

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Descending Into Hell”**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> in the series, *Scorning Shame*<sup>1</sup>**  
**Genesis 3:6-13**  
**August 18, 2019**

C. S. Lewis imagines Hell as this vast, grey, empty city,  
with row upon row of empty houses.<sup>2</sup>

Its only occupants are scattered on the outer edges. Because you see, when someone moves into the neighborhood, some conflict eventually happens... and both people respond, not with the hard work of reconciliation...

but instead... by simply moving away...  
by building another house farther out and away from everyone else so they can... “live in peace...”  
and not have to deal with all those annoying distractions we call people.

In other words, Hell... is really an ongoing journey of driving ourselves into total isolation. It’s the breakdown of all the relationships we were made for:

relationships with one another  
and relationship with God,  
and relationship with the earth.

Rather than working to heal our oneness with these relationships, Hell invites us to just move a little further out... where we can be more comfortable...

It’s just so much easier to leave than to love your neighbor. And so, we do it, don’t we? We pull away instead of lean in, especially when things get hard.

**And according to Lewis, every time we do that... every time we move farther away... Hell gets a little bit bigger.**

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This is our third week in this series on shame...

what it is and how it works...

And this week, we’re looking at its results.

And what we just heard from Genesis 3... was the birth of Hell.

You’ll remember:

Our story began with the man and the woman living in deep relationship and kinship with the body of the earth... from which their bodies came.

And they lived in deep oneness and openness with the presence of God, whose Spirit they breathed with every breath.

And they lived in deep, open, vulnerable relationship with each other... They were bone of one another’s bone and flesh of one another’s flesh, the scriptures say.

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2015).

And there they lived together, naked and unashamed.

This is God's intention for them and for us. We are made for relationships. There is a deep longing in all of us to be known and loved... and to know another and love another in the deepest way... without any shame or judgement breaking that down.

**And as I've been saying, this combination... of vulnerability and deep connection... is the soil in which joy and creativity can grow in our lives... and in our world.**

And there is a deep longing in us for that, too!  
Something in us knows this is what we were made for.

So, we thirst for deep connections within our families and our churches... and even our schools and workplaces.

We want to be able to explore new things without always worrying about how we'll look when we make mistakes.

We want to walk into a room without the anxiety of not being enough,  
not being attractive enough, or interesting enough, or funny enough.

We want to go to school and learn because we yearn for discovery, not because we're afraid we won't get into the best college... just another reminder that "I am not enough."

We want to parent our children in ways that provide opportunities for them to grow and become all God created them to be... without the understated message that "they are not meeting our expectations."

We want to tackle meaningful hard conversations about sexuality, and race, and economics, and gun violence, and immigration... without bracing against the onslaught of accusations or judgements about our character.

In our political life, we long for our politicians to govern with curiosity, with justice and mercy, rather than being governed by fear of the shaming vulnerability of losing power.<sup>3</sup>

We humans... want to live in the joy and creativity we were made for... but it is a joy and creativity that comes the more we can live with open vulnerability... without the ongoing fear of shame.

**By the end of Genesis 2, the man and the woman... they lived naked and unashamed....  
which is to say they lived in a world where they always anticipated joy. They assumed  
they were loved and didn't worry about it, in the same way they didn't think about the air they  
breathed.**

**It was just there. It was assumed.**

**They lived "naked and unashamed."**

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<sup>3</sup> Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 113.

But then, the voice of evil slithers in to sheer off that joy... and uses shame as its tool. Evil casts a cloudy dye of doubt over the picture you have of your relationship with God, and over the picture you have of yourself.

*"Did God really tell you that? Don't be so foolish..."*

And slowly we stop assuming that we are loved after all.

*Maybe God doesn't love us as much as we thought.*

And gradually we're told that our eyes are closed to the real world... but if we eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, that is, the fruit of judging what is good and what is evil... then we can be like God.

**"Because, honestly, right now... as you are, well, you're missing out.**

**You're kind of naïve.**

**As you are: you are not enough." You just don't realize it.**

This is the message of shame. And so, I ended last week with an invitation for you... to begin to listen for what that crafty voice of shame sounds like in your ear. And I want to remind you of this practice again, because it's so hard for us to recognize sometimes. But it's so critical that we do.

So, when and where in your life have you heard a voice whispering:

***Do you really trust God?***

***Don't be too foolish...***

***Do you really think you belong...?***

***Don't be too foolish.***

Can you learn to hear the crafty voice trying to cast a cloudy dye of shame over the stories you once believed about your life... over the things you assumed to be true...

in order to convince you that fundamentally: You Are Not Enough.?

We've got to learn to recognize the sound of that voice...

Because it comes slithering into our lives all the time. And it sounds a little bit different in each of our ears. It's a crafty little voice.

**And it can even sound like the voice of someone who's just trying to have your back...**

**and make sure you're taking care of yourself**

**...when the honest truth is... it's the voice that is trying to poison your heart... with shame.**

**Eve, and then Adam, take the fruit... because it "looked desirable" ... It looked like a good thing.**

But when they did, they stepped out of their state of "we-ness" (their state of assumed relationship with God and each other and the earth)... and they stepped into that dark, blind alley of **me-ness**, of independence...

And that's where we find ourselves today:

A front row seat to what happens as the poison of shame works its way into our bloodstream.

There are some clear patterns that are the result of shame that we find in this ancient story... and we need to begin to recognize it in our own lives.

When shame comes into the story, what we see for Adam and Eve is that all their relationships begin to fracture apart... and the light, and joy, and creativity they once knew, is replaced with the cloud of judgment, blaming, and criticism.

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Let's look at how this unfolds, starting with verse 7. **"Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."**

The first thing that happens is that their "eyes were open." They are looking around in a little different way... and suddenly they were aware of one another's nakedness... and their own... and they felt vulnerable like never before.

[playfully here]

I mean, imagine the conversation in that moment.

Adam watches Eve grab another apple and speaks up: "Umm... Eve, you might not want to eat too many of those apples. I've noticed you're starting to put on a few pounds."

Her eyes tighten in anger just a bit. And glancing below the waist she shoots back, "Well maybe, but I'm not nearly as unattractive as... well... *that!*"

And fig leaves are all they have left to cope.

This is what happens when we eat from the fruit of judgment. In fact, the more we find ourselves judging others... the more we end up covering parts of ourselves... because on a subconscious level... the one we're really judging... is almost always our very own self.

There's something about me... that I just don't like. In fact, there are a lot of somethings... and, let's be honest, God can't like them either.

My gluttonous tendencies...

My hoarding, lust, envying, criticizing, self.

My insecurities.

I can't stand these... and so I push them back down.

**I hide the ugly parts of me under a fig leaf, so I don't have to see them... hoping others won't notice them either.**

**And you can bet that if I see these things in you... they will be the only things I can see, and I may even just let you know. Because... the more I hate them about myself, the more I can't stand them in you.**

It's what psychologists call "projection" and what Genesis 3 describes as fig leaves and loincloths.

From the very beginning, we've never been very good at handling this power of judging between good and evil. It almost always tastes like judging, criticizing shame.... that makes us start to hide. And the fig leaves were just the start.

In the very next verse, they are hiding from God. They heard God coming, and they hid, verse 8 says.

And this is one of the critical things to notice about shame.

***Hiding is the most natural response to shame, especially the toxic kind of shame.***

And, let's face it. We are hiding in all kinds of ways every day.

We hide the parts of ourselves from our families

that we don't think will be accepted.

We hide from one another here at church...

afraid that some part of ourselves isn't quite holy enough for this crowd.

We hide from our neighbors.

We hide from our co-workers.

We hide, not just because we think we might be shamed...

but because we already carry a deep hidden sense within us that ***we are shameful***. We are burdened with this need for fig leaves and loincloths to cover parts of ourselves that we would just die if they ever saw the light of day.

You see, hiding is the most natural first response to shame.

We hide... and in the process, what we're doing is... we begin to cut ourselves off from deeper relationships with one another.

We hide and cut ourselves off from deeper intimacy with the love of God...

We hide... and are left with a fuzzy nondescript feeling that we're all alone with this stuff that we have to keep hidden. And if anyone ever saw it... it would be devastatingly embarrassing... we couldn't show our faces.

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As a kid I grew up the middle of three brothers. So, there wasn't a lot of privacy in our house. The only girl I spent any time with in those early elementary years was my next-door neighbor, Amber. She was a year younger than me, and probably my best friend at that time.

And there were a few school years where every day we'd load up in our car, pull up in front of Amber's house and she'd come running out, hop in the car, and we'd all go to school together.

Well, one day... probably about in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, I needed to go to the bathroom before school... take care of business. So, I sat down on the toilet. Only when I was done, there was no toilet paper.

Well, what is an 8-year-old to do in these circumstances?

The only thing that made sense.

With my shorts and undies around my ankles... I got up... waddled over to the bathroom door... and began to waddle down the hall to where we kept the toilet paper.

Only no one told me that on this particular day, Amber's parents had to leave early for work... and so, unlike every other day, she was coming to our house before school.

Yep.

Out of nowhere, and to my great horror, Amber came around the corner while I'm standing there facing her.

I panicked!

And turned around.

And I waddled back to the bathroom as fast as my 8-year-old feet could take me!

In other words, she got a full view of both sides.

And I was mortified.

I locked myself in the bathroom. There was no way I was ever getting in the car or be in the same room with Amber every again.

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This is what shame does.

It drives us deeper and deeper into hiding... making us more and more isolated... so that we won't feel the pain of humiliation, which is really the pain of rejection.

In other words... shame has this profoundly powerful way of driving me to the very place I'm most afraid of being: **isolated. alone.** [repeat]

Let that sink in for a moment.

The fear of being exposed... and then abandoned... drives us to lock ourselves in a room... making us more and more isolated.

Shame has this profoundly powerful way of driving me to the very place I'm most afraid of being: ***Into the utter Hell of isolation***

Cut off from others.

Cut off from God.

And even cut off from myself.

In fact, this is the pattern that we hear in Adam's response when God comes looking for them. When God calls out to them, "Where are you?"

Adam's reply is this very simple pattern. "I hid... because I was afraid... because I was naked."

It's the fundamental pattern of shame:

1. The emotional wash of shame, of vulnerability and nakedness... makes us,
2. Afraid. It's a fear of rejection. Fear of humiliation.... and so,
3. We hide. Adam hides those vulnerable parts from Eve, and he hides his whole self from God.

"I hid... because I was afraid... because I was naked." Adam says.

This is how shame works in us.

**And God's response is quite telling, I think. It gets right to the start of that pattern. God isn't upset that they hid, but what caused them to hide!**

"Wait. Who told you... you were naked?" God asks.

In other words,

“How did this idea of ‘nakedness’ even enter your imagination?”

“Who told you that there was something about who you are... that was unacceptable... and needed to be covered up?”

“Who told you that your body was not beautiful?”

“Who told you that you have to lie to be accepted?”

“Who told you that your sexuality was something to be ashamed of?”

“Who told you that your personality is not good enough for friendships?”

“Who told you that your abilities are not enough to matter?”

“Who told you that you were naked?”

Well, my money is on the slithering voice of shame.

Because it’s one crafty son-of-the-devil.

And whenever that crafty voice starts to get your attention, there is one thing that you can count on: all the relationships you were made for,  
your relationships with the body of the earth and your own body,  
your relationships with one another and other people,  
and your relationship with God...  
all begin to break down.

Not only have the man and woman begun to cover themselves from each other... now that judging, critical voice comes to the forefront.

“It was this woman... who by the way, you gave to me... it was her.” Immediately, Eve panics. “It was the snake. It’s his fault.”

Out of fear and self-protective reflex of the heart, neither one can own their own part in all this. They simply cannot stand the vulnerability. Because now they no longer trust or assume that they are loved or even loveable.

And in response, we begin to hear God describe The Great Curse that is settling on creation. We didn’t read it this morning, but it is the rest of chapter 3.

The curse between the woman and the snake,

The curse between the man and the woman,

the husband and wife and the struggles of those relationships,

The curse of the pain at childbirth, the pain between parents and children...

and the struggles of those relationships.

And the curse of the toil of working the ground... and the struggles we have with our relationship with work and our bodies at work.

**And finally, the curse of having to leave the garden... the place where we walk in intimacy with God... where we breathe joy because it never occurred to us before to question whether or not we were loved.**

Now... I want to be clear about this Great Curse... because it’s important how we interpret what is happening here. There are two ways to read what happens here: either prescriptive or descriptive.

**A prescriptive reading** would be one where you read God cursing the humans, and the creation, and all the relationships. As if God's saying, "Well, you broke my rules, now I'm going to make you pay. Get ready to be miserable Adam and Eve." That's how some of us were taught to see God... and grew up interpreting this story.

God is prescribing, doling out punishment.

But that's not actually what I think is happening here. I actually think God is **describing** what will happen and has already begun to happen as a result of having our imaginations and hearts now stained with the cloudy dye of shame.

Shame causes a breakdown in the relationships we have and were created for...

our relationship **with the body of the earth...**

**with our own bodies, and with our work.**

And it causes a breakdown in the relationship that God intends for us to have: **with our spouses, and our children... and one another.**

And finally... shame causes a breakdown in the relationship that we were **created to have with God.**

In other words, this curse... is not what God wants....

it's what shame has caused.

And God, in this story, is describing it out of grace because God wants us all to be able to recognize it.

It's so important that we recognize The Great Curse is descriptive, not prescriptive.

**Because the story of Genesis 2 and 3 is actually a story about how God desires intimacy with you... for you to know again that it is God's spirit you breathe with every breath.**

... and for you to know you were created to grow in joy and creativity.

God desires for you to live in deep relationship with others... within your family... within your communities...

because it is not good for the human one to be alone.

**And God desires for you to live in kinship with the body of the earth and the rest of creation**

**...because it is from this very creation that your own holy, wonderous body has been made.**

But whenever these relationships and this intimacy is broken... you can bet it's a result of that crafty voice of shame... cutting us off... pushing us farther and farther to the outer edges of hell... where we are judging, and criticizing, and protecting ourselves...

Cutting us off... from the relationships we have been made for.

This is how the story of the Bible begins.

And to read the Bible well... is to realize that these stories are archetypes of us all. They aren't giving us historical facts... but trying to help us look in the mirror and recognize what is happening in our own lives.



The man and the woman, Adam and Eve... are you and me.

And this pattern of the snake, and the shame, and the hiding... It's a pattern that creeps up in different ways, in different seasons of our lives. But the damage always looks the same.

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So, what are we to do?

Well, next week we'll look at how Jesus deals with this... because Jesus actually shows us the way to healing shame.

He does the very thing that shame convinces us is the most dangerous, the most threatening act we could commit. The healing antidote to shame... and to all these broken relationships.... is quite simply: ***courageous vulnerability***.

We'll get to that more next week.

For now, I want to invite you to take the next step in your practices of noticing how shame is at work in you.

Last week, I challenged you to learn to recognize that crafty voice of shame whispering in your ear. I want to invite you to continue to do that.

But this week, I want to invite you to begin to examine the three categories of relationships in your life,

(your relationship with the body of the earth, your body and your work,  
your relationships with others,  
and your relationship with God)

and as you examine these relationships, ask yourself a very important question:

*"How are my relationships... affected and cut off... by shame?"*

*What parts of me do I keep covering up with fig leaves?"*

You see, none of us will be ready to explore the importance of vulnerability... if we aren't first aware of the damage shame is doing to our relationships...

So, pay attention this week. Maybe spend one day this week journaling about each one of those categories:

your relationships with creation, and your body, and your work  
your relationships with your friends, and with your family members, and other people.  
and your relationship with God...

What stories of shame are eating away at those relationships?

Are those relationships suffering... and driving you to the outer edges of Hell?

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The first step in getting out of Hell... is a lot like the first step in AA.

You have to recognize that you are there... and want to change.

You have to recognize that you've been listening to the wrong voice, and maybe for a long time now.

**And then, it's time to listen again for a different voice,  
the voice that has always been calling you by name...**

**a voice that knows you already, better than you know yourself.**

It is the sound of the Lord God walking into the garden of your life...  
calling out in love, **“Where are you, my beloved?”**  
“Who told you that you are naked?”

Amen.

Silent Reflection:

“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

~Genesis 3:8-9

Hymn of Response: “Softly and Tenderly, Jesus Is Calling” 441.

“Gone is the joy, which has been sheared off while the man and woman were not paying attention to what they were sensing, imagining, feeling or thinking. Disintegrated are the relationships in which God and the couple enjoyed the love of being known.... No longer would connection, curiosity and creativity be engaged freely, without the worry of failure or of being exposed and humiliated for making mistakes. There was a new, bent order, one filled with thistles, undermining and abuse. Shame’s mission was complete.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, 112.