

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Standing Up Straight Together”**  
**5<sup>th</sup> in the series, *Scorning Shame*<sup>1</sup>**  
**Luke 13:10-17; 1 Corinthians 12:20-27**  
**September 1, 2019**

We were made in the image of a Triune God: A God who is “3 persons in one essence,” as the ancient formula describes it. And that one essence... is the energy of relationship itself.

This is what the Bible means when it says, “God is love.”

Which means, then, that we are made as a reflection of the divine energy of love that flows from one to another: between the Christ, the Spirit and the Creator.

We are made in that image, which tells us ***we are made for relationships!***

Which is why there is such a deep eternal longing in us to love and to be loved, to know another deeply and intimately,

and to ***be known*** deeply and intimately.

Or as Genesis 2 so poetically puts it, we were made to live “naked and unashamed.”

It’s part of our divine DNA.

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**But, as we’ve seen over the last month, there is this subtle, crafty voice of shame slithering into our hearts, and our minds, and our imaginations... and it started whispering things in our ears... and it still does today, fracturing these relationships we’ve been made for, cutting us off from the joy and delight of God,**

**and the joy and delight of relationship and openness with others,**

**and the joy and delight of our relationship with our own body, and our work, and the body of the earth. These things that have been made good and holy and get infected with the poison of shame.**

Shame is like a cloudy dye coloring how we see and experience all these relationships.

Which is why there are seasons in every marriage of frustration, and dissatisfaction, and hurts, and even loneliness. They will come in every marriage, in some form or fashion... because of shame’s crafty ways of working on us.

And come into our relationship with God, our relationship with our work, and in our deep, meaningful friendships. There are always seasons where things get hard... and healing the relationship feels so different.

Curt Thompson says that shame is ***the emotional energy in us that resists*** truth telling, and confession, and asking for forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

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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> Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2015), 144.

Let me say that again because it's something I haven't gotten to in this series, but it's something I want to invite you to notice in yourself: shame is ***the emotional energy that makes us resist*** truth telling, and confession, and asking for forgiveness.

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But, as we explored last week, all is not lost. There is a remedy to shame's grip on us and that is taking steps to practice courageous vulnerability—letting the light shine on those parts of us we keep hidden in the shadows.

In biblical terms, this is described as ***being known***.

The gift—and the terror—of being known.

When we take concrete actions to allow ourselves to *be known to another person who responds in love, the power of shame withers and something deep in us is healed and made whole.*

And this isn't just true spiritually.

**Psychologists and neurobiologists have discovered that being known -- taking concrete steps to be known -- actually creates a wholeness and integration on a deep biological level. Imagine that. Being known... changes you on a molecular level. It changes your body! It heals and liberates your body.**

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Now if we could stop there. But before we bring this whole series to a close, there is one critical part of shame and vulnerability that we still need to understand. And for us as a church, this may be the more critical thing:

Being known will be most healing  
when the communities we're a part of,  
like our families, and like the church,  
learn to scorn shame that is ***embedded in the groups themselves.***  
[repeat]

This is what Jesus does again and again throughout his ministry.

Last week we saw how he scorned the shame of the cross... showing us the way to profound vulnerability for himself.

But throughout his life and his ministry... Jesus scorns the shame that is embedded in his community.

In the story we heard earlier from Luke 13, it was like a Sunday morning, and folks are gathering for worship... and this bent over woman walks in.

And Luke says that she had a spirit that had been crippling her for eighteen years. And I find that description just fascinating.... because this woman is the quintessential image of shame.

She is bent over because her spirit has been crippled, Luke says.

Her body is reflecting something that is taking place in her heart, her spirit.

This is what shame does, as we've seen this month.

It casts a shadow across the heart...

and it shows up in our posture toward others.

We become bent over and closed off.

But (and here's what's key to this story) the spirit that's crippling her, the shame she carries... is actually a reflection of the shame that is flowing through her community, to her, and to others like her.

You see, shame's power is not just alive in individuals. In fact, shame is most profoundly alive and most powerful in the way that it is hardly noticed... hidden in the shadows of whole communities. You don't see it, but it's alive in the air.

That's what's going on in this story.

This bent over woman is a reflection of the shame that is alive in her community.

Remember, in that culture, women were considered less than men. And **that** message (that they were a little less) it wasn't just in the air. It came to them in all kinds of subtle ways.

Legally a woman's word was not valued in the courts.

Women only had slightly more dignity than animals.

They were treated like property... given from one man (their father) to another man, (their husband)... for a good price.

On top of that, in that culture, anyone with a physical ailment was thought to be somehow spiritually "less than" the rest of us. Their physical ailment was a sign to everyone they passed on the street that **they** were displeasing to God in a unique way.

**Do you remember the man born blind in John 9? The disciples asked why he was born blind.**

"Was it because he sinned, or his parents sinned?"

**This was the underlying way of seeing the world.**

**It wasn't a mean hearted question. It just was. It was the culture that shaped the way people (good, God-fearing people) saw one another. It was in the air they breathed.**

Women are just not the same as men. They don't have the same... relationship with God as men do.

The sick and the crippled... they are not the same as the rest of us... God must see them differently. They don't have the same value.

And of course, as you study the New Testament, you discover the list goes on.

The Samaritans... were just a little less than the Jews. They are the unholy, defiled, half-breed children of Abraham whose beliefs in God and whose worship practices are just not quite as pleasing to God as ours.

The Gentiles... are just a little less than the righteous. They had not been made pure.

The defiled, the sick, the beggar, those noisy kids, the lepers...

a cripple,

a woman...

told in subtle crafty ways

over and over again:

***You are not... enough.***

Shame exists, not just in individuals, but in whole systems and communities. And if you are a recipient of your community's shame... well, ***the weight of that slowly infects your spirit over time...*** and makes you hang your head, and hunch your shoulders... and after 18 years you are going to be a little bent out of shape.

**This woman is a reflection of what is alive in her community.**

**She is a reflection of what is in the air they breathe and the water they drink... and they don't even realize it.**

And at Dayspring, neither do we.

You see, this bent over woman  
is among us now.

She represents what is at work in ***our society*** in all kinds of ways we fail to notice.

You see, there are ways that we see the world... that just aren't questioned so much of the time.  
And it shapes how we see one another  
and interact with one another  
in ways that we don't even recognize.

But in subtle images and subtle messages... we have been told for years now... that so many are just not quite the same... as someone like me: a white, heterosexual, male,  
as someone like me, that was born in the United States of America,  
and grew up in the church,  
and made good grades... even when to college,  
as someone like me that got married in his 20s, and had a few kids,  
and owns a nice house in the suburbs,  
and pays his bills on time.

**Every single one of those descriptions about me is part of a cultural script that I embody... and that culturally... give me power... and invite *me* to hold my head just a little bit higher.**

But every time someone doesn't meet those descriptors... there is a very subtle message of shame... that comes from our culture,  
and that is at work in our schools,  
and is at work in our workplaces...  
and yes, even messages that are alive in the Church  
that says: ***You Are Not Quite Enough.***

And for some, those messages, those little, crafty, subtle messages, come repeatedly... like Chinese drip water torture... where what looks so small, like a drip of water, can become crushing over time.

Drip, drip, drip, in little moments over and over again that someone is told: ***"you are not enough."***

And the weight of that little drip repeated begins to cripple the spirit,

and after 18 long years... you can bet they are being pushed down and bent over in ways... that most of us... don't even notice... because it's just so small: **drip**.

"...there appeared a woman", Luke writes, "with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight." Verse 11.

It's a telling description...

And so is the description of how Jesus responds.

First, he sees her. That's no small thing. To be seen is to no longer be forgotten in the shadows... sloughed off to the side of the action. To be seen is the first step to being known. And there are so many people... who are not seen...

and whose stories we'd rather not hear.

But what is the first thing Luke tells us is that Jesus did? He saw her.

And once he sees her... the second thing is, he speaks healing words to her. He speaks a truth that shame doesn't want her to believe: "Woman you are set free from your ailment."

And that word choice is just fascinating. He doesn't say, "be healed" but "be free." Which is to say to her, "You do not have to stay tangled up by all this. Be free from all that shame that has a hold of you." Jesus' words here are an act of liberation, not just healing.

And then... he laid his hands on her... a vulnerable, intimate touch that was a bit taboo in their culture. In fact, who knows how long it's been since someone reached out and touched her?

But on this day, Jesus did.

He connected... human to human... body to body,  
made in the image of a Triune God of love.

***Jesus laid his hands on her... and in this profound moment of liberating love, she stands up straight again.***

This is what it is like **to be seen**,

and to **be known** for the first time in a long time.

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Only, the story doesn't end there, does it?

Remember, she's a reflection of the hidden messages of shame that are at work in her community.

***Shame is an intangible power that exists within the group.***

And when those who are marginalized are lifted up in front of the community... that power dynamic is triggered. And people get testy.

It triggers them to act in a way that they normally wouldn't.

So, the religious leaders start whispering to each other and talking to people in the room.

"Can you believe what Jesus is doing? He's making such a fuss over this *one woman*. What about the rest of us here to worship?"

It's the Sabbath, for heaven's sake. You're not even really supposed to do work on the Sabbath.

Why is Jesus interrupting our nice time of worship? Why is Jesus making such a fuss over this one person, at the cost of all the rest of us?!"

Now, let's be clear about something here. Because we often get the wrong picture. **These people in the synagogue... they aren't hateful people. They are good, church going people, people just like you and me.**

And they're just trying to have church. They're just there to worship. And they are trying to follow what the Bible says.

**And Jesus didn't have to do this on the Sabbath, right? She's had this for 18 years.**

**And he didn't have to do it right there in the synagogue. He could have pulled her outside... and helped her and not interrupted everything that everybody else was there to do.**

He could have done that.

Why would Jesus do it right in the middle of the synagogue?

**Unless... unless what he is doing...**

**isn't about just trying to free the bent over woman.**

**But maybe he's actually trying to free a bent over community.**

You see, Jesus is actually straightening out the community of God's people... who don't even recognize that their vision of one another has been clouded by shame...

And who don't even recognize they have been spreading the poison of shame... in little tiny little drips.

But when Jesus does that, just like when you try to lift up someone who has been bent over for a long time...

the community is going to get upset.

"What are you doing Jesus?"

"Why all this focus and care for this one bent over woman?"

And this pattern happens all the time in the gospels.

And so, I imagine by this point in Jesus' ministry... some of them are *"sick and tired of Jesus giving certain groups of people special attention all the time."* It's almost like the rest of them just can't win.

And so, Jesus responds to their frustration and their huffy hearts. But he does so by reminding them of one simple truth: "This woman is every bit a child of Abraham as you."

Isn't that an interesting response? It's not that anyone would ever say she wasn't. Nobody argues with him. Sure, they believe it. Only... there has been this drip, drip, drip of subtle ways she's been treated as not quite as much a child of Abraham as someone... like me.

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In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he reminds us that every part of the body of Christ is just as important as the other. The eye, the hand, the foot... No one can say they aren't needed or they don't need the other.

But... he has these really interesting lines in verses 23 and 24, and this is the key part of the passage we so often ignore: "But," Paul says, "there are some parts that are a bit more vulnerable than others. There are some parts of our body... that are more susceptible to being shamed than others."

This is how he puts it:

“those members of the body that we think less honorable, we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this.” (vs. 23-24)

I don’t know about you, but in our house, we call them private parts. And we teach our kids that private parts are for private places.

It’s these parts of our bodies that makes us feel most vulnerable.  
And it’s these parts that are the most susceptible to being shamed.

And so, Paul points that out because they are more susceptible to being shamed, we treat them with special honor and dignity.

But the more socially accepted parts... well, they don’t need that special treatment.

“And so,” Paul is saying, “it should be in the church.”

There are some parts of the body of Christ... there are some groups of people... in our culture around us,

and our churches in particular,  
who have not been given the same kind of acceptance and dignity as others. And these people... have been told that there is something about them... that isn’t quite as acceptable as someone like me.

Now, of course, they are not told that directly. The voice of shame is always so hidden, and subtle, and crafty, remember? It’s just in the air we breathe.

And drip, drip, drip... they have been slowly bent over...  
as they have had to keep their giftings...  
and callings...  
and their image of God...  
hidden in the shadows. Drip.

But God has so arranged the body, Paul writes, giving the greater honor to these parts of the body.

This is what Jesus is doing with this bent over woman,  
and what Jesus is still doing in our churches today.

[Women]

So, for centuries... women were told they were loved by God, but (drip) they’re just not quite as called by God as men. And (drip), you’re not suitable to lead in the church, and (drip) you’d better stay submissive to your husbands.

**Only Jesus keeps pulling women out of the shadows, and calling our attention to them, and telling them to be free of all this.**

**And yes, it makes some people really uncomfortable, and they start talking and whispering to each other.**

But others have learned that we actually need to give women special honor in response to all these drips. Which means, we need to work a little extra harder to listen to women’s stories and read women theologians.... and make sure women are put in places of leadership.

This is what it looks like for them to be seen, and freed, and lifted up by the hands of Jesus.

[Black]

But of course, it's not just women that Jesus lifts up, is it?

For centuries... in the American Church especially,

people with black and brown bodies were told that they are loved by God, but they are also just not quite the same as people with white bodies.

And well, your presence makes white people feel a bit nervous...

And why don't you buy houses in this neighborhood? You'll be more comfortable.

And certainly, you better not try to marry my daughter.

And drip, drip, drip, ***you are not enough.***

The shame of racism is embedded in the American DNA. Sure, it's not as obvious now as it was back in Jim Crow days, but shame always works in such crafty, subtle ways... which makes it all the more deadly.

It's in the air we breathe and the water we drink... and white people especially have the hardest time in the world recognizing it and get especially defensive when it's pointed out.

Because we're good people. We don't mean to offend...

But Jesus keeps pulling the bent over child of God into the center and calls us to see what is dripping off our actions and language that we don't even recognize.

**And it's kind of upsetting to white sensibilities. Because Jesus keeps disrupting our nice peaceful churches, and our nice peaceful neighborhoods, by drawing attention to our hidden racism by calling attention to those bent over.**

And yes, it makes some people in the church mad, and people in our city mad, because why do we white people always have to give them special treatment?

But Paul tells us that this is how the body of Christ has to work. We have to work extra hard to care for the parts that have been more vulnerable... even if it makes us uncomfortable.

And if you're not sure what it looks like to give special honor to these parts of the body, then maybe try starting like Jesus did: ***See them. Listen to them.***

Try reading some books from black authors and listening to what they say... and when you feel defensive, take a deep breath and keep listening.

Try reading

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*,

and Michael Eric Dyson, *The Tears We Cannot Stop*.

And maybe even try some black theologians

like James Cone's, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

I'm going to be reading that this fall with a group of theologians in St. Louis.

Because this is how Jesus starts. He saw the bent over woman and spoke to her, and touched her, and lifted her up right there in the middle of the synagogue, getting the attention of everyone, making everyone see her even though it was a disruption.



[LGBTQ]

And this is what Jesus is still doing among us... and he's also doing it now with those who are part of the LBGTQ community.

If you read my newsletter article that came out Friday, then you know that we're going to be working on honoring this part of the body, especially this year.

We're putting together a committee to help us  
by listening to their stories,  
and finding out why **they especially** may not feel safe walking in the doors of our church, let alone **any church**,  
and discerning how we might respond appropriately.

In other words, we're going to look at those who have been bent over by the church and see them and allow them to be known among us.

So that **all people**, and especially those who have been wounded or have been thought of as less honorable... can know they are **needed** just as much as the **eye**, and **hand**, and **feet**.

And so that **all people** can be set free from the bonds of shame that want to keep parts of their story in the shadows.

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So, Dayspring, as we bring this series to a close, do not forget that the snake, with its slithering voice of shame, is one crafty son-of-the-devil. And it works on us all in ways we don't even recognize.

And so, as followers of Jesus, with open hearts and minds:  
May we learn to practice courageous vulnerability,  
and may we be a church that will scorn the shame wherever it may be found.... even when we discover it in us.

May we do the work needed to make Dayspring the kind of church where **all people's** stories are honored  
and their differences honored.

So that together, we may **know** and **be known**.  
And together, we can hear Jesus saying to us:

Be free.  
Be free of that crippling spirit, hiding in the shadows.  
Be free to love and be loved without the fear of shame.  
Be free to dance in the joy of your creator.  
Be free, children of Abraham, from the shame that whispers in your ears and traps your imaginations.

**Stand up tall like you were created to do. And be free.**

Amen.

## Silent Meditation

“Vulnerability begets vulnerability; courage is contagious”<sup>3</sup>

“This process of being known opens the door not only for healing but for the expansion of our capacity to co-create with God renewed minds and hearts, out of which burst a kingdom of goodness and beauty in the face of shame’s withering onslaught.”<sup>4</sup>

Hymn of Response: The Servant Song

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<sup>3</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Penguin, 2015), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 132.