

Unstoppable...Escaping the Sin Pit

6/30/19 - Pastor Tom

We read in Acts 1, how Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witnesses throughout the entire earth before he ascended into heaven. And in Acts 2, we read how the Holy Spirit came and filled the disciples with power, and Peter preached a message and 3,000 people were added to the church in a single day. From then on, we read about the growth of the church, the practicalities of the people meeting together and serving one another, and the miracles being performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are seeing how Jesus established the church to be unstoppable.

Now before we jump into today's message, I would like a volunteer. I have a pit up here, and I would like to throw a child into it... (ILLUSTRATION of being stuck in a pit)

I want to talk about the greatest threat to the church. The one thing that could make the church not as unstoppable as it could be. (Ask the kids what they think it might be. It's sin!)

Now I want to talk about sin for a few reasons today. One is that I'm really, really good at it. Though I am working at becoming bad at it.

We talk about not sinning a lot in church. "Don't sin." "Flee from sin." I want to talk about what we should do **when** we sin.

Sin is categorized as a pitfall for a reason. It is a trap that we fall into. When we sin, we fall into a pit. The question then is, "how do we get out of the pit?"

Ideally, you never would have fallen into a pit in the first place. But, all have sinned and fallen short (into a pit), away from the glory of God. (reading from the PTT "Pastor Tom's Translation"). Now this can be very depressing on the surface. It is a constant heartache to know that we all deal with sin on the daily. But it is also a great relief! Paul said **I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have**

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already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. (Philippians 3:12). Jesus taught us to pray daily...

"Forgive us our sins." We can find some relief in knowing that it is normal for us to struggle with sin and fall into pits.

This doesn't mean we become complacent and ok with the fact we have sin in our lives. But we continue to work out our salvation.

Before I get into the Do's and Don'ts of what to do when you have fallen into a pit, I want you to remember something when you have fallen into a pit (not 'IF')...

- It doesn't matter where the pit came from. (Perhaps someone dug it on purpose to try to trap you (Advertisements.). Maybe you dug it yourself. Perhaps your friend invited you over to play right next to one. The truth is, it doesn't matter where it came from. All that matters is that you weren't supposed to fall into it, and you did.

So here are the Do's of what to do when you have sinned and fallen into a pit...

Do's:

- Admit you're in the pit

Trying to hide the fact that you are in the pit after you have fallen in helps no one. Especially you! (This is usually an issue of pride. The sin of pride can compound the problem of whatever other sin we are dealing with.)

When I was a young boy growing up, there would be different punishments for different things I did wrong. I learned at a young age not to lie when I did something wrong. If I hit my brother and started something that escalated into a fight, it was best for me to own up to it. I might get grounded for a couple of days. But if I lied about it and got caught, wooooo-eeee, I'd be grounded for at least a week! In our home, lying about doing

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something wrong was always worse than just doing something wrong. I learned real quick to own up to my sin.

When you lie about the fact that you are in trouble, you help no one! You may think you are helping yourself, because you "got away" with it. You didn't get caught. But God sees all and knows all. The fact that you got away with it doesn't help you.

Consequences of sin can actually be a good thing. It can teach us not to do it again! Mom says don't touch the stove. You reach up and touch the stove, you gonna get burned! That burn should teach you two things...1, not to touch a hot stove, but most importantly #2, Listen to yo mamma! Because she is gonna be saying smart stuff for the rest of your life.

When we get away with something, we are training ourselves to do bad things. We are telling our flesh that it is ok to sin. So when we fall into it, don't lie about it. Don't try to cover it up. People are sitting in the bottom of a pit, and when people walk by, they go "I'm ok. I'm not in trouble. Everything is fine!" Don't let your pride get in the way of getting help. Remember, everyone sins. So it is stupid to lie about it and act like you've never fallen into a sin pit.

Admitting you are in the pit is the first step to getting out. Admitting that things are not as they should be. That one has fallen short. That one has missed the mark. That one has failed. That one has sinned. You need to confess this to God, and it can be helpful to confess to another believer as well. We see confession throughout the book of Acts. Confession leading to repentance, and the church growing daily. **"Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done" (Acts 19:18).** Confession leads to repentance!

Jesus came for those who were in distress. He came for those who needed saving. If you don't need to be saved, then He won't save you. Admit you are in the pit. Confess your sin.

- **Accountability (get it!)**

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(You WILL fall in a pit someday. It is easier to get out if you already have a friend you can call and be like, "Yo, it's me. You know that pit? Yeah, well I fell into it. Can you help me out?")

All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD" (Proverbs 16:2). This is why we need to be in regular relationship with others that can hold us accountable. Here at Calvary, we offer small groups to help people live out their faith.

It is important that we not give up the importance of meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). Someone in my small group a few weeks ago said that they feel attending our small group is more important than attending Sunday morning service. They said that there is greater accountability in a smaller group. I'm not going to come into church on a Sunday morning and tell everyone here that I became a rage-monster while driving yesterday. But I might share that story with my small group.

Sometimes we might need some specialized help. Sin can be tricky, and we might need professional accountability. We need someone with experience with getting people out of pits. "That one there will need an extra long rope to get out. And we gotta make sure everything is tied down so no one else falls in." Pastors, counselors, and programs are tools for when we fall into certain pits. One great example of this is Teen Challenge. Here at our very own church we have Living Free, which is to help people get out of whatever pit they are perpetually stuck in. They help create systems of accountability to confront and break free from habitual sin. (Thursday nights at 7pm. See Rick Dodridge, Rita Leinheiser, Ramesh, etc...)

- Ask for help when it happens.

Now this seems like a given. But people have difficulty asking for help. Why? Because it admits failure. It admits a mistake. (Me asking for directions. Some men don't like asking for directions. They'll stop to ask for directions without actually ever saying "I'm lost." "Now I know I'm close, but maybe I took one wrong turn." Then the person gives them some directions,

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and the man isn't quite sure about them. But he doesn't want to seem too lost, so he nods his head along and goes "uh-huh" as the directions are given. He pulls off and turns to his wife and says, "Did you get that? Because I'm not sure I understood everything."

If instead he was like, "I'm lost," he would be clearly defining his need. And then he could continue to get help until he completely understood.

Too often, we say, "I got this." Or "I just need a little help." And then we find ourselves just falling back into the same pit that we may have been able to start to get out of. Admitting you are in the pit is the best way to ask for help in getting out. Admit you are in need. (Blessed are the poor in spirit. If we are poor in spirit, then we need God to do something in our lives. I plan on trying to be poor in Spirit my whole life so God can do something in me.). If I don't ask for help, then I don't need it, and I won't get it.

Persevering in the faith is a community project. That's what the church is for. We were given each other to help fight sin!

Now remember: Ask the right person for help. The best thing to do would be to ask God first. Don't forget Him! (We can ask for the Holy Spirits help to put to death the misdeeds of the body, Romans 8:13).

We must make sure that we are not relying on just a person for help. ("Woah, woah, woah, Pastor Tom! I thought you said we need to ask other people for help. Now you're saying I'm not supposed to rely on them?") Lemme explain...

When a pastor falls, it can devastate a church. And that's understandable. A group of people in a community working towards a common goal. Building programs, running ministries, raising leaders, equipping people. If a leader of that group fails, it makes sense that there will be setbacks, and even failure to the

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point of the group disbanding. Which is why a pastor is never who you should rely on. Because they will fail in some way. They will forget to call you back. They will meet with someone else more important. They will make a decision you don't agree with. They will sin. Please pray for your pastors so their failures are minimal.

But God... God will never steer you wrong. You see, relying on man and relying on God to use man are two different things. God has given us each other to help us grow in our relationship with Him (Iron sharpens iron, Proverbs 27:17). We have the church so that we can do more together than we can do alone (1 can fight a thousand, but 2 can fight 10,000). We have the church so we might be kept accountable (Galatians 6:1 says that we should restore someone gently when they sin. **Hebrews 10:24-25** says... **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.**)

But my faith will NEVER be in the church! My faith is in God. Now sometimes that might mean trusting God to use fellow Christians to help me out of the pit. And I'll thank them and understand their contribution. But it is because of God's Holy Spirit working THROUGH THEM that I was pulled out of the pit.

We have to be careful when our leaders fall into pits to not be surprised or let down. They aren't God. They are people. They are sinners, too. If our faith is placed in anything else besides Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, then our faith is misplaced. So if a pastor/leader/friend helps you out of a pit, remember it was God using them to help you out. Which means if you fall in again, and that person isn't available, God has someone else to use to help you get out. Don't trust another man or woman to be your rescuer. Jesus is the ultimate deliverer.

The nation of Judah was facing a massive incoming Assyrian army. In Isaiah chapter 30, we find that Judah decides to seek

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an alliance and aid from Egypt instead of seeking the Lord for protection from the invasion. They allied themselves with the wrong thing! They sought help from a source other than God! And they paid dearly for it.

People can help us, but they can't heal us. People can lift us, but they can't carry us. People can point in the right direction, but they can't be with you every single step of the journey. People can sympathize with your feelings, but they can't change the way you feel. Effective deliverance from a sin pit frequently involves control over one's thoughts. The only mind-reader I know is God Almighty. Now yeah, you can tell me what you are thinking as I'm trying to help you out of the pit, but what are you not telling me? What are you hiding from me? No thought can be hidden from the Lord, so why bother trying?!?

Ask for help, and make sure you are asking the right One for help. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct whom you should go to.

- Fight!!

Understand that while sin is something we all deal with, that doesn't make it any less trivial. So fight your sin! Attack it! Draw up battle plans! Write things down! Share it with those who are close to you. What exactly was it that caused you to fall into this pit of sin? Jesus says it is better for someone to cut off their hand or gouge out their eye than to go to hell. Now He wasn't telling us that we should actually cut off our hand or gouge out our eye. He is saying that if there is something in our life that will cause us to stumble into a pit, then we need to get rid of it! Now this is going to be different things for different people. For some men, that might mean not having a smartphone with internet access. For many of us, it might mean finding a way to cut back on access to the internet. A lot of impulsive things can be done online, from raging against others who think differently than you, to buying items that you are coveting, to trying to satisfy the lust of our eyes with things that are sinful. **Romans 13:14 says "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."** We must be careful to not be like the rest of the

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world. D.L. Moody once said, "The ship belongs in the water of the world, but if the water gets in the ship, it sinks." We are called to be in this world, but we are also called to be different from it. That means we aggressively fight sin. We are told to fight sin as a boxer fights another (2nd Corinthians 9), or as a runner fights fatigue in finishing a marathon (2nd Timothy 4).

Do not grow weary in doing a good thing by fighting this fight. Yes, it can be hard, but **2nd Peter 1:3 says that through God's divine power, He has given us everything we need for living a godly life.** The Holy Spirit can empower us to fight this fight against sin.

Here's the thing, Jesus already defeated sin. He is the heavyweight champion when it comes to sin. It is only by our faith in Him in Him forgiving us of our sins that we can claim victory over sin.

We fight sin not because we have to, but because we want to! In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus is speaking with the Pharisees and says, "**Which one of you has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?**" Jesus is saying it doesn't matter how you got in the pit. He will come to rescue you and lift you out of it. Whenever you become weary in your fight, remember Jesus, and let Him be your motivation.

Don'ts:

Don't play the blame game. "I'm here because so and so did this...". "I wouldn't have done it if this person didn't do this...". "They made me...". Shut your mouth!!! You done messed up yourself! "This woman you gave me told me to eat this fruit." Blame does nothing. Too many people in America want to play the blame game instead of fixing the problem. (We are already seeing plenty of it as the Presidential campaigns are underway. Ugh!).

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Don't try to justify why you are in the pit. This is sometimes the brother of the blame game. Saul once said, "I took the best of the plunder to sacrifice it to God." He was trying to justify why he disobeyed God. Oh, and then when he was confronted with his justification, he then blamed others by saying he was afraid at how they might react!

Don't play the victim card. "Well, I did this thing because I was hurt." Oh, so because that person did something wrong, that gives you the right to do something wrong as well? I don't know about you, but telling my parents I hit my brother because he stole my toy never got me out of the punishment for hitting my brother. Jesus could have played the victim card countless times, and he never did.

Don't run away from the Fixer:

We run to something to distract us from the fact we mess up.
Drugs, alcohol, entertainment, people, friends.
We run ourselves into other pits.
We run to comparisons. "As least I'm not as bad as..."
We run from the fact that we messed up at all. We lie!

Why do we run away from God when we sin when God should be the first thing we run to?! I mean, He's the one who unconditionally loves and forgives. He's the one who gave it all for us to be made whole. He knows and understands us better than anyone else, and yet we still deal with these dumb feelings of shame when coming before Him.

We run from the one who can fix everything we broke. Like a child running from his father because he broke one of his toys. What's wrong with you? Your dad can fix it. God can fix whatever mess we have gotten ourselves into. God says, bring me your sin, and I will cast it into the depths of the sea. Listen to this. **Micah 7:18-19** says **Where is another God like you,**

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**who pardons the guilt of the remnant,
overlooking the sins of his special people?
You will not stay angry with your people forever,
because you delight in showing unfailing love.
¹⁹ Once again you will have compassion on us.
You will trample our sins under your feet
and throw them into the depths of the ocean!**

Our God delights in showing mercy! Don't run from the one who wants to (and can) make you whole.

Closing:

Acts 3, starting at verse 19

¹⁹ Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away... ²² Moses said, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' ²³ Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people.' ...

²⁶ When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways."

As we are working towards being an unstoppable church, we need to remember that we are doing it together. And while we all individually sin, we don't need to fight it on our own. We can fight it together. While Jesus paid the ultimate price and pulled us out of the pit of death, he gave us each other to help us pull ourselves out of our sin pits that we occasionally fall into.

I would like to lead you in some meditation before we close. Jot it down. Ask yourself: Where am I right now? Am I in a pit? Has a sin wrapped itself around me to the point that it is hindering my daily walk with the Lord? Don't lie to yourself right

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now!! In fact, instead of asking yourself, ask God. (Search me, Oh God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139)

Lord, you have called your church to be unstoppable. And if there is anything in me that is holding me back from your greatness in my life, that's unacceptable. So I ask that you help me to avail myself to the resources you have in my life. Open my eyes to the people around me that I can have healthy relationships with that bring you glory. Help me to find people that will call me out when I sin, that I can go to when I sin, that I can share about my relationship with you.

God, grant us humility to admit our shortcomings, failures, and sin. We place them before you so that you might redeem them. Take us and work in us. May we not take lightly the redemption you have bestowed upon us, but boast in you and saving work in our lives every day. Keep us from trouble, but when we get into trouble, help us to admit we've gotten into trouble and ask for help.

Help me to surround myself with people that will love me and gently call me out when I sin. Place people in my life that I may go to when I am struggling with sin, that I might be built up and encouraged, and helped to draw up battle plans to fight my sin. I am willing to be obedient and go wherever you ask me to.