

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Shame Slithers In”
2nd in the series, *Scorning Shame*¹
Genesis 3:1-6
August 11, 2019

You were made to live in joy and creativity.
This is what it was like in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve lived there in
deep kinship with the body of the earth
from which they came,
and in deep connection and oneness with the love of God
whose breath they breathed,
and in complete intimacy, and openness, and connection with one another
they were bone of one another’s bones and flesh of one another’s flesh.

And there they lived “naked and unashamed,” the scriptures said.
They were able to live completely free, and open, and vulnerable,
without any hint of judgement, or criticism, or shame.

It’s the essential foundation for joy and creativity. The more we are free to be fully ourselves, the more we are able to live vulnerably and at the same time intimately connected,
the more we are able to live in joy and creativity.

But it is into this joy, and creativity, and innocent openness that shame always desires to slither into our lives. In fact, when we are being most creative and free is the very same time that shame can do its greatest damage.

Imagine a toddler painting a picture for her Dad’s birthday. She’s open, and creative, and joyful. But Dad’s had a bad day at work. And when he gets home... all he sees is the mess all over the kitchen and all over his daughter... who has just run up for a hug but got paint on his clothes.

“Don’t touch me! Why are you always such a mess!?” He says in irritation.

Of course, he doesn’t realize what he’s done. And she... she doesn’t have the words to explain what just happened... but you can probably imagine what’s just happened: a fundamental emotional shift just washed over her body.

She lowers her head. There’s a pulling back... and a tightness in her chest.

Maybe there is an uncomfortable fullness in her head, and a wave of an intensified blushing effect courses over her entire body.

And the joy, and creativity, and openness that she was living in...
is sheared off... just a bit.

¹ This series, including the opening examples of this sermon, is inspired by Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015).

These kinds of simple moments happened to every one of us as kids...and those of us who are parents... all have regrets of causing them.

But, I'm not using this example to shame all of us... but to understand that shame is part of the human condition. And it is most powerful... in those moments when we are living openly and creatively...

when our state of mind... is one of unsuspecting, trusting anticipation as we move forward in some endeavor. We are simply doing what we joyfully—or at the very least, unconcernedly—intend to be doing, such as coloring, or running through the house, or throwing a baseball near windows, or asking for a new bike, or writing a proposal for the supervisor, or entering a romantic relationship, [or suggesting an intimate night with your spouse,] or taking a risk with a new career... [or opening up to God in a new way ...or sharing a part of your spiritual story with someone].

Joyful, creative adventure has no age limit.²

And it's into this place of joy, and creativity, and vulnerability that we were made for... that the Evil One will try to slither into our lives...

in a crafty subtle way,
with its most powerful poison: shame.

Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. It's the culmination of the creation story in Genesis 2. They were living in the joy and creativity of God and charged with caring for the garden.

And as I said,
they lived in deep kinship with the body of the earth from which they came,
and deep oneness with the spirit of God... whose breath they breathed,
and in profound oneness and intimacy with one another...

And into this joyful, creative, open life... that shame slithers in.

The serpent was **crafty**, the scriptures say. It was darkly shrewd. And the way it enters this moment tells a lot about how evil uses shame to enter our stories. It often comes to us in crafty, subtle ways.... so that we might not even recognize it.

The serpent slithers up to Eve... and begins to innocently ask questions...

But if you're paying attention, it's obvious the serpent isn't looking for the facts or the answers. No, it's real desire... is to **fool Eve**. This is its intention.

² Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 65.

And that's always one of shame's first goals. It desires to **make you feel the fool**... because to be fooled is to feel shame... even if it's only shame on the subtlest unconscious level. To be made a fool, or to begin to believe we have been foolish... is to re-color your story with a cloudy dye of shame.

You see what shame is, is always an emotional shift that is trying to recolor the story of our lives. It's not a cognitive shift. It may come as a result of some information you learn, it may be triggered by some cognitive idea.

But shame itself never comes from the cognitive side of our brains. It's always an emotional shift ...that washes over our cognition. It's like a cloudy dye... recoloring the picture you have of yourself. ³

In fact, this is how emotions work. According to neuro-scientists, emotions wash over our cognition. They color the facts in a particular way.

Which is why all of us, even the most analytical person you know, **all of us**, are more driven by our emotional response to things than we realize.

What we remember,
how we remember it, and how we tell that story,
and how we respond to and live our lives... are all colored by the emotional content that is washed over the facts. That's why you'll hear historians say there is no objective version of history.

Now, this isn't necessarily bad. But it is how we are created. Our emotions are a powerful part of our lives shaping who we are, but they do color how we see ourselves and our world.

And so, since the very beginning, Evil has been wielding shame to recolor our story.

So, the serpent here slithers up and begins to ask questions: "Did God really tell you that you couldn't eat the fruit of any of these trees?"

It's a slippery question... a little bit of lies and a little bit of truth mixed together. The serpent is crafty... trying to cast doubt over Eve's memory....

"No," Eve says. "That's not it. Not quite. We can eat of the fruit, it's just that one in the center. We can't eat from that one... or even touch it... because we will die."

Already the details are getting a little fuzzy for Eve. God never said not to touch it. But the snake isn't interested in the facts. The snake is interested in shame.

And I love the way Nadia Boltz-Webber retells the snake's response... as if the snake is a gossiping neighbor on Real Housewives of Eden County.

³ Thompson, 51.

“Shut up! God said that? I mean, I know you guys are friends, but girl, you totally won’t die. God only said that because God knows that if you eat from that tree you would be like God, knowing good from evil. It actually makes me feel sorry for God, you know?”⁴⁵

And suddenly there is a whole cloud of confusion coming over Eve.

And apparently over Adam, too... because verse 6 says he’s standing right there... Apparently, he’s so confused he can’t find a single thing worth saying. So please, don’t go blaming this on Eve. At least she is speaking up.

But for both of them...a cloud of confusion enters their story... calling into question their memory of what God said... and what they thought was true. Have they been deceived?

And suddenly, for the first time, there is a voice in Adam and Eve’s life... calling into question God’s loving intention for them.

You see, under those crafty words... was another message:

God can’t really be trusted, because...

[slowly] God doesn’t actually have your best interest in mind.

Can you really trust God? I mean... come on. Do you really believe God has your best interest in mind?

It’s a little cloudy line that gets whispered into all our ears from time to time.

Your finances get tight. Maybe your career isn’t going well... and it whispers in your ear at night: *Can you really trust God? I mean... come on.*

Or something completely unexpected disrupts your hopes and dreams for the future, and it whispers in your ear: *Do you really believe God has your best interest in mind?*

Or someone you know, and love gets sick, maybe they even die... and it’s not even a whisper anymore, is it? Now it’s just there:

What did I tell you? Don’t be a fool. Do you really think you matter that much to God? You better just start watching out for yourself.

It’s shame’s way of working into our story... clouding what God has said and done... and trying to make us feel the fool.

It can come in all kinds of ways into our lives... but it especially tries to come when we’re living in open, creative, trusting joy. And shame starts whispering:

“Don’t be a fool, daughters of Eve. Don’t be a fool, sons of Adam.”

This is the message that shame gives us.

⁴ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 131.

It casts doubt on whether or not we are beloved,
and it asks us to trust... just ourselves....
so that we begin to pull away from God and away from others...
trusting in our own judgement about what is good and what is evil.

In fact, I think if you get to the heart of what the serpent is doing, the heart of how Evil tries to wield shame into our stories, it comes down to two things:

1. It casts doubt on whether or not you are beloved... Calling into question everything you were taught to believe about Jesus loves me, this I know...
and amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
and John 3:16, for God so loved the world,
and Romans 8, there is now, no condemnation for us in God
and nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Shame casts a cloud of fuzzy doubt on all that... suggesting that it's not all that simple.... and you're kind of silly if you believe all that.
Shame casts doubt on whether or not you are beloved by God and others.
But that's not all shame does.

2. Shame does that by suggesting that deep down, fundamentally you are not enough.... "See that fruit Eve? See this tasty fruit Adam? I know you're kind of naïve right now. But if you eat this... well. You'll be just like God! And you'll know... what's good and what isn't. You won't be so naïve..."

It is Evil's sly little way of trying to tell you:
What you are now... Is Not Enough.
What you have now... Is Not Enough
What you know now... Is Not Enough.
And all that work you've been doing... It's not Enough either.

Because Fundamentally: YOU ARE NOT ENOUGH.

To be human is to be infected with the poison of shame. And what I hope you're beginning to see now, is how this poison works its way into all our stories.... in the most subtle and crafty ways.

Certainly, shame can overpower us from significant traumas, but it is also always working its way into all our stories in the smallest ways, over and over, killing us with a thousand papercuts.

One Psychologist puts it this way: "*Shame does not limit itself to obvious parts of our story. It is not **only** the voice of our coach telling us we are the worst free-throw shooter she has ever seen. [It is not **only** the taunting of middle school bullies.] It is not restricted to the memory of the rape.*

*No, it lives [hidden] in our mind waiting for unexpected opportunities to color the feeling of the moment with its [fuzzy] nondescript **residue** that we would barely identify as having anything to do with [the moment]."*⁶

⁶ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 86.

You see, it's often in the everyday moments that shame asks the most subtle questions:

Did God really tell you that...

You know, if you really mattered...

You know, if they really cared...

But well, I hate to be harsh, but face it, you are not enough.

And before we know it, we're biting, and shame starts to cloud the moment

and the poison is working its way into our souls...

and it starts to disintegrate our relationships...

It draws us inward... disconnecting us from

the body of the earth and our own body,

disconnecting us from one another

and disconnecting us from God.

And well, look at what happens when that starts.

But today, I want to invite you to simply begin to notice and recognize that crafty voice...
wherever it's slithering into your story.

Where and when do you hear it saying:

"Maybe you're not beloved... after all."

Where and when do you hear it whispering:

"You are just not enough."

[pause]

It's those very places that you are invited to bring forward with you to this table of grace.

You see, even though we've eaten from the fruit of shame,

God created another meal.... with an antidote that can wash back over us and flow through us
with new life.

It's a meal where we can bring all our shame,

and all our inadequacies...

and come as one body... to eat and drink deeply of the bread of life and cup of salvation,
and have our stories redeemed from the cloud of shame.

**Here at this table we're invited to discover that God's love is much deeper and stronger than
we have begun to imagine.**

**And here at this table you can find that God's grace is enough...
even for you.**

Let's pray:

O God, help us to recognize that crafty voice... and listen to it no more.

And where shame is already clouding our story...

We bring it to you.

Come and heal us in your love.

This in Christ we pray.