

“The Bungee Cord of Shame”

Date: February 4, 2018
Unashamed Series
Theme: Shame

Place: Lakewood UMC
Texts: James 1:2-4; Romans 8:28; Phil. 1:3-6
Occasion:

In the fourth week of our sermon series on shame, we take a look at what Christine Caine calls the “Bungee Cord of Shame.” I’ve asked Russ Fisher to find a slide of some people bungee jumping – take a look. Have any of you ever been bungee jumping? Wow! Good for you!

I have a fear of heights, so that sport is out of *my* league. But there’s something else about bungee-jumping that kind of freaks me out. And that’s the unpredictability of when you reach the bottom of the cord and it begins to recoil and pull you back up. I don’t like those kinds of surprises.

As a person who has struggled with life-long shame, I’ve always tried to stay in control of things, even when I know there is an awful lot in life that is way out of my control. I’m still a bit of a control-freak, I confess it.

Here’s the thing about a bungee cord: when it does come back at you, it’s like a surprise attack. You try to be prepared for it, but you’re never quite able to predict its timing, its elasticity, or its speed. And the same is true of shame.

When it comes to shame, I definitely don’t like those surprise attacks. Especially when they come out of nowhere – like some crazy bridge-jumping bungee cord. You do some personal healing and you’re walking through a certain degree of freedom, having thrown off the shame, and it comes flying back at you when you least expect it.

Even if we are living a relatively shame-free life, at times, there will be those unexpected attacks of shame that come out the blue and catch us off guard. I call them shame-triggers. Something happens and it triggers those old feelings of shame. It happens when someone I trust unexpectedly

rejects me, or I perceive it that way. I can get triggered by shame when I am misunderstood, overlooked or criticized. It can happen when I don't live up to someone's expectations. It can happen when I try to do something and it doesn't go as I think it should, and I feel like a failure.

Even though we may have done a lot of work on ourselves, and allowed God's healing love to liberate from those old feelings of shame, the bungee cord of shame can come flying back at you and your thoughts flood with: "Not good enough; I'll never be....; you just don't have it; you're not enough; go ahead and give up."

So even though we've brought our shame-filled thoughts to God and allowed God to heal us and give us a measure of freedom from those thoughts, the bungee cord principle says there will still be times when those feelings of shame will fly back up at us.

But we don't have to be disheartened or discouraged. I'm willing to consider and discover what God is up to. Even when it hurts, even when it's painful, even when I'm afraid, I'm willing to look at what God is trying to show me about myself. What is this new layer of shame that has presented itself? How else does God want to heal me?

I could easily tell myself, "I've got this thing called *shame* under control. I'm never going to experience shame again in my life. God has healed me." But I would be kidding myself.

I would be kidding myself because shame takes a long time to heal, and we're never completely done with it. There will always be new circumstances, new people, new situations that trigger our old issues of shame. We just need to know it's going to happen. We may not know when it's going to pop, just like we can't predict when the bungee cord is going to yank us back up into the air. But it shouldn't come as a total shock.

God has more healing to do in our lives. God isn't finished with us yet. God has more to teach us. God has more to show us about ourselves. You see, no matter how old we are, no matter how far along the journey we may be, God still has more to reveal to us.

Instead of being discouraged, we can take comfort in knowing that we're not alone. This is a common experience to us all. James 1:2-4 offers us great comfort as well: "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

What a beautiful promise. God knew that we might get discouraged. Now, I don't know many people who consider it pure joy, when the bungee-cord of shame flies back in their face; it's painful.

But we can have joy in knowing that God has more to teach us, more to give us, more healing to offer. We need to stay the course and not give up. The Bible calls it perseverance. Stick with it and allow God to do a new work of healing in your life around this new shame trigger.

A new challenge will arise, like an invisible bungee cord that brings back old shame, exposing some old wounds that we thought were healed a long time ago. A recent shame-trigger will apply new pressure to old scars until we discover we weren't completely healed after all.

If we allow shame-based thinking to rule our lives, we'll think that this bungee-cord shame is terrible news. We might even shame ourselves for feeling shame again. We might beat ourselves up emotionally and chastise ourselves for repeating those same old patterns.

But shame-free thinking gives us a whole new perspective on how to see this new situation. Paul says it well in Philippians 1: "In all my prayers for you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the

gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this (and here's the promise I want you to hear) *that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ.*" (Phil. 1:4-6)

Who began the good work in us? God did! And *who* is carrying on that good work in us, until it is complete? God is!

That new shame trigger may come as a surprise to us. But God is never caught off guard! God isn't finished with us yet. God has more work to do in us. John Wesley referred to it as sanctifying grace, going on to perfection, being healed by God's love.

You and I are being healed by God's grace and love. We **will** be mature and complete, not lacking anything. God said so. God is at work in each one of us, completing us. When we're challenged by the surprise of bungee-cord shame, we can remind ourselves - God has more to give us.

When someone hurts us, when we're being challenged emotionally, we have the opportunity to recognize our past broken responses, surrender to God's healing touch, and resolve to become shame lifters instead of shame-makers.

Let's face it, on this side of heaven we are still flawed and imperfect people, surrounded by flawed, imperfect people, all dealing with life in a broken and hurting world. Shame will surface again in our lives. But we can take the principles we've been learning, and apply them in this new situation, and allow God to continue the good work he has begun in us.

The next time someone hurts us – and they will – or the next time we hurt someone – and we will – rather than hide from the pain and the shame, we can expose it to God's light and experience healing. This is living out grace. This is living in hope and promise, rather than returning to the old cycle we dwelt in for so long.

My growth is still a work in progress, as I'm sure yours is as well. As we've already noted, growth on this side of heaven goes on and on. And guess what – there is no shame in that! Amen!

Let us pray:

“We thank you God for the times you have delivered us from deep pain and hurt. And we thank you for the times when you walked with us through deep valleys of suffering and pain. God, give us an extra portion of your Holy Spirit, to use our scars and our past pains as a testimony to your power to heal. God, help us to not be discouraged when shame arises anew, but continually turn to you for our healing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.”

This sermon borrows heavily from the book and workbook entitled *Unashamed* by Christine Caine, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2016, pp. 173-189; workbook pp. 83