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The *DISTORTED LENS* of *SHEILA'S SHAME*

DISTORTION: *"If they really knew how horrible I am. . ."*

As long as she could remember, Sheila had been the target of peers bullying. Her skinny frame and fear of others made it impossible to feel confident; she was always last to be chosen when teams were formed in class. Sheila needed braces on her teeth, but her family could not afford them. Nor was she able to dress in the latest trends – most of her clothes were hand-me-downs, often zippers were replaced by safety pins. Besides that, something happened to her that she never told anyone. Between the ages of 7 and 10 years old, during the summer months while visiting her aunt and uncle's farm. When her mother and aunt would go into town, she stayed on the farm to play. However, her uncle would put her on his lap and touch her in her private area. Sheila recalls feeling conflicted, on the one hand, she felt shame, and yet, on the other hand, it felt good. There was no one she could really trust; she tried to tell her mother – once - but she was sworn to secrecy so as not to upset the family. She learned early in life that it was her responsibility to accommodate others.

Sheila longed to be part of a group, any group. In high school, she believed her "*luck*" had changed when she met and fell in love with Sheldon. The sense of belonging was of greater value to Sheila rather than the ill-treatment she received by Sheldon. In effort not to lose the only relationship she had, Sheila found herself compromising her standards to acquiesce Sheldon's desires, after all, she loved him, and he loved her. In high school, Sheila discovered she was pregnant. Sheldon abandoned her upon learning the news and Sheila learned she had been parcel to a bet – a bet, that Sheldon could persuade her to sleep with him.

This was emotionally devastating, Sheila withdrew money from her savings account, made an appointment, and drove herself to a clinic where she received an abortion. She carried her "*secret*" through her adult life. Her pain is shrouded, yet, the inner shame is unbearable. Though she puts on a happy face for others, inside, she despises herself. Serious bouts with depression have often left her despondent, withdrawn, wishing she would die. She tries to "make up" for her "mistakes," but does not believe she will ever have (or deserve) God's favor. Her life is a perpetual negative cycle. She is dutiful and ultra-responsible to those around her, but she rarely experiences joy.

She prays, cries out to God and has asked Him countless times to forgive her, to make her life new, but the depression continues. She tries to pull herself up, to have hope, but every time she thinks she is going to turn a corner, she finds it is a dead end. Sheila doesn't believe life will ever get better and, while there is an ache in her heart to live, she feels she died before she ever had a chance, "*There is no hope for me,*" is Sheila's internal mantra.

REFLECTIONS for DISCUSSION

What type of hope is there for Sheila? _____

What would *you* tell her? _____

How do *you* view her situation? _____

Is your *life lens* (view) different than Sheila's? _____

What makes it so? _____

Does your *life lens* (view) change Sheila's circumstances, experience, situation? _____

If not, then how could you have a different view? _____

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