relationship where you can be

real…connection is so important. I learned it's about connecting with people to be

real, to be vulnerable, and, you know, just to meet them where they are. (FG1, 18)

Recognizing the relationship between loneliness and shame, and then acting upon that

knowledge to share your own journey with someone else drives at the very purpose of the

workshop, which was to share tools that help expat women in ministry overcome the

effects of shame (guardedness) in their lives.

Analise: Yeah, I think it's just, you know, an aspect where it's—where

knowledge is …now challenging the behavior. (FG2, 5)

Another key concept of the workshop addressed the origin of shame. Like many

of the personal stories shared by participants, persons often trace their feelings of shame

back to their family of origin or some event. Research, however, indicates that shame is

part of the human experience and that even in the face of great parents, a happy family,

and a life free from terrible trauma, shame will find a way into one's heart and mind if for

no other reason than its origin at the fall of creation as recorded in Genesis. The third

significant change, Item 4 of the Guardedness Questionnaire indicates that participants

embraced this concept. One of the participants summarized:

Sly: One piece of information we shared is something we could recognize from

Scripture if we took the time, but we often don't….that even from the very

beginning when Adam and Eve sinned—that's when shame entered…. And so

even if we had had the perfect parents and we all made the right choices,

somehow, the enemy would have found a way to give us shame….And so I think

that was a deep revelation. (FG1, 15)

Chole: We have the biblical knowledge about the Fall. There's a lot of blaming the family of origin. I eventually realized with my own father that it's not my father. He's only a human being. And I realized that, you know, the enemy was trying to get you—he could get you to hate your parents—if we didn't have knowledge that it [shame] is from the fall. (FG2, 6)

The fourth questionnaire item that showed a significant change from pre-test to post-test was related to behavior, with more women responding that at least three persons within their church body knew details of their life story. This statistic indicates that the participants internalized the need for connection with others and took action within the six weeks between the workshop and the completion of the posttest. Again, the words of the women support this supposition.

Cori: And how you talked about relationships and vulnerability and I think it's something I valued but didn't realize the link with overcoming shame… (FG2, 3)

Febe: [The workshop changed other interactions]…in the various groups that we participate in like the [weekly women's Bible study]. Out of this workshop, we could share more…it gave people the freedom to share more in the other groups that we are involved in. (FG2, 3)

Gracious: But then after the workshop…I became more open. That is why there are three among the members of the church who know about parts of my pains…of my shame. (FG1, 11) To be open and to be connected with people…that was a great impact to me. That because of that workshop I was able to really open up and to get connected with people. Because before, I really just stayed inside the room. (FG1, 18)

Tanya: I can share with people openly of my struggles, so that way I can give of

myself and give to other people. (FG1, 18)

It was noted that three significant changes in knowledge translate into one change in

behavior, while the attitudes remained the same. This data suggests that knowledge is

applied first through behavior, which can become an attitude (or a bias). A prevailing

attitude for God-honoring behaviors is a redemptive bias and once formed, instigates

behaviors as natural responses.

While the reports of almost all the participants after the workshop revolved

around overcoming longstanding personal experiences of shame, one participant shared

her personal story of how choosing unguardedness had emboldened her to take hold of

healthy relationships and transparency in ministry. She explained her situation as follows.

Melody: The workshop day was a very good time for me personally because a

couple months before the workshop I was struggling in relationships to many

people….So I was thinking after the workshop, "God, I need to do this [despise

the shame]."

Melody (who married into a well-known pastor's family) was being strongly pressured

by extended family (largely through shaming comments and isolating behaviors) to

participate in a large-scale coverup of moral failure within the family. She continued:

Melody: Yeah. So God really gave me peace. And confirmed to me that I made

the right decision for not joining a certain kind of practice that I think is not

Biblical. You know, Christians need to live in truth. If there's so many lies in your

life, then there is something wrong. But even if they are not able to be real, then I

won't join it….The workshop really helped to give me peace. (FG1, 13)

Melody chose to live unguarded and refused to accept the shame being heaped upon her.

<center>**Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**</center>

What aspects of the one-day, four-session workshop on overcoming guardedness rooted in shame had the greatest impact on the observed changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior among the participants?

While the change in knowledge and behavior is compelling evidence of workshop effectiveness (shame versus guilt; the beginning of shame; the need for connection), the focus groups presented additional information of which components were most profitable. Data was gathered from the direct response to this question, but also to discussions or topics from previous questions that seemed to be woven through every conversation.

In response to the third research question, several participants singled out the information and workshop activity related to the concept of redemptive bias. Many indicated this was a new idea, although it resonated with their own thinking of the importance of principles that govern attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions.

> **Analise:** It's so powerful. Redemptive bias, I mean. All I could do is say, "Yes, yes, yes." That's really what happened. And it really does color attitude and behavior. (FG2, 5)
>
> **Febe:** And the thing I am taking from it is what redemptive bias is God calling you to choose? What [am I choosing] as redemptive bias in order to despise the shame? (FG2, 4)
>
> **Cori:** Yeah. So I also agree. I think that was the best tool going forward. (FG2, 4)

Sarah: …the part where you talked about redemptive bias. [W]hen Christ suffered all of that, He felt the effects of our sin and the shame—but He was so confident in His Father's love for Him [the redemptive bias] that feeling all that guilt, that shame—didn't make Him run from God…He went to God. (FG1, 17)

A second element of the workshop content that received many comments was the key Scripture references: Genesis 3, Hebrews 12.2, and the Book of Ruth. The Hebrews verse was often cited as pivotal in the focus group discussions: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12.2, NASB). "Despising the shame" became a focal point for the workshop, as described by the women.

Tanya: For me, after the workshop, from the Scripture—Hebrews 12 really spoke to me more…I don't need to look at the circumstances today, but I think of what He already has for the future. And I can do that… (FG1, 12)

Chole: So a very helpful tool for me was when you said that Jesus despised the shame. That we can actually say that to ourselves. That was powerful for me that if I have a moment of shame, I can say, "I despise that." (FG2, 1)

One recurrent point of discussion that was not highlighted in questionnaire results is the relevance that the women expressed concerning different expressions of shame. Since most participants likened shame to guilt before the workshop, the behaviors or qualities of shame in individuals or groups had not really been considered.

Febe: Because the different characteristics of how people behave or what we expect, but shows shame in your life: perfectionism, blame, favoritism, poor

relationships—can be characteristics of shame in a group. And if we are aware of

it, then it helps dealing with it or handling it. (FG2, 2)

Cori: It's also helpful, what I was saying about recognizing different forms of

shame in people…so you can just understand where others are coming from better

and hopefully be able to, you know, be a better friend and listener. (FG2, 5)

The women made one suggestion for future workshops on this topic: to have more time.

Most favored a weekend retreat over a long-term weekly study for the sake of continuity,

but almost everyone desired more time to talk among the group.

Cori: I honestly would have loved another session, too, because I really liked it

and I think people were kind of understanding really well and wanted to talk

about everything. (FG1, 7)

Sly: I think having more time to discuss during the sessions would be nice. There

were discussion questions, but we didn't really get to discuss them. (FG1, 22)

Gracious: More time! (FG1, 22)

Summary of Major Findings

The data resulting from this project provided important findings for expat women

to overcome guardedness rooted in shame. The findings may have relevance for Christian

women in any context around the world. These are the major findings which will be

discussed in chapter 5.

1. While the experience of shame is universal, awareness of its definition,

    characteristics, and resulting guardedness are largely unknown.

2. Personalizing knowledge that shame is a result of the fall of humankind is an

    important step to living unguarded.

3. Guardedness always leads to greater secrecy; connection in vulnerable, empathic relationships is the greatest deterrent.

4. Knowledge informs and enables behavior which becomes the foundation for redemptive bias. In turn, that redemptive bias can make those behaviors natural responses.

5. Living unguarded is not merely overcoming shame but walking out freedom through habits cultivated in redemptive bias.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Guardedness is the plague of the international church: silent, pernicious, mysterious, and deadly. Guarded persons are self-protecting, characterized by emotional unavailability, disconnection, and pretense. Guardedness prevents transformational ministry because interaction is based on a façade of authenticity. Absent mental illness or an ulterior motive (for example, hiding criminal activity), this project targets shame as a root cause of guardedness and sought to help women overcome guardedness rooted in shame through a one-day workshop.

This chapter presents six major findings from the project and explains how each finding correlates to the researcher's personal observations, the review of pertinent literature, and a biblical framework. In addition, the chapter outlines ministry implications, considers limitations regarding the generalization of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of unexpected observations and recommendations for further study on this topic.

Major Findings

Shame and resulting guardedness are largely unrecognized and unacknowledged

Prior to this research, I recognized guardedness as a damaging reality in the international church, but I did not see shame as a root cause. I observed that the participants of the study shared this outlook. Most everyone could share personal experiences of shame, but they also confused it with other emotions, primarily guilt and most often could not recognize shame apart from guilty feelings. There were very few

comments that recognized the communal nature of the experience of shame. Personal shame was considered a solitary reality to be concealed and dealt with alone.

The review of pertinent literature supports this finding. Many researchers refer to shame with words like *primal, universal,* and *dominant.* Yet many, like Brené Brown, have found that most individuals do not identify shame as an emotion they perceive to be present in their own life. Most often, the discussion of shame turns to guilt or embarrassment. The far-reaching effects of shame remain hidden in a "self-sustaining, dehumanizing pattern" (Fossum 16). The presence of shame in individuals impacts the groups of which they are a part. Group dynamics entrenched in shame prevent the camaraderie and mutual care or necessary for groups to flourish.

The biblical foundation for this project is the Book of Ruth, since the two major female characters of the story are expat women who exhibited unguardedness. The stories of Ruth and Naomi in the book present two women who rejected the shame of culture, status, loss, and personal circumstance. Both women act from authentic, courageous acceptance of their situation. The controlling responses of shame are absent in their relationship and subsequent actions.

Recognizing the origins of shame opens the way for unguarded living

I observed that participants in the project related their understanding and experience of shame to events in their family of origin or traumatic episodes in childhood (even if it was just "always there"). Assignment of shame's origin to personal events reinforces it as solitary and personal, thus "*my* problem." Furthermore, where traumatic events were involved, the on-going presence of shame was defeating to women who had done the work to forgive past perpetrators and experienced a measure of freedom from

the memory of those events. It was confusing that the shame remained. In another twist, the experience of shame prevented a process of forgiveness because that particular circumstance was seen as a fault in their own lives. Finally, the idea that a personal trauma is *the* cause of experiencing shame promulgates the feeling of isolation—a sense that "others who did not have this kind of trauma do not have the shame that I have and therefore I am damaged in a way that others are not."

Within the literature review, several authors began their discussion of shame with the Fall of creation in the book of Genesis. Others who did not acknowledge the biblical record, still discussed the universality of the experience of shame, irrespective of traumatic childhood events. Shame's pervasive experience is acknowledged throughout researchers and practitioners. One writer even said that shame is "charged with its own physiology" (Probyn 34). Whether or not one embraces the biblical account of the Fall and its effects, there is widespread acceptance that shame has primitive roots in the human experience and its presence is not solely determined by personal childhood events.

Biblically, the origin of shame is clearly apparent in the Fall of creation as recorded in Genesis 3. At the point of their primordial failure, the immediate response of Adam and Eve is shame. Before God calls for them in the Garden, shame has taken hold and the first humans are hiding. Awareness of their nakedness in a negative connotation also results from the Fall.

As previously stated, the foundational scripture for this study was from the Book of Ruth because the primary women in the book exemplify unguardedness for expat women. Naomi is a stellar example of a woman who refuses to see the events of her life as the origin of any shame she may have felt. Throughout the book, in sorrow or joy,

Naomi affixes her life's circumstances to the controlling authority of Yahweh. Even in her despairing declaration to change her name from Naomi to Mara (meaning bitter), this woman of faith pours out her every care, candidly, before God Himself (Ruth 1.20). Such honesty and authenticity invoke the help of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, women today are better able to overcome controlling shame, and thus guardedness, by refusing to accept the source of shame as coming solely from people, events, or circumstances. Shame is part and parcel of life as a human being.

The Christian understanding of the Fall reveals shame as intrinsic to human experience. If shame entered the world at the Fall, then one should expect that Jesus would also address it through His death on the cross. Hebrews 12.2 says that Jesus "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame"—that is, making shame of no effect. The joy that was before Him was the relationship He would share with His "offspring" (Isa. 53.10), knowing He would "see it and be satisfied" (Isa. 53.11). Like sin in the world, shame entered human existence at the Fall. Like sin, shame's power was nullified at the cross.

Guardedness leads to greater secrecy; connection is the greatest path to freedom

In the story of several participants in this study, shame led a woman into increasing secrecy in her life and became the fountainhead of further bad decisions leading to dead-end relationships, addictive behaviors, and lifeless spirituality. The disappointment, embarrassment, and hopelessness that resulted drove the woman into even greater secrecy, and the cycle repeated itself. Increasing guardedness became a way of life, and finally a fixed barrier against developing vulnerable, empathic relationships—

the one thing that is widely accepted as the key in overcoming an overwhelming sense of shame.

In addition, I observed that given a safe opportunity, women will venture into vulnerability with one another. Post-event data revealed a marked increase in the interpersonal sharing among the women in the study. In large measure, the women made the focus groups a continuation of the workshop, sharing life stories of their experiences of debilitating shame and testimonies of freedom as the relationships begun in the workshop provided a safe space for confronting old wounds.

In the literature, connection is a non-negotiable, indispensable weapon in fighting shame. Physical and emotional health flourish in the context of satisfying relationships. Conversely, several authors cite chronic loneliness as a factor in the onset of illness and even a factor in premature death. Neuroscience has shown that human beings are hard-wired for connection with one another. More than connections of casual conversation, persons crave meaningful relationships in which they can hear and be heard, in which honesty, understanding, and trust are reciprocal. Moreover, shame cannot survive in an atmosphere of transparency (Moll 6).

The biblical women Ruth and Naomi provide a compelling example of the power of vulnerable and empathic relationships. After the deaths of their husbands (Ruth's husband also being Naomi's son), each woman faces circumstances of cultural shame: Naomi is now a childless widow, too old to begin again with another family; Ruth is a foreigner in Israel and worse, a detested Moabite. Yet, in part because of their authentic connection with each other, both women courageously forge ahead to an unknown, new

life. Naomi found companionship on her journey and provision from Ruth's fieldwork; Ruth found the guiding voice of wisdom from a woman who loved her like a mother.

Behavioral change is critical to the development of redemptive bias which facilitates in those behaviors becoming natural responses

I observed in the data that in a six-week time period, most of the significant changes in the participants' lives were in the area of knowledge. This newfound knowledge resulted in a behavioral change that moved the women to increase their connections with others. In that short time period, underlying attitudes were not yet significantly impacted. Still, the conscious effort to identify and act out of a positive, faith-filled attitude (called a redemptive bias) is the first step to internalizing a perspective that can become the foundation for a desired behavior to become a natural, spontaneous response.

Fascinating scientific discoveries presented in the literature support the idea that one's behavior is a key component in rewiring the brain to embrace positive attitudes. At one time science considered the brain to be set to a fixed reality, with the best hope for change being in compensation and effort. That perspective has changed. "Behavior determines attitude," wrote Bolt and Myers (6). Many others agree. Positive behaviors stimulate brain activity to increase our ability to act in a similar way again. The embodiment of a desired attitude is imperative—one must *do* something. The repetition of desired behaviors impacts brain physiology and activity (Leaf; Thompson; Bolt; Duhigg).

The idea of redemptive bias originated in looking at the lives of Ruth and Naomi. In the face of incredible sorrow, struggle, and temptation toward hopelessness, these women continually exhibited faith, compassion, hope, and lovingkindness as attitudes

that gave rise to saving behaviors. Their circumstances could have understandably led

them to bitterness, criticism, distrust, pessimism, and fear. Instead, their actions appear to

be natural responses to a foundation of belief and trust.

An important distinction to note is that this project sets forth *redemptive* bias. It is

not merely positive bias or healthy bias. The spiritual connection cannot be ignored. The

foundational attitudes borne out in the lives of Naomi and Ruth were solidly grounded in

faith. Redemptive bias derives power from its own grounding in something greater than

one's own thoughts and determination.

Living unguarded is not about merely overcoming shame, but walking out freedom through habits cultivated in redemptive bias

I observed that overcoming shame is an important step in living unguarded, but

the ultimate goal is to live out an experience of freedom demonstrated by habits that are

the natural responses of attitudes informed by a redemption bias. The words of one

participant in particular signified that refusing shame had emboldened her to embrace

unguardedness in making courageous decisions away from a life of isolating secrecy.

Others echoed this desire. As a root cause of guardedness, shame must be exposed and

rejected. Still, that is only the beginning. Controlling shame can be overcome through

vulnerable, empathic connections and the development of redemptive biases from which

desired behaviors become habitual.

Once again, the literature supports this premise. The heart of the concepts of

overcoming shame and living unguarded is more than just reducing isolation and

emotional suffering. Expat women want to demonstrate resilience as described by Frauke

and Charles Schaefer: "Resilience is having the strength to fulfill the call God has given

us, even when it will be painful and difficult. Resilience is staying fixed on a higher

purpose, motivated by love of God, our neighbor, and the world, and supported by friends" (93). The literature fully supports the notion that knowledge impacts behavior which, over time, impacts attitudes which then impacts more desired behaviors.

The biblical example of unguarded living found in the lives of Ruth and Naomi reveals a wondrous end of the story. More than survival, the women found a new life, a new destiny, and pivotal roles in salvation history. Reliance and trust in one another, unrelenting faith in God, and actions that embodied such faith resulted in a miraculous end. The childless widow bounced the grandfather of King David on her knee. The outcast Moabite far-surpassed the expectation of perpetual widowhood to take her place in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Such fulfillment and purpose are not only the stuff of an ancient happy ending; it is the possibility for every believer.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The first implication for ministry is derived from the interest level of the women who took part in the study. In a church of about 120 expats, more than ten percent of that number responded to an invitation to spend a day learning about unguarded living through overcoming controlling shame. That response indicates this topic resonates in the hearts of expat women as a need in their own lives, no matter the age, nationality, or length of time serving as an expat. This conclusion is strengthened by the willingness of the women to transparently share their own experiences and, within a six-week period of time, apply principles from the one-day event. I do not think this strong interest and desire is limited to expat women but that women (and men) live with some awareness of personal shame that pushes them to secrecy and isolation. Contemporary authors like Brené Brown and Curt Thompson have sold millions of books around the world. As this

study has demonstrated, the awareness of shame and its resulting guardedness is not the issue. The essence of the study was to identify tools to overcome guardedness rooted in shame.

Second, there is a need for biblical teaching and preaching regarding the issue of guardedness rooted in shame. Such teaching must clearly identify the origin of shame, its qualities and expressions, as well as explore passages that exemplify persons living from a controlling sense of shame or those who model a life of unguardedness free of shame's grip. Many Bible passages and even whole books (like the Book of Ruth) exegetically support this message—little wonder given the universality of shame to the human experience. In addition to pulpit ministry addressing this topic, churches should consider retreats, study groups, or one-day events like the one described in this study. The church should be on the cutting edge of proclaiming freedom from controlling shame.

A third implication of this study is the need for communities of faith to provide and promote opportunities for individuals to connect in vulnerable and empathic relationships. More than an ongoing class or exclusively Bible study, these groups should take on the characteristics more like Wesley's class meetings where leaders are transparent about their own inner battles, thus becoming a role model of authenticity and unguardedness (Maddox). Data from the study indicated that women are looking for a safe and reciprocal space to share of themselves in order to find encouragement, help, and real friendship.

Limitations of the Study

While there are some limitations, I am convinced the study has broad generalized application.

The first limitation is that the study included only women. While research indicates that men also experience shame and its resulting guardedness, how those experiences are perceived and articulated remains unexplored. For the impact of this study, however, I was convinced that including a mixed group would have inhibited the discussion among the participants.

An additional limitation was the challenge of gathering the same group of expat women twice within an eight-week period that included Thanksgiving and Christmas—times when many expats return to their home country for the holidays. Remarkably, seventy-five percent of the workshop participants were able to attend a focus group. All sixteen participants completed both the pre and post-test questionnaires.

While the small number of participants could be seen as a limitation, intimacy and trust was more easily established, allowing the women to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences. In addition, the wide-range of nationalities represented (eight countries on five continents) provided an uncommonly rich diversity.

Unexpected Observations

Perhaps the greatest surprise was the emotion and depth of sharing evoked by the women who attended the workshop. With a mean age of 49 years and an average length of expat service being over six years, these women were veterans of church ministry with a wealth of life experiences. Still, particularly in times of sharing during the focus groups, tears were frequent and often inexplicable to the speaker. Traumatic events associated with the participant's own experience of shame were shared in greater detail than ever before disclosed—after a secrecy of years. In one case, a participant shared details hidden in silence for fifty years.

Matched by the transparency of the women, the documented application of workshop ideas so soon after the event was also unexpected. Prior to this study, I would have anticipated that knowledge would impact attitudes which would then be embodied in action. The research, as well the experience of the participants, strongly suggests that behavior precedes attitude (which then gives rise to more behavior, eventually becoming habitual). The women who took part in this study were ready to implement principles covered in the workshop, namely establishing greater connections in mutually vulnerable relationships. At least some of the women reached out to other participants.

Recommendations

I hope to repeat this workshop with other groups and encourage the formation of connection groups focused on transparency in living unguarded within the Body of Christ. One change would be an expansion of the program time so that participants have time to discuss information being shared and pray for one another. Times built in for personal reflection and prayer would also be helpful. Therefore, future use of the material would most likely be developed into a retreat format or four (4) week study.

I hope this research will be a compelling call to ministers and churches to boldly confront the pernicious presence of guardedness rooted in shame in their communities and congregations. Appearances are deceptive. The overwhelming body of research screams that the presence of shame is sweeping, universal, and even primal. Ignoring such need invites persons in our care to continue in chains of secrecy and isolation, ultimately preventing authentic ministry in the world.

This study also invites further investigation into guardedness in the church, the experience of shame, the formation of life-giving support groups, the establishment of

redemptive bias, and other possible roots of guardedness within the Christian community. I am more convinced than ever that shame is a linchpin of guardedness, but I doubt that it is the only key. More inquiry, examination, and analysis are warranted.

Postscript

The completion of this project has been a journey with many bumps and twists in the road. I was captivated four years ago by the idea that guardedness is the plague of the international church. In the beginning, the presence of shame in relation to guardedness was not on my personal radar. Initially, I was thinking of hindrances like simmering anger, long-term regret, or hidden sin. I am thankful the Holy Spirit led me through research to a focus on shame. I have come to a personal certainty that shame is a cornerstone of guardedness. The study has changed my own life and strengthened my resolve to minister to others on this topic.

My heart's desire is to faithfully represent the Gospel of Jesus to those I serve at Da Nang International Fellowship and to offer something helpful to the larger Body of Christ, that as children of God, we may follow the example of Jesus in despising the shame for the joy set before us. To God alone be the glory.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Questionnaire administered as the first activity at the Workshop
And at the post-workshop Focus Group

Guardedness Questionnaire

Please indicate your response to each question using the following scale:

4 – Strongly agree

3 – Agree

2 – Disagree

1 – Strongly Disagree

1. I understand the difference between shame and guilt.   1   2   3   4

2. I am confident that God accepts me fully, just as I am.   1   2   3   4

3. I reveal my feelings to others.   1   2   3   4

4. I am aware of the interaction between shame and loneliness. 1   2   3   4

5. I accept that feeling alone is part of being in ministry.   1   2   3   4

6. I am defensive when others criticize me.   1   2   3   4

7. I understand the roots of shame.   1   2   3   4

8. I believe that people in ministry are required to live an   1   2   3   4

   an exemplary life

9. I have secrets in my life that would surprise and shock others. 1   2   3   4

10. I am aware of the impact of self-protection on community life. 1   2   3   4

11. I believe that my testimony requires that I hide certain parts 1   2   3   4
    of my life.

12. I withdraw from others into solitude to protect myself.　　1　2　3　4

13. I understand that shame has a positive impact on faith
    development.　　1　2　3　4

14. I am confident God accepts my human struggles
    and frailties.　　1　2　3　4

15. I make new friends easily.　　1　2　3　4

16. I think that shame begins with a traumatic event.　　1　2　3　4

17. I feel that if others really know me they will
    back away from me.　　1　2　3　4

18. It is difficult for me to look someone in the eyes
    when speaking to them.　　1　2　3　4

19. I think that whether or not I have deep friendships
    is of little consequence to the church body.　　1　2　3　4

20. I believe that shame is the result of my sin.　　1　2　3　4

21. I frequently criticize myself internally with
    thoughts like: "You idiot!" or "You are so stupid."　　1　2　3　4.

22. I think that shame can be eliminated totally
    from my experience.　　1　2　3　4

23. I accept that weakness comes with vulnerability.　　1　2　3　4

24. More than 3 people at DIF know details of my past.　　1　2　3　4

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Appendix B

Schedule of Observation

Saturday, 23 November 2019	Workshop "Unguarded: Experiencing Freedom from Shame" Four Points by Sheraton, Da Nang 9:00 am – 4:30 pm
Saturday, 4 January 2020	Focus Group 1 9:00 am – 11:30 am Lighthouse Café, Da Nang
Monday, 6 January 2020	Focus Group 2 7:00 – 8:30 pm At a private home in Da Nang

Appendix C-1

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

"Unguarded: Finding Freedom from Shame's Control"

Sessions:
    1 – Un-Guardedness and the Root of Shame
    2 - Made for Connection
    3 - The *Heart* of the Issue: Choosing Redemptive Bias
    4 - Ruth and Naomi: Unguarded Living Through Connection and
            Redemptive Bias

    9:00   Welcome/Song/Prayer

    9:10   Questionnaires

    9:45   Session 1

    10:20 Personal Reflection/Break

    10:50 Session 2

    11:35 Small Group Discussion

    12:10 Lunch

    1:30   Session 3

    2:15   Personal Reflection

    2:40   Session 4

    3:25   Personal Reflection/Break

    3:50   Group Sharing

    4:20   Closing Prayer

Appendix C-2

Workshop Outline

SESSION #	TOPIC AND MAIN POINTS	ACTIVITIES OR NOTES
1	**Unguardedness and the Root of Shame** -The Quest for Unguardedness -Guilt vs. Shame -The Beginning of Shame -The Beginning of the End for Shame	*Discussion of Genesis 3 and Hebrews 12:2
2	**Made for Connection** -Biblical foundation -Better Connections Mean Better Health -What is Connection?	*Discussion of Genesis 2:18
3	**The *Heart* of the Issue: Choosing Redemptive Bias** -Biblical view of "heart" -Free Will -Evidence from Neuroscience -Time to reflect on Redemptive Bias	*Personal Reflection and Group Discussion on Redemptive Bias *List of Scriptures to consider for Redemptive Bias discussion *Participants make personal Redemptive Bias card reminders
4	**Ruth & Naomi: Unguarded Living Through Connection and Redemptive Bias** -Examples of Connection and Redemptive Bias throughout the Book of Ruth -Principles for Unguarded Living found in this Book	*Small group discussion of selected passages from Ruth

Appendix C-3: Follow-Up Resources

1. Carol Mitchell, Counselor
   Email: csmitchell7@gmail.com
   Phone: 0166 529 8016

2. Dr. Daniel Stern, Ph.D., Counselor in Hoi An
          Office at An Bang Beach, next to Soul Kitchen
          Phone: 0586 480 599
          Facebook Page: @emotionalheaalthtoday
          Cost: 600,000 VND per 75-minute session

3. Cornerstone Counseling Foundation
   Providing counseling to Christian workers throughout Asia
   285/86, Moo.4 Soi Surapol 1, Thasala, Muang, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand
   Phone: +66 81 960 8242

    Group Follow-Up Options:

1. New Creation "Healing of Memories" Support Group: A weekly meeting in Danang for those who want to process their healing with others in a loving atmosphere with confidential discussion and prayer.
   okcoaching@outlook.com

2. Small Group Discussion of *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* by Curt Thompson, M.D. A weekly meeting in Danang using the book's discussion questions. This discussion group will last for a period of 10 weeks. Participants will have the opportunity to express their desire to participate at the Focus Group session following the training event. Cindy Brewer will serve as the contact person for the group, which may be led by another woman from Danang International Fellowship.
   cindy@difnv.org

Appendix C-4

Participants' Bibliography

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Appendix C-5

Discussion Questions for Each Session

Session 1: Shame

1. What does "shame" look like in your life?
2. How can you "despise" shame?
3. If not now, can you think of a time in your life when you had to make the decision to "get up and move on"?
4. In what ways are you able to "walk with others" because of the "shame-related" events of your life?

Session 2: Connections

1. In what ways has God used your closest friend(s) to show you more of Himself and speak truth in to your life?
2. Is anything holding you back from finding community here?
3. Can you recall a time when you wanted to ft in, but for whatever reason, it just didn't work out? What did you learn from that experience?
4. Can you recall a time when you were faced with choosing personal "guardedness" or "vulnerable connection"? Which did you choose and what was the result?

Session 3: Redemptive Bias

1. How does shame express itself in your life?
2. What "redemptive biases" can help you "choose joy and despise shame"?
3. What is one practical step you can take to choose your redemptive bias every morning or throughout the day?

Session 4: Living Unguarded

1. How is God asking you to accompany someone else on their journey?
2. What do you want your legacy to be?
3. What is a mighty act that you have seen God do in your life this year?
4. What name have you given yourself that you need to abandon?
5. What is the most beautiful thing about your current season of life? In what ways does your current season of life make you come alive?

Appendix C-6

Songs for Play List

1. "Lord, I offer my life to you, everything I've been through
   Use it for your glory…"
   By Don Moen

2. "Somebody's Praying for Me" Don Moen

3. "Lord, You Are Good and Your Mercy Forever Endures" Don Moen

4. "My Life is in Your Hands" by Brooklyn Tab
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AS6tQYJVO80&list=RDDfW2mkkMTA
   g&index=8

5. "He's Been Faithful to Me" by Brooklyn Tab
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KtCcXXJB2Q&list=PLAimbpQf8zH7D
   hvRFXXnaBhu_61GyallD&index=15

6. "Come to Jesus" by Brooklyn Tab
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8-
   7jDXENK0&list=PLAimbpQf8zH7DhvRFXXnaBhu_61GyallD&index=17

7. "Total Praise" by Brooklyn Tab
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCsJyzm83W0&list=PLAimbpQf8zH7D
   hvRFXXnaBhu_61GyallD&index=24

8. "I Am Redeemed" by Brooklyn Tab (with lyrics)
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vs-
   RqyJEv6U&list=PLAimbpQf8zH7DhvRFXXnaBhu_61GyallD&index=51

9. "Bless the Broken Road" by Selah
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPaU7jJvqRc&list=RDfK6sYVQCqhs&i
   ndex=27

10. God of All My Days by Casting Crowns
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RocPcgqCDE0&list=RDW9I_-
    ShgVBE&index=11

11. Defender by Francesca Battistelli
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9cSRFt42iQ&list=RDF9cSRFt42iQ&in
    dex=1

12. I am Loved by Mack Brock
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OmYhgvwQa8&list=RDF9cSRFt42iQ&index=2

13. Holy Spirit, You Are Welcome Here by Kim Walker Smith
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySTtmLR1Exg

14. Mended by Mack Brock
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Otg-5p7qug

15. Well Done by The Afters
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZu7mfYS_VY&list=RD9OmYhgvwQa8&index=4

16. Scars by I Am They
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=It1XzDf-pFo&list=RD9OmYhgvwQa8&index=7

17. You Say by Lauren Daigle
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqpNGYbcy3U

18. Power in the Name of Jesus by Jesus Culture
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtyVdC7E6Wo

19. Breathe/What A Friend I've Found by Hillsong
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5w7MgTgVVs&list=RDDfW2mkkMTAg&index=3

20. Here's My Heart, Lord by Casting Crowns
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkSBmRAVXNc&list=RD8Qa6zZrYkZA&index=26

21. It Is So by Elevation Worship
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiuOTC1ucY0&list=RD8Qa6zZrYkZA&index=27

22. There Was Jesus by Zach Williams and Dolly Parton
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DFxbGbIDrY&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR3Qf1MahSgDZZAXEdxPGxd2mR8X8q6VeiRWygpYlDj5aRWb6y60pQ-ROkk

23. Heaven Help Me by Zach Williams
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CH5QaYzinI

24. Fear is a Liar by Zack Williams
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQTnREEtuNk&list=RD9DFxbGbIDrY
    &index=3

25. The God Who Sees by Nicole Mullen and Kathie Lee Gifford (story of Ruth is
    part of it)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sz81dIfwf4Y&list=RDy8SIcb2j1kQ&ind
    ex=3

26. One Day by Matt Redmon
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGAdaGbmfFs

27. Instrumental Worship songs (maybe for the lunch time or other "background
    music times")
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1RFSEoBRYI

28. Piano Instrumental
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3WV7cMWiwg

29. One hour of piano (for lunch or other background music)
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3WV7cMWiwg

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

Question #1

What were the levels of your knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding overcoming guardedness prior to the workshop?

Research Question #2

What were the levels of your knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding overcoming guardedness after to the workshop?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the workshop on overcoming guardedness had the greatest impact on you in any perceived changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior?

Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Unguarded: Experiencing Freedom From Shame

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Cindy Brewer from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are an expat woman serving Christ in Vietnam and attending Da Nang International Fellowship.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete two Questionnaires (each has twenty-four questions); attend a one-day workshop on a Saturday at the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel (9:00 am-4:30 pm; lunch and tea breaks provided); and participate in a 1.5 hour Focus Group in a private meeting room at Happy Heart Cafe within the first two weeks of January 2020. The Focus Group will be audio recorded in order to obtain a transcript for use in analyzing results of the workshop.

If anyone is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or pseudonym will be used instead of your name. Confidentiality in the Focus Group will be strongly encouraged, but cannot be absolutely guaranteed.

If something makes you feel bad while you are in the study, please tell Cindy. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want.

You can ask Cindy questions any time about anything in this study. She can be reached by email or phone. The email address is cindy@difvn.org and her phone number is 0905 122183.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

_____   _____

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study   Date Signed

Appendix F

Confidentiality Agreement

This form may be used for individuals who will be assisting the researcher with a variety of research tasks (e.g., audio or video recording, transcribing data, etc.)

I, _____ will be assisting the researcher by _____(specific job description, e.g., being an interpreter/translator)

I agree to abide by the following guidelines regarding confidentiality:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) that may be revealed during the course of performing research tasks throughout the research process and after it is complete.

2. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.

3. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession (e.g., using a password-protected computer).

4. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.

5. After consulting with the *Researcher(s),* erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

_____   _____   _____
(Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

Researcher(s)

_____   _____   _____
(Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

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