

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Being Known: The Healing Power of Vulnerability”
4th in the series, *Scorning Shame*¹
Matthew 3:16-4:3; Hebrews 12:1-2
August 25, 2019

For the last three weeks, we’ve explored how evil slithers into our lives with the crafty voice of shame... Shame that convinces us to hide different parts of ourselves... cutting us off from the relationships we have been made for,
our relationships with others,
our relationships with God,
and even our relationships with ourselves: our body, and our work and the body of the Earth.

Shame is the poison that the Evil One uses to suffocate the goodness, and joy, and creativity that God planted in our lives.

There’s a scene in the first Harry Potter Book where Harry, Hermione, and Ron fall down a pit onto a large vine plant called Devil’s Snare.

And down there in the dark pit, the vines slowly begin to wrap around their legs and their bodies. But Hermione, always the quick thinker... jumped out of the reach of this plant right away. Ron and Harry were not so lucky. They got more and more entangled and they started struggling with it. But the more they struggled with it there in the dark, the quicker it wrapped itself around them.

As Hermione watches her two friends begin to suffocate... she remembers something she heard about the Devil’s Snare: It likes dark, damp places.

Devil’s Snare...thrives in the dark...

This is how shame works, it’s most powerful...
when it stays hidden in the shadows.

It grows stronger and stronger the more we keep it in the dark... struggling where no one can see.

And it convinces us that we have to keep it hidden there...

We have to stay struggling in the dark.

The worst thing we could do would be let the light in...

We can’t let it be exposed.

This is the Devil’s Snare. And the more we struggle with it in the dark, the stronger its grip grows.

Remember what I said last week: ***Shame drives us to the very place we’re afraid to end up, isolated and alone on the outer edges of hell.***

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).

Ron and Harry begin to suffocate in the dark... with the tentacles of Devil's Snare gripping tighter and tighter around them.

But then, in an act of courage and insight, Hermione pulls out her wand and calls forth the light. "Lumos solem," she shouts.

And a blinding light fills the room. Nothing can remain hidden.

The Devil's Snare is completely exposed... And in the piercing light, it loses all its power over them. Its grip loosens. It withers...

And Harry and Ron can finally breathe again...

And throw off those vines... those things... "that so easily entangle them," to use the words from Hebrews.

It's such an insightful scene.

Light is the essential healing antidote
to the Devil's Snare.

The only way to get free of shame's grip, is to bring it into the light.

[Pause]

Of course, let's be honest. There's **no way we're** going to do that, right? Bring those parts of ourselves that have shame wrapped around them, into the light?

That's the last thing we want to do.

I mean, just try to imagine it for a moment, yourself being vulnerable in that way.

Do that.

*Take a moment and imagine... bringing some shame in your own story
into the light.*

Just the passing thought of it triggers shame, washing over our brains. It's the most natural response in the world. And the truth is, that happens all the time... in little ways, every day, where we don't even recognize it.

In fact, we have all developed some ingrained patterns to keep that from happening... to keep our vulnerabilities protected... as we interact with one another and keep our vulnerabilities protected as we move through every day.

Karen Horney describes these as three different postures we take in social settings... as we navigate protecting our vulnerabilities.² If you've studied the Enneagram you might recognize them as the stances.

Some of us... withdraw. We move away. We pull back. We try not to be noticed. We protect our vulnerabilities by hiding just a bit. We silence ourselves and keep our vulnerability a long way away from

² Brené Brown makes these connections with Karen Horney's work in, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Penguin, 2015), 77.

the possibility of being bumped up against by others. This subconscious way of moving through social settings has come to be known as the “withdrawing stance.”

Some of us respond differently. **Some of us move toward** others to hide our shame. We seek to appease and to please... and to figure out what you think so we can know what we should think. It’s sometimes called the “*Dependent Stance*.”

It’s a very different movement, but it’s also a way of avoiding shame... We move toward, depending on others, so our vulnerabilities are covered up by the needs and opinions of others.

And some of us... protect our vulnerability by **moving against**, by being aggressive or flexing our power over another. It’s called the “aggressive stance.” It’s the strong man response to keep anyone from ever seeing our weakness.

The idea of being weak is the worst possible thing we can imagine.

**Brene Brown says that these three social responses,
the withdrawing,
the depending
and the aggressive stance,**

these are ways that we naturally react... to keep our vulnerability... and the possibility of shame hidden in the shadows.

We withdraw. We depend on others. We get aggressive. All of it in a natural subconscious reflex to keep ourselves from being vulnerable.

Exposing our deep vulnerabilities... Shining the light, on the Devil’s Snare... is the last thing... we want to see happen.

Now here’s the great irony: We tend to admire openness and vulnerability in other people, don’t we? When someone opens up to us... we tend to lean in, don’t we? We feel honored to be trusted with something so sacred.

When a public person opens up in a very personal way... we often respect them even more for their vulnerability. This is the great paradox of vulnerability.

“We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people,
but we’re afraid to let them see it in us.

[Because] We’re afraid that our truth isn’t enough...
that what we have to offer isn’t enough....

*So, I want to experience your vulnerability, but I don’t want to be vulnerable.
I’m drawn to your vulnerability but repelled by mine.”³*

Only the Devil’s Snare keeps gripping us tighter. Keeping us always “as sick as our secrets.” I know some of you have heard that idea before, but it needs to be repeated. “You are only as sick as your secrets.”

This is why the Bible speaks about the profound importance and healing power of “being known.”
Remember 1 Corinthians 13, that great love chapter?

³ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Penguin, 2015), 41.

It concludes by saying that right now, we only know in part;
But a day will come... when we shall know fully, *even as I am fully known*.

In the language of the Bible... vulnerability is described as *being known*. “The gift—and the terror—of *being known*.”⁴

Before Jesus could begin his ministry, the gospels tell us that he went down to the Jordan River... and was baptized by John. And when he came out of the waters... he received a profound blessing of being known.

The heaven opened. And a divine voice spoke, a voice from the One that sees all. “You are my son. My Beloved. With you I am well pleased.” It was a profound moment in which Jesus experienced **being known**.

And it’s a picture of what we also... are invited to hear and know deep in our souls when we enter the baptismal waters and remember our own baptism. “You are my beloved daughter. You are my beloved son. Beloved. With you I am well pleased.”

It’s hard for us to believe that, isn’t it? I mean, our most natural response in the world is to think, “Well, sure that was true for Jesus. But those words aren’t for me. I mean, let’s be honest, I’m no Jesus!”

Only what we don’t recognize is that this is what the crafty voice of the Evil One sounds like in our rationalizing brains.

And it’s the same thing that Jesus wrestled with when he climbed out of those baptismal waters and went into the wilderness.

He had a hard time believing it, too. And so, a thought comes across his mind.

“If you are the Son of God... if you are really God’s beloved... then prove it to yourself. Turn these stones into bread. Or... maybe you’re not after all.”

“If you are God’s beloved... then throw yourself down from this high point and let God prove it to you... “

The Devil’s Snare that gripped Eve in the garden... is trying to grip Jesus in the wilderness... just like it is still trying to grip you.

Did God really tell you not to eat the fruit? Don’t be silly, Eve.

Did God really say you were beloved in the Jordan? Don’t be silly, Jesus.

Is God really well pleased... **with you?** [smirk and laugh]

Don’t be so naïve...

You see, Jesus’ baptism is a revelation not just about Jesus, but about us all. It’s why the Ancient Christians like Irenaeus described Jesus as an archetype of humanity.

He shows us what is really true about God, yes. But also, what is true about us. It’s why Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. He shows us what is true about ourselves and the way to live deeply with God.

⁴ Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 119.

The words Jesus hears... and the love he has to come to accept... is for us all.

“You are God’s beloved child.”

Not because of what you have or haven’t done,

but simply because you have been made by the overflowing delight and love of God.

The baptism and the wilderness temptations are the crucible that Jesus goes ***through to open himself up... to be fully known before God,***

so that he could open himself up... to be fully known by the world.

Because to love fully... and to allow yourself to be loved by God and by others... requires that we allow ourselves to be fully known.

And those parts of us that feel most broken and that we keep most hidden? Those are the parts that most desperately need to be known by God, so they can be healed in the light of God’s love.

Curt Thompson insists that “Vulnerability is [something we must always work at] in order to deepen our connection with God and others.... There is no other way.”⁵

Now, I know that for some of us that feels incredibly painful and risky...

But if you can take that risky vulnerability... and reframe it in terms of “being known” ... of being known by God,

of being known by our spouse... really known.

Of being known in deep, trusted friendships, then you begin to realize that is what you’ve been longing for. It’s the joy you’ve been missing and it’s the key to your healing!

And so, at the end of his ministry... Jesus, for the joy set before him, entered the most painful kind of vulnerability.

You see, a Roman crucifixion was not just meant for physical pain and torture... but it was designed to inflict the deepest kinds of shame and humiliation possible.

The cross wasn’t just an execution device. It was a humiliation device.

Remember before Jesus was even crucified, the Roman soldiers led him into a courtyard and called the crowd over to watch... as they stripped him, and then mocked him as a puppet king, putting a purple cloak on his shoulders, and then a crown... not of olive branches... but a crown of thorns.

And standing there half naked and bleeding, they mocked him calling out “Hail King of the Jews.” They spat on him, and bowed before him, and beat him, the scriptures say.

They were humiliating him in every possible way, half naked and bleeding in the court yard.

And once they were done with all their fun, they stripped him naked again and threw his rags back on... only long enough to march him out to the hill called Golgotha in front of the whole world this time. And there... they stripped him again.

Only this time... they stretched out his naked body,
as exposed as could be,

⁵ Thompson, 123.

nailed it to the cross... and raised the cross for the whole world to see.

Jesus' crucifixion is the most profound image of shame and humiliation... known to man.

This is what Hebrews 12:2 is referring to when it says that Jesus, "for the sake of the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame."

You see, Jesus knows how terrifying and painful it can be... to be vulnerable.
Jesus knows... what you feel... when you try to imagine telling the truth about your secrets.

But the only way to loosen the Devil's Snare, is to let the light shine in.
It's the only way.

**And so, for the joy set before him... the joy and creativity that creation was made for...
the joy of redeeming the broken relationships between humanity and God,
Jesus disregarded the shame he had to endure. He scorned the shame.
And he invites you to follow.**

For the joy of healing your relationships.
For the joy that's set before you, of being known
deeply by God and by others.

**For the joy that's set before you, of making peace with your body
and your work.**

For the joy set before you... scorn the shame and let the light come in!

Now here's the thing, you can't do it by yourself. It requires a "great cloud of witnesses."
Harry and Ron had to have Hermione to call forth the light.

We all need someone with whom we can trust and speak the whole truth of our lives to... It's the gift of having a confessor, or a spiritual director, or a gut honest friend, or a sacred community group where we can tell our stories.

We all need our cloud of witnesses... surrounding us... holding us before the throne of God. We need pastors, and mentors, and spiritual directors, and soul friendships, and confidants supporting us.

And if you don't have that... then know that I am willing to meet with you in confidence
and listen in honest grace without judgment or shame...
but in honesty... and guide you into the light of God.

But next week we're going to talk about how we as a church can
create more safe spaces where that can happen.

Because part of the sacred calling of creating community...
is to be that cloud of witnesses for one another...
who will keep holding the joy set before us in our brokenness...
inviting us to scorn the shame...
and calling the light to shine on the Devil's Snare that so easily entangles us.

Let's pray:

*O God, help each of us find the courage we need to let the light in.
Help us to find the healing from shame that we need this day...
and find it again when we need it next week,
and find it again when we need it next year.*

*Help us to find our great cloud of witnesses...
and to become a great cloud of witness for others.*

*When the nights are dark, O God,
Take our hand... and lead us... to the joy of being known.*

Amen.

Silent Reflection:

"When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable."
~Madeleine L'Engle⁶

Hymn of Response, 638 "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

⁶ Quoted in Brown, 43.