

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2025  
SERMON: TRAUMA AND SIN  
SCRIPTURE: LUKE 13:22-30  
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**LUKE 13:22-30**

22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, 24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’

“But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

26 “Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’

27 “But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

28 “There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. 29 People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

**Sermon: Trauma and Sin<sup>[1]</sup>**

Sin<sup>[2]</sup> and repentance are hard subjects to preach on because nobody walks into a church on Sunday morning thinking: “Hey, I’d really like to feel worse about myself and everything that I’ve done wrong in life. Give me that Holy Anxiety!”

Maybe some of you *do* come here seeking to have your sins absolved, feeling guilty about something that you hope communion with the Lord might help alleviate. But if you’re like me, you’re hoping that absolution will be gentle, forgiving, and encouraging, rather than an assault-style message verifying that you are a bad person and everything you’ve ever done is wrong. People don’t often respond well to blunt criticism because it feels like a visceral attack that shuts us down. Criticism that is too heavy has the potential to tear down rather than encourage or build up.

Yet, despite our natural human aversion to gut-wrenching criticism, Jesus doesn’t hesitate to call people to repentance. And he doesn’t just direct this call toward the

obviously corrupt—politicians, dictators, or abusers—but to all of us. Ordinary people. People like you and me, our neighbors and friends. He warns us that the door to salvation is narrow, so it's not just a couple "bad apples" that need repentance – it's the vast majority of us, if not *all* of us. No one is exempt from the need for repentance.

So the question is – how do we earnestly examine our own sins with integrity and encourage others around us to examine theirs, without feeling discouraged or attacked by the process? This past Friday at the retreat, we engaged with the Enneagram, a secular tool that functions similarly to a personality test. But unlike other personality tests, the Enneagram doesn't just measure traits; it digs deeper, examining the spiritual and psychological reasons behind our behaviors and helping us become more self-aware of why we engage in both negative behaviors (sin) and positive behaviors (gifts). The purpose of doing this exercise together was exactly that; to look at our individual personality traits, why they manifest how they do, and how to enhance the positive traits or course correct the negative ones when they arise.

The Enneagram uses the word "trauma" to discuss the negative coping mechanisms that make up aspects of our personalities. I've talked to you at length before about how walking with people who have experienced trauma and helping them find their way into a new story with God is my passion and purpose. Trauma is a negative experience that foundationally shapes the way that we function in the world. I've told you before that most people, if not all people, have experienced some form of trauma that does, indeed, manifest in difficult or sinful behavior. I find the Enneagram useful for its focus on trauma, how it affects our actions, and most importantly, how to be aware of those triggers and why they are happening.

At first glance, this self-awareness seems entirely positive—and it can be. That is why I encouraged us to engage with it. If you weren't at the retreat and would like to take the test yourself, I am happy to provide you with a copy. However, like any secular tool, the Enneagram carries potential pitfalls when applied without a biblical foundation.

The first danger is over-reliance on the self—the assumption that if we just know ourselves well enough, we can fix ourselves. That by sheer willpower, we can overcome our deepest sins. But as Christians, we know this is not true. Jesus tells us clearly that we are all sinners in need of redemption that only God can provide. The burden of self-examination doesn't rest solely on our own fragile shoulders. We are not called merely to improve ourselves; we are called to surrender ourselves to the One who makes us whole.

We do not have the power to "fix" our sinfulness, but we do have the power to recognize our sins and hand them over to God for transformation. We are not trapped in our sinful nature, because God has provided a way out through His Son, Jesus Christ. If you struggle with the idea that a God you cannot see, hear, or touch can transform your sin better than you can by sheer awareness, I encourage you to talk to someone in Alcoholics Anonymous. Their entire program is built on the understanding that people cannot free themselves from addiction—only by surrendering to a higher power can true transformation occur. Most recovering addicts will tell you that their sheer willpower

alone was never enough to save them from their addictions – only surrendering to a “Higher Power” is really where they began to heal and break free from what felt like the most hopeless circumstances, because it takes the pressure off of them to need to “fix” something so heavy and difficult as an addiction, and instead hands it over to the Creator of the Universe who can, indeed, fix all things. Alcoholics, rageaholics, melancholics, workaholics – whatever your sin of choice is – we all need God to get through it.

The second danger comes from the opposite end of the spectrum. The first danger is in self-reliance to course correct our own trauma and the negative behaviors it manifests in us. The other danger of assessing trauma and its associated sin without the lens of God is living in the trap of victimhood—the idea that because trauma shaped us in ways beyond our control, we are not responsible for our sinful reactions to it. That we are simply broken, and others must accept our brokenness as an unchangeable reality. Responses to the universal trauma of being alive can either look like people overfunctioning trying to “fix” themselves, or underfunctioning and blaming others or their circumstances for their plight.

True, not all trauma – in fact, *most* trauma – is not something we caused or that we can control, and the sinful behaviors we use to cope with trauma like anger, addiction, self-sabotage, or isolation, are often naturally self-protective measures against the trauma we incur. However, Jesus did not engage with sinners to emphasize their sin. He engaged with sinners to emphasize their ability to be restored and redeemed. He didn’t believe we were stuck by the circumstances of our fate, nor did he believe we had to “figure our way out of it” by ourselves. In Luke 13, He says, “The last will be first, and the first will be last,” because He understands that those who have been broken by trauma are not stuck there. They are not slaves to their victimhood; they are beacons of hope, proof that God can transform all things—including and especially the most difficult.

The Enneagram, or any other self awareness tool viewed through a secular lens, can be misused to instill a false sense of self-sufficiency, or the need to carry the burden of sin and brokenness by oneself. It can also be misused to make people believe that they’re “stuck” how they are and everyone else just has to “deal with them as they are”, which is a tragedy to think that people believe they are so stuck and helpless. Of course, Scripture tells us the opposite: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We cannot course-correct our sinful nature through willpower alone, and we are not trapped by the circumstances that have created our brokenness.

Secular wisdom tells us that 1) we have the power to overcome adversity by “trying hard enough,” and 2) we are helpless victims of our trauma, but neither of these are true. So does that mean we “throw the baby out with the bathwater” and just not use secular or extra-biblical tools at all?

Of course not. Many of the great advancements we benefit from today—airplanes, modern medicine, telephones—are the result of secular knowledge, yet they serve good

purposes in our lives. Likewise, throughout Scripture, we see God's people using cultural tools and ideas to advance His Kingdom.

Consider how Moses, raised in Pharaoh's court, was trained in Egyptian wisdom and leadership—knowledge he later used to lead Israel out of slavery (Acts 7:22). Daniel and his friends studied Babylonian literature and wisdom while remaining faithful to God (Daniel 1:17-20). Paul famously quoted Greek poets and philosophers like Epimenides and Aratus to connect with his audience and point them to Christ (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Even Jesus used Roman coins to illustrate spiritual truths about earthly and divine authority (Matthew 22:19-21).

These examples remind us that while secular tools should never replace God's wisdom, they can serve as useful instruments—provided we discern their purpose and align them with biblical truth. In the same way, we can use the Enneagram—not as a tool for self-sufficiency, but as a means of self-awareness that leads us back to God.

The Enneagram can help us recognize the ways we attempt to cope with sin. Some of us deal with fear through control. Others through avoidance. Some struggle with pride; others with self-doubt. But the goal is not simply to recognize these tendencies—it is to repent of them. To turn from our sinful patterns and surrender them to God.

Jesus' call to enter through the narrow gate is not a call to despair over our shortcomings; it is a call to transformation. So what action do we take? First, we must identify the sins that hold us back—whether through self-examination, Scripture, or prayer. Second, we must repent, not just by feeling bad, but by actively turning away from those sins and seeking God's power to change. Finally, we must embrace the grace that Jesus offers. The gate is narrow, but it is open to those who come in humility and faith.

Let us not be people who rely on self-improvement alone, or people who declare ourselves victims of our fate that are hopeless. Let us be people who, through tools like the Enneagram or any means of self-reflection, are led not to self-worship, but to deeper reliance on the God who redeems and transforms. The narrow gate is before us. Let us walk through it—not by our own strength, but by His.

Amen.