

Belonging, Burden, and Shame: How we overcome moments and lifetimes of feeling Unlovable

Dr. Lauren Edwards

Will for Hope
www.willforhope.org

Samaritan Counseling Center of Atlanta
www.samaritanatlanta.org

First Presbyterian Church
<https://www.firstpresatl.org>

Unlovable = Lack of Belonging + Perceived Burdensomeness + Shame

Lovable = Belonging + Perceived Value & Contribution + Dignity & Compassion

BELONGING

Lack of belonging – an unmet human need to be in real and reciprocal relationships with others

Authentic belonging – feeling accepted based on being your real self, having supportive and reciprocal relationships

Discussion Questions:

What have been/are your experiences of feeling that you don't belong? How can you start to create this for yourself? Are there spaces now where you fit but not authentically? Do you need more connection than you really have right now? And if not, where would you start to find this?

How do you give belonging to others? Do you find yourself welcoming others? Offering invitations? In what ways can you be more inclusive?

BURDEN

Perceived burdensomeness – the false belief that you are a burden on others, create more harm than good in your relationships and in the world

- Research shows that our beliefs of being a burden rarely match with reality or with how others actually experience us

Perceived contribution & value – the recognition of what you positively add to your relationships and to the world, the acknowledgement of your significance

Discussion Questions:

When have you felt yourself to be a burden to others? How do you dispel this? How do you talk about this (because that conversation is often the quickest and most effective way to dispel this belief)? Where do you contribute and add value?

Is there someone in your life who may believe they're a burden to you? How do you ask about this? How do you set the record straight? Can you more often acknowledge others' contributions and their value to you and to the world? What would it look like to express appreciation more often?

SHAME

Shame – the believe that you are bad, broken, fundamentally flawed and that because of this, if others truly knew you, they would not stay in relationship with you; you feel you are unfixable

- Shame leads us to hide, it creates isolation and alienation
- Guilt is the belief that you have done a bad thing (a behavior – not you)

Dignity – feeling worthy and in control of oneself

Compassion – a deep and emotional sense of understanding suffering and responding in a tangible way

Acceptance of fallibility and vulnerability – acknowledging that every person is weak, makes mistakes, endures suffering, has areas of incompetence, is powerless in various moments

Discussion questions:

What shame do you hold in your life? How do you hide your shame? What small shame can you begin to acknowledge to yourself and who might be a compassionate listener? How can you begin to own your weakness and messiness, your unattractive traits and your painful history?

Who in your life has shame and needs your compassion? Do you shame others or are you able to express non-judgment and empathy? When you encounter brokenness are you able to see and comment on that as being human?