

“THAT’S NOT WHAT IT MEANS’—THE POWER OF FALSE ASSUMPTIONS”

Having counseled hundreds of individuals and marriages over the years, we can truly say that one of the greatest contributors to damaging a relationship is the making of false assumptions. For example, a wife experiences hurt from her husband’s perceived (or real) lack of attention and interest in her. From that experience—especially when it occurs more than once—she then says to herself, “I’m not attractive or desirable. I’m not special. He really doesn’t care about me or my needs.” Or, for example, a husband feels hurt when his wife expresses concern that he doesn’t spend enough time with the children. From that experience he then says to himself, “I don’t measure up. I’m not good enough. I can never do it good enough.” In both of these situations the assumptions made and the messages that are internalized are false. THAT’S NOT WHAT IT MEANS! For example, in the first situation the husband may be stressed out over a variety of issues which then interferes with his attending to his wife in an appropriate way. In the second situation, the wife is legitimately concerned over the relationship between child and father, and wants to bring this out so a change can be made. However, the truth in these situations becomes overshadowed by the lie of false assumptions—THAT’S NOT WHAT IT MEANS!

THE ROOT OF MAKING FALSE ASSUMPTIONS . . . THE POWER OF DESTRUCTIVE SHAME

Why do we often make these false assumptions? What is the “default mechanism” that frequently sends us down this path? In the broadest sense, it is usually due to the presence of “shame.” It is the type of ungodly, destructive shame that says, “There is something wrong with me. I’m not really O.K.,” versus the type of godly shame that brings about true conviction over something we’ve done and moves us to change and “go in a different direction” (repentance). Going a bit deeper with this, John Eldredge states in his writings that there is a fundamental question that a man and a woman need to have answered. In the man, the question is (paraphrasing) “Do I have what it takes? Am I enough?” In the woman, the question is (again paraphrasing) “Am I lovely and desirable, such that you would come and pursue and rescue me?” These questions can only be truly answered and settled in our hearts by Father God, as this is where our true identity is based. However, when we are wounded (and all of us have been to some degree) by not receiving what we needed as children or from receiving things (i.e. abuse) that we should not have received, the answers to these questions are not realized. What then happens is that we may look to others for this validation. This will never work and may often result in recurrent conflict and ultimately a breach in the relationship.

“I STRUGGLED WITH THE ISSUE OF SHAME FOR MANY YEARS”

I (Jerry) struggled with the issue of shame for many years, and have been very familiar with its workings. During the early years in our marriage and particularly when I started my first college teaching position, I was very insecure. As a result of that insecurity, I excessively over-prepared for every presentation, which placed a great strain on our marital relationship. Although I knew what I was doing was “over the top” and inappropriate, my fear continued to “drive this car” (me). When Denise would confront me on this, which was right for her to do, I would often respond with defensiveness. I didn’t know my true, God-given identity at that point and her voiced

concerns came “too close to the core of shame” that resided within. It was a very difficult time in our relationship, and thankfully, we were able to work through those difficulties. I wish I could tell you that this was the only time in my life and in our relationship where shame surfaced, but I’ve had to work through many other situations in my life where I heard internal messages of “not being good enough, not measuring up, etc.” that were not from the Father. Once again, THAT’S NOT WHAT IT MEANS! About 12 years later I surrendered my heart to Jesus Christ. This started a journey to yield to the Father’s heart to allow Him to begin the healing that I needed.

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO DESTRUCTIVE SHAME

We can respond to the pain of shame in a variety of ways, depending upon our own personal make-up and what has been modeled to us. One person might become angry and “clam up” and emotionally and/or physically retreat. Another person might become angry and defensive and become verbally aggressive. Still another might feel the pain of shame and become sad and downcast. And if someone, due to past hurts, has closed off his or her heart from feeling pain, there may be no visible response whatsoever. All of these responses, though very different in nature, can still be rooted in shame. It is also important to note that when anger is present, it usually is a symptom or simply a pointer to a deeper emotion (i.e. pain, loss, disappointment, fear, etc.). Although shame-based false assumptions are especially common in marriage, one doesn’t have to be married to respond in this manner. Any relationship can lead to making false assumptions and responding in an ungodly way. Sometimes it is important to take a look back at past relationships and try to identify unhealthy patterns that have existed (i.e. where you find yourself either abruptly ending relationships or possibly staying in a relationship long after the other person has “emotionally left”).

GODLY RESPONSES TO SHAME VERSUS MAKING FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

One of the most important things we can do when we feel one of the responses to a perceived hurt is to ask ourselves and the Father, “Is this a valid response on my part or is this a reaction to a deeper issue within me (i.e. a shame response)?” This, however, will mean that not only will I need to allow myself to feel what I’m feeling, but also allow the Holy Spirit to take me beyond my immediate feelings and help me connect with what is really true. I will also need to be able to properly engage the other person and “check out” what I’m feeling and perceiving . . . in order to avoid making a false assumption and then reacting to that assumption. This, of course, also requires the other person to be honest in his or her response at that time. None of this is easy to do, but it is imperative if we are to live with any degree of “love, joy and peace” in our lives and to honor the Father and one another. It will undoubtedly require a certain degree of godly brokenness and continual surrendering to the Father and His healing work.

PLEASE PRAY WITH US . . .

Father, when it is possible and as far as it depends upon me, I desire to live at peace with others (Rom. 12:18). I know that there have been times when I have not done this . . . when I have made false assumptions, reached wrong conclusions out of my own woundedness and shame, and I have not only hurt others but I have also hurt Your heart. Please forgive me for this. I want to be whole. I want to be secure in who I am in You. Please help me to see where shame and lies are still operating in me as I relate to others and to You. I desire to see myself and others through Your

truth. I give You permission to reveal and heal those places in me that still are in need of Your love. And Father, the next time I hear messages that are not coming from Your heart, please help me to reject them and to hear the truth, "THAT'S NOT WHAT IT MEANS!" I ask this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

From the Father's Heart,

Jerry and Denise Basel