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The Garden of Shame

Genesis 3.7-13

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Have you ever wanted to hide because you did something wrong? If we're honest with ourselves, most of us can remember a time we did something we knew was wrong that made us want to hide because we felt shame about what we'd done. It might be as recent as today or this past week. It might have been long ago. It could be something as serious as a crime that led to an arrest and time in jail, it might be you were unfaithful to your spouse, cheated a business partner, or told a lie that hurt someone else, it could be something no one else knows that you feel shame about such as pornography or a gambling debt. There are as many examples as there are people. These moments can remain with us for a long time.

I can still recall more than 50 years later a time when I wanted to hide because I was ashamed of something I did. My mother had a small collection of Hummel figurines that sat on a shelf in our living room.(show photos). As a boy I enjoyed playing with and throwing all kinds of balls, but my parents made it clear I was to do that outside - off the garage, off the side of the house, off the roof of the house or the outside stairs, but I was not to throw a ball in the living room. One day a friend was over, and I don't recall why or how it happened, but I remember the sound of a ball hitting the wall and the Hummels and I immediately knew that some of the Hummels were damaged or broken. I was ashamed and knew I was in big trouble. There was no hiding what I had done because some of the Hummels were broken beyond repair. When my mother saw what happened, she was really upset. She was angry, but what I remember more was that she was hurt and disappointed that I hadn't followed the one restriction I'd been given. She asked me with tears in her eyes why I'd done it, and I had no good response other than to say it was my fault and how sorry I was. I felt terrible to have hurt my mother and can still remember thinking, "I never want to make mom feel like this again." I **never** played with a ball in the house again and as you can see from the photos, I still have some of my mother's Hummel's including one that was the least damaged.

Have you ever wanted to hide because you did something wrong? Adam and Eve did.

Listen to **Genesis 3:7-13**. 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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, **“Where are you?”** ¹⁰ He said, **“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”** ¹¹ He said, **“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”**

¹² The man said, **“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”** ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, **“What is this that you have done?”** The woman said, **“The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”**

Genesis 3:7-13 illustrates humanity's first encounter with sin and its consequences and yet it still contains the good news that **God desires a relationship with us and seeks us out, even when we've sinned and messed up. God can help us overcome our sin and shame.**

Last week, Pastor Nate shared about Adam and Eve disobeying and failing to trust God. Today, we're going to see the consequences of that choice. What happens when we fail to trust the goodness of God? **For Adam and Eve, it leads to shame, fear, and separation from God. Genesis 3:9 is the first picture of separation from God in the Bible.** Yet, despite their disobedience, we see God seeking them out, desiring to restore and continue their relationship. This passage teaches us that **God doesn't abandon us when we sin but actively pursues us.** It also reveals that without God, we suffer spiritual desolation—an emptiness that no human effort can fill. Today, we'll explore three themes: **God's desire for relationship with us, the spiritual desolation we experience without our Creator in our life,** and I'll spend the most time on the third which is that **God can help us overcome our sin and shame.**

Two weeks ago, the final verse of our theme passage was **Genesis 2:25, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”** Everything was great. Today's passage begins with Adam and Eve trying to cover themselves after they've sinned by not trusting and obeying God's word to them.

Genesis 3:8 says, *“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.”* This description shows God’s personal and intimate presence with humanity. **God Desires a Relationship with Us.** Even after Adam and Eve sinned, God came looking for them. God didn’t abandon them, leave them in their shame or wipe them out. The Lord sought them out. God’s pursuit of Adam and Eve reflects the Creator’s heart for all humanity. We see this theme repeatedly in the Bible. In **Ezekiel 34:11-12**, God declares Himself the shepherd who seeks out His scattered sheep. Jesus echoes this in **Luke 19:10** when He says, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* That’s what God’s been doing from the very beginning. God’s desire for relationship is unwavering—even when we fail.

Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves from the Lord God which is impossible. God comes walking through the garden and you can almost hear Martha Reeves and Vandellas singing in the background, *“Nowhere to run to baby, nowhere to hide...”* **In verse 9 we hear the First Question God asks in the Bible, “Where Are You?” That’s a question each of us must answer for ourselves.** Are you moving toward God or away from God, do you feel close to your Creator or far away? Are you open with God or hiding for some reason? This question wasn’t because God didn’t know where Adam was; It was an invitation for Adam and Eve **to think about where they were** and to step out of hiding and into a restored relationship with their Creator. God is like a loving parent looking for a lost child. Hear love and concern in God’s question which echoes through time and applies to each of us. When we sin or feel distant from God, God asks: **“Where are you?”** It’s a reminder that God desires a relationship with us because God loves us unconditionally even when we’ve made a major mistake.

Jesus embodied this pursuit during His earthly ministry. He spent time with and engaged with tax collectors and others marginalized by society, even Samaritans and Roman soldiers, and offered them grace (Matthew 9:13). His actions demonstrate that no sin is too great to separate us from God's love if we repent and turn back to the Lord.

Without our Creator in our life, we experience spiritual desolation. St. Margaret of Cortona (1247-1297) said that **spiritual desolation allows us to discover what we are without God.** Genesis 3 shows this truth clearly: Adam and Eve

experienced **fear instead of peace**. They felt **exposed instead of secure**. Their relationship with each other was fractured as **blame replaced unity** (Genesis 3:12-13). **Notice the preoccupation with “I,” in verses 10-13, “I heard, I was afraid, I was naked; I hid, I ate.” There’s not one “we.”** All these consequences remind us that life apart from God leads to suffering. Spiritual desolation occurs when we forget or reject our relationship with God. It manifests as emptiness, dissatisfaction, anxiety, or a sense of meaninglessness in life. After eating from the tree God commanded them not to eat from, Adam and Eve’s response was to sew fig leaves together to cover themselves to hide their shame. Shame makes us feel unworthy and disconnected from others and from God. But shame doesn’t have to define us.

God can help us overcome our sin and shame.

Adam and Eve’s shame led them to hide among the trees when they heard God approaching (Genesis 3:8). This symbolizes how sin drives us away from God rather than toward the Lord. Yet hiding only deepens our spiritual wounds. I appreciate the books and TED talks of researcher and author Brené Brown. She’s given some of the most watched TED Talks including ones about vulnerability and shame. Brown defines **shame** as *“the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.”* Shame is a universal human emotion and toxic shame thrives on **secrecy, silence, and judgment**.

Key Characteristics of Shame

Universality: Shame is a common experience that people have unless they lack empathy, the capacity for human connection, emotional intelligence, or honesty, such as with sociopaths or narcissists. People who feel no empathy for others often don’t feel shame about their actions even if other people believe those actions are evil.

Silence and Secrecy: Shame grows when left unspoken. It isolates individuals and fosters a fear of rejection or disconnection, which is what we see with Adam and Eve as they sought to isolate and hide themselves from God.

Triggers: Common shame triggers today include body image, parenting, work performance, relationships, and societal expectations.

According to Brown's book *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't)*, **the impact of shame takes shape in three ways: fear, blame, and disconnection. We see all of these in Adam and Eve.**

Fear: Shame creates fear that one's perceived flaws make them unworthy of love or connection, so they try to hide from God.

Blame and Judgment: Shame can lead to blame or judgment of others as a defense mechanism against vulnerability or responsibility. *"The woman **whom you gave to be with me.**" "The serpent tricked me."*

Disconnection: Shame isolates individuals from others, eroding relationships and emotional well-being.

However, shame isn't always toxic—sometimes, it can have positive effects. **Healthy shame** helps us survive by teaching us how to behave acceptably and fit in with our community. Rather than shame inevitably leading to fear, blame, and disconnection, **healthy shame can have positive effects like self-correcting unhealthy behaviors, making amends with others, and personal growth.**

Think of how healthy shame could have transformed Adam and Eve's response.

Accountability: Instead of blaming someone else, they might have **taken responsibility**, acknowledged their wrongdoing, and sought reconciliation with God.

Healthy shame could have led to **guilt, focused on behavior:** *"I did wrong"* rather than toxic shame which influences our sense of identity, *"I am wrong."* Guilt is good if it leads to repentance and change.

Vulnerability – owning our imperfections—is a key to healing. Had they **confessed openly** instead of hiding, maybe their story and all the negative consequences of their sin (Genesis 3:14-19) might have been different. We'll never know.

As Christians, we're called to confront our sins honestly through confession (1 John 1:9) and not to try and hide among the trees. **Psalm 32:5** reminds us that confession leads to forgiveness: *"I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."* When we bring our sins into the light of God's grace, God forgives us and restores our relationship with our Creator. God is gracious and loving so Adam and Eve are given another opportunity to live life in God's world on God's terms, but because of their lack of trust and subsequent sin, that life will be more painful, difficult and challenging – just as it can be for us when we sin.

God has been pursuing humanity in love ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator and sought to hide and cover up their sin and shame. Adam and Eve violated God's trust, and they needed to confess their sin, shame and their refusal to take responsibility for their actions. When we return to God through repentance and faith, we can **break free from shame**. On the cross, Jesus bore our guilt and shame so that we could be free (Philippians 3:9). When we place our faith in Christ we're declared righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21). We gain access to His grace, which is sufficient for all our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9). We experience God's love anew (Romans 8:38-39) and find joy that transcends circumstances (Psalm 16:11).

Do you have a story in your life that makes you want to hide like Adam and Eve? God is calling each of us today just as God called to them: ***"Where are you?"*** How will you respond? Will you continue hiding behind shame, excuses or distractions? Or will you step into God's grace? Examine your heart and confess any sin weighing you down. Remember that confession isn't about condemnation, it's about restoration. Meditate on scriptures that remind you who you are in Christ: *"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has gone; the new has come"* (2 Cor. 5:17). *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). Let truths like these shape your identity rather than allowing shame to define you.

If you've been feeling empty or disconnected, turn back to God today. Spend time in prayer asking your Creator to fill your heart with God's presence. Genesis 3:7-13 reveals the result of humanity's tragic fall into sin but also **highlights God's relentless pursuit of relationship with us despite our failures**. God desires a relationship with

each of us—even when we've messed up. Without God's presence in our lives, we suffer spiritual desolation—but restoration is always possible through repentance. Shame disappears when you tell vulnerable stories in safe environments. If it would help you to speak with a pastor or someone else and to have prayer together, please feel free to reach out.

Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we can overcome sin and shame. As you reflect on this passage today; Let go of any guilt or shame holding you back. Respond to God's invitation by stepping out of hiding. Seek fulfillment not in worldly things but in a relationship with your Creator. God is looking for you, like a shepherd for a lost lamb (final Hummel photo). God loves you deeply and desires nothing more than to walk closely with you every day of your life.

Closing Prayer: Loving God, we thank you that you don't give up on us, abandon us, or condemn us when we sin, make a mistake, or fall short of your expectations of how we're to live as your children. Thank you for pursuing us in love, forgiving our sins when we confess them, and delivering us from the negative consequences of shame. Enable us to run toward you and not away from you, to open our lives to you rather than trying to hide, because there is nowhere to run to and nowhere to hide from your presence, for which we're eternally grateful and for which we give you all the praise. Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever tried to hide from God or avoid a person because you were ashamed or embarrassed by something you did or said? While you don't need to share the specifics if it's too personal, can you say a little about how you felt?
2. The first question God asks in the Bible is, "*Where are you?*" How would you answer that question? How does it make you feel to know God loves you so much that God searches for you like a parent looking for a lost child?
3. St. Margaret of Cortona said that spiritual desolation allows us to discover what we are without God. What are some of the negative consequences of life apart from God for Adam and Eve? For us?

4. Adam and Eve's sin, like ours, drives them away from God and leads to shame and a cover up. Review from the sermon the difference between toxic shame and healthy shame. How could Adam and Eve have handled their disobedience and the shame they felt better? What steps could they have taken, but didn't?
5. Why is taking responsibility and confessing our sin and mistakes wiser and healthier than trying to hide or allowing toxic shame to harm our relationship with God or other people? How do we avoid, "blaming it on the serpent" or anyone else?
6. Genesis 3:7-13 reveals the consequences of humanity's tragic fall into sin but also highlights God's relentless pursuit of a relationship with us despite our failures. God is still asking, "*Where are you? What is this that you have done? Why are you hiding from me? Is life in the trees, hiding in shame, eyes open to your weakness, failure, fear, and anxiety where you want to stay?*" How would you respond?