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Presentation Transcript
The Path to Inner Truth
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The last time – that would be the first in this series called *Getting Real* – we saw that two of the byproducts of sin in the Garden of Eden were, number one, guilt – and *guilt* is when we know we did something wrong – and *shame* – “I’m defective,” “I’m wrong,” “I’m not good enough,” or “I’m just not enough – there’s not enough of me to do what needs to be done.”

It’s interesting that years ago in pop psychology – not real psychology, but pop psychology – the guy that had the bears and all that – they taught us that guilt was bad. Actually, that’s not true. Guilt is *very* helpful to people. Guilt is negative feedback about our behavior so we can learn to correct our behavior when we feel guilty. But shame – the “I’m defective” and “I’m wrong” – I mean, there isn’t anything you can do about that, so it’s just all negative.

We saw – when we think about what happened in the Garden – that these beliefs – especially the shame part – move us toward believing that who we really are – who we are – will cause God and other people to steer clear of us. That’s why they were hiding, right? They didn’t think that God would accept them any longer. “If we just let people know who we really are, they’re not going to like what they see.” That’s what you believe if you have shame. “If we’re open, then we become vulnerable to rejection, because people aren’t going to like us.” And that creates anxiety, because we are designed for connection. We all need it. Now, there are some people that say, “Well, I don’t.” Well, that’s because you’ve lost touch with it.

So, when we fear that we won’t be able to achieve connection, all kinds of bad things begin to happen – like Cain. You know, he was apparently jealous of Abel. He didn’t bring the right offering and he got called on it, so he was jealous of Abel, who brought the right offering – you know, “the good son.” And God got right to it. He said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” He’s talking *right* to the issue. But Cain didn’t believe Him. So his solution to that problem was to sweep away the competition. He removed the comparison and he killed his brother.

Okay, that’s a biblical example. Let’s think about one that’s a little more down to earth. Have you ever been in a classroom, or a church Bible study, or at work, and the leader asks

the question, and we hesitate with the answer we have? We're not quite sure that's what he's looking for or that we're right, or, if we're wrong, what will people think of us? Not enough, right, off-track, wrong, dumb, not fit to be connected with – that's kind of where that goes. So we become fearful about being truthful about who we are and what we think, because we believe that we're not good enough.

The Bible tells us it all goes back to the very beginning in the Garden. And it is the cause of a lot of our problems in our lives today. We're afraid to reach out to others for connection, because we're afraid that we're not going to be connected with, and so there's no chance to achieve it for many of us. And the result of that is loneliness. We're afraid to be open with our ideas, so our creativity is stifled.

When people aren't afraid and they talk openly about what they think, the synergy begins to develop and people feed off of one another's creativity. If that doesn't happen, then you get dullness.

The last of the things that I wanted to remind you about – that we talked about last time – is that we saw that when being open – letting other people know who we really are – is going to turn people away from us is just the opposite of what actually happens. If we're not genuine, there is no way to connect to us because we are not available to connect to. All that people are going to see is the *image* that we create to hide ourselves from others. They're just going to see the wall.

I was talking to two friends recently on the phone. And we were talking about sending an email to some ministers about the Feast. And one of them volunteered to write the email. He said that he would send it to us for final review, which he did. And when his email came, he had all the points we talked about, plus a few others, but the most important point was kind of way down in the message, buried in the verbiage. So when we talked next about the email, I mentioned that I thought it needed to be at the top and I asked him why he put it down lower. And the reason I asked that question was because my friend – I've learned over the years – always has a reason for everything that he does. So I was expecting to hear some profound explanation that would make sense, and there was this long pause, and he said, "Well, I see what you mean. It needs to go at the top." I said, "Well, I think so, but I wasn't sure if you had something else in mind." He said, "No, I just threw it all out there and that's what happened." So, not a big thing – not defensive, not worried that what he did would cause me to think less of him – just himself. He was busy, threw it out there, and that's how it came out, and boom, out the door it went – didn't have to worry about feeling stupid or not good enough or whatever – just honest.

Don't we respect that when that happens? We do, don't we? We think it's courageous. And it is, because of what? Because of what we see in the Bible and how we all are.

So today we're going to consider some strategies to help us become more honest internally and externally – to find "truth in the inward parts," to quote the scripture that we quoted last week.

Let's think about internal stuff first. I think I drew you the picture – maybe that was at the Feast – of the little core self with the hurt, and then the anger, and then the defenses around that. Remember that? This is about penetrating the defenses.

I'm going to start you with a scripture. It's Jeremiah 17:9. We read this last week, too.

Jeremiah 17:9 – *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?* Well, that's the challenge – to understand ourselves and others.

So how can we understand? If you go back to Genesis 3 and 4, what was it that God said to Eve after He found out what happened? He said, "What have you done?" And she told the truth. She said, "I ate of the fruit," but she put something in front of that – "the devil deceived me," which is also true, but it was an attempt to kind of shift emphasis or responsibility away from her. That question that God asked, "What have you done?" The answer to that question caused something inside of them. It caused shame. "I'm bad. God's going to hate me. I'd better hide from Him. I'm going to lose my connection with Him." Long story short, they're response to that feeling that they had – because of what they did – was he blamed her and she blamed the snake – tried to shift it away. Get real! The snake did not eat the fruit. *They* did. *They* ate it.

When Cain killed Abel, what question did God ask him? "What have you done?" And the answer to the question: "I killed my brother." He couldn't even say that. That would really make him feel like he was a bad person. So what was his response? Do you remember? "You're not fair! It's not fair. It's more than I can bear – what You've dumped on me." No answer to the question, "What have you done?" He just avoided it.

What would have been the better action for them? Joel 2, verse 12. This is Joel writing at a time when Israel and Judah were really way off and God said, after all the stuff that they'd done wrong:

Joel 2:12 – *Yet even now, declares the LORD, return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments.* They used to tear their clothes with a big show of emotion – you know, expensive clothing. God wasn't interested in their clothes. He wanted them to tear their hearts. *Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and He relents over disaster.*

So what would have been the better action? Well, it would have been to repent and just admit wrong. "I messed up God." Be honest! Quit trying to deflect and divert.

I want you to notice something else about this scripture. God says that, if we do that – if we are just honest – the *opposite* of what we expect is going to happen – that God is *not* going to pull away from us. He's going to draw closer. *Return to Me with all your heart. Return to the LORD...for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.* So the fear that we're going to lose relationship with Him – if we make ourselves vulnerable and admit who we really are and what we've really done – isn't true. It's a lie. If we do that, then, in fact, we *gain* relationship with God.

So, here are some questions that we need to think about when we are starting to feel bad, shameful, we've messed up – like people aren't going to accept us, like we're not good enough, or we're not smart enough and we don't know enough. These don't fit every situation, but one of the questions is, "Why did I do that? Why did I do that? What was I afraid of?"

I had breakfast with a Zen-Buddhist the other morning at my favorite restaurant. He asked if he could sit with me. He's an elderly gentleman – very interesting. I found out that he retired from being a psychologist in 1980. So he's been twenty-two years out of the field. He used to work at the VA and he was talking about all the mistakes they make there. When you pay people to be sick, they never get well. I said, "What would you do to change it?" He said, "Well, I would try to get them away from all that medication stuff. I think that, if people would just sit quietly and think about how they're feeling for a half hour every day, everything would be fine." I don't know if that's true, but it's a lot better than what we do now. I know that. And that's what I'm asking you to do. "What was I afraid of and how did it make me feel?"

Another one is, "Where is the anxiety? Where is the vulnerability? Where is that coming from?" If we're aware that we feel vulnerable, and that makes us anxious, we're way ahead of the pack – if we'll just sit and think about our behavior.

I had a lady one time come to me who had been angry with her father for many years. One of the incidents she recalled was going to a carnival as a family. I guess they went, probably, in the afternoon. He drank all morning, so he was drunk by the time they left to go to the carnival. When they got to the carnival, he got in a fight with a game-booth operator because they weren't winning enough points, I guess. Then, while they were on the Ferris wheel, he tried to raise the safety bar while they were up in the air, and they had to stop the ride. And, of course, everybody was angry about it, because they were stuck up in the air, and people on the ground were worried about their kids, and they were all pointing at him, because they knew *he* – the drunk – was causing the problem. She was very *angry* with him for this and many other things that he'd done. And she had felt this anger for years!

While we were working on that incident, she recalled that she was embarrassed by his drunken behavior – humiliated to the extreme – and, of course, there she was, up in the air, right beside him while everybody is pointing at him and what a fool he is! She was really humiliated. But she did not remember that. It was too painful to think about. She finally did recall it, though. She realized that she was defending herself from the hurt of humiliation by being angry with him. And once she got that hurt out in the open – once she was *honest* about her feelings – and she processed it, she noticed that she wasn't as angry with him as she had been before.

He died out fifteen years ago. He wasn't the same person anymore. So she confronted him about it later and he broke down and cried and begged her forgiveness. And she forgave him. The reason she came to therapy was because she had an addiction problem. And she was starting to notice, as she worked her way through some of these things, that she didn't have the craving to medicate away her anger because she wasn't angry any longer. She

didn't like to think of herself as an angry person. And she wasn't a mean drunk, so when she'd get drunk, she'd be really happy. She got over being angry and that caused her to get over the need to medicate herself with drugs. So she doesn't have to deceive herself anymore about how hurt she was. She told me that she felt free. The truth will set you free, right?

Anger is usually a defense against hurt. Do you get angry a lot? Do you have a lot of smoldering anger underneath?

I have another example for you. One time one of my teen clients ran away from home. She was young – a young teen. Her mother had to drive a long way in the middle of the night to pick her up and bring her back. It cost quite a bit of money to buy the gas. And when the young girl came in for her session, she looked really sheepish and uncomfortable. What do you think was going through her mind? She knew I knew. Well, she was thinking, "I'm bad and you're not going to respect me. And I might lose my relationship with you." So what did she talk about? Well, she talked about dying her hair, and going shopping for school clothes, and how mean her brother was, and avoided the entire issue completely – not willing to be truthful, because she was afraid – not willing to trust that the relationship that we had would hold because of what she had done. She left feeling more alienated than when she came in.

So why didn't she talk about the real issues? Well, that's why she's in therapy. She has always repressed her feelings until they explode out of her in impulsive behaviors – like running away – or fits of rage.

Now what if you were the therapist and she sat there and said, "I know I screwed up, but I just couldn't stand it anymore. The pressure at home was just getting so great I didn't know what else to do. And besides, I wanted my mom to know that it's time for her to *do* something and just talking to her doesn't work. So I had to take some kind of extreme measure to get her attention." How would you feel about her if she said that? If she had been able, at that time, to say that to me, she would have been able to see the understanding look on my face, instead of the giant question mark, and she would know that I was still with her, and that I still cared about her, and that I wasn't going to give up on her. And I told her all those things, but she hadn't come forward with the bad stuff, so that couldn't be proven to her.

So we all have things like this, don't we? What can we do to make it easier for ourselves when we get in these kinds of situations, where we're afraid others are going to turn away from us because of what we have done – saying the stupid thing at the office meeting or flunking the easy test.

One of clients told me some time back that she had to take a final in class, and before the final they had a pretest that they practiced on. When she got to school for the final, she realized that the final *was* the pretest and the teacher told them that they could even use the pretest to help them with the final, and she left hers home. She failed the test. She doesn't have a problem admitting wrong, though, or weakness, and so she's telling me about that. And I'm doing all the right things to be empathetic, right?

Okay, so what can we do? I think one of the things to know is something the Bible tells us about how we are. It is true that we are imperfect. It is true that we're self-deceiving. It is true that it's hard for us to stay on the straight and narrow track – you know, like the song says, we're prone to wander. It is also true that we *are* not enough in every case. Nobody has ever...you might be enough to hold a job, or get a degree in college, or something like that – be happily married – but to live sin-free and attain salvation? None of us is enough for that, right? Isn't that true? So what do we do with that?

Let's go to Psalm 103:13.

Psalms 103:13 – *As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him* – and tell the truth, right? – *for He knows our frame and He remembers that we are dust.* He knows all this stuff about us already – that we mess up a lot, that we are incapable of living up to the perfect standard of Christ.

So what do we do with this knowledge? I mean, is this just something that we learned at Sunday school years ago, or, as my good friend, Conway, told me, Vacation Bible School? Or is it something that *means* something to us in the way we live our lives? I think the answer is in 1 John 1:9.

1 John 1:9 – *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Right after we repent of what we did wrong, we're clean. Right?

So how do we confess our sins? Do we stand out on a corner on a soapbox and yell out all the bad stuff we did? No, that's not what this is talking about. It's talking about praying. We take our fears to God – and our mistakes – and we become transparent with Him in prayer. Before we get started on a prayer of confession and of repentance, God already knows what we're going to say and He already knows what needs to happen. But He wants *us* to be honest about it. He wants truth in the inward parts. That's a bit about inward truth. We could go on and on about this, but we either do it or we don't.

Let's talk about external stuff now. How do these inward stances manifest in daily life? We said that shame was the cause of inward deception. We just said that – fear of disconnect from God. It also causes us to fear disconnect from other people. If we want to appear knowledgeable and competent at work – I mean, we *do* – I don't mean *if* – our professional reputation rides on it – and sometimes, maybe, even our jobs. So, if we're not accepted, we might not be working. So sometimes it's pretty important. So where is the shame there? The shame comes when we believe that we're probably not...you know, it'll just be...I saw a movie a while back – *Notting Hill* – and there was a character in the movie that was an accountant. And he said, "They finally figured me out. I don't know what I'm doing." That's the way a lot of people feel in their work. "I'm not enough for this job." So people just clam up and they try to keep that a secret – you know, their little secret – they don't know what they're doing.

I had an example of the opposite occur a while back. I went to a training for ISTDP. What does that stand for? Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy – terrible name! But it's

pretty good therapy. But there were twenty very experienced therapists in this informal class. And they were all trying to learn a new kind of therapy. So we're all kind of back to baseline even – nobody knows what to do. And everybody was invited to bring videos of sessions that they had done with clients. Of course, you have to have permission to do that. You have to have the equipment and all that. But only one person brought in a video. And why do you think only one person brought a video in? Because all these professional therapists are afraid to come under scrutiny of their peers. They're afraid they're not going to be enough.

There was an older man there who was probably one of the least experienced of all the therapists there. And he brought in a video. And after we watched it, he said, "So you can see I don't know what I'm doing and I'm completely stuck, stuck, stuck." I just thought about how hard it was for him to say that. He made himself completely vulnerable to the scrutiny and the possibility of criticism.

But there was something very instructive about what happened next. What do you think happened? The entire group jumped to encourage him and reassure him. And we all knew exactly how he felt. So what is that when you know exactly how somebody else feels? That's empathy – right – understanding the experience of others. And that, as it turns out, is the opposite of shame. Empathy is the quality that promotes connections and shame is the quality that prevents it. Isn't that interesting? So what did understanding him cause us to want to do? Well, we all jumped to his defense. We all tried to encourage him. And it made us all feel connected with him. It caused all of us to have respect for him – not because he was really good at doing this kind of therapy, but because he was brave enough to let us know that. So we just poured out a torrent of positive and supportive comments. And it was interesting to me, at any rate, that the following week he sent us all a link to Brene Brown's *Vulnerability Talk* on TED, which is the inspiration for this series. Just Google it – Brene Brown – B-R-E-N-E – and listen to what she says there.

So what was this courageous therapist doing? In an abbreviated way, he was telling us the story of his struggle to learn this therapy. I left out a lot of the things that he said – there was a lot more to it than that. He had to tell us his vulnerability story – the story that made him vulnerable.

Do you remember when we were working on the other series – the last one – about how I placed emphasis on telling our faith story – how much it helps our children? Human minds store information in story form. It's easiest to make sense of what's happened when it's in that form. Maybe that's why Jesus taught in stories – the Creator of the mind and brain using what He knows works, when it comes to making a point. But along with that, we've seen that the hallmark of someone who comes to grips with his or her own life – the negative aspects of it – all the ups and downs of it – can tell a rich, coherent story of that lived life.

I think of the lady, whose father got drunk at the carnival. Now she can add a piece to that story. "He got drunk and I was so humiliated that I got angry with him. And once I learned that was what was causing me to be angry, I could let go of it and forgive him."

So that rich story is what connects us to other people, too. That's what they want. They want who we *really* are, not who we really aren't. And we were all designed – our brains are designed – for story. That's what it is. That's how our brain works. We relate to each other through our stories – not just the accomplishments and the successes, but the failures and mistakes, as well – the true story, the open story. I, one time, read a book about all the mistakes famous therapists made that they told in their own words – very helpful – the true story without deception.

I was talking to one of my most respected clients some time back. When she was a young teen, her mother died. And her father isn't in her life, so she had to move away from the life she lived to a whole other city, which happened to be this one, and live with her cousin and her cousin's four children. So you've got a new teenager in this already big family. Her therapy has been one of building a full story of what happened to her. She just added another excellent piece to that story. She's now looking at her last year of high school and college beyond that. In weeks past, she's lamented that she doesn't know how she's going to get to do that, because she doesn't have any money, and she doesn't really feel like she should be staying with her cousin any longer, because she's old enough to be on her own. She's been worried about that. She came in a while back, and she told me this story. She said, "I was talking to my boyfriend's father and he said, 'You know, you've had a lot of hard things happen to you – your father, your mother, uprooting your life and having to build a new one when you're in the middle of your teenage years – but you know with every bad thing comes something good. Do you know how much money you can get to go to college because of all these hard things that have happened to you – scholarships, financial support, health insurance? You live in a country where people respect the way you have dealt with your hardship. And they *will* help you.'" And she said, "I never thought of that! I had no idea!" I said, "How does it feel?" She said, "Well, I'm still really sad that my mom died, and I'm still really angry at my dad for dumping me, but, as long as I had to have that, it's really great to think about getting some help." And then she went on to talk about what she hopes to become, and where she wants to go to school, and the field she wants to study, and the place she wants to live.

So her story started out, when I met her, as one of despair. And she truly was a child that nobody really took care of. But now, it includes hope and plans for the future. When she started out telling her despairing story, my heart went out to her, because it was all genuine. There wasn't any cover up. And you know, when we got to the anxious and the depressed part, I was worried for her. But now that things are looking up, I find that *I'm* encouraged by her. We just can't help but go with people every step of the way when they tell us their real story.

So, one key to having others with us and to being genuine is to be willing to tell our story to people – even the parts that make us feel a little uncomfortable. So how do we do that? How do we find the courage to talk about the mistakes, and the bad things, and to admit that we're stuck, stuck, stuck – as my friend said? Well, that takes courage. Where does that come from? Well, for Christians, it comes from God, doesn't it? So, if we're open to Him, He'll see us, He'll forgive us, He'll take care of us, and He promises that He's got our backs, if we're just open with Him.

So that's a little bit about how to become more inwardly honest and how to express that honesty externally. The next time we're going to look at what that does for us. We've just barely scratched the surface of the benefits. So we're going to look at that next time. Stay tuned.