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TRANSFORMED

Transformed In My Relational Health
Genesis 3:6-13

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This Transformed Series has been amazing. We've been hearing incredible stories from people who are experiencing transformation in significant areas of life – physical, financial, emotional and mental. It's remarkable what happens when we invite the Holy Spirit to renew our minds, which in turn shapes the way we live. And we're continuing that journey today as we talk about transformation in our relationships. Anyone here have a relationship or two in need of transformation? Chances are we all do, so let's dive in.

Earlier this year I read a book entitled, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. It's the story of a woman in Australia who became a caretaker for terminally ill people, and the wisdom she learned about how to live well by listening to the regrets of the dying. I found it interesting, though not surprising, that four of the five top regrets had to do with relationships. The dying regretted the things that they had done or failed to do that kept them from the kind of deep, soul-satisfying relationships we all long for.

We're going to learn from Scripture today what often stands in the way of those kinds of relationships, and how we can enjoy more healthy relationships. And to do that we're going to turn to an ancient and perhaps familiar story in the book of Genesis, chapter 3, verses 6-13. As I read it, I want you to pay particular attention to the relationships that are broken in this story, and what breaks them.

So often when we hear this story we focus on Adam and Eve eating the fruit. While that's important, I think the heart of the story is both the relationships that are broken, and what breaks them.

The first relationship that is broken is the relationship between Adam and Eve. Earlier in the story we're told that Adam and Eve were "naked but not ashamed." That profound statement is saying so much more than the fact that they weren't wearing clothes. It's referring to complete transparency. They have nothing to hide from one another. They are unafraid to be completely themselves with one another. Isn't that what we all

long for? Relationships in which we can be fully and completely ourselves? But that all falls apart after Adam and Eve eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The very first thing they do is cover themselves with fig leaves. Again, that's meant to say so much more than the fact that they clothed themselves. They aren't just hiding their bodies; they're hiding their true selves.

The second relationship that is broken is Adam and Eve's relationship with God. God comes walking through the Garden in the cool of the evening. And while the story never says so, it gives us the impression that this was a daily thing – that God would stroll through the Garden and meet with Adam and Eve, enjoying one another's company. But after Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they hide from God when they hear him coming.

This amazing story isn't just about Adam and Eve. It's our story. This isn't a story about something that happened long ago. It's a story about something that is happening in our lives. Our relationship with God and with one another is broken. We are not fully present to God and one another. We are not fully open and transparent with each other. We hide ourselves. And what drives our hiding is fear. The fear of exposure makes us distant. There are things about us of which we are deeply ashamed, and we fear that if others knew they would reject us, and so we hide ourselves. We distance ourselves from one another. We hide our true selves. We push one another away, even though we desperately want emotional intimacy, even though we deeply long to be fully known. And so, like Adam and Eve, we hide.

I think this little video clip says it so well [<https://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/the-heart-of-man/shame>]

Can you relate? I sure can. We all live with a reservoir of shame within us, shame for things we've done or said that we're just sure if people knew, they'd judge us and reject us. And so, we hide ourselves. And here's the crazy thing – I even do this with people that I'm certain, at least intellectually, would never reject me or stop loving me. In fact I'm certain, intellectually, that to reveal myself more fully would actually draw us closer. But my fear is often more powerful than my intellect, and so I hide.

So, how do we break free from our fear of being exposed and rejected? How do we get to the place of being willing to boldly be our real selves with one another? The answer is to believe the Good News. The Good News of Jesus Christ is what heals what got broken in the Garden. In his life, death and resurrection Jesus proclaims that we are fully known and completely loved and forgiven. God isn't keeping score of our faults and failures, so we

don't need to hide. Or, as 1 John 4:18 puts it, *"Perfect love casts out fear."* As our lives are rooted in the security of God's perfect love for us, our fear of exposure and rejection loosens its grip and we are empowered to branch out and be our true selves, without hiding.

And this is where the renewal of our minds happens. Remember our theme verse for this series from Romans 12, the verse that's printed on the front of your Workbook: *"Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Most of us have a script in our mind that says, "I'm damaged goods. I'm not worthy of love. If people knew the whole truth about me, they'd reject me." But the truth of the Gospel says, "You are worthy, not because you're perfect but because of God's perfect love for you."

I want to share with you three steps that help that renewal happen. Put another way, I want to share with you three steps to deepen your faith in the Gospel.

First, **surrender**. In other words, give God your heart and confess your fears. Of course, God already knows your fears, but naming them and surrendering them robs them of some of their power. Fears are like mold; they grow best in the dark. Bring them out into the light and they start to die. So, bring your heart and your fears into the light of God's love.

We so often think that sin is all about breaking God's law or being naughty, but I have come to think that the heart of sin is our failure to trust God's love. That's what so often drives our stinkin' thinkin' and our bad behavior. With that in mind, listen to these words from Job:

"Surrender your heart to God, turn to him in prayer, and give up your sins— even those you do in secret. 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. You will rest safe and secure, filled with hope and emptied of worry." – Job 11:13-18

The renewal of our minds that deepens our faith in the Gospel and frees us from the fear that causes us to hide starts with surrendering our heart and our fears to God.

Second, **remember**. Each day remind yourself of God's love for you that was revealed in Jesus Christ. In time, the truth of God's love replaces the lie that we are unworthy and unlovable.

I became a Lutheran and was confirmed as a senior in college. And during my confirmation I learned what a big deal baptism is for Lutherans. Martin Luther urged disciples over and over again to return to their baptism as a way of being reminded of God's amazing grace and unending love. Baptism is a tangible reminder that we're

loved despite our faults, fears and failure. I can't tell you how powerful this has been for me, and over time it has helped to re-write my self-worth script, which has set me free to be more honest about my fears and failures.

So, almost every day during my devotions, I take Luther's advice. I make the sign of the cross on myself and remind myself of this profound truth – I am a beloved child of God and nothing, not my faults, fears or failures, will ever change that. Remembering that truth daily has changed me.

Finally, **offer**. Offer that same unconditional, non-judgmental love of God to others. The same love and grace that God gives to us, we offer to others. In John 13 Jesus said to his disciples, *"I'm giving you a new commandment to love each other. Love each other in the same way that I have loved you."* Please notice that it's not an option. It's not a suggestion. It's a command. Jesus fills our lives with love and grace so that our love might spill over into the lives of others.

You might wonder how loving others will renew your mind and transform your relationships. It's simple. The more you try and love others the way Jesus loves you, the more you'll come to realize that on your own you can't. You can pump the handle of your heart all day long and it will not flow with unconditional love. You'll be forced to find a deeper well to tap into, one that flows with living water, an infinite source of love and grace. And that would be Jesus. You see, offering unconditional love to others leads us right back where we started, to surrender, to admitting how much we need the Good News of Jesus' unending, unconditional love for us.

Far too often we believe that our relationships would be better if the other person would just...fill in the blank... be kinder, apologize, be more generous, listen better. But our job isn't to change others. That's God's job. Our job, and the pathway to healthier relationships, is to allow God to change us, to renew our minds and transform our lives. The Good News of Jesus heals the relationships that fear and shame broke in the Garden.

So let's take that first step right now. Let's spend a moment in prayer. And during this prayer I'm going to invite you surrender your heart and your fears to God, and invite God to renew your mind with some Good News....