

Week 3 Participant: The Gardens of God

Session 3: Week of March 23, 2025

The Garden of Shame – *Genesis 3:7-13*

Brewster Baptist Church

Connecting

Brainstorm as a group: What are some situations or circumstances in which we might want to hide?

Genesis 3:7-13 (NRSV)

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.”

Questions

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. See the page on Shame. 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 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?

Closing thought: How can we, as a group, support each other in overcoming shame and experiencing God’s love and forgiveness more fully?

Praying for Each Other

Are there any joys to celebrate, any burdens we can share?

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.

Shame

Brené Brown defines shame as *"the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection."* Her research highlights how shame is a universal human emotion and toxic shame thrives on **secrecy, silence, and judgment**. According to her book *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)*, **shame takes shape in three ways: fear, blame, and disconnection**.

Key Characteristics of Shame

Universality: Shame is a common experience that people experience unless they lack empathy or the capacity for human connection, such as with sociopaths or extreme narcissists.

Silence and Secrecy: Shame grows when left unspoken. It isolates individuals and fosters a fear of rejection or disconnection.

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

Impact of Shame

Fear of Disconnection: Shame creates a fear that one's perceived flaws make them unworthy of love or connection.

Blame and Judgment: It can lead to self-blame or judgment of others as a defense mechanism against vulnerability.

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

Healthy shame: 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.