

*Text of a message delivered by Mikayla Reid for Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 15th June 2025.  
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility reasons.*



## **Risking Vulnerability**

**Mark 5:25-34**

We all have a deep desire to be known and loved despite our shame. To achieve this we have to risk vulnerability, and letting ourselves be known by both God and others. It is this space of vulnerability that leads to healing and deeper connection.

We're invited to stop hiding, embrace community, and meet God not with perfection, but with honesty and openness.

*VIDEO – A range of people from our community answer the question:*

*How are you, really?*

How am I, really?

I am afraid.

When we were planning the filming of this video, I was talking about the concept with Aidan, and he made a comment that stuck with me. When I said I would need to think about what I wanted my word to be, he replied, 'Yeah, you'll need to decide what you want to be vulnerable

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about in two months.' And that is exactly why I am afraid, why I could pinpoint that that was probably the emotion I would be feeling this morning.

I am here talking about the risk of vulnerability, the risk of being fully known by God and those around us, exposing the inner, messy parts of ourselves—and I am terrible at it. I like to be in control of how people perceive me, I don't want others to see the messy parts of me - the moments when I snap at my flatmates, where I binge watch Netflix cause the world feels too much, where I edit and re edit a photo before I post it so everyone can see me in my best light, the times I've brushed away tears and put on a shaky smile as I get out of my car and walk into church hoping my eyes don't look too red. I want people to see me as I would like to be – with all the broken parts, all the pieces I am ashamed of, cut out of the picture.

I'm aware this isn't just something I struggle with. We can all wear that mask, we can all pretend, we can all cover up what is really happening. We can all avoid vulnerability. Loneliness statistics across the Western world suggest that while we are more connected to people than ever, we feel like people know us less than ever before. We might have work friends whom we make small talk with at lunch, followers who see pictures of our latest holiday, people we sit next to at church who we answer the weekly question with, but it seems we all struggle to have relationships where we can reveal our shame, our mess. And this creeps into our relationship with Jesus as well. The real us starts to become something so hidden that even as we come before the God who made us and formed us, we cannot really show ourselves - our wounded, broken, hidden selves to Him.

To be fair to myself and all of you, we have always struggled with this. From the very beginning, humanity has hidden; we have turned away from the risk of vulnerability. And so the beginning is exactly where we will start today - in Genesis. All the way back to the Garden of Eden.

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Most of us know the story right - Adam and Eve walked in the garden with God, and in the garden they were naked. No clothes, no coverings - Adam and Eve were naked in the garden and naked in front of God. And this was not a cause of concern for them.

To begin with, in the garden we weren't ashamed, we did not hide, we did not try to cover ourselves. **In the beginning, vulnerability was not a risk - it was simply how we were.**

Physically, Adam and Eve were naked in the garden, like toddlers who run around on the beach with no care for their nakedness, no awareness of why they would even want to hide. The nakedness of Adam and Eve in the garden was a physical reality, but it shows a much deeper spiritual security. They had no need to hide any part of themselves.

But then we sinned. ***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 3:7)***

That security, that ability to be completely vulnerable, open, and free in front of God and others, was broken. Sin entered the picture, and with it shame. Not just the healthy kind of shame - that voice that tells us we've done wrong and need to make it right, but toxic shame that tells us **we are** wrong, that calls **us** a failure and pushes us into hiding. God came looking, but their shame would not let them go to Him. They hid.

Shame had caused them not to bring their pain to God but to hide it. To cover themselves in the hopes that somehow God would not see them, they tried to fix their brokenness themselves so God wouldn't see their vulnerability - as if he wasn't already acutely aware of it. Adam and Eve did not look to God in their mistakes; they took things into their own hands, making clothes to hide the parts of themselves that caused shame.

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Just as we hide in our busyness, numb ourselves by passively consuming whatever media is popular, and focus on our accomplishments, crowding our minds with the noise of the world, or simply deny any issues that arise. Adam and Eve used worldly things to try to alleviate the shame. In hiding away the deepest darkest parts of themselves, they thought they would save their relationship with God. They brought their idealised selves to Him, not realising it was their brokenness He really wanted to work in. It was this hiding that broke it all - God knew, He always knew - but as soon as humanity began to hide the dark parts of ourselves that need God's love most, our relationship with Him began to splinter.

We live in this reality - Adam and Eve sinned, and they hid from God, covered up in front of each other. The relationship between God and humanity, and the community within humanity, were broken. They exacerbated the rift caused by sin by hiding it, by hiding themselves. And we follow this pattern now. We struggle to take the risk of being vulnerable in front of God. We struggle to let Him see us, see all the pain, all our mess, all our shame. We struggle to even look at our own brokenness, how could we let God - the perfect one - see it? Would He still think we're worth loving? Would He still want us? Most of us know cognitively the answer is yes but we struggle constantly to be vulnerable, to take the risk of vulnerability, and expose ourselves before God - to stand naked before Him.

In some ways this seems like an inevitable reality - it's the only thing we know, at least. But I enjoy random thought experiments, I am a massive theology nerd and one of the fun things about theology is you get to ask random questions to help you understand things - one of my favourite of these thought experiment questions is, would Jesus have come as a person even if we'd never sinned? Or you get fun ones about heaven, like will we have different abilities, like seeing in 30 dimensions of colour like shrimp do. And as I was reading through this Genesis account of humanity's first experiences of the sin, shame and hiding, I kept coming back to one question - what would it have looked like if instead of hiding, Adam and Eve had run to God

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when he came calling their name? What would it have looked like if instead of gathering something to hide themselves, instead of running to the bushes, running from the voice of their Father - **what if** even in their sin, shame, and brokenness, they ran **to** their Father? Would life look different now? Would the response of God have been different? We'll never know, no matter how interesting it is to think about. But one of the things we can do is look at how Jesus - God incarnate - reacted to those who came to Him in sin, shame and suffering. There are many stories of this - Jesus with the demon possessed, Jesus healing those with leprosy, Jesus with the tax collectors - but one in particular struck me - the story of the bleeding woman in Mark - so if you're following in your bible flick forward to the New Testament and join with me in Mark 5:25.

So Jesus had been wandering around in Decapolis - healing people and casting out demons - He had just got the news that one of the Synagogue leaders' daughters was dying, and Jesus was going to go see this child. But if you're Jesus it's not as simple as just getting up and going - there was a huge crowd following Him that swarmed around Him as he tried to make His way to this man's daughter. Now I've been to Israel, I've walked some of these old roads and let me tell you I can understand why they use the word 'pressed' to describe the crowd - these narrow streets would quickly become full, full of people, bodies, noise, smells.

Now in amongst this throng was someone who should not have been there...

***And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. (Mark 5:25-26)***

This woman should not have been in the crowd. This woman should have been hiding. Whether this woman was suffering from a haemorrhage, or her period - the laws in Leviticus and

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Deuteronomy are clear - she is unclean - and she should not be out. She should not be in community, she should not be touching people, brushing up against them.

For this woman, shame was the only reality she would have known. She could not go and worship at the temple so she could have no direct connection to God; she was unable to make offerings. She could not work - and even if she could she spent all her money on doctors to try cure her, if she had been married her husband would have been allowed to leave her because of her bleeding, she likely could not have had children, to make any place for herself in society.

**Living away from others, living hidden should have been the only way for this woman.**

And we look at this and think how backwards, how awful she feels so much shame for this - our Western culture in particular likes to think we've moved past shame - but let's be honest, we can still relate to feeling pushed to the margins because of shame we hold onto - sometimes even shame for something that is out of our control. I bet most of the woman sitting here today know what it's like to feel the need to hide - have hidden pads or tampons hidden up their sleeve as they go to the bathroom - hoping they don't rustle, been paranoid about period stains, strategically chosen clothing so no one would know. The extent is very different, yes, but the hiding - we all know what that is like.

We all have those things that make us feel like we should not show our face - it's not enforced by religious law - but societal expectations, cultural norms, and our own shame are just as powerful at telling us to stay away. To not go out, to not go be in the crowd, to not be in community, to not go and seek Jesus. And if you are sitting here thinking you don't have anything that makes you hide - that causes shame - I'd ask you what is the thing you'd never

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want anyone else to know, that you'd struggle to tell even your closest friends? We all have something that makes us want to stay away.

But this is where this woman is remarkable - she is supposed to hide away, supposed to be hidden in her shame, supposed to not be in the crowd, touching people, close to others, **yet here she is** because she knows even in this state she needs to get to Jesus. Not waiting for perfection, not pretending this is not her life - she is desperately reaching for Jesus because of her need, weakness, her pain.

As we continue on with the story, we read:

***When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (Mark 5:27-29)***

This is **risky faith**, this woman who would have been ostracised even more than she already if she was seen, came out into the crowd and then reached out her hand just to touch Jesus - just to touch the edge of His robes. Despite everyone else telling her to hide away, that she was unclean, that she could not be in community, not come and worship God - here she was reaching out to touch Jesus. Reaching out in faith. Reaching out from a space of utter vulnerability. This woman embodies risky faith - not reckless Christianity, acting prayerfully and surrendering the outcome to God, with great potential cost to herself.

And she gets a physical reward for this - she is healed! But I want us to keep reading because a greater reward is still to come for her.

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***At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:30-34)***

So I know we've just seen a miracle happen but this here is my favourite part of this story. Jesus knows someone has been healed - there's a lot of debate over whether he even knew who it was before asking - He is the son of God after all - maybe Jesus wants to give this woman an opportunity to step out of her isolation, to speak in public, to take the risk of claiming and bearing witness to the healing she has experienced. To ensure she was not just physically healed but that her shame was put to death.

And the woman does come, she comes trembling. She shrinks away from this moment, the publicity at first but then she comes forward - not hiding as Adam and Eve did - she risks being seen by her maker, allowing herself to be known in all her pain, all her suffering, all the things she wants to hide - and in this risk of allowing herself to be known, she receives an even greater blessing than the cure to her bleeding.

***"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (v.34)***

Jesus calls her daughter. ***Daughter***. This is the only time in the gospels Jesus calls anyone by this name, she is the only person he uses the affectionate, intimate, familial term with. Jesus relates himself to her, in her moment of vulnerability he sees her and draws near to her in a way he has not with others. This woman has been kept at the margins, left on the fringes for the last 12



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years, and as she comes and presents all this, all her pain, all her suffering, the thing everyone said was cause for shame, in front of Jesus, **He says she belongs**. She can be close to Him. This is her reward, renewed intimacy with Jesus, closeness with God because when she felt lost, broken, beyond help, full of shame she did not run from Him, but ran to Him.

This is the vulnerability we are called into, this is what it means to open ourselves - our hearts, our lives, our deepest, darkest places to the God of love who calls us His child. This is an invitation to meet God not with your work small talk, your social media smile, your fake laughter, your polished personality, the qualifications or titles you hold. This is an invitation to meet God with your realest, rawest, truest self. This is the invitation to let God see the depths of our need so He can love, embrace, and heal it all. He sends her off in peace - she is not just physically healed but is invited back into the fullness of community, relationship, closeness with God and those around her. God invites this woman - His daughter - to leave her shame and re-enter relationship.

Now, I go to a lot of camps as a person in youth ministry - I think I figured out I have spent about 6 months of my life at church camps if I add all the days together - and if you've ever been to a youth camp you will know they are filled with moments of vulnerability, breakthrough moments where young people do bring the hard things in their life, the hurt they carry to Jesus. And at camps these moments of vulnerability - the risk of showing ourselves to God, coming before Him, is often accompanied by snot and tears, shrugging shoulders, group hugs and barely audible words. At Easter camp this year I actually left one of the sessions with snot marks on my shoulders after consoling some kids. Now sometimes this is exactly what vulnerability will look like but I want to suggest that a lot of the time vulnerability with God looks a lot more like brushing up against Him, being with Him in the crush of life.

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Because vulnerability is not a one-off experience, not a breakdown that happens once in the dark of night and then withdrawing again until we yet again reach breaking point. Vulnerability requires us to walk closely with Jesus in the gritty, messiness of day-to-day life. It is daily bringing our human struggles to the God who became human and knows those same struggles, it is about bringing our daily burdens to Jesus, being okay with our humanity, and knowing that our weakness, our vulnerability, is a gift that Jesus uses to draw us closer into Him.

**Vulnerability is a daily exercise of allowing Jesus to truly see us.**

In fact even the snot and tears moments at camp come - partially because of sleep deprivation - but mostly because for 48 hours straight these kids are living closely in community - they see each others bed heads, unbrushed teeth, learn the foods the other can't stand, watch each other get tired, need a hug, get a bit homesick, and sing really badly in karaoke - so by the end, they are comfortable enough with each, they have done enough life with each other - and they have spent enough time - 48 hours at camp focused on Jesus - that they feel free to let themselves break, to show the rawest parts of themselves to each other and to Jesus.

Vulnerability draws us into a beautiful cycle of deepening relationship. The more vulnerable we are, the closer we can be with others, and the more vulnerable we naturally become. This is the cycle we are invited into, if we will only take the risk of opening ourselves up - both in opening our hearts but also in the vulnerability of a shared life, especially when that life gets messy.

We know this is a reality - our deepest, most meaningful relationships come when we can be completely ourselves in front of someone. Our spouses, our closest friends, our siblings, our parents, whoever it may be - that person who you know you can call whether you're having a panic attack, have just received a promotion, are bawling your eyes out, or are furious at the world - that is vulnerability. This vulnerability in a community is important too - the bleeding woman was restored to a relationship with God, yes, and that is first, but the removal of her

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bleeding meant she could rejoin her community too. She was no longer unclean, held at arms' length, but could join with her people again.

We are invited to be vulnerable - to show ourselves completely to God, to live life close with Him, even in the grit, the pain, our brokenness. And we are invited to do this with the people we live closest to. And this can be a very easy thing to say - but as I said at the beginning, a very hard thing to do. Starting to peel back the layers can seem an impossible task. So I want to leave you with two practices today.

### **Community**

It's really hard to be vulnerable if we are not intentional about finding people to do life with. I really like the image of a Lego block - 4-6 people who you do life up close with - who see the mess of your life and loves you anyway. Who's on your Lego block? Who sees you at your best and your worst? Who do you walk alongside, even when they are suffering, struggling, or celebrating? Does someone come to mind? If they do great - make time to be with them, to revel in, enjoy this space of vulnerability. If there isn't anyone - who would you like it to be? Is there someone you think could be that person? Ask them to grab coffee, and invest in building that relationship.

### **Contemplation**

This is one of those kind of fancy Christian words but essentially contemplation is a type of prayer - it is sitting with God and is often described as 'exchanging gazes with Him' which - if you've ever looked into someone's eyes for a long period of time - is vulnerable. Contemplation is coming before God and letting Him see us, and looking to see Him. To be honest it's hard to explain if you haven't experienced it before, but one of the ways I like to practice this is having a cup of tea with God. I make a cup of tea, normally go find somewhere outside to sit, and drink it slowly with God. Sometimes I tell him about everything that's going on, sometimes I just sit

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and feel His loving gaze. But I am there for the 20 minutes it takes for me to drink my cup of tea, just sitting with God, enjoying the closeness, being open to Him. Maybe you want to try something similar this week - try bringing yourself before God in silence, with a flurry of words - however you come, He will welcome you

We're going to be listening to song by a New Zealand band - Te Rautini - and as soon as I heard the topic for this sermon this song came to mind - the lyrics say:

*Don't restore us  
To what we've once been  
Purify us  
And heal that which bleeds  
Take us deeper  
Beyond the Sunday sheen  
Where you're waiting  
The truth to set us free*

And this is our prayer today - that we will not simply be restored to the hidden life we've been living but that God will take us deeper, will heal the very depths of us, and let us live in freedom with Him.

Amen.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

**Reflecting on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> of June:** Last week Pastor Grant challenged us to risk failure as we attempt great things for God! Have you failed at all this week? What did you learn?

1. When is a time you have risked vulnerability? How did it feel in the moment? How did it impact you afterwards?
2. What do you find hardest to be vulnerable about? Why do you think that is – what image might you be trying to protect?
3. Read through the story of Bleeding Woman in Mark 5:25-34 (or check out a different telling in the other Gospels) Put yourself in the woman's shoes – how does it feel to be seen completely by Jesus and then called His child? How would like to respond to Jesus in this moment?
4. Who are the people in your life you want to be more vulnerable with? What are some practical steps you could take to make space for vulnerable conversations?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at [care@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:care@windsorpark.org.nz); **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email [info@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:info@windsorpark.org.nz) and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

- Henri Nouwen is a celebrated Christian writer and his book **Reaching Out** moves through three movements of the Christian life. Nouwen sees vulnerability as the foundation to any relationship and emphasises it's importance in leadership too. This is a short but challenging book to consider how a vulnerable life could impact you.

<https://www.amazon.com.au/Reaching-Out-Henri-Nouwen/dp/0385236824>

- Practicing the Way has a new course on the practice of Community – exploring what it does look like to live vulnerably with others. If you have a life group you want to go deeper with and lean into vulnerability to give this course a go.

<https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/content/details/900374>