

# **HIDE & SEEK**

## **The Story of Guilt and Shame**

### **Vulnerable Series (Part 1)**

**Texts: Genesis 2:8-3:16**

#### **In the Garden**

The story is told of a clergyman who noticed that a particular parishioner had not been seen in worship for several weeks. On a Sunday when his associate pastor was preaching, he decided to pay a surprise visit to her, anticipating with a certain twisted glee the look on her face when she opened the door and saw it was he. Arriving at the house, he saw the church member's car parked in the driveway. When repeated doorbell rings produced no response, the pastor walked around the side of the house toward the back garden, calling out the woman's name. There by the poolside he found an empty lounge-chair and a half-finished glass of ice-tea, yet still no parishioner.

Feeling his plan to confront her nearly foiled, the minister took out a pen and one of his business cards, and furiously scrawled on the back: Isaiah 65, verse 12, which reads: **"I called but you did not answer, I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."** Finally satisfied that he had at least had the last word, the pastor left the note in the woman's mailbox and went on about his business.

The next morning, the clergyman found in his own mailbox, a note from the woman he'd called on the day before. It simply read: **"Dear sir, Genesis 3:10. Yours truly."** More than a bit surprised that this truant parishioner had sufficient command of the Scriptures to respond to his note in kind, he leafed through his Bible till he found the passage she'd cited. With a flush of embarrassment, he remembered the poolside, the empty chair, and read the words: **"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid!" (Gen 3:10).**

**"I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."** I want to think with you today about those famous words from the Bible and their implications for our lives. In fact, over the course of the next several weeks, we're going to unpack together the world of meaning behind those words and ponder with one another how God can enable our lives and relationships to be even better than they are if we could take the daring risk of being more VULNERABLE with one another. To get at this subject it is crucial that we understand how God originally intended us to experience life, what has gone wrong, and how it might get repaired.

**God's Original Intention: Vulnerability**

For that reason, I want to go back with you to the story in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 where the Bible pictures these realities for us in such vivid and simple terms. The Bible tells us that **"in the beginning"** – which is Scripture-speak for that dimension where the purposes of God are perfectly seen and done – life was **"very good"** (Gen 1:31). The Book of Genesis portrays the ideal state of humanity in terms of a glorious garden where a man and a woman **"were both naked and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25)** – and both of the terms used there are worth defining more clearly.

Do you remember those days when your kids, or maybe your younger siblings or nieces and nephews would happily toddle around the house in nothing but their birthday suits? Amy and I have photographs of our three boys in that state that we've promised never to reveal, on pain of death! But there's something so beautiful about that time of life, isn't there? There's this physical innocence and openness that seems so very pure.

When we're told that Adam and Eve were **"both naked,"** however, it is meant to bring to mind not only that state of physical innocence we associate with children, but also that fearless state of emotional-spiritual transparency we associate with the most pure-hearted saints. I think of my grandmother in her early 90's and how fearlessly transparent she was. She was past the point where she was performing for anyone. Her heart was an open book. She confessed what was messy in her story, she dared to speak the words of truth others needed to hear, she loved boldly. Grannie (or G.G. as my kids called her) lived nakedly. That may not be a pretty picture to you, but I tell you, wrinkles included, she was never more beautiful than in that season of life.

Genesis says that Adam and Eve were not only naked (in the twin senses I've been talking about) but that **"they felt no shame."** To appreciate this statement, it helps to understand the difference between the common terms "guilt" and "shame." As a recent article in Psychology Today puts it, GUILT is "our ability to recognize that our actions may have hurt someone, to empathize with that person's pain and to feel remorse for having caused it... all [of which are] signs of emotional health. Guilt is the awareness that we've crossed a moral or relational boundary we should not have broken. It's that bad feeling that makes us do something creative – like confess or make amends or seek help in trying to repair the situation.

SHAME, however, is something else. **If guilt is the awareness that we've done something bad, shame is the feeling that we are irreparably bad.** There is something wrong with us that no confession will satisfy, no amends can make up for, and no one can fix. Shame is the sense that we are hopelessly stained, destined for judgment and rejection, with really only one recourse left: We've got to hide not only what we've done but who we are.

Are you getting all this? OK. So let's go back to the story that Genesis tells. The Book of Genesis pictures God's original intention as a life where Adam and Eve – who stand for us – are living nakedly and without shame. In other words, they enjoy a completely unguarded relationship with their Creator and one another. They have no need to defend or pretend or hide anything. They can be stewards of the creation without needing to own it and control it. They can live within the boundaries God has established without needing to write the rules themselves. They can be creatures without needing to be the Creator. In short, they can be VULNERABLE beings -- naked, dependent, and unashamed of that for ONE splendid reason: The good and great and glorious God loves them and out of his grace is providing for them, abundantly. They are like trusting children in the hands of a tremendous parent and this original vulnerability is one of the most beautiful things about Paradise.

### **What Went Wrong: Mistrust, Sin & Shame**

But here's what went wrong. The Bible says: **"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made" (Gen 3:1)**. Don't get hung up on an image of an intelligent, talking snake here, because that's not the point of the story. The point Genesis is making is that amidst all this abundance of love and grace and freedom to be vulnerable lies an insidious threat, a snake in the grass, as present today as ever it was. And the voice of this Evil comes hissing and spitting THE ULTIMATE LIE: **"You can't trust the love of God."**

If you read the account in Genesis 3, you'll see that this is what Satan says, in effect: You think that God is totally for you, but he's secretly keeping something from you. Look how pleasing to the eye that fruit over there is. It's selfish and unreasonable that God has put a fence around it. Don't you see? God has done this to keep you limited. He knows that when you eat of it you will be a God yourself and no longer need him (Gen 3:1-4).

And this seed of mistrust took. And the woman and man ate of the forbidden fruit. **"And their eyes were opened,"** the scriptures say, **"and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to [humanity], 'Where are you?' And [humanity] answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid'" (Gen 3:7-8).**

By eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of good and evil alright, but -- like a magnifying mirror with a bright light -- all that knowledge did was show them how poor and shivering a human life looks

when it has turned its back on the God who is their source of life and love and light.

I have this theory that Adam and Eve could still at this point have recovered their balance and avoided the full Fall. When God asks the question, "Where are you?" it certainly isn't because he's lost a GPS lock on them. No, God asks the question for the same reason Jesus asks us so many of his questions – to help us locate ourselves. There was still time for Adam and Eve, as there is for anyone hearing this message right now, to answer: "I'm right here in this mess, God. I've done something terrible. I've offended against you... I've wounded this other person... I've injured myself... I'm so sorry, God, please forgive me." I have this theory that if Adam and Eve had let appropriate feelings of **GUILT** drive them to come before God -- like King David does in Psalm 51 & Psalm 139... If they'd been able to confess and repent with complete vulnerability, their Fall could still have been arrested and Eden restored.

But the serpent's lie had worked too well. Adam and Eve no longer trusted the love and goodness of God was large enough for their condition, so instead of being lifted by guilt they plunged further into **SHAME**. "We've not only done something bad, we are bad in a way that no confession will satisfy, no amends can make up for, and no one can fix. We are hopelessly stained, destined for judgment and rejection from the One who finds out, and so we must HIDE. We've got to cover-up with fig leaves, run into the woods, or blame someone else. **"The woman YOU put here with me -- she gave me [the] fruit."** **"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."** (Gen 3:12-13)

In countless ways you and I could probably describe, we are still living in this condition. The story of Adam and Eve is quite actually the story of us all. The ways that shame has worked itself into us, the various strategies we use to cover-up, run, or blame are too numerous to go into here, but we're going to take a look at some of them in coming weeks. Yet it's not our problem that I want you to think about as you head out of here today. It's how our condition gets repaired.

### **How Our Condition Gets Repaired**

Reflecting on this theme, author Robert Fulghum shares some thoughts inspired one Autumn afternoon as some children in his neighborhood chose his yard for a game of hide-and-seek. Fulghum writes: "Did you have a kid in your neighborhood who always hid so good, nobody could find him? We did. After a while we would give up on him and go off, leaving him to rot wherever he was. Sooner or later he would show up, all mad because we didn't keep looking for him. And we would get mad because he wasn't playing the game the way it was supposed to be played... No matter what, though, the next time he would hide too good again. He's probably still hidden somewhere, for all I know. "As I write this," says Fulghum, "the neighborhood game goes on, and

there is a kid under a pile of leaves in the yard just under my window. He has been there a long time now, and everybody else is about to give up on him over at the base. I considered going out to the base and telling them where he is hiding. I thought about setting the leaves on fire to drive him out. Finally, I just yelled, 'GET FOUND, KID!'

"A man I know found out last year he had terminal cancer. He was a doctor. And knew about dying, and he didn't want to make his family and friends suffer through that with him. So he kept his secret. And died. Everybody said how brave he was to bear his suffering in silence and not tell everybody, and so on and so forth. But privately his family and friends said how angry they were that he didn't need them, didn't trust their strength. And it hurt that he didn't say good-bye. He hid too well. Getting found would have kept him in the game. Hide-and-seek, grown-up style. Wanting to hide. Needing to be sought. Confused about being found. 'I don't want anyone to know.' 'What will people think?' 'I don't want to bother anyone.'"

Do you know anyone anything like that? I bet you do. Maybe it is you or me. Our disease comes in many forms. But what I want you to remember as you go today is that there is Someone who has not stopped looking for you, who is still shouting, **"Where are you?"** not because he doesn't already know, but because **the one pre-condition for receiving the love and grace of God (and often of others) is that you have to be VULNERABLE.** You have to be willing to be found.

As we go on this journey together in weeks to come, here's my encouragement to you: "Get found, kid." Put your trust in the absolute love and the amazing grace of God and this family.

Let us pray...

Great God of all Creation, you have revealed yourself in Scripture, in the history of the church you keep reforming, and ultimately in the person of your Son as the Good Shepherd who goes out in search of the lost. Thank you so much for that. Find us where we hide. Show us that to be nakedly dependent upon You and courageously vulnerable before others is to be clothed in splendor indeed. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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Joseph Burgo, "The Difference Between Guilt and Shame" Psychology Today, May 30, 2013 -  
HYPERLINK "http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shame/201305/the-difference-between-guilt-  
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Robert Fulghum, All I Really Needed To Know I Learned In Kindergarten, p.56.