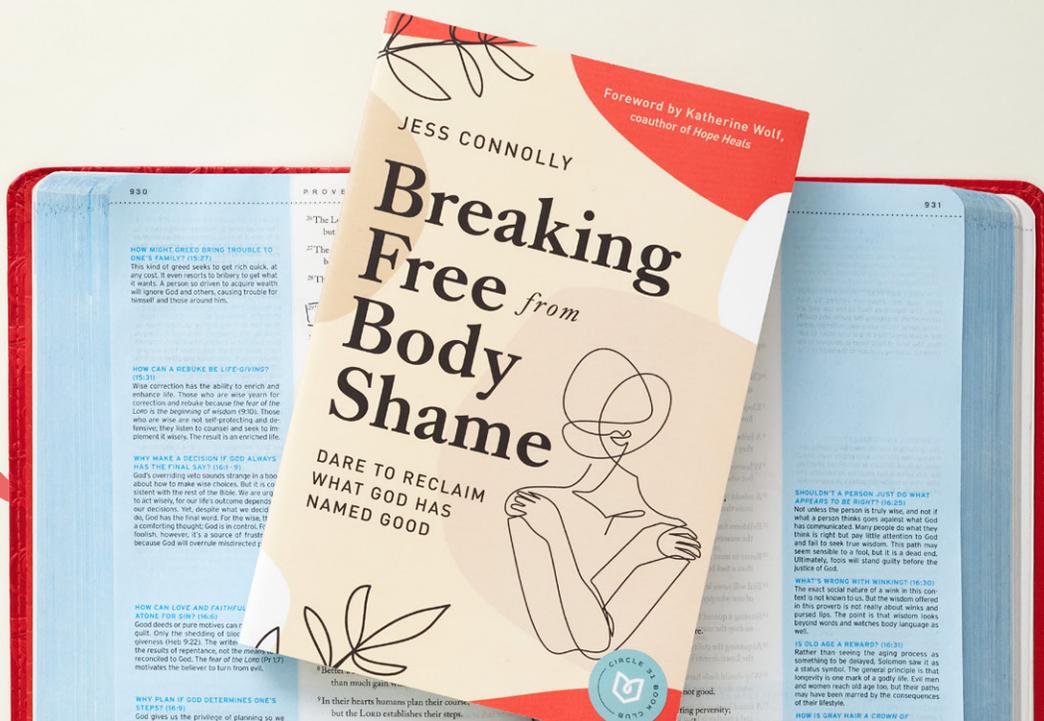




Breaking Free from Body Shame

BIBLE STUDY COMPANION



Foreword by Katherine Wolf,
coauthor of *Hope Heals*

JESS CONNOLLY

Breaking Free from Body Shame

DARE TO RECLAIM
WHAT GOD HAS
NAMED GOOD





Hi, friend,

My name is Shae, and I'm on staff at Proverbs 31 Ministries. I'm so glad to meet you in the pages of this Bible Study Companion.

Since we're new friends ... Let me tell you a little bit about my own journey with *Breaking Free from Body Shame* and how it's a little ironic that I would be the one to write this resource.

I've been a Christian for over 20 years. Yet the difficult relationship I have with my body has been something I've wrestled with that whole time.

Struggling with body image as a follower of Jesus feels especially vulnerable. I can recount truth-soaked passages of Scripture like Psalm 139:14, which tells me that "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (NIV) ... but if I'm honest, I struggle to believe those words are true about me. Maybe you can relate.

I remember finding Jess Connolly on Instagram through a post from a couple years ago that said "Your body is ready for summer." The authority she spoke with inspired me. I wanted to believe her. I also didn't really know of anyone else in the Christian space who was talking about this in such a life-giving way.

That's why I'm so passionate about *Breaking Free from Body Shame*, the message Jess has so bravely gone first to share with us. This is not just another book. This is an invitation to be free. To come into agreement with the truest things God says about us. To refuse to spend our one life on earth stuck in ruts of insecurity, comparison and jealousy.

Because body shame is a spiritual issue, not just a physical issue, this Bible Study Companion will help you take a deeper look at Scripture to further process and apply the truths you read in Jess' book each week. I've included:

- **Scriptures To Hold On To:** This section will include featured Bible verses from the assigned reading for that week.
- **Words To Cling To:** This section will include words from Jess to set up our additional Bible reading.
- **Dig a Little Deeper:** This section will include additional scriptures, response questions and space to pray.

Sister, I am right here on this journey with you. Please know these words do not come from someone who has figured it all out in any way but from someone who intimately knows the daily struggle you're facing. With God's help and by the power of His Word, I know it's possible for us to break away from shame and taste more of the abundant life He has for us.

Cheering you on,

Shae Hill



Week 1

What We're Reading This Week:

- *Foreword by Katherine Wolf.*
- *Chapter 1: Why Body Image Is a Spiritual Issue.*
- *Chapter 2: A Better Mindset.*

Scriptures To Hold On to This Week:

“Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20-21, NIV).

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

Words To Cling to This This Week:

“Your body image is the perception you have of your body. What’s wild is that when God looks at your body, He sees Himself. When He looks at you, He sees His own goodness and glory. And you need to know that God loves His image. God cannot see you without seeing Himself, and when He sees Himself, He sees glory” (*Breaking Free from Body Shame*, Page 41).

Dig a Little Deeper:

Breaking free from body shame starts in our minds. What we dwell on in our thoughts trickles out into many different parts of our lives, like what we say and do, how we spend our time, the decisions we make, and more. If our minds ruminate on untrue narratives about our bodies, we will continue to walk in a posture of shame, trying to earn others’ approval or live up to an impossible standard we’ve set for ourselves. If our minds rehearse the Truth of what God says about us and our bodies, we can simply come into agreement with those things, knowing and declaring God’s Word as the Truth we live by. This doesn’t mean we will always *feel like* it’s true, but His Word will guard our hearts and minds when our feelings try to take us in another direction.

Week 2

What We're Reading This Week:

- *Chapter 3: Renaming What the World Has Labeled Less-Than.*
- *Chapter 4: Your Body Does Not Belong to the World.*
- *Chapter 5: Resting from the Quest for a "Better" Body.*

Scriptures To Hold On to This Week:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10, NIV).

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1, NIV).

Words To Cling to This Week:

"As we begin to break some chains and some ties with the lies that have come our way, with the names that have been wrongly spoken over us, with the authority others have taken unjustly in our lives, here are three truths to anchor you when misnaming comes your way: 1) Words hold whatever power we give them, 2) You may have to remove yourself from the space where the words are spoken, and 3) We have to remember who we belong to" (*Breaking Free from Body Shame*, Pages 74-76).

Dig a Little Deeper:

One way to guard our hearts and minds and step into the abundant life God has for us is to refuse to live by any other words than God's. In the struggle of body shame, oftentimes there are people who have wounded us with their words as they've spoken about our bodies. Even if they didn't have hurtful intentions, their words landed on sensitive, tender places of our hearts, and chances are we've never forgotten them. Friend, if we do not confront these untrue statements (which does not mean we have to confront that person), it will be almost impossible for us to live truly free from body shame. We may find ourselves slipping back into old patterns in some way. But let's read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 together. Instead of reading these words through the lens of shame, receive them through the lens of truth. Remember: God has already called your body good.

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (NIV).

- How does refusing untrue names and labels about your body honor God?

- How does it feel knowing God cares about your body? Hearing from Scripture that you were “*bought at a price*” and are a “*templ[e] of the Holy Spirit*,” how do these truths reinforce the words you’ve been reading in *Breaking Free from Body Shame*?

- What would change about your daily life if you let God and God’s Word be the only things that name you and your body? How would this help you resist striving and instead start living free?

- Are there any people you need God’s help forgiving because they have said negative things about your body?

- Write down the name(s) of anyone who came to mind in the question above. Then write out a prayer, acknowledging to the Lord the hurt this person/people caused and asking for His help in forgiving them.

Week 3

What We're Reading This Week:

- *Chapter 6: Your Body Is Not a Project.*
- *Chapter 7: Restoring Your Body to Its Original Purpose.*
- *Chapter 8: Your Body Is Not a Marker of Righteousness.*

Scriptures To Hold On to This Week:

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ...”
(Romans 8:1, NIV).

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).

Words To Cling to This Week:

“I believe God wants good for your body. I believe He wants healing and restoration for you. I believe He wants freedom and wants you to experience the wholeness He purchased for you on the cross of Christ. But I don't believe that means you'll look like you've always hoped to look. I don't believe restoration is defined by experiencing the bodies we idealize here on earth; rather, I believe it's a far greater vision than that”
(*Breaking Free from Body Shame*, Page 130).

Dig a Little Deeper:

Jess asks on Page 147, “What if living in your body was less about how you could make it better and more about seeing God?” As women who are followers of Christ, isn't that truly what we're after? Seeing God. Worshipping Him. Chasing hard after His purposes for our lives. And none of these things require the “ideal” body. In fact, many times in Scripture, God talks about the condition of our heart (inside) more than the state of our bodies (outside):

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8, NIV).

“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30, NIV).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

It's not that our bodies aren't important. We experience life and God in these bodies, and we get to steward them. But our bodies aren't the most important things about us, and looking a certain way definitely doesn't equal certain access to God in His Kingdom. Also, having an "ideal" body does not equal obedience to God. Stewarding our bodies well takes a lot of intentionality, prayer, and support from the right people around us.

As you meditate on these scriptures, answer the following questions:

- In what ways are you tempted to make your body "better" or chase after the "ideal" body?

- Think about your plans for this week. In what ways are you investing in your heart, not just your body? (For example: spending time in Scripture and prayer, having a life-giving conversation with a friend, journaling, etc.)

- How might you encourage others to live in freedom by choosing to see their hearts more than their bodies?

- What tie do you see between living free from body shame and worshipping God?

- Now, let's pray. Ask God to help you continue on this journey to freedom so that body shame will not get in the way of the good works He has called you to.

Week 4

What We're Reading This Week:

- *Chapter 9: Welcoming Revival.*
- *Chapter 10: Your Body Is Not a Trophy.*
- *Chapter 11: Freedom Starts Today.*

Scriptures To Hold On to This Week:

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (Proverbs 13:12, NIV).

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ...” (Acts 3:19, NIV).

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV).

Words To Cling to This Week:

“We won’t see revival unless we repent and relinquish the idea that our bodies are trophies, or that they’re up for consideration or scrutiny by our culture, or by every individual we encounter” (*Breaking Free from Body Shame*, Page 195).

Dig a Little Deeper:

This journey of breaking free from body shame is a decision both for right now and the future. It’s a decision to come into agreement with what God says and to *decide again* to live free when life happens. When sickness comes. When another hurtful comment lands on a tender place. When an upcoming celebration, trip or milestone tempts us to panic. We can choose to live free now, and then tomorrow, we can choose to live free again.

Psalms 145:16 says this about God: “You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing” (NIV). God is the only One who can interrupt chaotic or insecure moments in our lives and interject what we really long for: **lasting satisfaction**. Both the decision and the journey of breaking free leads to a life of being more satisfied by our Creator God than we could ever imagine.

Friend, He calls you good. And He is also more good, gracious and kind than you could ever imagine. You can trust Him.

I believe He makes
good things, and I
believe that because
He created my body,
it is a *good* creation.

JESS CONNOLLY