

A Small Book about Why We Hide

How Jesus Rescues Us
from Insecurity, Regret,
Failure, and Shame

EDWARD T. WELCH



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Start Here

We all have voices that tell us we are never enough. If we measure up in school, we don't in sports or attractiveness or anything else. We always have voices, around us and in us, that assure us we are, indeed, substandard—or average, which feels just as bad.

Hiding, insecurity, not comfortable in our own skin, failure, feeling worthless or at least worth less than others, fears of rejection, past regrets that we'd prefer weren't known—all these are features of everyday life. Left to themselves, they grow into shame and self-loathing.

This is a small book of readings for human experiences that are anything but small. Too often we want to hide, or at least hide some part of ourselves.

We hide because we are not . . . enough.

Hiding, of course, comes with its own problems. Hiding reduces our close relationships to mere acquaintances. We put on a face, so we are never fully known. The result? We become more and more isolated. Relationships can't thrive with such privacy. As if this weren't bad enough, our human relationships

reveal details of our relationship with God. If you hide before other people, you will hide before God. If you are not open with God, you are not open with other people. The two go hand-in-hand. But life goes on, and, somehow, you wake up tomorrow and keep going. Human beings are resilient, at least for a while.

God's words in Scripture can seem worlds apart from these everyday struggles. We know what God says about murder, lying, and unfaithfulness. Our fragile inner worlds, however, are a different matter. We know that God speaks to our *spiritual* lives, which we think of as prayer and Bible reading. But we wonder if we need something else to speak to the hidden parts of our lives—the fears, shame, regret, and failures.

Let's try a different course: God created us to be open and honest with him and with each other. If you have ever had that kind of relationship, you know this to be true. If you have never had that kind of relationship, you want it. God speaks in detail, with gentleness and wisdom, about these critical matters of life, and what he says is very good. With this in mind, we listen and search until hope sneaks in—and our need to hide begins to fade.

We begin with insecurity—that underlying feeling that we are not quite adequate. Here is a wide entry to Scripture. We are all familiar with it, and we

are all invited to listen. Our insecurities are also a less jarring start than struggles such as feeling worthless and humiliation, which will come later, and insecurities seem to be less tied to our identities.

Then we will consider failure, which is harder to face. We can feel insecure without having a long list of significant failures. Failure confirms our suspicions; we really are losers.

It too can be found most anywhere. I know a sixty-year-old woman who loves people well. She listens and asks good questions. Her conversations quickly move to important matters. Recently another woman simply asked, “Could you tell me *your* story?”

The tables had turned. She was accustomed to asking rather than revealing. Now the conversation was about her. In response, her mind reeled. Life with an alcoholic father, never being enough, a résumé with no worldly accomplishments—a loser through and through. Her life flashed before her, and all she saw was failure. When failures accumulate, they *do* become an identity.

Who would have known that right under the surface of her competent care for others was an abiding sense of failure? And she represents many of us.

After failure comes shame. That is how these readings are ordered, and that is how the struggles of life can descend. Shame is the most difficult, most

life-dominating, and most hidden. Perhaps you did something really bad, and it became public. Any addiction could do it. More often shame is not so much a result of what you have done but of what was done *to you*. When you are treated as nothing, you feel like nothing. When you are treated disgracefully, you believe you are a disgrace. Either way, done by you or done to you, you hope to disappear or die, which are extreme versions of hiding.

The path ahead for us does not end with hiding. Instead, God aims to replace it with a settled confidence. No need to defend yourself. Rest—like a secure child. Loved—and you are sure of it. Life will still have its trouble but without the layers of complexity that can overwhelm our inner world. All this does not come easily, especially given how shame can leave you almost deaf to anything good. But God's words are quite powerful. They are food that strengthen your soul.

Each day will include a reading from Scripture and a few questions or suggestions in response. If you can talk about these with other people, all the better. You might consider starting a journal as you go through these readings. That way you can start to collect God's words to you and for you. These readings are divided into fifty days. But go at your own pace. You can take fifty weeks if you want. Just keep going.

God's words to you combined with asking him for help will be life-changing.

Expect to see God's words from Scripture match the concerns of your heart. Here are some words that can get you started: "God . . . knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalm 44:21).

If you have ever prayed silently, you believe this. He hears you and knows what is in your heart, which is where you fret, hide, love, hate, desire, and feel. When someone knows what is in your heart, and that person loves you all the more rather than turns away from you, you are more inclined to stop hiding and start talking.

Response

1. Have you ever had a relationship in which you were free to be open and honest? This is your real desire. Too often, this happens only in rehab centers and counselors' offices. Have you ever been open and honest with God? This is God's desire. Is that hard for you to believe? Can you imagine why it is true?
2. Who can you ask to walk with you and talk with you as you read?

Part 1

Insecurities, the Fear of People,
Regrets, and Failure

Day 1

Being Seen

Good literature often reveals its most important themes at the very beginning.

“Call me Ishmael,” and we are invited into *Moby Dick*, his very personal story. When he says that there is “nothing particular to interest me onshore,” you immediately know that this casual beginning foretells much-more-than-casual adventures at sea.

Scripture, too, reveals critical themes at the very beginning. Take a look at Genesis 1–3. There you will find the basics:

- God created all things. Everything belongs to him.
- He created us to be near him.
- We are his royal children who must grow in distinguishing good and evil. How else could we bring the ways of our Father and King into the world?
- We are prone toward independence. We prefer to determine for ourselves what is right and wrong. We are like teenagers who insist on independence but cannot live independently. The

moment we go out the door, determined to trust in ourselves, our inadequacies are on display.

The consequences of that quest for independence are still keenly felt. First among those consequences is that, when we try to live on our own, we hide and look for cover. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Genesis 3:7).

Life as we know it has now begun. Insecurity, failure, and shame enter, in unison.

- Do you ever feel exposed and inadequate? If so, Scripture invites you to join the story.
- Have you ever tried to cover yourself in order to avoid the disapproving gaze of others?
- Have you ever clung to a version of fig leaves such as résumés, achievements, or a particular ability? If so, Scripture is *about* you and *to* you.

God would not introduce this problem if he weren't going to do something about it. He knows we can't both hide and flourish. We are people who are created for closeness with God and others, and hiding undermines these relationships. God, of course, acted. “The LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

This was a small beginning that anticipated something more—much more. We need covering, and only God can cover us. Once you see it, the story is everywhere in Scripture. It doesn't end with animal skins. Those skins could cover the body, but human inadequacy, shame, and fears of being seen go much deeper. One reckless criticism from *any* person has the power to expose how we are not enough. How much more can the demeaning words and actions of those close to us cut deeply and leave us forever vulnerable and insecure.

So God keeps doing something. He announces through the prophet Isaiah, “Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion” (Isaiah 61:7). Shame signals that you are forgotten and cast out. A double portion is a sizeable inheritance. And the people respond with joy.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

They are rejoicing in Jesus. By shifting your allegiance to him—by trusting him—you “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). You are covered in his beauty and honor.

You can be sure of this: If God draws near to the shamed and outcast, he will meet you in the insecurities of daily life.

Your task is to learn the details of this story, be attracted to it, try it on, and then live within it. As you do, God overwrites your stories of inadequacy and shame and changes them. For now, it is enough to know that hiding is normal, it is not what God intended, and the arc of change begins with us turning from our attempts to be independent and toward Jesus. Security, glorious coverings, and his achievements on your behalf are ahead.

Response

1. One important and challenging task is to connect God’s words to everyday life. Write down a few ways that God’s words, in the very beginning, connect to important matters in your life now.
2. Scripture connects our quest for independence with our inadequacies, insecurities, and tendency to hide. Can you see the connection in those around you? How about your life? Give an example or two.