

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“Naked and Unashamed”
1st in the series, *Scorning Shame*¹
Genesis 2
August 4, 2019

There are a few things I want to clear up before I get too far into the sermon today.

If you saw the title and are secretly hoping it means we’re starting a new outreach to the St. Louis Exhibitionist Society, you’re probably going to be disappointed... I don’t know, maybe this sermon might make you a little less judgmental of them.

If you’re hoping this is going to be a sermon on how to have great sex, then you’re also going to be disappointed. But there is a good chance this sermon series might help your sex life.

If you’re wondering if this will be about a new attire policy for worship... well, please set up a time to meet with me later, because you need some prayer.

This sermon is about nakedness of a sort...
but it’s also about all the stories we tell ourselves about keeping covered up.

We all have those kinds of stories, don’t we? Some are big stories. Some are small.... Other stories we’d rather die than tell a soul. We all have them.

Jack was quite clear about his story. There was no way he was going to tell it. Impossible. When he was asked what exactly he felt when he imagined telling his wife the story of his affair, he could only find one word: “Terrified.”

“Terrified of what exactly?” a friend asked.

He could only describe in vague language this deep sense of humiliation that he would carry if this illicit relationship came to light.

Another individual named Julie had her own story. Julie had worked so hard to get her daughter into the top school choice... but she didn’t get in. “I’m worried about what it will mean for her future.” Maybe... that would be understandable, except her daughter was only three years old.

But Julie has a story... about what it looked like to be a good mom and for her daughter to grow up successful... and apparently, Julie wasn’t making the cut. And some deep-rooted shame she carries into motherhood, a shame she hardly recognizes, is now being passed to her three-year-old daughter who is already... also... not enough.

We all have stories... big and little stories...

We get out of the shower and a quick story goes through our mind about our bodies.

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).

We get to school or to work... and we have a story about how good we are or what others think about us...

We get home... and our loved one tries to gently remind us that we still haven't finished that project we promised to get to last week, and a story runs through our head about him or her...
and under that story is another story about our own inadequacy...
and together those stories keep a cold distance between you all night long.

There are lots of little stories... stories of shame that are in the background of our everyday lives.

David has small stories like that... just like you and I do. But David also has a big story. It started when he was 13 and started drinking. By the time he was 15 he had two DUIs. By the time he was 20, a third landed him in jail for a month. But all that was more than 20 years ago, before he met Christ... and his life turned around.

Only in the last 5 years the bourbon had begun to flow again most evenings after everyone went to bed. His wife finally told him that if the drinking didn't stop, she was leaving and taking the kids.

And then there was his job. How exactly would he tell the people of his congregation... a church where he had been the pastor for 15 years?

You see, for David, Jim Beam and Makers Mark were about the only thing that helped David hang on in the face of the burnout he felt leading such a challenging flock. But if it came out... well, that's just unimaginable.

Interwoven into these stories is ***the subtle poison of shame***. It's a poison that can be so small it's undetected at first... or can be so strong, you can't get out of bed. But it's a poison that shows up in all our stories, big and small. Shame...works on us all.

Infant psychiatrist and author, Curt Thompson says, "To be human is to have our stories infected with the poison of ***shame***."

It doesn't really matter whether you have a two-comma salary or work for minimum wage.
It doesn't matter if you're married, single, divorced,
whether you're white, black, or Latino,
happy or sad, depressed or angry,
employer or employee.

Mary was the chief executive of a successful marketing firm. She had relied on her hard-driving style to get things done. But now she was bewildered that her company was faltering... and no matter how hard she worked, it just wasn't enough to right the ship.

She was out of ideas.

A close friend asked who she could turn to for help. Without hesitation she said that to admit she needed assistance... was tantamount to resigning. "I can't afford not to have ideas that work. If I have to ask for help, I will be seen as incompetent and the board will fire me."

You see, one of the primary messages of shame is: ***I Am Not Enough***.

It's a message that is whispered in our souls... whether we're in the board room or bedroom,
whether we're in church or at school,

whether we're all alone, or in some social setting.

In our small stories and in our big stories... it's there as a poisonous voice whispering, "I Am Not Enough"

And as that poison grows, it begins to cut us off from one another, turning us inward so that no one will find out. We hide. We protect. And in the process, we grow cut off from one another.

And we grow cut off from God.

In fact, what we will see over the next several weeks as we explore shame in the biblical story... is that shame... is the primary poison evil uses...

It's the primary tool that evil uses to unravel the goodness of God's creation,
separating us from God,
separating us from other people
and separating us from the body of the earth.

Shame fractures and undoes that profound relationship of union, of oneness we were created for.

You see, in the beginning, when God created heaven and earth...

**God took some holy dirt of creation... and made the human. From the beginning we were made of holy soil and holy breath,
at one with the body of the earth
and at one with the Spirit of God.**

In fact, the Hebrew word here, *adam*, is not being used as a proper name of a man. Not here. The original Hebrew here, "the *adam*" simply means a creature made from the *adamah*, the Hebrew word for earth.

**A literal translation would be to say
God took the earth and made an earth-creature or,
God took the humus (that black good soil) and made a human.**

All that to say, from the beginning we were created by taking the earth of the ground and having the breath of God breathed into us.

We were created at one with the body of the earth
and at one with the Spirit of God.

And the human being, this earthling with divine breath in it, was then placed in the garden, charged with caring for the rest of the garden on behalf of God. The earthling was a steward of it... a gardener... of the garden from which it came.

**It was to tend the garden of creation like you might tend the garden of your family.
The human... had a deep kinship with the humus, the body of the earth,
and kinship with animals,
and kinship with all of creation.**

But God wanted even more for this human.

God wanted us to know not just our kinship, our oneness with Creation... but a deeper kind of oneness that we can experience with those who are of the same substances as us.

It wasn't good for the human to be alone... because we've been made in the image of God... and God is a relationship of love. God is three persons of one singular substance.

It's what we mean when we describe God as Trinity. God is Creator, Savior, and Spirit, 3-in-1, holy relationship of love and oneness.

So, if the human was to be in God's image, then the human one was made for that same kind of intimacy and oneness that exists within God's own self. The human was made for intimacy and oneness with God and with others of the same essence, the same substance. It was not good for the human to be alone.

So, God pulls another human from the same flesh... that one flesh made of holy dirt and holy breath. And now for the first time in Hebrew there is maleness and femaleness...

Now you have two humans who are of the same essence. They are two persons but one essence, just as Creator, and Savior, and Spirit are different persons, but one in essence.

So, why does all this matter? Why am I taking you down this theological road with this nuance of the original Hebrew?

Because it's critical that we recapture our origin story,
that we realize from the beginning we were made
in a profound relationship with the body of the earth,
and a profound relationship with the Spirit of God,
and for profound relationships with one another.

We were made for *union*.

This is how the story of our faith begins. This is how God creates things to be. It's what the Garden of Eden is all about. There is intimacy, and kinship, and oneness.

And the very last description we are given... to try to get at this beautiful profound reality, is that the two, the man and the woman...

"were both naked and unashamed."

It's a physical description, and an emotional description... to sum up what God has created.

They were "naked and unashamed."

These 2 juxtaposing concepts are quite profound and potent.

The author could have chosen from a vast array of other words to describe their emotional state at this point... other words that would have been just as true.

They were happy. They were joyful. [I mean, who wouldn't be?]

Or the storyteller could have put it, "They were naked and strong or confident" or "They were unafraid... or without sadness or disappointment."

There are all kinds of descriptions that were surely just as true... But the scriptures emphasize for us... the lack of shame in God's intention for us.

Now, in part, this is to set up what happens in Chapter 3, and we'll get there in the next few weeks., but it is also a way to help us to see that the whole of our oneness with God, and the body of the earth and with one another, pivots on the lack of shame.

They were naked and unashamed.

It's the most important thing that the scriptures could say at this culmination point of the creation story. They were

completely vulnerable, and open, where nothing is hidden
and at the same time... without any shame.

Why is that? What makes this the most significant description? According to Curt Thompson, "We are maximally creative (and full of joy) when we are simultaneously maximally vulnerable and intimately connected."²

[That was a lot of superlatives. So, let me read it again. *repeat*]

In other words, the combination of complete vulnerability with complete intimate connection, that oneness that I described a moment ago, is the combination that maximizes joy and creativity in your life.

And this is what God intends for these human ones made in God's image.

Joy and creativity.

The joy to be freely yourself, to play and laugh without hesitation. The joy that comes from knowing you are loved and delighted in just as you are. The joy that gives us ground to stand on even when things are hard, or when we take new risks.

And creativity: The creativity that flows through us into our work... helping us be productive in the best ways... contributing to the well-being of the life of the world.

And creativity that allows us to find new life-giving solutions to old problems...
and creativity that flows into our dreams.

This kind of creativity requires a deep openness... It only comes to us when we aren't having to hide parts of ourselves, or we aren't holding back out of the fear of judgment.

And this is what God desires for all of humanity: joy and creativity. God placed the two human beings in the garden... where they were to love and care for the earth... and love and care for one another... and live in open, deep relationships with God. It was a place where goodness and delight was all around them.

And they lived there in naked vulnerability without any shame that shut them down, or cut them off, or stirred dissention, or created pride, or judgement, or selfishness. None of it.

They were naked and unashamed because they were made for joy and creativity.

And so were you.

You have been made for joy and creativity.

You are made of holy dirt and holy breath...

² Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 99.

**a sacred combination reflecting the very image of God...
a God who is a communion of so much love and joy flowing between the Creator, Son,
and Holy Spirit that creativity comes flowing out.**

You are made in that overflowing abundance of love and joy.
And in God's love, you are already naked and known.

It's just that the stories we tell ourselves, the stories of our lives... have the poison of shame in them, don't they?

Next week we'll look at how that shame starts to work into the story of the Garden of Eden and how it is working into your life. Because remember, the script mirrors us.

But today, let me invite you to remember where your deepest story begins. You are the human ones, made for intimacy, made of maleness and femaleness.

You were created to live in vulnerability and profound connection... because your work, your calling in this world, your job is to live this life of yours with deep joy and creativity... reflecting the joy and the creativity of God.

If that sounds impossible for you, well... you're in good company. On this side of the garden it feels impossible for us all. By the end of August, we're going to explore steps we can take to heal us from the poison of shame, so we can recover joy and creativity.

**But for today, I simply want to invite you to remember Eden.
Remember the place from which you came.
Remember what God desires for you and for us all:**

**You were made to live free of shame,
at one with God,
at one with the body of the earth,
and at one with others.**

This is the place of abiding, creative joy.

Amen.

Silent Reflection

"Life cannot have any other purpose than joy and goodness. Only this purpose—joy—is ultimately worthy of life." ~ Leo Tolstoy³

³ Quoted in Thompson, 59.