

Facing the Fears that Ruin Relationships

50 Days, Part 5; 11-12-17

I want to welcome you to Part 5 of our 50 Days of Transformation series, where we've been focusing on transformation in seven key areas of our lives.

- So far, we've looked at our spiritual health, physical health, mental health... and, last week we looked at emotional health.
- This week I want us to look at **relational health**. How we can experience God-empowered transformation in our relationships.

Now, of course, that could be a seven-part series in itself. So, this morning, we're going to focus on one particular issue that impacts all of us in so many ways... and, that is fear.

- But, more specifically, I want to talk about **how we can disarm the fears within us** that can so easily impair our relationships.
- And to do that we're going to go all the way back to the very beginning of Scripture,
- to that first couple, Adam and Eve... because that's where all the problems started.

After each day of creation, we read, in Genesis 1, that God looked at what He had done and said, "It is good."

- But, on the 7th day, after breathing life into the crown jewel of His creation, He looked at Adam and said, "It is very good!"
- And yet, now looking at all He had done, God sees one problem. He says, *"It's not good for man to be alone."*

So, God says to Adam, *"I will give you a woman who will wash, clean, iron, sew; who will never have 'headaches'; who loves power tools; who thinks its manly of you when you're lost and refuse to stop for directions;*

- *Who appreciates the toilet seat being left up; who thinks it's cute when you drink out of the carton; who loves everything you love; never complains..."*
- Adam says, **"Wow... but, God, what's that going to cost me?"** God said, *"Well, it'll cost you an arm and a leg."*

- **So, Adam asked,** “*That seems a little excessive, God... what can I get with a rib?*”

And with that, having created Adam out of the dirt... **He now creates woman out of Adam’s rib.**

- This by the way is **why men don’t mind getting dirty** and women do. Because men are made from dirt.
- But, let me ask you, why do you think God chose to create Eve separately from Adam... like He did with all the first male & female animals?

Well, He did so to show **that they were actually the same created being**, two halves of a whole.

- In other words, the female wasn’t created as a separate being, second to the male,
- **but was formed from the very same “stuff”** as the very first man.
- And, as such, she was every bit as perfect as man and every bit as patterned after God’s image & likeness.

So, **God puts Adam to sleep; He creates Eve...** and when he wakes up, he sees Eve in all her glory.

- And the only words he could muster were, “*Whoa, that’s my wife?! Whoa man!*”
- And that’s where the word “woman” came from!

Things went along really great for a long time between man and woman because sin hadn’t yet entered into humanity.

- Imagine that... there was no sadness, no sickness, no sorrow, no suffering, no deceit, no lying, no manipulating, no jealousy.
- In a very real way, they had a perfect relationship... till the serpent began to tempt Eve.

We looked at this a few weeks ago... how God had told Adam that they could eat of any tree of the Garden... except one.

- If you eat from just that one particular tree, he says in Genesis 2:17, then “*you will surely die.*”

- God wasn't trying to tempt them with this one forbidden tree. But rather, He wanted their love to be a matter of choice.
- So, He provided **a context whereby they could either choose to obey & live in His love...**
- Or, disobey and turn away from His love.

So, satan begins to tempt Eve, *“God’s lying to you, Eve. You’re not going to die if you eat of the fruit of that tree. In fact, you’ll be as wise as God.”*

- In other words, he’s telling her that if they eat from the fruit of that one tree, then they’d be able to decide for themselves what is good and evil apart from God.
- You’ll no longer need to make your life fit with the way God designed things to work.

Well... Eve completely fell for it and, in **Genesis 3:6**, we read that

- ***“Eve ate some of the fruit. Then she also gave some to her husband, Adam, who was with her, and he ate it. Immediately, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness,”***
- This is where shame enters the world. There had never been any fear or pain... never been any guilt or shame prior to this.

So, God said to Eve, “because you disobeyed me,” what was just so perfect is now entirely broken.

- And, one of the things that’s going to be broken is childbirth.
- He said... *“you’ll have greater trouble in pregnancy and great pain in childbirth.”*
- But then we see how this brokenness begins to impact their relationship:

God says, in verse 16, *“And though you’ll desire your husband he’s going to lord it over you.”*

- Now, the NLT translates this as, *“You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”*
- In other words, while they were created for mutual submission, their tendency will now be to gain the upper hand.

- The **battle of the sexes** had begun with conflict and power struggle replacing the love and interdependence they had once enjoyed.

There is so much more to all of this... so many important spiritual truths for us to get a hold of.

- But I just want to focus on what relates to relationships.
- And, what we can see in this story reflect **three fundamental fears** that pop up in every single relationship...
- Fears that are still reaping havoc in our relational lives.

So, let's look at these **three fears that were birthed into humanity following the Fall** and how they can ruin our relationships if not dealt with:

1. The first fear we learn about is this: It's the fear of exposure

Why can't I get closer to the people in my life? I'd like to be closer to my wife or husband.

- I'd like to be more transparent with my friends. I'd like to be more vulnerable with my family.
- Well, our fear of exposure **creates an inevitable distance in our relationships**.

Truth is, there may be a lot about you that you don't like. And, **because you don't like certain things** about you,

- you certainly **don't want anybody else to see those things** in you.
- So, you'll consciously or unconsciously create enough distance to keep them from seeing the real you.
- It's so natural for us that we hardly know we're doing it... how we keep people at a distance,
- fearful of the rejection that could come with being exposed.

It was easy for Adam to be vulnerable with Eve before the Fall because there were no blemishes...

- no mistakes, no failures, no brokenness that could be exposed.

- But, all that's changed now. And so, after the Fall, we're told in **Genesis 3:9-10** that ***"God called Adam, 'Where are you? Why are you hiding?' And Adam said 'I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid.'"***
- Now remember, because God is God, whenever God asks you a question, you can be sure that he already knows the answer!
- So, in asking Adam these two questions, He's doing two things:

First, He's reminding Adam that, in spite of what just happened, that He's still here... that He still loves him.

- And, **secondly**, He's asking him these questions because He wants Adam to man up to what he's done.
- You see, transformation in our relationships can only happen when we **own up to the fact that they aren't what they ought to be...**
- that they could be a whole lot better than they are right now.

And so, God calls out to him again... *"Adam, where are you?"* But this time Adam answers Him, *"I heard you in the garden and I was afraid b/c I was naked, so I hid."*

- This phrase, ***"I was afraid... so I hid,"*** is so important because they always go together.
- And why? Because **fear always causes us to hide.**

Look that phrase ***"I was naked."*** What does it mean to be naked? He's talking about more here than just physical nakedness.

- There's an emotional nakedness too. To be naked means to be exposed... to be uncovered... to be vulnerable.
- You are never more vulnerable than when you're naked. It's just all out there. There's nothing to hide.

When we're afraid of being transparent... afraid of being honest... afraid of letting people see us as we really are,

- our **fear of exposure will almost always create distance** in our relationships... even relationships that we've had for years.
- For Adam & Eve, the damage created by this distance came in three stages.

- First, was the shame:

SHAME

In Genesis 2:25, at what I think is one of the high points of the creation story, we're told that,

- *"The man and his wife (Adam & Eve) were both naked and they felt no shame."*
- But, after the Fall and the entrance of sin, we reading Genesis 3:7 that *"They suddenly felt shame at their nakedness."* (NLT)

Clearly, this idea of shame is central to our story. So, what is shame?

- Well, **unlike a more familiar word, "guilt,"** which speaks to a remorse over what we've done,
- Shame reflects a **remorse over who we think we are.**
- Ultimately, shame is a conscious or unconscious belief in **one's essential defectiveness** or brokenness as a human being.

Beyond the shame that was birthed into humanity at the Fall, **the roots of shame can grow deeper & deeper** as we live out our lives...

- Where, as a result of something said to us or done to us, or something we've perpetrated,
- we see ourselves **marked as damaged good.**

Whatever the trauma might have been, you **began to define yourself as broken** and without value...

- worthy of the **abuse** or **neglect** or **abandonment** of others.
- With shame, we ultimately, see ourselves as **defective**... without hope of ever being anything else.

And, because shame is tied to our brokenness... and **because it's brokenness that we're ultimately wanting to hide** in our lives,

- That **shame produces fear**: fear of being exposed, fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of being humiliated.
- So, immediately following the Fall, Adam & Eve began to experience the weight of shame.
- But, from the shame **came a drive to cover up.**

COVER UP.

In the face of our brokenness & shame, our tendency will always be to cover up and hide... concealing who we really are.

- In **Genesis 3:7**, we now read that **"At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So, they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves."**
- Now, in their nakedness, full of shame, they **threw together some makeshift clothing** made with fig leaves in order to cover themselves.
- Why? Because **shame always seeks a hiding place.**

Of course, we no longer use fig leaves to cover our brokenness & shame...

- but we've certainly found **many other things behind which we can still cover up & hide.**
- Some people hide behind humor, never letting anyone get too close to them.
- Some people hide behind inappropriate sex... which serves only as a counterfeit to the true love & intimacy they desire **but don't think they're worthy of.**

What is it for you? Maybe you try to cover up your insecurities by presenting an image that you're all put together.

- You've got the right clothes, you've got the right accessories, you've got the right hair, you drive the right car, you say the right things, you use the right words.
- You give this image that you're all put together but you're not.
- Your **relationships** are not ok; your **heart is not ok**; your **marriage is not ok.**
- You don't have it all together. But you try to present an image that you are. **Why?** Because of fear.

The most convenient way to do this today is online. If you read through someone's Facebook timeline, **you could think their life is perfect.**

- And if you read their Instagram **you'd think they have nothing but fun and everybody wants to date them!**
- You see, our fears are causing us to be our own publicists... where we carefully manage our image. All of that, because of fear.

Years ago, author John Powell wrote a book called Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Really Am?

- Well, that's a good question. Well, bottom-line, I'm afraid to tell you who I really am is **because you may not like who I am!**
- And if I shared who I really am and you don't accept me, well, the rejection would just be too painful.
- So, there's no way I'm going to let you see the real me. So, we continue to cover up and hide.

So, the first fear is this **fear of being exposed**, which leads to greater distance with those around us.

- The second fear we see in Adam and Eve is the **fear of disapproval**... and that disapproval makes us defensive.

2. Our Fear of Disapproval Makes Us Defensive

Now we move from simply hiding & covering up to now being defensive. We're **not just hiding; we're now hurting**.

- We're **not just excusing ourselves; we're accusing others...**
- So that, whenever we feel a sense of disapproval from others, we start pointing fingers back at them **assigning motive to their actions... questioning their integrity**.
- "If I've done anything wrong, its only because of what they've done."

We see this in verse 12 where God asks Adam, "*Did you eat what I told you not to eat?*" Adam answered and said, "*You gave me this woman and SHE gave me the fruit, so I ate it.*"

- Rather than owning up, Adam blamed his wife. "*If you hadn't made this woman, you and I wouldn't be having any of these problems. It's my wife's fault.*"

- But ultimately, he's not even blaming his wife... he's blaming God.
- *"You gave me this woman! I'd really be close to you, God, if it weren't for that wife of mine that You gave to me!"*

But, as much as Adam wasn't "manning up" to God, Eve wasn't willing to "woman up" to her part in this as well.

- In Genesis 13, *"Eve said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate it.'"*
- So, Adam blames his wife and Eve blames the snake. Why? Because my fear of disapproval makes me defensive.

This happens too often in our relationships... where if someone says something to you that hints of disapproval, you immediately get defensive.

- And you either **get offended** or you **attack back** or you **accuse them** for being the source of the problem.
- So... my fear of exposure makes me distant and my fear of disapproval makes me defensive.
- But there's a third fear that we see in Adam and Eve. It's the **fear of losing control, which often makes us demanding**.

3. Our Fear of Losing Control Makes Us Demanding

One of the results of Adam and Eve's sin was a total loss of control.

They lost control of their future; They lost control of their destiny;

- And, what we've probably all experienced is that **the more out of control you feel the more controlling you become**.
- The more out-of-control you feel, the more insecure you become...
- And, the more insecure you become, the greater the need is to get your way.

Suddenly, we start bossing everybody around. We start making demands. We start defending, demanding, demeaning and dominating.

- We see all this in **verse 16** where, as we read a few minutes ago, God says to Eve

- “You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.”
- In other words, while they were created for mutual submission, their tendency will now be to gain the upper hand.
- Again, this is where the war of the sexes began. Right there.

All the misunderstanding between husbands & wives, boyfriends & girlfriends... between friends & co-workers...

- All the confusion, all the conflict, all the jockeying for power & position, all the tit for tat;
- All the **bargaining over who’s going to be in control of this and who’s going to run that**... it all goes back to the Fall.

So, what is the **antidote that can disarm these three fears**... The fear of exposure that causes me to be distant;

- The fear of disapproval that causes me to be defensive;
- And the fear of losing control that causes me to be demanding in relationships?

There’s only one core ANTIDOTE to the fears we all, to one degree or another, experience in our lives...

- **And that’s to learn to live in God’s love.** That is the antidote... to receive and live in the reality of God’s love.
- **1 John 4:18** says this **“Wherever God’s love is, there is no fear, [Why?] “because God’s perfect love drives out all fear.”** (NCV)

You see, the opposite of fear is not peace or calm... the opposite of fear is love.

- When you **invite God’s love into the front door** of your heart,
- fear will have no choice but to **head out the backdoor**.
- Why? Because fear & love can’t live in the same house.

Why is it that people will stand watching a fire burning down a home and everybody’s afraid to go in?

- But a mother or father will run right in to get their baby. Why? Because fear is overcome by love.
- So, we need to learn to live more deeply in God’s love.

- Because, if you grow in God's love, you really will experience genuine transformation in your relational life.

So, how do we do that? Well, **let me suggest three ways** to connect more deeply with the Father's love in your everyday life...

- They're pretty straight forward, but, honestly, the most important ones usually are.
- So, the first thing is to surrender our hearts daily to God.

1. Surrender My Heart to God Every Day

In fact, when you wake up each morning, I'd encourage you to sit on the side of your bed and declare that intention. **Make it your first prayer:**

- *"God before I even start this day I surrender my thoughts and emotions to You. God, I want you to be Lord of my feelings & reactions... of my heart & my mind. I surrender it all to you.*
- *Father, my greatest desire today is to know your love more today than I knew it yesterday. So, have your way in my life today, Lord. In all I do and in all I'll face today, not my will be Yours be done."*

I'm not suggesting this as some kind of magic formula, but it's a powerful thing to declare and affirm your intention to surrender to Him and to **know Him more.**

- And the more you know Him, the closer your relationship with Him will grow.
- And **as it grows, your ability to embrace and live in His love will continue to grow** as well.
- And, because "perfect love casts out all fear," things like anxiety, worry and insecurity will lose their hold in our lives.

Of course, laying down the stuff that gets in the way of our receiving and living in God's love may be difficult.

- But, look at how this passage from **Job 11:13-18** can provide a little encouragement along the way:
- ***"Surrender your heart to God; Turn to him in prayer, and give up your sins— even those you do in secret."***

So, when you have your morning bedside chat with God, in addition to turning to Him in prayer and surrendering your heart to Him,

- You might also give up your sins... where you **confess any sin from the day before**,
- while **making the choice to turn from any sin** as you walk out the new day in front of you.

“Then you won't be ashamed; You will be confident and fearless. Your troubles will go away like water beneath a bridge, and your darkest night will be brighter than noon. Then you'll rest safe and secure, filled with hope and emptied of worry!”

There are **three commands and eight promises in this passage**. We saw the three commands:

- Surrender your heart to God. God, **I give you my emotions**, I give you my heart.
- **Turn to him in prayer**. Where you develop that conversational relationship with Him and interact with Him regarding whatever's in your heart.
- And, third, you **give up your sins**. That's confession and the decision to turn away from sin.

Now, notice the **eight benefits**: No shame; you'll be confident; Fear will disappear; Your troubles will be like water under the bridge,

- the darkest night will become as bright as noon; You'll be able to rest safe & secure;
- You're going to be filled with hope; And, you're going to be emptied of worry.
- Honestly, I would write this passage down on a note card and hang it on your vanity or tape it to your night stand.

So, the first thing I do to live more deeply in God's love is to surrender my heart to God each and every day.

- Secondly, I not only surrender, but every day, I'll remember.

2. Remember His Love Every Day

It's so important to hit the pause button at least once each to reflect on the Father's love toward you and how He's demonstrated that love in your life.

- So, what do we have to remember? First, that I'm completely accepted.

a. I'm completely accepted!

That's important because **some of the deepest wounds of life** are those caused by rejection.

- We expend so much energy trying to earn the acceptance and avoid rejection from those around us.
- From our peers & parents to total strangers.
- We **want their respect and their acceptance** while **fearing their rejection**.

There is a myth that says, If I could just be perfect then everybody would like me.

- I hate to tell you this: Jesus was perfect and a lot of people didn't like him.
- The Good News, however is that **this issue of acceptance has already been settled by God**.

The Bible says in **Titus 3:7** ***"Jesus made us acceptable to God."***

- In his Life Group teaching last week, Rick Warren said that we **tend to see ourselves the way the most important person in our life sees us**.
- This is why it's so important to invite Jesus to be that most important person... and to know what He thinks about you!
- The second truth we should reflect on & remember is that...

b. I'm unconditionally loved

There are a lot of things I can say about God's love but two characteristics of God's love is that it's consistent and it's unconditional.

- Because **it's consistent**, you can know that God is not fickle. He's not unpredictable...
- That He completely loves you even when you feel most unlovable.
- And, because it's unconditional, you can know that God won't ever think or say, "*I love you if...*" or "*I love you because...*"

Instead, He says I love you *period!* I love you in spite of the fact. You can't make God stop loving you.

- There's just **nothing you can do or stop doing** that could **make God love you any more or less** than He does this very second.
- **Isaiah 54:10** says "*My love for you will never end says the Lord.*" I am completely accepted and I'm unconditionally loved.
- Here's another thing we ought to remember:

c. I'm Covered by Him

So why am I trying to cover and hide from my shame when, in fact, He has already covered my shame?

- In **Romans 12:7**, Paul celebrates God's forgiveness, saying, "*Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are covered.*"
- We don't need to cover up and hide because He's already covered our sins and, as Paul says in **Colossian 3:3**, our lives are now "hidden in Christ."

As we've already seen, because of their shame, Adam & Eve tried to cover their physical & emotional nakedness by making a feeble garment made of fig leaves.

- But, having seen this, we're told, in **Genesis 3:21**, that God sacrifices an animal for the first time in order to make a more lasting garment of animal skins to cover their shame.

And, this, of course, is a **foreshadowing of the day when He would send the perfect Lamb of God...**

- whose life would be sacrificed to forever cover our sin & shame.
- Both the guilt over what I've done... and the shame over who I've become... have been settled.

That's why Paul writes, **in 2 Corinthians 5:17**, that anyone who belongs to Jesus is a new creation, the old life is gone, our new lives have begun.

- And that's why, as **Romans 8:1** says, "***There is NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!***"
- Then, lastly, we ought to remember just how valuable we are to Him.

d. I'm Extremely Valuable.

Let me ask you a question that's sort of awkward to answer: How much do you think you're worth?

- I'm not talking about your valuables. I'm talking about your own personal value.
- How much do you think you as a person are worth?
- Let me ask you an easier question: "*What is it that makes something valuable?*"

Well, there are two things that create value. The first is, "**Who owns it?**" And the second is, "**What is somebody willing to pay for it?**"

- Would you agree that, at an auction, a toothbrush owned by John Lennon would be more valuable than a toothbrush owned by Craig Simonian?
- Well, who do you belong to? You belong to God. You're a child of God. That certainly speaks to your value.

But value is also determined by what someone is willing to pay for something.

- Here's what the Bible says about you. "*You've been bought with a price. And, that price was Jesus' very life. (1 Cor 6:20).*"
- Jesus Christ paid for you with his life. That's how valuable you are.

So how can you reflect on the way God loves you in your everyday life? Well, you get up in the morning and say, **God, thank you that...**

- I'm completely accepted... That I'm unconditionally loved... that I'm totally covered. And, that I'm considered extremely valuable.

- You ought to regularly remind yourself of those things.
- So, we talked about how we need to surrender and how we ought to remember.
- But, **let me close with this third thing...** how, every day, we need to OFFER this same love to others.

3. Offer to Others, What I've Been Give

Here's what the Bible says in **John 13:34**. Jesus said ***"I'm giving you a new commandment to love each other. Love each other in the same way that I have loved you."***

- And so, because He's forgiven us, we ought to forgive others;
- Because He's accepted us, we ought to accept others;
- Because He values and loves us, we ought to value and love others.

In Romans 15:7, we're called to ***"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you."***

- Will that transform your relationships? Absolutely!
- In **1 Corinthians 13:7**, Paul says this... that ***"Love never stops being patient; Love never stops believing; Love never stops hoping; Love never gives up!"***

This is how real love gets expressed... This is how God loves you. God never stops being patient with you.

- God never stops believing in you. God never stops hoping for the best in your life. God never gives up on you.
- That's the kind of love we're meant to express to those around us!

Truth is, guys, we all need transformation in our relational lives. Our relationships can be more than what they are.

- So, if you're willing to acknowledge that, **if you want to transform your relationships**, then I'm going to invite you to follow me in a prayer.
- And, as I pray this, if, in your heart you agree with what I'm saying, just whisper that to Him... *"Yes, God, that's I how feel too."*

Father, I admit that I have made a mess in my relationships. Hopefully, I'm doing better now than I have in the past, but I still have a long way to go. Too many relationships are complicated or even broken. At the very least, I've accepted a certain level of disrepair in my relationships, where I've settled for less than Your best. And so, yes God... I need transformation in my relational life.

So, I invite you, God to begin changing me from the inside out. Deliver me from these three fears that we've talked about today. I can see how they make me distant and defensive and even demanding.

So today and each day from now on, I want to surrender my heart to you. In fact, right now, Jesus, I surrender my heart to you. I want to learn to live my life in your love. Because of what You've done for me on the Cross, help me let go of my shame and fear as I embrace more and more your perfect love in my life. When I'm afraid to let others see the real me, remind me of how You see me.

Thank you that you accept me completely. Thank you that you love me unconditionally. Thank you that you forgive me totally. Thank you that you paid such a high price to save me. Thank you that I can be known by You in my weaknesses and yet be fully embraced as your son/daughter.

Father, I ask that you'd also help me to accept others just as you've accepted me. Help me to love others unconditionally just as you have loved me. And help me to forgive others totally just as you've forgiven me. And help me to value others as much as you value me. God, I want to live a life that reflects your love to the world around me. So, help me to extend grace & hope & mercy & kindness to the people around me. I want to live my life in your love, Jesus. And I humbly ask this in Your name. Amen.