

Hey everyone my name is Tommy and I am the youth pastor here at Catalyst. I want to talk to you today about Labor Day. Labor Day is special to me for a few reasons; one of course is the free day off of work, but more importantly it is my wedding anniversary. This is a happy time for Teresa and I not just because we get to celebrate, but this is when we usually take time away for a weekend getaway or something fun. We usually start out kid free, but typically after a few hours Teresa misses them and the face time commences. All holidays, especially this one start out the same. [Vacation Checklist] I get out my mental checklist and start to check my boxes. Have I booked our getaway? Have I coordinated babysitting? Have I called the restaurants and put in our reservations? Where are we going to eat? Are we going to have dessert? How can I top last year? ( Since I am a bit competitive I may or may not try to out do myself every year.)

I don't know if you are anything like me, but unfortunately my "box checking" bleeds into so many parts of my life. This is actually what helps me at work. I am able to take an idea, a goal, or an objective and bring it all the way down to check boxes. I can create a custom process to help my customers achieve their goals. I actually quite enjoy that about my job. However, when I am at home, planning a vacation, or celebrating a date night this can be a difficult thing to shut off. Sometimes I find myself running through my mental checklist over and over again. This can at times test Teresa's patience, it causes her to repeat herself, remind me of something i've forgotten, or to try multiple attempts at getting my attention.

Growing up in church this was ingrained in me. With religion it can be easy to fall into the trap of checking boxes. I was told to go to confession, say my prayers, go to communion, go to church, give to the church, and follow the commandments. In fact, well-meaning churches and people sometimes believe this so much that they encourage others to follow this process. A box checking faith doesn't lead to life and flourishing. Instead we are suddenly beating ourselves up over missing a box, or we are embarrassed at our failures. Box checking faith is a vicious cycle that leaves us unsatisfied. Box checking religion doesn't lead to abundance, in fact it leads to an abundance of shame. Checking boxes can easily put us in a circular process that leaves us unsatisfied.

[Shame Spiral] Shame is a mortifying and lonely emotion. Shame isolates us and kills the work of God in us. Shame says ""You're not good enough." THEN, to BE good enough, Shame says, "Do more, work harder, check more boxes." And it's a vicious cycle because you never feel like you did enough, so you feel like more of a failure, so you feel MORE shame, so you try harder, but you never do enough, so you try harder...Shame is paralyzing, we can't get better, we just end up in a downward spiral. A spiral of shame..

We return to the Shame Spiral again and again.

This is also how people see religion. They imagine God frowning down from Heaven, disapproving, saying Shame! Shame! Shame! Do More, work harder, check more boxes. or earn God's favor. This is how the world sees religion. If you need proof look at pop culture.

[Shame Bell Picture?] The HBO hit Game of Thrones illustrates shame based religion well. In a

scene one of the characters has finally confessed every wrongdoing that could ever be imagined to the church. The church's response was to give her atonement. Her "atonement" is to be paraded naked through the streets of the city while a nun chants Shame! Shame! Shame! and rings a bell.

Just a few weeks ago Teresa, the kids, and I went to a meet and greet. It was a get together for all the parents in our neighborhood who have a child going into kindergarten. As I was getting to meet the other parents the inevitable question came up. Hey you mentioned you are in the car a lot where do you work? As I went through my description of my sales job at Supplyworks I got around to the part where I tell people I am a pastor. Immediately the other parents started apologizing for bad language, drinking at 7:00p.m., and for other things I wasn't aware were even issues. It was almost as if I transformed in front of their very eyes as the nun ringing the bell proclaiming "shame, shame, shame."

But Friends, this is not who the "Church" is called to be. This is not who God is. God is slow to anger, quick to show mercy, and the church is a space free of condemnation. The church is a safe space, a sanctuary, a place we go to get rid of our shame. The church is where it is safe to come as you are open and honest. The church is where we can put down the lists, expectations, and standards that everyone else has and just be us. **[No Shame Bells Allowed]** We don't have to hide who we really are or act a special way to be a part. The church is where we are transformed into God's healing presence. The church is anti-shame. In fact, the church has a no "shame bells allowed" policy.

**[Church Checklist]** Okay before you tune me out or remove me from the stage let's be honest. You might be asking yourself how often I go to church or if I am busy doing one of my mental checklist while I am at church, so I am oblivious to what is going on. You might even think to yourself "Really" does he even know what he is talking about. We all could most likely tell story after story of churches or church people shaming others. The stories could range from shaming about race, sexual orientation, divorce, or just old fashioned shaming. One google search of Westboro Baptist could reveal this to be true. We are better than \_\_\_\_\_ fill in the blank. We are holier than \_\_\_\_\_ fill in the blank. We don't associate with \_\_\_\_\_ fill in the blank. In a lot of experiences, we could all most likely agree that the "Church" is a shame factory.

I grew up Catholic, so unlike many of you, when I messed up, I had actual nuns standing behind me saying "shame, shame, shame." Well I guess that's not the only thing the nuns said. They did say things like "do your homework, sit up straight, stop talking back, and go to the principal." There are even times set aside that during the church service they ring bells at everyone in the building. If you want to talk about the shame bell I grew up with it at my back, front, and side. You may not have grown up with literal nun like me, but you know the sound of the bell and the words that follow "Shame, Shame, Shame."

**[Scripture Slide]** We will see today that shame doesn't come from God, but from us. Shame wasn't God's plan for us, in the beginning, and it is not God's plan for us now. If you have your Bible, turn with me to Genesis 3. Genesis is the first book in the bible and it's name means

beginning. It is the first stories of our interaction with God. In Genesis it tells this story God just completed all this and he looks over all that he made, and he saw that is was “Good.” God declared all of creation including us and called it “very good.”

In this story the two human characters named Adam and Eve mess up. They live in the garden paradise, Eden, and they can have anything they want. They have only one rule, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. "Genesis 2 expands on the creation of the man and woman. In this story, God shapes them like a masterful potter, then breathes life into them. God places them in a Garden paradise, and warns them that to eat of one of the trees means death. The man and woman don't listen. They eat the forbidden fruit. Let's read:"

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. -- Genesis 3:6-7

The two together immediately isolate themselves from the source that breathed life into them. Shame came from Adam and Eve realizing they had done wrong. This was the first time humanity heard the bells and “shame, shame, shame.” Shame didn’t come from God. As God is trying to find Adam and Eve he comes to realize they are hiding. When they come out he asks why they were hiding. Adam answers “we were naked and afraid so we hid”. Shame loves secrecy, shame loves to hide. Adam starts to check his boxes. Hmm if I can just get some clothes I won’t be ashamed. If I can just blame it on Eve, then I won’t be ashamed. I think we can all see what is unfolding in this story. Shame is continually breaking down relationships and driving a wedge in between each one. First shame drives a wedge between man and women, then between God and man. Shame isolated them from God.

Shame was not God's plan in the beginning, and it is not God's plan now, for the Church. Turn over to Romans 8. The book of Romans is a letter written by Paul, one of the first Christian missionaries, to the Church in Rome. The Roman church is diverse - made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Part of Paul's goal is to build a bridge between the various groups, to show them that they are all one body through Jesus' death and resurrection.

In the first four chapters, Paul illustrates why both Jews and Gentiles need God's rescue. And then, in chapters 5-7, he goes all the way back to Adam, the first man. He draws on that story we just read together, to show how, because of Adam's original sin, we all need God's grace and forgiveness. Chapter 7 ends with a shame-filled lament if there ever has been one.

But then Paul moves into celebrating the one who has rescued us from Shame, from Sin and Death: Jesus. And Chapter 8 is a beautiful meditation on the power of the Spirit to rescue us from Shame. Let's read how he announce the good news of God's life offered to us in Jesus.

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus ( Repeat 5x's). And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. -- Romans 8:1-4

Paul reminds us what God has done from the beginning; when he breathed life and spirit into humanity. Paul reminds us we have freedom from shame and there is life in the spirit. God has done all the box checking for us, there is no more box checking, there isn't a work harder program. There is just freedom in the spirit. There is no more guilt, no more shame, just freedom. Shame is from us, freedom is from God.

[Spirit breaking out of Shame Spiral] There is freedom in the spirit so what does that mean to us? So what is our next step? How can I live in freedom instead of shame? For all of us It can be hard to break old habits, so we are all in danger of this. We can easily slide back into our old ways of box checking. If we ask what do I do next? Then we have moved ourselves back into the cycle that I was in at Catholic school. We are back into our old habit of Shame and Atonement. We can't let shame inform our decisions.

What does it look like to live free in the spirit? Living free in the spirit doesn't look like redoubling our effort. Living free in the spirit isn't responding by giving more money every time we see a commercial that says a child in the middle east needs food, clothes, schooling, or water. Freedom is about stepping and living outside of the shame cycle. Shame takes us through the box checking to earn God's love.

But God says creation is good and beloved. God has breathed life into us and given us life through the spirit. God did that so we could live in love and freedom. We can't box check love, we can't box check peace, we can't box check Joy, but we can respond with Joy, peace and love. We can choose not allow guilt, fear, or anger be our response.

I know your immediate reaction is to feel like this is more box checking. To Love means I have to do \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and blank. To practice kindness I have to \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and blank.

[Fruit of the Spirit overtaking Shame Cycle] The fruit of the spirit isn't a box checking experience. The fruit of the spirit is the measure of the spirit transforming us. The fruit of the spirit is the result of how we are living into our freedom. It's just like breathing we take in the spirit and we exhale the spirit back into the world. Just like in the Genesis story when God breathe into humankind and we then exhaled out into the world. Life in the spirit is just as natural as breathing.

I don't give so I can check off my box, I give at Catalyst because I believe that we can make a difference. I believe that Catalyst is a place for everyone so I give of my time, money, and effort. I don't help people because I feel guilty about my status or my position. I help because I love people and I want to help make the world a peaceful, loving, and just place. I don't volunteer my time at Catalyst because I feel guilty, I volunteer my time because the church has transformed me. The church has breathed life into me and now I am exhaling that back into my church, community, and town.

This isn't the easiest thing to do as it is natural to check our boxes and want to know where we stand. It makes us wonder how do we. Where do we start? How do we get going?

In the lobby we have our lists of spiritual practice guides. One of the practices on the guide is called Sabbath. Now before you switch back to your box checking hear me out. Sabbath is our break from box checking. Sabbath is the practice of nothing, the practice of rest. Sabbath is the first step in letting go of the shame bell. Sabbath is waiting on the spirit.

[Sabbath] Since this is Labor Day weekend I want to offer you the the practice of Sabbath as a way to remain in the Spirit, to settle in the freedom God gives you. We also offer a spiritual practice guide for kids too. Sabbath for me, who is a typical box checker, it looks like letting my kids decide how we spend the day. Sometimes it even looks like planning nothing. No check boxes, no plans, no appointments, no practice, but a day just me with my KIDS.

Friends we have a choice, we can choose to slip back into our old ways. We can choose to ring the shame bell or we can choose to listen to the shame bell.

Or

We can be a part of Catalyst, we can be a community where there is Freedom from shame. Where our actions flow not from shame, but from God's infinite love. We can continue to be a community that is a safe space for everyone to embrace their God given calling.

### **Communion Set Up**

[Communion Slide]

One of the ways we practice that here at Catalyst is through the communion table, which invites us to join the meal Jesus shared with his followers. At that meal, he broke bread as his body, broken for us. He offered us wine as his blood, poured out as a new covenant between us and God.

Romans tells us there is "No condemnation for those who are in Christ. Communion is God's invitation into life in the spirit. Communion is the reminder of God breathing life into us and as we go from here we exhale that life into the world.

This communion table is for everyone you don't have to be a member of Catalyst to take part. If you are ready to start living a life of freedom in the spirit after I pray we invite you to come forward.

Father we thank you for your invitation into life. We thank you for being a God that does not shame us, but that you are a God that is quick to forgive. We ask you that as we take part in communion today that you remind you have breathed life into us and we are good, not just good, but very good. Remind us lord that we are invited to a life with love, kindness, happiness, and joy. Lord I pray for Catalyst that we will continue to be a place that is shame free. I pray that we continue to be a place where no shame bells are allowed. Father help catalyst to continue to transform our community and make our town, neighborhoods, and house a better place full of life. A life of freedom in the spirit.

As we approach your table today, may these wafers and juice become a spiritual food for us. May the grace we receive transform us into people that live a life of love, kindness, joy, and peace. I pray this and all these things in your holy name. Amen.

### **Blessing**

Catalyst as we go back to our jobs and our lives, after Labor Day, after our Sabbath. May we be a people and a church that trades in the shame bell for the fruits of the spirit. Go in the grace and peace of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. We will see you next week.