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# The Lies We Tell Ourselves



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Message by Pastor Tom, Interim Lead Pastor  
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Scripture Passage 1 John 1:5-2:2  
Vancouver Chinese Baptist Church Vancouver, Canada



Did you play hide and seek when you were a child?

I grew up in the dark streets and tenements of Glasgow. Air-raid shelters from the war were still in our backyards. A group of us from the same street played together. One of our favourite games was hide and seek. Long before the computer games of today. Xbox and whatever else. Hide and seek was at its best especially when it grew dark and you played with flashlights.

Then we all grew up, and we stopped playing the hide and seek. Or did we? Perhaps we play this childish game now at a more sophisticated level. We play it emotionally and spiritually. We have learned to hide so that parts of our lives would never be discovered.

That kind of cunning has been a game that people have played for a long time. We have become experts in hiding. Where did we learn to become experts in hide and seek?

Let me take you back to a garden. It is a long long time ago. A young couple have enjoyed the innocence of sex. There has been no need to be embarrassed. They have been walking in the early dawn of the light of God.

### Genesis 2:25

**The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.**

Then the first fingers of darkness start to creep across their souls. It all starts so simply. Here is how it happened.

### Genesis 3

**1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"**

**2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,**

**3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"**

**4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.**

**5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."**

**6. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took**

**some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.**

**7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**

**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 from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.**

**9. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"**

**10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."**

As this episode comes to a close, a cherubim with a flaming sword which can turn in every direction guards the way back into the garden. There is no way back into the light of God.

As the young couple leave, the light in which they used to walk without any shame is now behind them at their backs, and as they go, it throws the grotesque shadows which they see in front of them, and the further they get from the light, the longer the shadows become. Pretty soon, there is

darkness all around them, and it is getting cold. Ever since then, we have been playing this cosmic game of hide and seek.

Sometimes we want people to think that we are better than we really are, that's playing hide and seek. This morning, if you feel a failure in some area of your life, can I tell you that you are in good company. We are all failures. If you have ever blown it in some way, then don't run and play away and hide. We have all blown it.

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline.

"We view the church as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners...we are sinners together, and in acts of mutual confession, we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed."

None of us has arrived. The Bible says that all of us have sinned, and we are falling short. Moment by moment and day by day of the glory of God. So if you feel a failure in some part of you right now, and you really wonder why you came, you need to stay. You are among friends.

The story that we read in Genesis sets the stage for our new game of hide and seek

which 1st John describes. We find this in 1:5-2:2.

**5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.**

"Let there be light" is the earliest expression of the nature and character of God. Without light, nothing will grow, nothing will be seen. Light is needed for life to exist. He is the light that reveals, nurtures, exposes.

Then we face the first of three lies we tell ourselves. This is where we start to play the dangerous game of spiritual hide and seek. Each lie can be healed by an antidote of telling the truth, facing up to reality and no longer hiding. Each lie is introduced by the phrase, if we claim...

### **Lie #1**

**It is the lie that says sin does not matter.**

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

The seduction is that we think of life in bits and pieces, like some jig saw puzzle, and each piece is separated from the rest. This fragmented way to look at life allows people to play the game of hide and seek within themselves. It leads to what is

called privatization. We think that our faith is a private thing and does not relate to the ethics of daily life. Family and social life become separated. Emotional life and relationships drift apart. We become gnostics, separating ourselves into bits and pieces.

The talk of belief and the walk of behaviour are strangers to each other. This is a kind of internal game of hide and seek, in which the different parts of our lives hide from one another like strangers. The result is a distorted and disjointed view of ourselves. If we were to look in the mirror and see ourselves as we really are in this state, it might look as though Picasso painted our portrait, bits of us all over the place, all out of proportion.

But it is not funny. It is a deadly game in which the various parts of our lives play hide and seek with each other, and if they ever all came together, they might not know that they were all parts of the same person.

Hide and Seek played at the emotional and spiritual level, slowly causes the disintegration/break-up of our wholeness as people. But it can be healed by telling the truth.

### **Antidote #1**

**It starts with the move from deception to honesty.**

**7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**

The pathway back to God is one that each of us must walk if we would want to know God in our lives and live before Him. It is the invitation to step into freedom.

Any real change in our lives always begins with honesty. We stop playing hide and seek with others, with God and really with ourselves and we say, this is where things are.

It can be painful, but it is not as painful as continuing the deceit.

It is the cry of David in Psalm 139:

**23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.**

**24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

It is the trust that God will not hurt us, but heal us and so we invite him to explore the dark recesses of our lives.

Honesty leads to confession and confession leads to healing.

**Lie #2**

**It is the lie that says sin doesn't exist.**

**8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

There is probably no piece of theology/doctrine more denied and rejected as the doctrine of original sin. The teaching that sin has left its mark in each of us from the very beginning. The determinism of B.F. Skinner would say that we are shaped by our environment.

Others would say that our values comes from our community. Which should prompt us to ask, who decides the values of the community? Optimistic humanism would say that we are all climbing the ladder towards a glorious humanity of self-actualisation.

If only we would rid ourselves of these restrictive old-fashioned ideas of God and morality which Christianity continues to encourage.

The idea that God was dead was spawned by the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche. He contended that Christianity and its teachings had paralysed the potential of human beings. So if we could do away with God and his moral restrictions. If we could do away with sin, we would begin to climb to our potential. The teachings of Nietzsche influenced and shaped the thinking of a man called Adolf Hitler. You see, If you do away with God, and sin,

and some objective standard of morality, it is only a short step in your mind to the creation of the gas chambers.

Hanging on a wall inside the death camps is a quote from Hitler: "I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality."

So we killed God in order to be free from his moral rules. Dostoevski said, if God is dead, then everything is permissible.

Living without God means an attempt to live outside of his moral law. It was a lie but it was believed. The game of hide and seek was being played in an ever-increasing darkness.

Our puny attempts to live without sin create for us all kinds of tensions and dilemmas.

Our culture does not want censorship, but we think someone ought to regulate the Internet, especially in the area of child pornography. But without a moral yardstick, who will set the standards?

We want personal freedom for abortion, but we also want to stop the baby seal hunt. A strange twist of values.

In this value neutral culture, adultery becomes having an affair. Theft is helping ourselves to what is ours. Selfishness is standing up for our rights and

getting our own way. The last thing that we are prepared to admit is that sin is at the root of all of this. We have done away with sin, and now it seems the struggle for morality and meaning is even greater.

Ravi Zacharias “The heaviest price exacted from a society living without God will be paid for by its young people.” It is young people who always have to pay the personal and social price tags for this moral and intellectual anarchy.

Perhaps Jesus was right, men do love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. (John 3:19)

In some strange twist of irony, we find that we actually may need the sin we have done away with. Perhaps it will turn out that we cannot live without the reality of sin. We really do need the holiness and the light of God to expose and x-ray our lives. But still we play hide and seek.

## Antidote #2

### It is the move from Denial to Confession.

**9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Confess means to agree with. It's when we stop pretending,

and we turn to God for cleansing. The word 'purify/cleanses' is a present tense. It means that he cleans and he keeps on cleansing. His forgiving love pours over our lives, not just once and that's it, but over and over again.

We cannot change the past. We may have to live out the consequences of some past action that we should not have done, but we can do so freed from the guilt and the burden of the past.

## Lie #3

### It is the lie that sin isn't personal.

10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

John moves us from the abstract theory of sinlessness to the personal reality. Surely, we have not sinned. It is the denial of our own sinful actions and attitudes. Perhaps this is the darkest of all three lies. It is the unwillingness to face our own sins and struggles.

Most of the time we can avoid and step around the gross sins that even our society condemns, but what about the subtle hidden sins in our heart, where no one can see, except the x-ray vision of God. Who really sees greed, who really sees lust, who

really can measure a critical spirit, who can weigh the bitterness that makes our heart heavy. Who sees covetousness? No one really can see these things, but they breed inside us slowly choking us to death, and so we continue to embrace the darkness.

We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

The lies continue to seduce us. The lie says, sin doesn't cost anything. O yes it does, sin is expensive, both for individuals and for society. What we sow, we reap.

Paul Tournier, our sense of sin lacks depth.

If we stopped there, the game of hide and seek would become a cosmic and personal tragedy. But of all the worlds' faiths, Christianity is utterly realistic about sin. It does not try to explain it away, it does not re-classify it, it does not excuse it, rather it drags it out into the light. It refuses to let it get away. It is utterly realistic about its ugliness. It drags it kicking and screaming onto a cross and nails it to the beams.

## Antidote #3

### From Guilt to Forgiveness.

There are two kinds of guilt. There is false guilt. This is the kind that people try to place on

one another. It traps us and make us feel crummy.

Then there is true guilt. This is the kind of guilt that comes from God. This touches us at the very core of our being and sears us so deeply that it heals us. It does not trap us and leave us feeling guilty. Actually, it sets us free.

There is a terrible little cliché we use. Let's just forgive and forget! We need to delete that from our vocabulary. We do not forget! We remember! That's precisely our problem.

That is why we need forgiveness because we remember. The next time you say and another thing...you are remembering. You did not forget at all!

Some years ago, a popular idea about forgiveness said that forgiveness means accepting life as though some event never happened. Broken relationships are restored as though they had never been broken. I think that was both biblically wrong and emotionally dangerous.

Forgiveness says, this thing did happen. The sin happened. The adultery happened. The anger happened. The hurt was real. Forgiveness does not hide the event. Rather it says that the event happened, but the sting and the pain of the event can be released through forgiveness.

We often think that the work of forgiveness is to pardon. It is that, but much more. It is really to heal. To restore. In his death on the cross, Christ died as the atoning sacrifice. Atonement is the process of restoring to wholeness, taking those fragmented parts of our being and melting them back together again into a whole person.

Christ does not simply pardon my sinful acts, and then abandon me leaving me to struggle again and again with the same battle. Rather his forgiveness is that costly enterprise which forgives me for being the very kind of person who would harbor such acts, and then he works in me to change and transform me through his love into being a different kind of person.

**Honesty leads to confession, and confession leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness leads to change.**

Forgiveness saves the expense of anger. It saves the cost of hatred. It prevents the damage of relationships. It releases the healing power of freedom. The result is what God wants for us in the first place, freedom! Our lives, minds and hearts would be free from the tentacles of sin. Freedom from some heavy invisible burden that we drag around day by day. Freedom from some hidden rapist that

has broken into our heart and ravaged our souls.

## 1 John 2

**1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.**

**2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**

The story sometimes is told like this. God is holy which means that he gets really, really angry with sin, and so when he looked at the mess we were in, he became really angry and he sent Jesus down to the earth. He was the only one big enough to take the rap for everyone.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the heart of God to forgive and to heal. The Bible says that it was not God's anger, but it was God's love that stimulated him to send Christ to the world.

Calvary where Christ died, was the result. Not of God's anger, but of God's love. God chose to play the role of the seeker in the game of hide and seek.

So, what can we do?

**2 Cor 3:18** And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

"with unveiled face" – behind that phrase is an Old Testament story. Moses goes up to meet with God and the light of God is so intense, that when he returns to face the people, he has to wear a veil to hide the glory of God. But as time goes on, the veil stays on, even though the glory begins slowly begins to fade.

It seems that there is always something in human nature that wants to make us appear better than we really are. Growing up in Glasgow, I always had Sunday clothes, Sunday shoes. We always wore our best to church. Nothing wrong with that. It was also where society was at. You dressed up for all kinds of events.

But perhaps, just perhaps, it communicates a subtle message when you come to meet God. You need to dress up. You don't let God see you in your ordinary working clothes.

If we think God can only see us at our best, then he can never get to change those parts of our lives which are less than our best. We will always be trying to hide something from him.

But when we come with unveiled faces, no pretense, no hiding, no masks, face to face, this is what transforms us from glory to glory.

Perhaps this is why an old hymn like *Just as I am* has moved so many people to Christ.

**Just as I am, without one plea,  
but that thy blood was shed  
for me, and that thou bidst me  
come to thee, O Lamb of God,  
I come, I come.**

**Just as I am, and waiting not to  
rid my soul of one dark blot,  
to thee whose blood can cleanse  
each spot, O Lamb of God,  
I come, I come.**

**Just as I am, though tossed  
about with many a conflict,  
many a doubt, fightings and  
fears within, without, O Lamb  
of God, I come, I come.**

**Just as I am, poor, wretched,  
blind; sight, riches, healing of  
the mind, yea, all I need in  
thee to find, O Lamb of God,  
I come, I come.**

**Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse,  
relieve; because thy promise I  
believe, O Lamb of God, I  
come, I come.**

We will start seated. Then perhaps as one line or a thought touches you, you stand. Don't worry about anyone else. You stand.

You come just the way you really are. You don't have to put on your Sunday best. In fact, we may have to take off our Sunday best and come with an unveiled face.