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**It's Not Me It's You**  
**Part 3 – Maybe it is Me**  
Shay Robbins

Excited to be with you for our final part of a three-part series – *It's Not Me It's You*. Well guess what we're talking about today? *Maybe It Is Me*. So, you thought this whole series was outward looking and now we're turning it back on you today, which is great. Here's kind of the heartbeat of the premise of the message. We're going to examine our own hearts to make sure we're not toxic. Another way of saying it is rooting out toxic traits in me. You're going to hear that phrase *toxic traits* throughout this message. My hope is that God can open our eyes to things that are in our life or perhaps places where toxic traits can bubble up and take root in our lives, so we're going to approach that as the body of Christ together, in hopes of growing up in our faith.

I want to introduce you to somebody. It's the fourth grade Branson Pirates. Look at these guys. What a bunch of knuckleheads. Yesterday was our final game of the season; I can share with you all of our secrets. We run a four-four, we blitz every down, half of my defensive linemen, when the ball is snapped, they backpedal into coverage. You might not know anything about football, I'll just tell you it would be better if they just laid down right where they are at.

A couple of weeks ago, we were getting ready to go to Bolivar to play an away game. Our head coach, Adam, is getting the guys all pumped up. He says, "We're going to go to Bolivar, and we are going to beat those Bolivar... What are they called?" Some kid pops up, "The boogers!" Everybody thought that was so funny. Adam goes, "Yeah, we're going to go play those Bolivar Boogers!" Then some kid speaks up and says, "We're going to eat those boogers!" Again, so funny. So, this is my life. It's unbelievable. I now know why you look at professional coaches... either college or professional ranks. I know why they are psychos. On Friday night, I could not fall asleep. All that was running through my mind was defensive schemes and trying to figure out how to get them to do what I want them to do. It's been like that for the last eight weeks of my life.

It's so funny. You know how God tees up messages. So, I'm preparing for to talk about weeding out toxic traits in our life and I like... Legit, when I was on the field Saturday morning, my blood pressure was through the roof. I go off and have to practice breathing exercises when the offensive goes on just to get myself under control. And as I'm studying all this, I realize this is a seedbed for toxicity. That is where we are at. Things that we get passionate about, things that stress us out, things that rub us wrong. They all create these little environments for unhealthy things to grow in.

So, my heartbeat is really to pick up where Ted left off. Ashlyn and I happened to be sitting with our soon to be 12- and 13-year-olds next month. We were listening to the message out in the Courtyard last

week. I was so stirred by the message for a bunch of different reasons. Ted shared this picture and of course this is Nazi Germany, and these people are pledging their allegiance to the Nazi party, except for this one guy who sat apart in the crowd. As Ted shared that, I just thought to myself, *I want my children to live that way, to be set apart from the crowd.* It's not going to be easy for them, but that is my heart's desire. It was heavy. It was a powerful message for me, but then even to be sitting next to our daughters, I'm feeling that on a whole other level.

It just so happened that Bell had a writing project this week, and somebody asked her a really good question. They asked, "What do you want from God?" She wrote down her answer. "I want God to give me wisdom like he did to Solomon. I want God to be with me when it's hard. I want God to give me conviction and compassion to people who are mean." When I read that, I was just like, *Oh, she's getting it.* I'd be willing to bet that there are a bunch of you that feel the same way I do. You want your kids to have conviction and compassion.

This week, in preparation for that, I'm just kind of like stewing on what Ted said last week and what needs to be said this week. I'm telling myself, *If that's my desire, I'm going to have to model it.* That's a big responsibility for a parent. If I want my kids to grow up and have conviction and compassion, then I'm going to have to model it. My question for all of you is how do you go about doing that?

I was prayerfully asking God that question this week. "Lord, how do I do it?" He spoke clearly through his Holy Spirit. He put one word on my heart. The word was "carefully." How do I model that for my children? Carefully. Here's the significance of that word. That word means that I need to go about my business with a great deal of self-reflection, weighing the weight of my actions, being honest with myself. I'm just asking this question: If I need to go about my business carefully, how do I protect my conviction and compassion?

So, this morning, we're going to go to God's Word and we're going to ask God's Word to do what God's Word does. The scriptures were given to us to be held up in front of us like a mirror. According to scripture, God's Word is able to judge the thoughts and intentions with the heart. So, when you pair God's Word with the Convicter, the Holy Spirit, what he does is he carefully exposes areas in our life that we need to grow up. That's what I want to invite the church into this morning. Is that we talk about this idea of toxic traits popping up in our life and we take a hard look at our own lives with a heart to grow up in the faith. Ya'll with me on that?

We're going to start in Matthew 7. I'm not even going to give you explanation. These words are the words of Jesus, and they are as straight forward as can be. Let me read you the words of Jesus. ***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.***

Here's the first point that I want to make this morning. **Judgement and pride are toxic traits that erase compassion.** Let me explain it this way. When we think about self-reflection, these are easy to spot. Judgment, interestingly, is when we have a thought that is negative natured in our minds. It generally doesn't go through our head once. It will typically cycle through your head over and over and over again. Shake your head if you know what I'm talking about. The reason that happens is because when we have a critical thought and the Spirit convicts us of it, if we want to hold onto it, we have to convince ourselves, over and over again, why I'm justified in being critical or being judgmental. So, with the spirit of self-reflection, it's actually helpful. So, I know like if I want to weed out toxic traits, I want to be aware when I have judgmental thoughts that are cycling through my mind that I'm justifying myself in. That's a flag, there's an issue here, and this is actually not okay. It doesn't matter how right I think I am about this specific thing, it is a judgmental nature and that is a toxic trait. And pride always comes behind that judgment and it erases compassion.

If you've been around here for any amount of years, you know my wife, Ashley Robbins, is both the heart and the hammer in the Robbins household. We can't get away with anything because we are met with a whole lot of love and a whole lot of accountability. She's powerful in both those ways. In order to walk that out well, it requires her to carefully navigate that space to carry both of those responsibilities.

So, judgment and pride on one side can erase compassion and you could just become the hammer. Well, on the other hand, I want to take you to another passage. This is Ephesians 6. It's at the very tail end of the letter. I think it's especially significant because as Paul writes this, he is closing his letter. When you close a letter, you're wanting to make some of the final points that are most important to you. One of the points that is most important to him, he makes. He says, ***19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

In some ways, this is puzzling because I look at Paul's life and I'm like, *of all people who would need to pray for fearlessness...* He was so bold; he was almost reckless for the gospel. He poured his life out for the gospel. But knowing where Paul came from, I understand. Paul was so blinded and so stuck in his ways, that he had to have a radical experience where Jesus revealed himself in a blinding light on the road to Damascus in order for Paul to be shaken up. I think in humility, when Paul closes the letter and he asks, "Give me courage to share fearlessly," Another version says, "That I may be with boldness" He knows where he came from, he knows what he's capable of, and I now see the awesomeness of his life and his ministry being because God answered the prayers of the saints and the Holy Spirit gave this man that which he did not have. So, I know that even Paul wrestles with fear or insecurities. That leads us to our second point.

**Passivity and fear are toxic traits that erase conviction.** What's interesting about these two things – passivity and fear – is they are less in your face than judgement and pride. They can go under the radar. In fact, they can even be labeled as being a nice guy or nice girl. But passivity and fear are just as toxic as the traits that came before them. With a spirit of self-reflection, I think it's interesting to consider in my life which one I'm more susceptible to. As I think about that, I think naturally I'm a little bit more susceptible to fall into judgement and being proud. I know that's a big issue in my life; it is a constant

temptation that I can get sucked into. Some of you, just from the way that God made you, your personality, it can lend itself, just more naturally, to fall into a passivity or fear. It's good to know that about ourselves so that we can learn ourselves well.

The next step in this is I want to begin to ask: "How did these toxic traits develop? If we are humble enough to acknowledge the fact that this stuff can bubble up in me and it can become a factor in my life, I want to make us aware of some of the ways and avenues that it stirs up in our life. Here are some of the things that I thought of. Toxic traits develop in an unhealthy environment. Some unhealthy environments are online. For some of us, I think it may be super unhealthy to spend time on Twitter or on Facebook because it stirs up toxic traits in us. There might be environments that you know when you go to, they bring out the worst in you. What are those unhealthy environments? I think of teenagers in the locker room. That's a toxic environment that you've got to tread carefully in. Maybe even in the hallways can be a toxic environment. We've all got these places. What are the unhealthy environments in your life where toxic traits develop? Let us be aware.

Here's another one. Around toxic people... I want to back up. I had a young man bring me a great point. There is also an unhealthy environment where toxic traits can develop and that is in isolation, by yourself. I think that's really important to think about. The next one is toxic people. Who are the toxic people in your life that when you're around them, their influence causes toxic traits to bubble up in your life? Is it a friend? Is it a sister that you talk on the phone with that's sour? Is it somebody you run into at the salon. Where is it? We all have those people and it's so important we become aware of who those people are in our lives.

Another one is during stressful seasons of life, like the fourth-grade football season. It might be the holidays for you. Or perhaps, during an election. What are the areas of your life or the seasons of your life that create extra stress and cause toxic traits to bubble up. The next one is when we aren't doing what we should be doing. I think we all fall into this one, but I really specifically think about men. I want to read this proverb to you. Proverbs 21: 25-26 says this. *The craving of a sluggard will be the death of him because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more but the righteous give without sparing.* You guys have probably heard the saying that idle hands are the devil's playground. It's not actually in the Bible, but I think it's true. So, I'm speaking to the guys that waste hours playing on video games or won't go out and get a job because they can't find the perfect job, or whatever it might be. When you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing, that's going to be an environment where toxic traits are going to develop in you.

Here's the last one. When we harbor unforgiveness. This might be the biggest of all. I've got a lot to say about this. **Unforgiveness is a seedbed for toxicity.** Followers of Jesus, I want to make you aware. I want to remind you that unforgiveness is always going to result in your own sickness. Gary Smalley used to say, "It's like drinking poison and expecting somebody else to get sick." I want to make it clear. It doesn't matter what's been done to you. You may be the victim of this issue. In fact, many times you are. But when you harbor unforgiveness, it's going to make you sick. We weren't made to hold onto forgiveness. What happens when we do is we take God off the throne as the judge and we put ourselves on the throne where God is supposed to sit. You were not made to be the judge. And so long as you are sitting in that place, it's going to make your heart sour. I will just call it.

The fruit of unforgiveness is a toxic trait. I want to implore you to be honest. Is there unforgiveness in my life and if so, what steps do I need to take to give that forgiveness?

Another thing I want to say about this is that unforgiveness can happen to the greatest of people. Ya'll hear me on that? Nobody is exempt from this – Unforgiveness. Here is just the beauty of God's grace. When we look back, retrospectively, and we remember what God has pulled us out of, it gives you a gratitude for his grace. To remember where I was delivered from and to say, "God, I deserve all kinds of punishment for that and yet, you picked me up, put me on my feet, wiped off my shoulders and said, 'Son, you're forgiven. I love you. Let's go on an adventure together.'" We've got to go to that place before we can give forgiveness to others, recognizing that they are broken and that out of a heart of gratitude, I can then forgive others.

Here's the next step I want to take. Have you guys ever noticed that it's easier to spot out the toxic traits in other people's lives than your own? What's up with that? It's so true. It's easier to see what's going on in other people's lives. Again, that's why we take the scripture, and we hold it up like a mirror that we might look in it and allow God to judge us, to purify us and to help us to grow up. I was thinking through some of the ways that we can become blinded to toxic traits in our own lives.

When we are unforgiving, like we just talked about. When we're angry, bitter, proud. When we are fearful, insecure, wounded, and believing lies. You could probably go on and on with this list, but when these things exist in your life, it causes you to be blinded to the unhealthy things that are going on in your life. As I was thinking through this and talking with the Lord, I said, "God, I know that I am susceptible to being blind to this stuff that's in my life. How can I overcome that?"

As I prayed through it, God brought to mind a story about Bartimaeus. I actually taught this two springs ago. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar sitting outside of Jericho. He lived off the sustenance that people gave to him and he was in a line of beggars. He was cast outside of the city. One day, Bartimaeus is sitting alongside the road. Hears this big commotion. He elbows the guy next to him and says, "What's going on?" The guy said that Jesus of Nazareth is coming and there is a huge crowd around him. The scripture says that Bartimaeus stood to his feet, threw off his cloak, and yelled out, "Son of David, have mercy on me." There is significance to the language he used. Have mercy... mercy specifically says, "God, withhold the punishment that I deserve. Withhold it from me. Let me off the hook." So, he stood up, cried out, and Jesus is in this mass of people, heading to Jerusalem for the passion week. Literally, he's walking to be crucified. Yet Jesus, the God of the universe, came out of the crowd and he took time to have a personal interaction with Bartimaeus. Here's how he answers. He said, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus responds, "Teacher, I want to regain my sight?" His simple request was met with this. "Go your way. Your faith has made you well." Therein lies the very simple equation.

In this story of a physical healing where a man's blindness was taken away, there is a truth that lies for spiritual blindness to be healed as well. In these four statement, it's simply laid out. Having the humility to stand up and say, "God, have mercy on me. I recognize that I am blind to things in my life." Jesus will ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?" As a loving Father. And Bartimaeus says, "Teacher, I want to regain my sight. I want to be able to see." It's the kind of request that a loving Father is going to meet. He's going to answer that request.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite passages for self-examination. It's in Lamentations 3. Jeremiah writes this,<sup>39</sup> ***Why should the living complain when punished for their sins?*** I often run here with my judgmental nature, and I always find God waiting with a 2 x 4 to just smack me up side the head with the reality of my sinful nature. Who am I to judge, as jacked up as I am.

And in that humility, then you ask, ***40 "Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the Lord.*** Again, I just want to remind you that as we seek out this stuff that's fowl in our lives, we seek it out with a heart to grow up. The Lord wants to raise you up. And there might be some of you sitting here today whose blindness to a toxic trait has put you outside the city walls, so to speak. There might be relationships in your life that are broken because of toxic traits in your life. Maybe it's a marriage, maybe it's a relationship with a child or with a sibling, maybe it's a relationship at work. Maybe you're sitting on the outside of the city, and you have a desire to be restored.

I've got great news for you. The way home is always the same. It's these three things: humility, repentance, and reconciliation. First of all, the humility to recognize that I made mistakes and that there is brokenness in me. That has to come first. Then secondly is repentance. It doesn't say humility saying I'm sorry and then saying I'm sorry and then reconciliation. There is massive difference between the two. Saying I'm sorry doesn't demand a change. Repentance means I'm going to take ownership of what I've done wrong, ask for your forgiveness, and then I'm going to turn from that action and begin to live differently. The way home requires the humility, the repentance, turning and running away, in order for reconciliation to happen.

There are two things I want us to understand that have to happen when we find ourselves outside the city. 1) You are going to have to change. I'm speaking this to maybe some older guys and older gals sitting in here that are fixed in their ways. Or maybe some 14-year-olds who think they know everything. And everyone in between. You're going to have to change. 2) You are going to have to rebuild trust. It's going to be a process to experience reconciliation in the lives of those relationships that have been broken, but that's okay.

I want to share one last thing with you, and I want to be careful not to dad all over you guys. Some of y'all are old enough to be my dad, so I want to speak respectfully. From the heart of a father, a couple of weeks ago, I made a mistake. I messed up with my wife and I was discouraged with myself. I was just down. I ran into this sermon and a pastor shared this analogy. He said, "When I look back on my children learning to walk, I can't even remember them ever falling down. All I remember about that process is when they would get up and take one step forward toward me, and the sheer jubilation I had as a father as I saw my childe walking toward me into my arms."

He made the connection that a lot of times we just get so down on ourselves when we fall, we forget about how God, the Father, views us. Your daddy spends a whole lot less time focused on your mistakes than you do. Ya'll hear me? What he's concerned with and what brings him the greatest joy is when you stand to your feet and you take one step after another toward him. He rejoices in it. I don't know if that encourages you, but it was a great encouragement to me, even recently.

Father God, we just come to you, and I just want to pray, Father, as a church, that we would grow up in our faith. I want to pray against discouragement, and I want to pray for hope and gladness. I want to pray, God, that you would open our eyes to see toxic traits and that you would give us the humility and courage to weed them out of the garden.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.