

“Hide and Seek”

In 1985, I served the Moores Hill First Baptist Church. Fresh out of school, I intended to be Super pastor to each and every parishioner. I would respond to parishioners crises faster than a speeding bullet. I would leap tall buildings to rescue one lone sheep. With my x-ray vision, I would see into the secret needs of every member and solve all their problems. One day in early August of 1986 at Hogan Hill Cemetery, Super Pastor had a chance to strut his stuff.

As we were preparing to lay 86 year old Lucille Gifford to rest, I was standing under the shade of a small maple tree talking with Lucille’s brother. He was a gruff, hard-nosed fellow and I can’t even recall his name but I can still see his face as if it were yesterday. As I began to speak, all eyes turned toward me. I commented that this had to be a very difficult time for him. His voice cracked and tears welled up in his eyes as shared that he was the last sibling living from 4 sisters and 3 or 4 brothers. “Only me left now,” he replied in a hushed, choked voice.

As I reached my arm around to pat myself on the back for being Super Pastor who could get this rugged old farm laborer to share his burden, I felt a sharp jab right at the top of the back of my thigh. I know I was somewhat startled and had to have had a look of great surprise as a sharp burning began to rise up my backside and I sort of instinctively shook my leg. At that movement, I felt two more sharp jabs and I knew I had something in my pants. I thought, I’m not sure what’s wrong but I’ve got to get out of these pants,

something's got a hold on me. No it wasn't a Mississippi squirrel but I had inadvertently stood over a bumblebee nest and a pesky bumblebee had apparently crawled on my pants to the point where the material met the back of my leg and he, or maybe it was a she, didn't like being blocked from further progress. But for just a moment after the first strike, I was still under the impression that we were on the cusp of one of those break through spiritual moments. I was after all, Super Pastor, and I could surely suffer a little for the Lord. But after strike number two and three, I went running for the cover of a large tombstone to get those pants down and the unknown intruder out and Lucille was yet to be eulogized.

Well as you can imagine, everyone knew what I was doing, this body doesn't fit well behind tombstones, not all of it anyway, and as I tried to compose myself, buckle my belt and get back into Super Pastor mode, I inadvertently forgot to, well you guessed it, I forgot to make that last northern movement with my right hand that completes a pants puttin' on by a guy. When Lucille's brother, trying his best not to break out in hysterical laughter made that south to north movement, all hope of maintaining a Super Pastor stance had vanished.

Once the funeral was over and I was safely back in my office updating my resume, I realized how trapped I felt. First, by the fact that successful pastors never take their pants off in cemeteries with mourners around, or anytime for that matter. And, secondly because I had seen the scorn in several person's eyes, even though I did my best to explain, they weren't all listening. I never wanted to come out of that office, I was absolutely ashamed. Put those two things together and you have a tough dilemma, endure the pain of an angry

bumblebee or endure the shame. Only when the pain of the stings gets worse than the pain of the shame will a would be Super Pastor let his agony be known. Why do we do that? Why would I try to hide the pain instead of facing it? The answer is as ancient as humanity itself.

God gave Adam and Eve a luxurious garden in which to live. It was a literal paradise, the very thing that we all long to experience. Their provision was limitless. No disease, no death, no worry and the way the bible ends chapter 2 of Genesis, I think best describes paradise, "...and they felt no shame." The only thing that God felt was significant about Adam and Eve's relationship to speak of before the fall was this, they felt no shame. To say that they felt no shame means that they never had a moment of wondering if the other was thinking something critical. It means they never had the slightest fear that if they said something silly or weren't romantic enough or bought the right birthday present. We all know the rest of the story. They broke the one and only prohibition that God had placed upon them and in that moment they broke God's law, God's heart and broke their fellowship with God. And, notice the starkness of the contrast. The only thing we know about their relationship before sin was that they felt no shame and after they ate the forbidden fruit, the first thing they realized was that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made a covering for themselves...they covered their shame. The primary pain that entered the world with sin was the anguish of shame. If you think of sin as a disease than shame is it's primary symptom. Whenever someone comes into my office, head bowed, a look of anguish on their face, when the hem and haw around at the question, "Tell me, why are you here today?" I know we will be talking about sin. Don't

mistake the Genesis account to be merely about the embarrassment of being naked.

Outward exposure can feel embarrassing, but it's nothing like having your soul stripped bare. Shame not only inflicts the pain of feeling really bad about ourselves but then it begins a cycle that blocks us from taking the only steps that can help us feel better.

As Adam and Eve began hiding from one another, they also began hiding from God, let's look at our passage of scripture for today from Genesis 3:8, "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 themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

One of shame's greatest goals is to get you hiding from God. Why? Precisely because the scriptures also tell us that God rewards seekers not hiders. Our other scripture passage from Hebrews 11:6 tells us that, "(God) rewards those who earnestly seek him." Shame therefore steals not only the joy of knowing yourself to be of infinitely valuable, but also steals all the blessings that come to those who seek God. Shame's invitation is: "Hide from God lest you be condemned." Jesus' invitation is "Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well." (Matthew 6:3)

Adam and Eve weren't only hiding from God and from each other but they tried desperately to hide the truth from themselves. That is really what Adam was trying to do when he attempted to shift the blame toward Eve: "The woman you gave me..." and ultimately pointed the finger for the blunder at God..."You, God did this!" John Calvin, the great 17th century reformer wrote two volumes of Theology that has helped to shape Christian thought. And while I believe that Calvin got some stuff wrong and I do not ascribe to all his theology, I do agree with something he said in his work, *Institutes of the*

Christian Religion. In fact, the entire work begins with one of the most important statements of his entire work: “True religion consists of the knowledge of God and knowledge of self.” Here is some knowledge you should understand about God, “God is not hiding from us. He wants to be known.” And, some knowledge of ourselves, “Our shame lures us into hiding from God.” Shame keeps us from knowing God and knowing ourselves. The only thing that can keep us from knowing God is our decision to hide from him. The only thing that can keep us from the cleansing stream of God’s mercy is our decision to hide from ourselves.

And it doesn’t help much when our whole society seems to encourage us to hide from God or hide from others and even ourselves. How many times do we as parents issue the command, “GO to your room!” The tone of the voice says it all, “I am so frustrated with you that I don’t even want to see your face right now.” The message is easily translated by the child, “Go off by yourself and bear your shame on your own.” We do our best to shake off the sting but the bumblebee keeps striking. Shame hurts, silent shame is suffered in deafening silence. What’s the alternative to hiding?

I don’t know if you realize it or not but shamed people dread the idea of being exposed. Behavioral psychologists tell us that when people are dealing with loads of shame the most common dream they have is being naked in front of a crowd of people. The second most prevalent dream is one where your teeth fall. We hide from God because the church for so many decades used public humiliation as a way to testify to the shame of the sinners committed. It is a short leap to imagine that God himself will jerk the fig leaves off, leaving us exposed. The fear of being exposed causes us to hide all the more stubbornly.

Here's the good news. Even though Adam and Eve had broken God's only prohibition and had introduced sin into a sinless world. God didn't yank off their fig leaves. Instead he gave them a better set of clothes. Genesis 3:21 says, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. Please notice that the first covering for shame required shed blood. Fig leaves fade. Sacrificed animal skins last a while longer. But God had a permanent covering in mind. What began as the blood shed to make leather garments continued as a crimson thread throughout the pages of God's word. Isaac was on the altar but a ram caught in a thicket was ready to take the knife. The blood was on the doorposts of the Hebrew homes in Egypt as the angel of death slew every first born in every home-except the ones covered by the crimson stain. The stream from the Passover lamb ran from the alter of the tabernacle on the Day of Atonement. From the thorn pierced brow to the nail scarred hands and feet, the blood of Jesus flowed freely to cover our shame.

The Bible tells us that Jesus did more than pay the penalty for our sin, he became our sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says this, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In the excruciating hours of the cross, Father God, in his unspeakable love for us, did the two unthinkable things toward his son. First, the Father turned his face away from his son, as one does when disgusted. When Jesus began his ministry and was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased.

Second, while Jesus was on the cross, the Father lifted the cover off His only Son. He didn't even allow Jesus the clothes he had given Adam and Eve. The Father allowed Jesus

to hang exposed and vulnerable, not only before the watching world but before the whole invisible realm of spiritual powers. I don't think the mocking taunts of the Roman guards or passerby's held any comparison to the taunts of the invisible demons who were granted an unthinkable open season to the shame of the Son of God.

In the cup of suffering that Jesus drank was the poison of not only every sin committed, but also the shame that it evoked. In other words, on the cross, Jesus Christ not only bearing the sin of the child molester, he also was bearing the shame of the bewildered, broken child. He was not only bearing the sin of the prostitute's adultery but was hearing the shame of her identity too. He was not only bearing the sin of the alcoholic's drunkenness but at the same time was bearing the shame of the alcoholic's child who never invited friends home to play. See the sin...and the shame...born by Jesus?

And Jesus took the shame willingly...in fact almost eagerly...that we might be set free. Hebrews 12:2 tells us, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Step # 1 in dealing with the shame: Stop chasing the rabbit. Step #2: fix your eyes on Jesus. You don't have to keep the bumblebee in your drawers any longer. Jesus already took the sting.