

Hope and Healing

Week 2: I Can't Do This On My Own

Matthew 12:9-13

Hi, my name is Shawn. I have a new life in Christ and I struggle with people pleasing and getting defensive sometimes, also known as pride.

Nine years ago, if I was standing before you, and being honest, that statement would have sounded much different. I wasn't as confident that I had a new life in Christ. And one of my struggles would have been People Pleasing...that's been a life-long battle...but my biggest struggle 9 years ago was alcohol.

In July 2016, my mom passed away. A lot of you know that part of my story. But what most people don't know is what followed. I sank into a pretty deep depression. I was angry and confused, trying to work through my own emotions while leading a struggling church plant in Rhode Island. I felt like I was on this downward spiral.

It started as just a casual drink with friends or at dinner. I'm not a hardliner when it comes to alcohol. I think Scripture gives us liberty, as long as it is in moderation and within the laws of the land. But Scripture does warn against the dangers of drunkenness for a reason. There's a fine line between enjoying something and abusing it. And in the Fall of 2016, I started crossing that line.

I was using alcohol to numb the pain I was feeling. It was a way for me to escape. What was once something I would casually do with friends became something I did in secret, by myself. And I was intentionally going over the line of moderation.

Remind you, I was leading a church at the time. Every Sunday, I was preaching about the love of Jesus, and the life transformation we can find in Him, but I wasn't experiencing any of it myself.

My friend, Alan Ahlgrim, used to say that preachers are in danger of becoming "traffickers in unfelt truth." Meaning we teach and preach the powerful, transformative message of the Gospel to others, but don't experience it ourselves. What we're preaching is true, we're just not feeling it in our own lives.

That's where I was. And it wasn't long until I started to believe that maybe this Gospel wasn't as powerful as I thought it was. Maybe Jesus doesn't heal like I thought He did. And if the Gospel is powerful, and Jesus does heal, then why wasn't He doing it for me?

All of it made me feel like I was a fraud. I didn't know who I was anymore. I didn't know what I believed. I just knew I wasn't in the head and heart space to lead a church. They deserved better than what I was giving them, and if this church plant had any chance at survival, it needed someone better than me to lead it.

So, in March of 2017, we sold our house, loaded up a truck, and moved into my in-laws basement. Nothing has a way of sobering you up like being 36 years old, living in your in-laws basement, having no clue what was next. But **it's often times when we hit rock bottom that we find what we've been looking for.** Or, He finds us.

Jesus met me in that space. As I cried out to Him, He began to heal me and give me new life. It didn't happen overnight, and there are still times in stressful seasons when I'm tempted to go back to it, but I have safeguards in my life now that I didn't have then. I have a group of guys I meet with regularly who I can be open and vulnerable with about anything.

There's a phrase in recovery that **you're only as sick as your secrets**, so I've just committed to always having a small group of guys that I can be honest with, so that my sin can be quickly exposed to the light instead of festering and growing in the darkness.

And so, I can stand before you today and say, "Hi, my name is Shawn. I have a new life in Christ and I used to struggle with alcohol...but I still struggle with people pleasing.

To be honest, it's a little embarrassing standing up here and sharing that part of my story. Again, people pleaser. But the reason I'm not ashamed to tell it is because my identity is not in my sin. My addictions and struggles are not who I am; they don't define me. My identity is in Jesus. He defines who I am. He has given me new life. He has made a way for me to be adopted into God's family and be called a child of the Most High.

The things in my past that I'm easily embarrassed by and ashamed of, they've lost their power over me because, by God's grace, I am being transformed. I have received new life in Christ, and I'm not who I will be one day, but I'm not who I was, either. I'm one of "those people" who has a hurt, hang-up, or habit, but is finding hope and healing through Jesus.

That's *part* of my story. And I wonder today, **what's your story?**

When you think back over your life, is there anything that still brings a sense of shame and regret? Something you've just kind of buried and tried to move on from, but you're always afraid it might come up again?

These things are typically known as **stigmas, a word that means "a mark of disgrace."** Maybe you wear a mark of something like that. Addiction, past legal troubles, moral failure. These are the things we don't typically talk about because they're a source of deep pain or shame for us.

We keep them hidden in the dark because we think, if people knew about them, they might look down on us, think less of us, or use them against us. We might lose our jobs, our family, our reputation. So we keep our stigmas...our hurts, hang-ups, and habits, a secret, and hope that no one ever finds out about them.

In our text today, Jesus meets a man who had his own stigma and source of shame. And this account is primarily about show us that God values being merciful to people over keeping a set of rules and rituals, but I think we can also learn a lot from it about how Jesus begins to heal us from the stigmas in our life. Those marks of disgrace that we try to hide.

Read Matthew 12:9-13.

We don't know this man's name, or why he had a withered hand, but we can assume some of his story based on the times. In the 1st Century, having any kind of disability was seen as a curse for sin. The assumption was that, if something happened to you, it must be God punishing you or a family member for something. And if God cursed you, then we don't want to be guilty by association, so we'll just have you stay over there and we'll stay over here.

So, this man's withered hand wasn't just a disability, it was a stigma. It was seen as a mark of disgrace on his life. And so, it probably led to him being excluded, judged, pushed aside. I imagine, every time he looked at his hand, he probably hated it. He hated the looks of it, he hated what it had done to his life. I imagine he was ashamed of it and tried to keep it hidden so that no one could see it. He probably went out of his way to make sure he didn't draw attention to it.

And so, imagine being this man...you go to church, minding your own business, carefully hiding your stigma, this supposed sign of God's punishment in your life, when all of the sudden, the Pharisees, these upright, religious leaders, point it out and use you as a pawn in their game against Jesus.

And to make your embarrassment even worse, Jesus asks you to come to the front of the room and do the **one thing you've spent your life** trying to avoid. In verse 10, Jesus says to the man, "Stretch out your hand." Show us your stigma. Show us the source of your shame.

But as he obeys Jesus, instead of feeling ridicule and shame, he starts to feel tingling in his fingers and strength in his hand that's he's never felt before. With just a word, he is healed and his source of shame is gone. Jesus has brought him new life and a fresh sense of hope.

So, what's your story? What is the stigma you hide, hoping that no one every finds out about it?

What if Jesus is saying to you today, "Stretch out your hand," not as a way of shaming you, but as a first step towards healing you? He already knows your secrets and he wants to turn your mark of disgrace into a sign of HIS grace.

There's a reason that the first step in all recovery programs is admitting you have a problem. Admitting that you have something in your life that you cannot heal on your own. Step 1 sounds something like this:

We admit we are powerless over our addictions, brokenness, and sinful patterns, that in our own power, our lives are unmanageable.

Step 1 is a form of stretching out our hand to Jesus and saying, "I can't do this on my own. I can't fix this. I need you to heal me."

The truth is, we all need to stretch out our hand to Jesus, admitting we can't live without Him and His grace. We need to come to Jesus, openly and honestly about our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. And when we do, Jesus doesn't shame us for our brokenness, He heals it. He transforms our "stigma" from a source of shame to a place of hope and healing. We don't earn it, we just simply stretch out our hand in obedience and allow Jesus to bring new life.

But if we're honest with ourselves, we know this is harder than it sounds. We're afraid that if we open ourselves up to be seen and known, we won't be loved. People will reject us. They will use it against us. They will talk about us behind our back. Look at us differently. And so, we just work really hard to keep everything hidden. We hide our addictions, our anger, our shame, and we pretend like everything is okay.

And all the while, Jesus is lovingly, tenderly, inviting us to stretch out our hand. Not to expose us, but to heal us. You see, Jesus knows that healing begins where pretending ends. The finish line of pretending is the starting line of healing. You simply cannot pretend and heal at the same time. You can only have one or the other.

Jesus is inviting us to find true life in Him, and our healing begins when we admit that we are powerless to change those places in our life and we need Him.

So, what do we do? Two Scriptures I want to leave you with this morning:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9, NIV

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results." James 5:16, NLT

Confession and repentance unmask our sin. They bring it out into the light so they stop festering in the darkness. These practices are how we stop pretending like we've got it all together so we can start finding the healing that Jesus has for us.

But we can't do it alone. We need each other, which is why Jesus gave us this community called the Church. And, unfortunately, the Church (big C) has become the LAST place people feel like it's safe to confess their sin and find healing. The Church has turned into a place of pretending because we're afraid of what people will think of us if they really knew us.

But, I can honestly say, in my experience, Sherwood Oaks is different. And we want to continue to lean into that and be a place where authenticity is valued and grace is not only found, but it's experienced in the powerful, transformative love of Jesus that can heal us when we stop pretending and open ourselves up to Him.

Invitation

Communion

- At the cross, Jesus took our guilt, our shame, and bore it on His body. He stretched out His arms for us and His wounds became our healing.
- We remember this as we take the bread and drink the cup. Hope and healing are found in Him alone.
- Let this be a moment when we stretch out our hand to him. We bring our brokenness, our needs, our sin. We admit that we are powerless to do anything about it on our own. We just simply come to receive His grace and mercy.