

Run the Bootleg

Luke 10:2-9

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If you have had your heart broken, you know how painful that is.

Somewhere in the midst of that pain, heartache, self-pity, and distress, you might have vowed that you would never love anyone or anything that much again.

So how do you keep your heart from being broken?

It's very simple. Don't ever love. Don't love anyone. Don't set yourself up for disappointment. Don't have any hopes or dreams. Don't risk or plan or become entangled in the hopes, dreams, or plans of others.

Then, you will never have your heart broken—but then you will never know the joy of loving another person, or anything, and it's not likely that you will ever be loved by many either.

If you do not find either of these two scenarios very appealing, then let me suggest that you become more comfortable being vulnerable.

People don't like that very much because people associate being vulnerable with being weak—and with good reason.

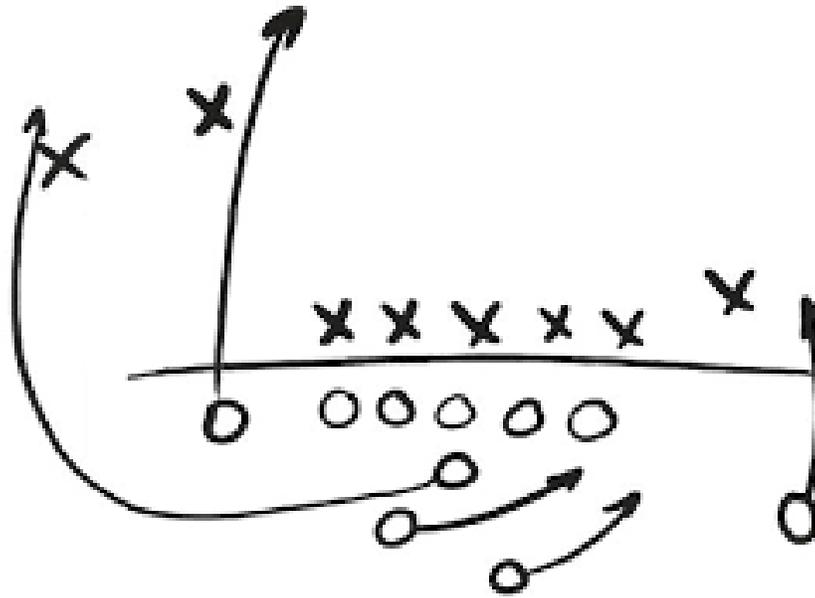
When you look up the word “vulnerable” in the dictionary, you will find words like unprotected, defenseless, susceptible, unsafe, and unguarded. These words are negative.

However, since we need to be vulnerable to experience love, we need to think of being vulnerable in a different way.

Being “vulnerable” does have some kinship to being placed in a weakened position, but that does not mean it is not a healthy thing to do.

At first look, there doesn't seem to be any advantage to putting ourselves in situations where we appear to be in a weakened, defenseless, or unguarded position.

But there can be some advantages. I'd like to try to convince you of this with a football analogy. Even if you don't like football, I'll try to make it interesting.



In football, the bootleg is a play in which the quarterback fakes the ball to a running back to one side of the line of scrimmage. All of his blocking is going in that direction, but the quarterback reverses behind the line of scrimmage, running in the opposite direction that the play appears to be going.

Sometimes he has a pulling guard to block, but if he doesn't it's called a naked bootleg. The quarterback may be out in space all by himself. That's why he's vulnerable. He hopes the misdirection fools the defense and gives him room to run or he may have the option to pass the ball.

If the play doesn't work, he could get tackled behind the line of scrimmage. That's the big risk.

Jesus liked to run the bootleg. And you thought Jesus didn't anything about football. Here is what I mean.

Jesus was constantly embracing vulnerability. He wasn't trying to fool people, but he was often going into vulnerable situations to make some gains in people's lives.

This seemed to be God's way from the beginning, to allow Jesus to come to us through vulnerable situations.

It was God's choice that Jesus came to us through a vulnerable newborn. What can be more fragile and more vulnerable than a baby?

A baby depends on parents for everything to survive and Jesus was placed in the hands of Joseph and Mary to care for his every need.

Not long after Jesus was born, his life was in danger as King Herod looked for him to kill him. Again, his life was vulnerable.

Jesus wasn't killed because Joseph and Mary left for Egypt after Joseph was warned in a dream by an angel. Jesus was vulnerable, but God gave them options.

After Jesus hung up his carpenter's apron, he slipped away into the desert to contemplate his ministry. He was vulnerable to being tempted, just as we are.

However, he was sustained by God's Spirit and God's word, which helped him turn Satan's temptations away.

Recalling scripture gave Jesus options, which helped him rebuff the tempting offers.

When Jesus preached his first sermon in his home church of Nazareth, he could have opted for an easy comfortable topic, one that would have drawn lots of "Amens" and little controversy.

Instead he focused on a passage in Isaiah 61 that said he would bring hope to the "poor, the blind, the prisoner, and the oppressed." (Luke 4).

This part of the message was well received because the people in Nazareth were among those that were socially and economically depressed.

But Jesus provoked his hometown crowd when he told them that His ministry would benefit outsiders, the scorned, and the powerless, just as Elijah and Elisha ministered to outsiders like a widow from Zarephath and Naaman from Syria.

This left Jesus vulnerable to the threats of his hometown neighbors and they took him to the brow of a hill to cast him over it.

That's really vulnerable, but he walked away from their intended threats, showing that God still had options available to him.

Preaching on the mountainside, he elaborated on this theme. It's the "discouraged, the sorrowful, the hungry, the hated and rejected" who are candidates for grace," he told the crowd. (Luke 6:20-22).

Then he said,

 "Do good to those who hate you,
 bless those who curse you,
 pray for those who mistreat you.

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also.

If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them." (Luke 6:27-29)

In other words, *be vulnerable*. Choose to be vulnerable. Run the bootleg.

Just look at the whole of Jesus' ministry. One gospel writer suggests that he traveled with nothing. He did not even carry a pillow.

If he's going to sleep in a bed, it's going to be as a guest. If he's going to eat, it will be based on whatever God provides that day. *Jesus makes himself vulnerable on a daily basis.*

We see this as he sent out 72 of his disciples. He taught them to be vulnerable by instructing them not to take a purse or bag or sandals. He wanted them to depend on God to provide for all their needs. God knew that through vulnerability, they could learn to trust and have faith in Him.

Once Jesus' disciples tried to block mothers from bringing children to see Jesus. They thought his time was much too important to spend with babies and children, but Jesus surprised them by telling them to let the children come to him. He was running the bootleg.

Jesus touched lepers to heal them. He talked to women and befriended prostitutes, jeopardizing his reputation. He spent time with tax collectors, people everyone else hated. He made non-Jews heroes in his parables.

He did not mind making people angry to bring justice to a situation. But it made him vulnerable.

Once, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus from the Romans that came to arrest Jesus, but Jesus made him put it away. He was vulnerable to attack, but Jesus was running the bootleg. He had options they were not aware of.

If this isn't enough, it should be enough to say that Jesus was at his greatest when he hung on the cross, a time when he was physically at his weakest.

It was from a place of vulnerability that Jesus became "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

It was through Jesus' vulnerability that he showed us the depth of God's love.

It's amazing that we miss this obvious aspect of Jesus' life and instead embrace all the trappings of power and entitlement.

The Apostle Paul, for all the great attributes as an apostle, did not like the vulnerability he had to deal with because of a weakness he had in his life. But he was very honest about it.

When he prayed to be released from his weakness, he received this answer: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

We become so fixated on those who have all the strength and the power that we begin to make them into our gods and we dismiss anyone who becomes vulnerable in our presence.

We must remember that being vulnerable is not a weakness when it is a choice. Even when we have not chosen it but we learn to embrace it, it can become our friend because it can teach us how to love.

While being vulnerable does not have to be a weakness, it is risky. We open ourselves up to being wounded. However, the alternative is to live with walls built around our lives, which only makes us lonely and prideful.

Confessing our sins to each other breaks the power of pride.

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,” James, the brother of Jesus, wrote.

Sharing our brokenness removes any strongholds the enemy may have in our lives. Doing so establishes the reality of truth, no matter how ugly, and breaks the power that secrets hold over us.

Being vulnerable is not easy, but it is necessary if we are to share truth and from there learn to trust and learn to love.

If you want to know how to have your heart filled with true love, it can only happen with vulnerability. It is true that this is risky. You can be wounded. Jesus was nailed to a cross.

However, if we only try to love people from a position of strength, people will always keep us at a distance. We might be respected but never truly known or loved.

The only way for true intimacy to develop is through the mutual risk of vulnerability. Think about that as you think about your relationships with others.

Also, as you reflect on the ways Jesus became vulnerable to show his love for us and in turn to be loved by us, I want to you to think about what is keeping you from running the bootleg in your life.

It’s scary to be vulnerable. You might get hurt. You also might never discover love. You might never be loved, either.

Where do you need to risk yourself more? Take the risk.

Do you need to take that kind of risk with Jesus? Do you need to open your heart up to Him? Do you need to share your secrets with Him?

Even though God already knows them, God is waiting for you to walk out into the open with Him, and when you do, God will open up options for you.

God will show you how He can change you and make ministry happen in your life because you opened your heart to Him.