

Session 1 – Preface & Chapter 1 (“Surprise”)

Opening: (prayer)

This first session is a logical one for participant introductions in 3 areas:

1. Name and background (marital status, occupation, hobbies)
2. Something about your faith (background, conversion, praises or needs)
3. How you came to be in this group and what you anticipate from it.

Preface:

1. If *gender* and *sexuality* are God’s *first words* about us being made in His image, why haven’t those areas been a priority in Christian studies?
2. What is meant by a “*flight from the body*”? Share any examples of this you’ve seen?
3. What “taboos” have prevented Christians from learning about *body acceptance*?
4. How does the Incarnation make “*human-friendly*” a new benchmark for doctrinal truth?

Chapter 1:

1. Discuss the quote by E. Stanley Jones. How does it apply to the taboo of *body shame*?
2. If some cultures see no lewdness in breast exposure (see note #2, p.10), what creates it?
3. Why might a healthcare worker, who sees nudity routinely, be distracted by it in public?
4. What would go through your mind, if you saw the nude baptism scene in the story?
5. Have someone read aloud note #4 (p.15). Why might these historical facts be ignored?
6. Before swimsuits were invented (18th Century), all swimming was skinny-dipping. Anyone ever been skinny-dipping... and willing to share their story\feelings about it?
7. Even in cultures that treat nudity as *sexual*, it becomes *nonsexual* in certain contexts. Give examples. What is the real basis of the distinction: *context*, *perception* or *nude behavior*?
8. In a culture where seeing occasional or daily nudity has made naked bodies a common, nonsexual sight, what would it take to transform that culture into one like ours?

Session 2 – Chapter 2 (“Antiquity”)

Opening: (prayer)

How many have already read the whole book? If you re-read this section to prepare for this study, has a second reading given you a better grasp of the message being conveyed?

Chapter 2:

1. Discuss Madeleine L’Engle’s quote. Is *body acceptance* part of our memory loss?
2. How might cultural habits within the timeless “communion of saints” cause discord?
3. Read aloud Wikipedia’s quote about the *mikveh* in endnote #6. Why might John the Baptist have chosen the nude *mikveh* washing as symbolic of repentance?
4. After endnote #7 is read aloud, discuss the spiritual meaning of nudity in ancient baptism.
5. Gnosticism taught that an evil demi-god created matter and attached human spirits to it in the form of bodies. What are some Scriptural responses to this heresy?
6. Discuss how Gnosticism might have influenced the extreme forms of asceticism among early monks. How do we distinguish denying “*the flesh*” from despising “*the body*”?
7. Early Christians emphasized the hope of resurrection more than we do today. Why is that?
8. What assumptions about the body are common to both secular *pornography* and religious *prudery*? How does a prudish view of the body lead to a pornographic society?
9. What’s dangerous about allowing cultural taboos to become part of our Gospel message?
10. Why might Christian scholars skip over the early church history of nude baptisms?
11. What social factors in an ancient “clothed society” made public nudity *no big deal*?
12. Why does culturally hiding the body *create* rather than *prevent* problems with lust?
13. If a pornographic view of the body lays the foundation of a pornographic culture, how can the spread of *body acceptance* reverse it?

Session 3 – Chapter 3 (“Education”)

Opening: (prayer)

Discuss any insights or questions about last week’s study that anyone in the group may have had during the week between the two sessions.

Chapter 3:

1. Discuss the two quotes heading this chapter. If an ungodly *body shame* has replaced a godly *body acceptance*, what remedy does Merton see for it?
2. The old preacher in the story accuses us today of *not seeing* clear references to nonsexual public nudity in Scripture. Discuss what causes our blindness.
3. Discuss how a cultural *body acceptance* made *public nudity* a non-issue in the case of:
 - Mary talking to a naked gardener... or her naked Savior... (endnote #21)
 - Peter fishing in the nude... (endnote #22)
 - nude manual laborers and field workers... (endnote #23)
 - the poor whose only garment was being held as surety for a debt... (endnote #24)
 - Jesus washing His disciples feet naked... (endnote #25)
 - no tans-lines on women who had to do outdoor manual labor... (endnote #26)
4. Why was clothing’s high value in ancient times a factor in promoting *body acceptance*?
5. Discuss the three occasions of nudity associated with prophets in the Old Testament. How does the ancient fable of “the naked truth” (endnote #31) parallel naked prophesying?
6. What keeps us from visualizing King David’s half-naked dance, the bare body of Lazarus unwrapped after being raised, or the just-washed body of Dorcas prior to burial wrapping?
7. Read endnote #44 aloud. How does *modern modesty*’s body-hiding bring *body shame*? How does this modern definition sabotage Biblical modesty as an attitude of humility?
8. The word “naked” implies having previously been covered. Discuss why Satan would tell Adam and Eve that they were naked? Read and discuss endnote #42/62.
9. How has the invention of the bra worked against the Biblical concept of modesty?
10. Jesus died naked. How could removing His conventional loin cloth help *body acceptance*?

Session 4 – Chapter 4 (“Decision”)

Opening: (prayer)

Recall last session’s many Scriptural examples of nonsexual public nudity. What do they show about the closeness of ancient *body acceptance* to God’s original design of “*naked and without shame*”? How does modern *body shame* stand in relationship to the Creator’s original will?

Chapter 4:

1. Discuss the insights in Merton’s quote. How do they apply to the error of *body shame*?
2. How can being “*a child of [our] culture*” blind us to seeing realities in God’s Word?
3. Discuss what nudity in healthcare demonstrates. What makes it not a moral problem.
4. How does the commonness of outdoor bathing in ancient times cast a new light on the story of David’s temptation to commit adultery with Bathsheba?
5. Discuss the implications of the Scriptures in notes #51 and #52 in relationship to nudity. What is the source of temptation and sinful behavior, according to both James and Jesus?
6. How does clothing help maintain a sexual attraction to the body?
7. Why does a routine familiarity with nudity not erase a nonsexual appreciation of the body’s beauty? How might that same familiarity enhance that nonsexual appreciation?
8. Why did former missionaries think “*clothe the naked*” meant *hiding skin*, when it actually meant giving the naked poor warm clothes. How did their mistake morally backfire?
9. Someone read aloud endnote #62, and let the group discuss the implications.
10. How can the church’s and society’s *sexualization* of the body lead Christians to experience double-mindedness about nudity itself, such as in nonsexual healthcare situations?
11. Again, someone read aloud endnote #66, then discuss how a decision to get involved in an art class on figure drawing might work to end the double-mindedness just mentioned.
12. When the truth of *body acceptance* confronts the *body shame* of our upbringing, what are some new attitudes or practical activities that can help us change? (Participants should be encouraged to share what they envision personally.)

Session 5 – Chapter 5 (“Calling”)

Opening: (prayer)

Last session concluded with discussing practical attitudes and actions that might be needed for a personal adoption of *body acceptance*. Allow time to share any personal success in that area.

Chapter 5:

1. Discuss the impact of John Stott’s quote as it relates to scrutinizing the church’s modern legacy of *body shame* and how it is to be reformed.
2. Discuss how our physical embodiment affects our understanding of *being human*?
3. What does the human nature’s unity of body and spirit imply about true spirituality?
4. Some Christians describe the body as “*a shell*.” Discuss how such language clouds a view of God’s intention for humanity in creation and in a future bodily resurrection?
5. Christian hostility toward *nudism* has a long history, yet nudists are experts on principles of *body acceptance*. Discuss this, and let anyone share personal stories of such hostility.
6. Discuss, “Widespread religious support for a demonic lie cannot alter its falsehood.” (p.64)
7. Discuss another quote: “. . . being accepted in your humble nakedness, by friends and family and others, is healing. It breaks the bondage to ungodly shame over the size or shape or blemishes of the body that God has given you.” (also p.64)
8. Someone read aloud endnote #74. Why is public *repentance* necessary? What are some things the church could do as *restitution* for the damage done by religious *body shame*?
9. Someone read the last paragraph starting at the bottom of p.65. Discuss the power of a man-taught legalism to produce a “wounded conscience.” How can *truth* heal the wound?
10. *Body acceptance* has all the earmarks of a prophetic message that both church and society need to hear and heed, yet why might both resist and persecute the prophet bringing it?
11. Despite *body shame*’s legalistic precautions, life usually offers inadvertent episodes of seeing others naked or being seen naked. Allow a time for openly sharing and discussing any such episodes experienced by the group.

Session 6 – Chapter 6 (“Encounter”)

Opening: (prayer)

We’ve learned mentally about *body acceptance*. This section deals with applying this learning in a real encounter with nonsexual social nudity. Before exploring that situation, discuss the differences between *studying about* a trade or profession and *being directly involved* in on-the-job training. What are the *difficulties* and what are the *benefits* of each mode of learning?

Chapter 6:

1. What does Kierkegaard’s quote show about swimming in the past? What does it show about nakedness as a spiritual metaphor?
2. While *meeting* the ancient church was fantasy, this modern *meeting* is more realistic. What would be your first thought on seeing people skinny-dipping at a secluded location?
3. Discuss why youth in Western cultures might stare at gender-distinctive body parts that youth in a naked culture would ignore. What would make such staring a sinful act?
4. What does society and the church assume when young people are nude in front of each other? How might nonsexual skinny-dipping challenge those expectations?
5. Someone read aloud the paragraph on p.75 starting with, “When I was a nursing student...,” and discuss any point the group feels is crucial or interesting.
6. Discuss how *body shame* is unknown in all of nature except among humans. Why might this explain a sense some have expressed about “feeling still dressed” when nude?
7. Why is clothing unable to prevent *body shame*? How does it contribute to *body shame*?
8. Some claim their poor *body image* was healed after feeling accepted in a situation of nonsexual social nudity. Why might this be so?
9. Someone read aloud from the top of p.80 to the end of the chapter, and then discuss:
 - how *body acceptance* instills respect for the bodies of others
 - how *body acceptance* tends to make us focus on people rather than body parts
 - how might nonsexual social nudity help “clean the mind” rather than defile it?

Session 7 – Chapter 7 (“Mission”)

Opening: (prayer)

In the last chapter, what Jason learned at a nudist resort was validated by the experiences of the four students. While this validation made the concept of *body acceptance* practical, we might still feel prejudiced against nudism. After exploring the group’s feelings along these lines, have someone read aloud endnote #70 and discuss why nudist *body acceptance* has Christian roots.

Chapter 7:

1. Evelyn Underhill, a great spiritual writer, understand the implications of Christianity being an “incarnational” faith. What does her quote have to do with body acceptance?
2. Someone read aloud the last paragraph on p.83 and discuss Rhoda’s italicized evaluation.
3. Hollywood’s use of nudity and the modern church’s *body shame* are based on the same pornographic view of the body, yet they are in conflict? What is the basis of the conflict?
4. Why were the experiences of the students in conflict with both Hollywood and the church?
5. Discuss how to answer the two hypothetical objections to the Gospel that are based on the fact the Bible teachers have erroneously mixed *body shame* into the message of Christ:
 - the “history professor” (someone read aloud the paragraph on p.86 that ends on p.87)
 - the “European vacation” experience (someone read aloud the 2nd paragraph on p.88)
6. Someone read aloud Prov. 18:13. How has uneducated Christian “suspicion” (p.89) led to a legalistic stance, and even persecution, against those practicing *body acceptance*?
7. Someone read aloud the paragraph on p.90 starting with, “You know, we’re just like those lepers...” Why does discovering *body acceptance* carry a responsibility to share it?
8. To reform Christian thinking from cultural *body shame* to Biblical *body acceptance*, why is educating the church about the heresy of Gnosticism a good place to start?
9. How might a Christian embracing body acceptance open a door of opportunity to share Christ with: 1) artists; 2) nudists; 3) naked people groups (read aloud endnote #56)?
10. If we have an obligation to inform others about *body acceptance*, how can learning from the 3 groups mentioned in the last question help equip us to do share more effectively?

Session 8 – Appendix A - Poems

Opening: (prayer)

How has poetry, in popular song lyrics or in hymns for worship, shaped minds? In this session, be aware of how these poems review *body acceptance* or extend its implications.

1. **“Pornography”:**

- After the poem is read aloud, ask the group for favorite lines and what makes them so.
- How is pornography’s objectification of the body an attack on personhood?

2. **“The Divine Story of Naked Glory”:**

- After the poem is read aloud, have the group look for lines that show how the Biblical story confirms the concepts of *body acceptance* and discuss these.

3. **“Christians and Nakedness”:**

- In a circle, have each person read one stanza, pausing to discuss these points, or others:
 - the benefits of *body acceptance* and the liabilities of *body shame*
 - how the stanza reviews historical or cultural facts brought up in the novelette

4. **“I Sing the Body Immortal”:**

- Before reading this poem, discuss how much or little the church has emphasized the incarnational nature of humans and the centrality of bodily resurrection in our salvation.
- After it’s read aloud, solicit comments or reactions on the poem’s impact.

5. **“Nurses and Nudity”:**

- After it’s read aloud, share memories or feelings that this poem’s context elicits. How do art and health-care provide a dose of realism for a society immersed in sexual fantasy?

6. **“Origin of Body Shame”:**

- After it’s read aloud, discuss the role that Satan had in original *body shame*. Why might those religiously committed to *body shame* wish to ignore or deny a satanic influence?

7. **“Woman”:**

- Satan targeted Eve. How do men fail to defend women from his ongoing attack?
- The phrase, “let your church repent her rape” is strong language. Discuss whether or not it is justified.

Session 9 – Appendix B - Essays

Opening: (prayer)

These two essays explore how nudity in health-care offers a transition to *body acceptance* from the *body-shame* culture. Since the writer, too, was raised with *body shame*, try identifying with him as his nursing encounters with “the naked truth” changed his thinking.

1. What About the Hospital Nudity Problem?

- A. After both the 1st paragraph on p.149 and Matt 15:19 are read aloud, discuss how Christ’s focus on the heart is sabotaged by a religious focus on what the eyes see.
- B. Read the 2nd paragraph from the bottom of p.149. Name some of these “social problems”?
- C. Why does routine familiarity with nudity not cause a “numbness” to it? How could the same familiarity allow a better appreciation of God’s design of anatomy?

2. My View on Nakedness

- A. In relationship to body shame, why is it important for the church to remember that it once persecuted astronomers who discovered that Earth was not the center of the universe?
- B. In what ways has our society “abnormally ‘sexualized’ the human body”? How does that sexualization relate to the church’s promotion of *body shame*?
- C. If “complete exposure short-circuits the imagination,” what does a bathing suit do?
- D. Read the 2 paragraphs at the bottom of p.155 and top of p.156. How do the 2 conclusions about the “*body taboo*” imply the involvement of satanic activity?
- E. Why would God be to blame, if the sight of the body’s anatomy itself caused lust? How does the body as His temple and as the embodiment of His image clash with that idea?
- F. How does the *body taboo* create a moral stumbling block by hiding the body? How does it create unrealistic expectations of nudity that the naked body can never really provide?
- G. Why might a naked-people group see our *body shame* as a form of immaturity or insanity?
- H. If the *body taboo*, spread by the church, is responsible for the success of pornography in our culture, what can the church do to repent and repair its mistake?

Session 10 – Appendix B - Essays

Opening: (prayer)

In the novelette, the author realizes, “just how thoroughly I was *a child of my culture*.” Has this group-study brought that same realization? Wearing culture-colored glasses shapes how we see life. These two essays help us remove *body-shame* lenses and to adopt God’s view of the body.

3. Teaching God's Design for BREASTS

- A. Has anyone ever heard a sermon from the Isaiah 66 quote? Why might that be?
- B. If “*shad*” in “*El Shaddai*” means “nursing breast,” how does God view women’s breasts?
- C. If the *nursing breast* is God’s Self-portrait, who would wish breasts hidden from sight?
- D. How are church *cry-rooms* and *nursing blankets* “deceptively *suggestive* that breasts are naturally *seductive*”? How could open breastfeeding in church services benefit believers?
- E. If we began “to honor physical gender distinctions as part of personal identity,” how would it remove the mental platform used by pornography?
- F. Why does the duty to teach a proper view of the visible breast fall on the pulpit? How can nursing mothers be the best advocates for God’s truth about breasts?

4. The Pornographic View of the Body

- A. Read Kennedy’s quote aloud. How does it precisely address the deception of body shame?
- B. What is a “pornographic view of the body”? What shows that it isn’t part of human nature?
- C. Ask group volunteers to summarize how *body acceptance* was exemplified in: 1) *Egypt*, 2) *Greece*, 3) *Rome*, 4) *early church*, 5) *pre-WWII Japan*. Then, discuss how an absence of private bathrooms and swimsuits in ancient times promoted culture-wide *body acceptance*.
- D. Describe areas of our culture where seeing nudity or reference to body parts is accepted as nonsexual. If this is true, why is there a persistence of *body shame* in our culture?
- E. How are both a prudish and pornographic view of the body identical? Why do all methods of fighting porn addiction fail when based on concepts that embrace *body shame*?
- F. How does *God’s view of the body* silence most religious arguments for *body shame*?

Session 11 – Appendix B - Essays

Opening: (prayer)

These last 2 essays are used for review and exhortation in this session. Some groups will make it their conclusion, and that's okay. But it was designed to prepare for an optional 12th session *practicum* which offers a real-life encounter with *nonsexual social nudity*, plus a sharing time for exploring personal perceptions, feelings and insights. So, in this session, the discussion will be less directed, allowing a prayerful, internal seeking of God's leading either for each person's next practical step as this study ends, or for a decision about participating in the *practicum*. Despite these weeks of studying God's view of the body and wishing to see with His eyes, a double-minded separation can stubbornly persist. The *practicum* has amazing power to dispel *body shame* permanently and to solidify *body acceptance*. During the session, reflect on the old preacher's words in the story: "If you are morally unable to bare your body to bathe beside us, then the dividing wall in your mind will stay where it is..." But remember also his precaution not to dive into a naked skinny-dip "unless you can do it before the Lord in good faith."

5. Rebuilding a Godly View of the Unclad Human Body

- A. Circling around the group, with each person taking a paragraph at a time, read the entire essay aloud. BUT, before each new paragraph, anyone can interrupt the flow of reading to share an insight or raise a question. When discussion subsides, move to the next paragraph.
- B. When the entire essay has been read, allow discussion. But before moving to the next essay, let the group spend a few moments in silence meditation praying the question: "Lord, what is Your will for me as far as *body shame* and *body acceptance*?"

6. Will You Undress Before God?

- A. Circle around in reading aloud this essay as before, but this time, jot down insights or questions and save them for discuss after the whole essay is read.
- B. After the essay is read, let those who wish share their thoughts for discussion.
- C. Finally, let each person in the group declare their intention to attend or not attend the optional 12th session. Each should feel free to share or not share their reasons for attending or not attending.
- D. Close in a prayer for the whole group's further growth in body acceptance.

FOR THOSE ATTENDING THE 12th SESSION PRACTICUM:

A good mental preparation for this experience is to re-read Chapters 6 & 7 in the book.

Session 12 – Nonsexual Social Nudity Practicum

Opening: (prayer)

Except for the expense, the ideal location for this practicum would be at a nudist resort. But wherever this session is held, privacy and freedom from disruption is important. Just as with nude models for art classes—where only art students are allowed—the location for this session should be isolated and secure from the presence of those who are not in the study group.

1. Being in a Context of Nonsexual Social Nudity

- A. Before undressing, preview a few thoughts to keep in mind as you go into this practicum:
 - Stay aware of your feelings, trying to remember them for the discussion afterwards.
 - Always remember that you're looking at the Holy Spirit's temple made in God's image.
 - Staring—often discouraged—is as crucial here as in an art class where close observation is mandatory. Make an artist's effort to keenly observe the bodily identity of each other.
- B. Disrobe quickly (to undermine habits that treat undressing as erotic), and stand in a circle silently facing each other for about a minute. Then, one by one, each person walk to the center and very slowly rotate once in place before returning to their place.
- C. Next, with hands joined, each person share a problem needing prayer. When the one on that person's right has prayed for his or her problem, continue clockwise, until everyone's needs have been shared and prayed for. Afterwards sing a familiar Christian song or hymn before getting dressed and returning to seats for the sharing time.

2. Sharing Feelings, Insights, and Takeaways

- A. Discuss the feelings experienced when *first* observing and being observed in the circle.
- B. What thoughts came to mind when being focused upon while rotating in the center?
- C. During the prayer time, did anyone lose the awareness of being naked? Why might this be?
- D. Share your feelings while singing together? Were there worries that the prayer and singing were sacrilegious? Conversely, was there a heightened spiritual awareness? If so, why?
- E. Discuss any worries, assumptions or expectations before the naked encounter and how they were either eased, changed or fulfilled by the end of the nudity episode.
- F. What is a lesson learned or personal takeaway from this practicum?