

Episode 49: Outcomes of Distortion

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Good morning and welcome to ConneXions Classroom Podcast for the week of March 7th, 2015. We are going to continue to talk about the many, many questions that keep coming in around shame. Shame versus guilt. What is shame? How does it affect us? How to protect our children. How to change it, neutralize it. And how to live a life free from shame.

Before I get started, I'd like to invite you, if you have any questions around any kind of issues about communication, family conflicts, addiction, anxiety, depression, anything like that, you're welcome to send them to me at the website: www.ConneXionsClassroom.com. Go to the Podcast section and there's a space there to write in your questions. I'd be more than happy to do my best to answer those.

Question #1:

So, starting off this morning, the question is: *how does perfectionism hinder you in growing, in maturing?* Another word to put in there with perfectionism is *how does shame?*

Let's go back and talk about where perfection falls on the scale of shame—the shame scale or shame continuum. So, remember, shame manifests in both directions. It manifests in this position of self-loathing, self denigration, this belief or “knowledge” that you believe that you are inadequate, that you're not enough, you don't matter, you're not capable, on and on. And then, on the other side of that shame continuum is this position of I am invincible, I am always right. This is self aggrandizement, it's this belief that I am better than another person, and that's where perfectionism falls—that I have the ability to be perfect. For those of us who have spiritual beliefs that we can become perfect, that might be a true statement for some of us. However, in this existence of life on this planet, we are not able to reach that experience of perfection. However, some of us are trying to strive for it and when we strive for perfection, we must know what's driving us to do that. There's nothing inappropriate about doing your very best and knowing when you're really accomplished at something, or when you've done something that is really positive or supportive or unique, and appreciating what you've done.

Notice my language, I'm underscoring the things I've done, not who I am. Trying to become perfect is impossible. Doing things that are the best I can do—and maybe they're recognized by the world as this individual and they are different from other things that have been done—is great. You recognize that the things you do are not indicative of who you are.

And so, perfectionism needs to be scrutinized, like what is driving my perfectionism? Because this is how desiring to be perfect can hinder you in maturing, hinder you in sophisticating yourself emotionally and spiritually. And so, look at what you are attempting to be perfect *in*, be conscious, be thoughtful about what's motivating you to be perfect in this particular area.

So, if I'm wanting to **look perfect**, you have to first say to yourself *okay, what is that? What would that look like?* And you might say *well here's a picture. Here's a picture of somebody who I believe looks perfect* and then you have to say to yourself, *and what about that person is perfect? Well, you know, their arms look a certain way or their face looks a certain way, or they have less wrinkles, or their teeth are so beautiful, they look like chiclets.*

And then you have to be thoughtful and say *why is that perfection? What is this person getting that I'm not getting? Why do I want to look like that? Why do I want to be that? What is it that's coming towards that person that I want to have as well?*

And as you are being willing to be conscious like that, you also will realize if shame is attached to it—you'll feel it. If shame is present, you'll feel this fear of *if I'm not like that, then I'm not*

enough or *I'm bad and unworthy*, or *I'm inadequate*, or *I'll never measure up*. And if you experience that, then you will know that that's being driven by shame.

To want to look a certain way, being driven by something other than shame—I'm sitting here trying to think of what else would drive you to look that certain way. Because each of us look different and it's very intentional to our existence that we're all different. We're all different yet we have many similar characteristics, we all have noses, we're born with these bodies, and we have similar needs, and desires, and wants, and those types of things. However, our characteristics on our physical bodies do look different to individuate us.

So, trying to strive for perfection is an impossible task because it's not on this planet—being perfect. And so, people will say, “Well, isn't it a good skill to attempt to be perfect?” I'll always say to them, “I think you need to do the best you know how to do, and be the best you possible.” However, you must know what's driving you to behave that way, and if it is this feeling of fear, or this feeling of I'm better than another person, or I get to have special privileges, I don't have to follow the rules, I'm unique, you might want to look at what your motive is, because it will hinder your ability to mature and to sophisticate yourself.

So again, notice why you are attempting to be perfect, what you're attempting to be perfect in, and then be critical of yourself—which is not a negative thing, it's just being really thoughtful. You're criticizing a piece, if you will, of your thinking. And make very sure that shame is not the instigator or the motivator behind that because it will be very, very destructive to you and it will stay with you the rest of your life. And you will not be able to grow and mature.

Question #2:

Another question: *How do I safeguard my children from another person's shame?*

That is such a great question. Let me just say that when children are born into the earth, into the world, shame is a part of their experience. It's as prevalent as the air they breathe and so there is no way to completely safeguard them from shame, whether it's in their own head—things that they think—or somebody else's shame coming at them.

However, with that being said, they can learn tools to boundary themselves and protect themselves from not only their own shame but someone else's. And so there's no way to completely insulate them from the experience of shame, but again, you can teach them.

Now, obviously when they're little children, it's almost impossible to teach them how to protect themselves because their whole experience is supposed to be living in a safe environment where they don't *need* to protect themselves. However, that's becoming more and more difficult today

because there are so many possible threats that are out in the world that would harm them. And sometimes, the threats are actually inside their own home, and sometimes their parents are their threats. Parents could be shame-based and can be inadvertently shaming them without the parent even knowing about that.

So if you're a parent of children, and I would say grown children as well, if you are a parent I would invite you to look at your own behavior and see if these things that I'm teaching don't apply to you. And if they do, which they will because all of us are not immune to shame, go looking for your shame. Understand where it comes out and then notice if you have inadvertently given it to your children because the chances are very, very likely that you have, just unknowingly to you. And you can always go back and clean that up.

The way I safeguard my children from shame (this question is about other people's shame, but just shame in general), is I teach them about what shame is. I would encourage you to go back and listen to the other podcasts on faulty core beliefs and shame and understand about how shame comes and how it speaks, and what it feels like, and the demonstrative presentations of shame, like someone feeling afraid or someone feeling bad about themselves or somebody putting their head down because they feel ashamed or someone snapping back in defensive posture because they feel shame.

There are very particular ways that people react to shame, and those are a handful of them. Not being able to look someone in the eye could be being driven by shame. Feeling shy could be—not all the time—but could be being driven by shame. Not being able to connect with another person, like not wanting to shake their hand, or a lot of social anxiety is being driven by shame.

So, how do I protect them? I teach them what shame is, and the way that I teach them is anytime I might see that they are in shame, I will talk to them and say, “Help me understand what you're feeling, why you're feeling this way.” As I hear the distortion come out of their mouth in the language that they use, then I invite them to correct that and put that back into Truth. For example, they might say, “My friend doesn't like me. My friend said that I was silly and that I was not cool enough to be in their group any longer.” As I listen to my child say those things, I first validate them such as, “I'm so sorry that Susan said those things to you, that has got to be very, very, uncomfortable. You've been friends with her for a long time.”

So, I validate my child and then I share with them or I invite them to reframe the language. I might say something like, “Do you think it's possible that Susan's having a hard time these days? Her father just left her family.” or, “I heard about her brother is really sick and in the hospital, and she might be under a lot of stress. Do you think it's possible that she's having a very difficult time and therefore some of that stress is leaking out on you? Do you think that's a possibility?”

Or let's say I know nothing about Susan and her family, I might say something like, "It was inappropriate, what Susan said, and it's very sad that she doesn't want you to be her friend any longer. And that does not mean that you're not a spectacular friend, that other people wouldn't want to be friends with you because you are extremely friendly and very loyal. Anybody would be very lucky to have you as a friend."

And so, what I'm doing is, I'm putting Truth around that statement, that distortion that says *I'm not worthy to be a friend, I'm not good enough to be a friend, I'm a bad friend*. Those statements are false and therefore, they have shame in them. And what happens is that when we have statements that are false, we will oftentimes believe them. And so, this is an invitation to change those thoughts back into the Truth and have the person believe that instead of believing the lie. It's very difficult because shame is very provocative and it is seductive in its language and we desire to believe it. It's much easier to believe that I'm a bad friend than it is to believe that Susan's just having a hard time. We're all very susceptible and very vulnerable to that, but we must teach our children how to reframe.

Let's say that the child goes out for baseball and they get on the team and they get up to bat and they strike out and they feel horrible amounts of shame. They throw their bat down and they're crying in the dugout and you go over and say, "Help me understand what's going on. I just saw you strike out, what does that mean to you?" "It means I'm terrible, I'm bad, I can't do this, I never should have tried out for baseball." You validate all of that, you validate the emotion of how hard this must be for them. And how you saw them strike out and how you just felt really badly for them, "And you probably felt embarrassed." "Yeah, I did."

And then, after you've validated them, then you invite them to reframe it—something along the lines that has Truth in it like, "Everybody strikes out. Striking out doesn't mean that you're a bad baseball player, it means you're learning and you get to keep practicing, and part of learning is striking out, you have to strike out in order to learn how to not strike out."

You put Truth back into those statements of shame. The way you get really good at this as a person or as a parent is that you practice in your own life. I was getting up to give a speech the other day and as I walked up on the stage, my shame hit me and said *you're going to forget your talk, you're going to look like a fool up there*. And I just said to myself, *stop, first of all that's not true, I'm very prepared, and second of all, if I forget, I have my notes here*. Immediately shame went away. It was that fast and it didn't come back about my talk again. It comes back about other things but it didn't come back around that because I stopped it and said *that is not the Truth*.

And the reason why shame comes is when we're vulnerable. When we're vulnerable, this voice comes into our head and tries to exploit our vulnerabilities. So me getting up on stage and talking to a good sized group of people created vulnerability for me, and so here came shame to

try and “make me” believe that I was inadequate.

That’s how you safeguard your children: you teach them, you teach them and you teach them. And you teach them by example. When you go into shame and you say it out loud, you go, “Whoops, that was inaccurate.” Let’s say I’m shopping for clothes and I say, “Oh, I’m so fat. This is such a beautiful outfit, I’ll never be able to wear it because I’m too fat.” I just shamed myself. I hurt me and I also hurt the people who are around me because I just told them that I’m inadequate and I’m bad because this outfit is so beautiful that I don’t deserve to have it because of the way that I look.

And so, I apologize to them and I say, “I’m so sorry.” And I apologize to myself and I say, *that isn’t the case, I do deserve to have this and I’ve got to get a bigger size because I’ve not been taking care of myself. I need to get out and start exercising. I need start eating differently because I’ve not been putting food into my system that has been nourishing to me. It’s been food that has not been nutritionally appropriate for myself.* I go back into Truth and shame will leave as fast as you do that.

Question #3:

Another question: *How do I love without expectations?*

Now, this is question is a little different from shame, but shame is in it. It’s a great question. *How do I love, how do I love myself and how do I love others without expectations?*

Let’s look at expectations. Expectations are necessary to have, everybody must have them. When I get up in the morning, I expect that the sun is going to rise at a particular time depending on the season. I expect that I’m going to go throughout the day and not have some kind of physical injury happen to me. I expect that there will be food in my fridge. I expect that my children will wake up at a certain time. I have thousands and thousands of expectations. I expect that the water is going to turn on. I expect that I’m going to get a phone call at a particular time that I’ve planned or scheduled. There are all sorts of expectations and so when an expectation doesn’t show up, it frightens people. It kind of throws them off, they get confused or maybe they get angry. Or maybe they react. But the point is, is that my expectations are fine until they don’t come to fruition and then that’s when I get myself possibly into a bit of a quandary or a problem because I have such an expectation that things and people are going to show up a particular way, and when they do not, it can create conflict inside me.

So, the expectation is not the issue. I can have expectations. I expect that I am going to interact with certain people, that I’m going to be treated a certain way, I expect that I’m going to be able to think clearly, I expect that I’m going to be able to go to work. I have all these expectations.

And so, how do I love without expectations? Well, I just got done talking about expectations and

how they go towards other people. So, I need to make sure that my expectations that I have for others are reasonable—and reasonable would mean that I don't expect them to do anything for me. Now, it gets a little tricky because if I'm in intimate relationships I want, and I do expect, people to show up a certain way. And that's okay to expect that, but when they *don't* show up the way that I expect them to, I don't then get to be angry or react or retaliate or go into drama with them or be hysterical or blackmail them or shame them. I don't get to do all that.

It's like I get to have expectations and I get to also accept where that person is. So, how do I love someone and have expectations? That's the question. The question here is *how do I love without expectations?* And I would change that to *how do I love and have expectations.*

So, here's how I do it. It's fine for me to have expectations, it keeps my world safe. It keeps me stable. However, I am responsible to meet my own expectations. And I am also responsible when someone that I have put into my inner circle, someone that I have placed in my life in a very intimate way so they're close to me, if they are choosing to not meet the boundaries or the standards or expectations that I have for safety, for connection, for intimacy, then I ask them. I get curious about *help me understand why you're showing up this way.* I don't get angry at them, I get curious about it. And what's happening is that they're giving me information. They are teaching me about them and what they really think and what they really believe and what they really want, and what they stand for, and what they value—they're teaching me about them.

However, it gets really frightening when I have brought them so close to me and now all of a sudden, they “change” on me. I thought they were one way, now I'm realizing they were another way. And so, how do I deal with having these expectations for a relationship that now is not showing up in those same ways that they were previously?

Well, like I said, you can still keep the expectation but you have to figuratively and maybe literally move them back away from you so that they're not so close to you, they're not in such an intimate spot with you where you can be negatively affected. And you have to realize that *wow, I must have read that wrong.*

Now, this gets really difficult when you're married to someone who was one way and now they're choosing to be another way. Your expectations have remained steady, however theirs have changed. And so, instead of reacting to this and spending a lot of time, and drama, and effort being upset, and threatening, and coercing, and intimidating, you can listen to what they're saying, watch their behavior and realize that their expectations must have changed and they're not the same as yours any longer. And so, you can get curious about that and you can ask questions and you can understand. And you get to decide where they stand in your life, where you're going to place them. You are in charge of that. You have agency to choose, and if you are willing to not react to what's going on and be really wise and learn from what they're telling you, what they're behaving towards you, then you'll know where to put them in your life.

I talk about these rings around a person, of boundaries. So, the first ring that's right next to you is where all your intimate relationships, where all your safe relationships are, the people that you can trust and you feel comfortable with, and you can be honest with, and they take accountability for themselves. It's basically, you're living in the similar expectations that you both have and so you feel relaxed with that person.

And then, the next ring are people that maybe you don't know as well, maybe they're more associates than close friends. Or maybe you do know them and you don't agree with some of the ways that they choose to live their life—which is totally fine, but they're just not going to be real close to you. And so, they're on an outer ring. You get to decide where you're going to place people. And it is very sad and unfortunate when you've gotten yourself into a close, close relationship, whether it's a friendship, or a marriage, or you're inside of a family unit where people's expectations have changed and they're no longer in alignment with yours. And it's very painful to invite them to move to that outer ring because it is no longer safe to be close to them or connected to them in that way, because of choices that they are making.

That's how you love **and** have expectations, is you are loving to self by assessing what's going on, not reacting or doing the best you can to not react, gather information by asking questions and getting curious. And then, you get to move you to another place and move them out of that spot where they once were, of closeness to you. That's where your boundaries come in, and so if you don't know what boundaries are, I'd invite you to listen to the podcast on boundaries. But you are the one who gets to choose how close people are to you.

So, everybody is in different situations and so there's no way to talk about each one of our situations. However, if you'll use these principles of gather data, do all you can not to react—it's not personal to you if someone has changed the way that they choose to live, it just means that you need to be wise and recognize: *what do you need, what are your expectations?* And it's very loving to self and it's loving to them to invite them to step back from this close connection that they might have with you.

And that's how you love **and** have expectations. But remember, your expectations are yours, they're not there for anyone else to meet. Now, I can have an expectation and I can say, "Are you available to meet that?" And the person goes, "Yeah, I can." Then great, they can meet it. But it's not their **obligation** to meet it for me, it is my responsibility to meet it for me and so I need to choose to put people in my life who are available to meet those needs, not place people in my life that I want in my life and then *demand* that they meet those needs for me.

We're going to stop right there and I have several more questions that I'm going to answer on the next podcast around shame. But I do invite you to go to www.ConneXionsClassroom.com and ask any questions you have around relationships, communication, addictions, anything that is of an emotional nature that might be causing conflict in your life, please go to the website and ask

that question and I will do my best to answer that for you.

Have a great day and as always, stay connected. Until next time, bye bye.

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