

## QUESTIONS ON *PRINCE OF TIDES*

“In Greco-Roman culture, shame is primarily repugnant in the external sense, as disgraceful in words and deeds or in appearances and afflictions in the sociological sense. It is not merely a matter of what one has done, but who one is, how one appears in the public eye. Similarly, in New Testament usage, the sense of being put to shame is more pronounced than that of being ashamed. One conceals things of which one is ashamed, because if they are discovered, one’s social standing is jeopardized.”<sup>1</sup>

If you are familiar with the phrase “poor white trash” you may understand something of the shame that people feel when they live in an environment in which “who you are” is highly important. (Even if “who you are” is only attributable to the accidental luck of being born into the “right” or “wrong” family.) A key to the revealing of secrets and the healing from shame, is the exposure of lies that have been told, even to oneself, to protect the secret.

1. As you watched the story unfold, what kinds of emotions did you experience?
2. What did Tom’s mother want out of life? What was her “motto”? What was her greatest fear? (demonstrated several times but especially after the “Callenwold” incident)
3. What incident causes Tom Wingo to see a psychiatrist?
4. “Marker events” is a phrase coined by Gail Sheehy in the book Passages. She says that a “marker event” is a happening in one’s life that is so significant to the person that it becomes a marker by which we measure time-especially in terms of our life passage. We might say for example “that was the year we got married” or “that I started working for such and such a company”, or “that was the year I broke my leg”. Marker events can be—
  - personal (an unexpected or abrupt end to a relationship)
  - societal (the Trade Tower catastrophe)
  - institutional (a graduation)
  - cultural (Cinco de Mayo, a bar mitzvah)
  - familial (wedding, birth)
  - a. What marker events does Tom recall as he and Dr. Lowenstein try to discover the roots of Savannah’s problems? How did these events shape the way he views himself and the way he responds to people who try to get close to him?
  - b. Is there a marker event that you consider to be of fairly great significance in your own life?
5. When Tom talks about “The Southern Way”, what does he mean?.
6. What is meant by the reference to Tom being “Savannah’s voice”? Is that a “twin” thing?

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jewett, “*Saint Paul Returns to the Movies*”, William. Erdmans, (1999) p26.

7. Why do you suppose that Tom has never gotten counseling help to resolve his own trauma?
8. What sorts of things can happen to people when they become emotionally crippled due to something that happened to them over which they had no control?
9. Is shame always bad/dysfunctional?
10. What does Jesus teach us about shame through His interactions with people in the gospels?
11. What issues of professional ethics are violated in this film?
12. What “spiritual, or pseudo-spiritual” message do you think the creator of the film is trying to make by having Wingo and Lowenstein have an affair? How do you think the viewer is expected to respond emotionally? (Think about the last scene when Tom is driving home across the bridge.)
13. To what extent do you think that “affairs” and “romantic love” have replaced commitment to and faith in God as normalcy in our society?