

**Title:** I Quit Hiding  
**Text:** Genesis 2:8-9  
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**Preacher:** Rev Stu Cameron

Just before Christmas I read one of those quirky stories that pop up in the media from time to time. You know the type; the 'did that really happen' kind of story.

The headline of the story, which went viral, was:

**WALKING and social media is no LOLing matter, Victoria police say**

Let me read you the story in full as it appeared in the Australian:

A tourist is lucky to be alive after she fell into Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay while browsing on Facebook, police say.

The woman was walking along St Kilda pier engrossed in social media, when she walked off the pier into the icy waters of the bay about 11.30pm yesterday.

A quick thinking witness raised the alarm and police rushed to the scene.

Police on land were able to point out the position of the distressed woman, floundering in the water, to water police units who rescued her about 20 metres from the pier.

It is believed the woman did not know how to swim. She was taken to hospital for treatment.

*(Apparently the woman had a backpack on that acted like a flotation device, keeping her head above water. Here's the killer line of the story...)*

There will be no need for a lost property report as the woman kept hold of her mobile phone throughout the entire ordeal.

Imagine the scene for a moment; a woman so engrossed in the screen she literally walks off the end of a jetty - and then desperately clings to a screen she seems to value as much as life.

I first read that story, incredulous.

But then in a moment of revelation I saw the this unnamed woman's folly is analogous for the far deeper and more tragic behavior many of us engage in as we cling to patterns of behavior that steal and kill and rob and destroy life in us, even up to the point where spiritually we will walk off the end of a jetty rather than let it go.

Of course what I am talking about – that which we will stupidly cling to – is sin.

Today, as we prepare to gather round this table of bread and wine, my goal is simple; that all of us might let go of the sin that robs us of life and in its place receive grace that gives life; life in all its abundance.

The title of my message is I Quit Hiding, the reason for which will I hope become clear.

**Let's Pray.**

Right back at the beginning of time, the bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth and all that the universe contains, and that he declared it good. Culminating his creative effort, God formed man and woman from the dust in his own image. He breathed the breath of life in to them and declared that not only were they – we – good, but very good. He placed Adam and Eve in the idyllic Garden of Eden where they had all they could want and need.

Created in his image, God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose – the freedom to choose to love and honor him as their Creator or not. God gave them the freedom **and the opportunity** to choose by placing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden, with the instruction to eat the fruit of every tree but this one.

Created in the image of God, all of us have the God-given freedom, and have the opportunity to love and honor God, or not. Most of us know how the story unfolds. Listening to the lie of the serpent that if they eat the fruit they will be like God, they reach out, take hold and eat.

Folks, this is the essence of sin:

Reaching out and clinging to anything other than God for our meaning, or purpose, or identity.

The fruit Adam and Eve ate was not evil in and of itself, but it became evil when it took the place of God.

Adam and Eve eat the fruit and immediately they experience a new and devastating heart condition; shame. They attempt to hide the shame of their nakedness with fig leaves. Then we read this in Genesis:

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. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"  
(Genesis 2:8-9)

No two verses in the bible more eloquently sum up God's posture towards us, and our response.

Put simply:

God seeks and we hide.

We hide from God because of our sin-fuelled shame, whether we recognize it or not.

God relentlessly seeks us out simply because God is love, and love is a verb, not a noun.

The bible is the story of God's search and rescue mission for humankind.

Again last year there was a story published about a woman who was exploring Iceland on a tour bus. She was reported missing after she supposedly failed to return to the tour bus. The driver waited for an hour and then notified the police. Search and rescue teams were sent to the area, but the rescue efforts were called off at 3 A.M. It turns out the missing woman had been on the bus the whole time.

She even participated in the search for herself.

Apparently, before reentering the bus she changed clothes and freshened up so the other passengers didn't recognize her. The local chief of police said that she didn't recognize the description of herself and she "had no idea that she was missing."

Here is my point; it is very difficult to be rescued when we don't recognize we are lost. The nature of sin is that it deceives us into believing that we are not missing; that there isn't a problem; that there are no fundamental issues of the heart we need to address. In our hearts we will do everything we can to hide from the fact we are lost. In hiding from our lostness, we ultimately hide from God, the only one who can search us out and rescue us. The prophet Jeremiah summarized our heart's propensity to deceive ourselves:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?  
(Jeremiah 17:9)

Controlled by our deceitful hearts, we ignore the fact that we are lost in our sin and so we hide from God. We hide behind the illusion we have no need for God. We hide from the reality that we don't just need heart surgery, but a heart transplant.

A core teaching of the bible is that Adam and Eve's sin is our sin; and their response to hide from God is our response. The bible's teaching is clear and unequivocal – all of us are sinners – people who have exercised their God-given freedom to choose by rebelling against God. Summarizing the Bible's teaching in his letter to the Romans, Paul says this of our spiritual condition:

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

(Romans 3: 10-12)

Another story to illustrate: A 61-year-old Texas man kept getting drunk, even though he claimed he hadn't been drinking alcohol. The escalating problem compelled doctors to isolate him without access to alcohol for 24 hours. He still got drunk. It prompted his physicians to look internally for the problem. In the absence of healthy gut flora, brewer's yeast had taken up residence in his stomach, and was turning any starch he ate into alcohol—and enough to inebriate him. His rare condition is called 'Auto-Brewery Syndrome'.

Infected by sin, our hearts outwardly manifest in sinful actions many and varied. In fact, so bad is the state of our sinful hearts, in Romans Paul says we invent ways of doing evil.

Instead of being creatively good, we are creatively bad.

Why am I laboring this wonderfully cheery, point this morning? This is why:

The Gospel only sounds good to a heart that knows it is bad.

(Tullian Tchividjian)

Perhaps the primary way we hide from God is by ignoring the fact that we are spiritually lost in the first place. We hide behind the illusion that we are OK, that there we have no spiritual problem that needs to be addressed. In fact we are so blind to our spiritual condition we need outside intervention to recognise our desperate need.

The nature of sin is that it hardens our heart.

It starts with **denial**: 'Sure, I may have had a problem in the past, but I don't now.'

It starts with denial, but by no means does it end there.

It progresses to **minimisation**: 'Sure, I may muck up now and then, but it's not that bad. No one is getting hurt'

It then moves to **normalization**: 'Everybody does it – it's no big deal.'

Then comes **rationalization**: We come up with reasons why our sinful behaviour makes sense.

Finally there is **celebration**: This is where we buy into the deception of sin so much, we feel no need whatsoever to defend our actions – in fact we even celebrate them.

At this point our hearts like stones.

Perhaps the most important gift the Spirit of God grants us is the awful gift of conviction. Jesus promised:

And when (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

(John 16:8)

Like a defibrillator machine, the Holy Spirit jolts our dead heart alive with the conviction that, because of our sin, we are desperately lost and so desperately need God.

This morning God is calling some of us to let go of our denials that say we are OK apart from God.

We hide from God with our denials, and we hide from God with our accusatory fingers.

Adam and Eve knew they had a problem a big one. They knew they had stepped over the only line that mattered when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They did not deny that they had eaten the forbidden fruit; they simply attempted to shift responsibility. When God asks them if they eaten the fruit, this is how they respond:

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."  
Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"  
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."  
(Genesis 3:12-13)

The classic, 'she made me', and the 'devil made me do it', excuses. Adam and Eve refuse to take responsibility for their own conscious decisions, instead shifting blame on to external forces.

We hide from the painful reality of sin in our lives, and so hide from our need for God by shifting blame for the mistakes we make.

We're perhaps a little more subtle and sophisticated than Adam and Eve, but the message is the same – it's not my fault.

We blame our genes, or our family background, or a dysfunctional relationship, or a bad influence...and the list goes on.

'It's not my fault'.

Make no mistake, some of us are victims terrible betrayals, or awful family circumstances, or horrific tragedies. The ripple effects of these things means it can be incredibly difficult to both recover and live a well-adjusted life. In these circumstances, professional counseling and other assistance is incredibly helpful in making sure that while we may be a victim of circumstances beyond our control, we don't always have to live as a victim.

But in the end the primary problem that afflicts every human being is not a psychological condition that can be addressed with therapy and medication, but a spiritual condition that will only be overcome through the gracious love of God.

John Ortberg tells the story of a CEO has taken on a new job. The outgoing CEO says to him, "Sometimes you'll make wrong choices. You will. You'll mess up. When that happens, I have prepared three envelopes for you. I left them in the top drawer of the desk. The first time it happens, open #1. The second time you mess up, open #2. The third time, open #3."

For the first few months, everything goes fine. Then the CEO makes his first mistake, goes to the drawer, opens up envelope #1, and the message reads, "Blame me." So he does: "This is the old CEO's fault. He made these mistakes. I inherited these problems." Everybody says, "Okay." It works out pretty well.

Things go fine for a while, and then he makes his second mistake. So, he goes to the drawer and opens up envelope #2. This time he reads, "Blame the board." And he does: "It's the board's fault. The board has been a mess. I inherited them. They're the problem." Everybody says, "Okay, that makes sense."

Things go fine for a while, and then he makes his third mistake. So, he goes to the drawer and opens up envelope #3. The message reads: "Prepare three envelopes."

The problems with blaming others for our mistakes – for the sins we alone choose to commit – is that we will eventually run out of people and circumstances to blame, and the accusing finger we have pointed everywhere else will point back at us.

This morning God is calling some of us to stop hiding behind the finger of blame.

We hide from God with our denials and our fingers of blame.

We also hide from God with our Masks.

We hide behind masks when we have admitted, at least to ourselves, that something is fundamentally wrong in our life – that we have, and continue to muck up and seem powerless to stop.

But it's one thing to admit it to our flawed spiritual condition to ourselves. It's another thing entirely to admit it to anyone else, let alone God.

And so we put on our masks and pretend to be something or someone we aren't. We manage our sin so it it's not too obvious to others, or disruptive to us. And we hide from God.

A cowboy walked into a Texas bar, ordered three bottles of beer, and sat in the back room, drinking a sip out of each one in turn. When he finished them, he came back to the bar and ordered three more.

The bartender told the cowboy, "You know, a bottle goes flat after I open it. It would taste better if you bought one at a time."

The cowboy replied, "Well, you see, I have two brothers. One is in Australia, the other is in Dublin, and I'm in Texas. When we all left home, we promised we'd drink this way to remember the days we drank together, so I drink one for each of my brothers and one for myself."

The bartender admitted this was a nice custom and left it there.

The cowboy became a regular in the bar and always drank the same way. But one day, he ordered only two bottles. All the regulars took notice and fell silent. When he came back to the bar for the second round, the bartender said, "I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I wanted to offer my condolences on your loss." The cowboy looked puzzled for a moment, then a light dawned and he laughed.

"Oh, no, everybody's just fine," he explained. "It's just that my wife and I joined the Baptist Church in Longview, and I had to quit drinking. It hasn't affected my brothers though."

In ancient times, the Greeks had a word for actors who would play multiple parts in a play, signifying each part by wearing a different mask. The word was hypokretes – hypocrite. Jesus caused a scandal when he addressed the religious leaders of his day with these words:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.  
(Matthew 23:27)

The religious leaders were experts at sin management, projecting outward signs of holiness and godliness, while all the time their hearts were still far from God.

They hid from God behind their masks of respectability.

The religious leaders were experts at sin management, and if you hang around church long enough, you are in danger of becoming an expert as well.

But the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart!

We can't manage our sin away with outward signs of holiness. We need a new heart. We need a heart transplant.

We hide from God behind our denials, our fingers of blame and our masks.

Perhaps most dangerously, we hide from God behind our ladders.

This happens when we know deep in our heart and spirit that there is a chasm that separates us from a holy God. caused by our sin. We seek to overcome this chasm by climbing a ladder towards God with our good works.

Put simply, our thinking is that the more good we do, the more rungs we climb until eventually we our good will more than outweigh our bad and we will reach God.

But no matter how well we live our lives, no matter how many of the poor we serve, or sacrificial acts of generosity we offer, we will never, ever climb enough rungs to reach God. The prophet Isaiah put it bluntly:

All our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.  
(Isaiah 64:6)

The good things we do in an attempt to earn God's favor are just as spiritually dangerous as the bad things we do ignoring God's favor.

All our attempts to reach God, to impress God, to earn God's favor are destined to failure, leaving us bitter and exhausted and hopeless. Our bad overwhelms any good in us.

Here is how insidious ladders can be. Many of us have experienced the gift of a new heart that comes from placing our faith and trust in Jesus' finished work for us. We are forgiven and set free. But then we construct new ladders.

Having received all of God's favour, we start to doubt and work to earn it again, but this time not just with our good works, but our religious good works.

We read our bible more, pray more, serve more, give more – often thinking this will draw more favor from God than we have already received, or somehow compensate for our continuing failures.

We sing 'our debt is paid, it is paid in full', but we live our lives as if, 'my debt is paid, it is paid in part!'

We don't read the bible, pray, give, serve to earn God's favor.

We read, pray, give and serve out of God's favor – the gift of which is that we will discover the riches the grace we have already received.

We hide from God with our denials, fingers of blame, masks and ladders.

We hide, but hallelujah, far more than our capacity to hide, God seeks!

In fact God never stops, and will never stop seeking us.

His search and rescue strategy culminated in the Cross of Christ, where the sacrificial blood of Jesus covered over our sin, and whose resurrection ensured that sin and death no longer have any power or dominion over those who place their faith and trust in Jesus!

For our ladders God gives us the Cross of Jesus.

The Cross of Christ kicks out the feet of our ladders, exposes our denials, blunts our fingers of blame and destroys our masks.

The Cross of Christ reveals that we no longer need to hide, because the One whose wrath we deserve absorbs it into himself.

The judgment we deserved because of our sin rested on the One who knew no sin.

God's grace finds us, and does not just repair heart, but offers us a new one.

For our heart of sin-hardened stone, Jesus in his resurrection power, grants us a new heart. Once dead in our sin, we are now eternally alive in Jesus. Ravi Zacharias puts it this way:

Jesus does not offer to make bad people good but to make dead people alive.  
(Ravi Zacharias)

Don't walk of a jetty clinging to something that will kill you.