

Re-imagining Life



Session 4: *Paradise Lost*

Paradise is lost. Seduced by the attraction of living an alternative way from the one planned for them by God, Adam and Eve pay the penalty and not only lose their initial intimacy with God, they find their own relationship fractured and their work frustrated. They also discover they have an enemy who will continue to try to deflect them from embracing the best that God has for them. But God's grace is still present. He provides clothes for them so that they are not in constant shame. He banishes them from the garden so that they will not be tempted to cross the line of obedience again. But life will never be the same again.

The command to care for the earth continues.

As Christians, we have a glimpse of the re-creation that begins through the death of Christ. Relationships do begin to be restored (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 3:28), Our enemy is overcome (1 John 3:8), we are being transformed (2 Cor 3:16-18). But life is still frustrating, studded with difficulties and tragedies. This is the arena in which we engage in discipleship. We live as people who can bring a sense of hope to others, though. Hope that reminds people that all is not lost; that God is still at work around us.

This session looks at the ways we might be tempted to live as something less than whole-life disciples. The temptation to settle for the easier path is an ancient temptation. And one to be avoided.

Genesis 3

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' "

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,
"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."

Notice

As you read, notice these features:

The serpent is the first example in scripture of theological arguments replacing the straightforward call for obedience. From this point there is the possibility of doing things another way, other than God's way.

Eve reflects on what God said, but now the boundary (you will die) is reflected as a threat.

It is unclear why they were unable to eat the fruit of the tree. It is simply forbidden. What we can see is that the alternative to whole-life discipleship, where we are being made into mature followers of Jesus, is to be self-made, to want to gain knowledge, our satisfaction and our values apart from the Creator.

They hide because they are aware of their nakedness. This disruption of their relationship with God will continue and worsen through the story of Cain and Abel, the flood until the building of the Tower of Babel.

The result of the disobedience was that for the serpent he was humiliated. There would be continual enmity between all that the serpent represented and humanity. There is the seed of hope here: that the offspring of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Christians interpret this as referring to Christ: Col. 2:13-15, Heb. 2:6-9, 14-15, Rom. 8:18-23, Rev 22:1-5

The woman would face pain in the midst of the creative act of new life. The relationship between men and women would be skewed. From the relationship being one of mutual support, it becomes one where power is struggled over.

¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." ²³ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove them out, he placed on the east side ^[e] of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

For Adam, the consequence of disobedience is that the task he was given, to care for the earth, is now full of frustration for him.

Reflect

What strategies does the tempter use?

What made this temptation so attractive?

Why did they give in to the temptation?

In what ways are you tempted to be disobedient to God?

The temptation was easy to give into because it seemed so logical: the fruit was good for food, pleasing to the eye and would give wisdom. Are there actions that someone living without God would think were logical actions to take, but that for those living under God's care and rule would be out of bounds?

The consequence of disobedience was that their everyday life would be prone to frustration: in terms of relationships and the difficulty of work.

What are the frustrations in either of these areas that you are facing at the moment?

For Adam and Eve there was hope expressed: the serpent would be dealt with by the offspring, Adam and Eve would still be in a relationship together and would be fruitful, the earth would produce crops for Adam. What is the hope that keeps you going in the everyday frustrations of life?

You might want to look at Matthew 6:25-34 as Jesus' antidote to the frustrations of life. How do you put his teaching into practice in your life?

The ultimate hope is expressed in Romans 8:18-27. When will this hope be seen in reality? When will the 'sons of God' be revealed? Is it only at the second coming, or is it as the children of God of each generation live out their faith in everyday life?



Word for the Week

Blame the government... Blame global warming... Blame the dog...

The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate'. Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate'. Genesis 3:12,13

Every now and again a politician, a CEO or even a football manager accepts defeat and failure, and not only avoids blaming someone else but actually takes personal responsibility themselves. Such restraint is not only unusual but remarkable. After all, in a society where to say you're sorry after a car crash could be a dangerous admission of liability, where people will sue a local authority for stubbing their toe walking down a pavement, where politicians never make a mistake, where survival means never having to say you're sorry, most people mind their backs and keep quiet. Or make sure they blame someone else.

Genesis chapter three shows with searing clarity what happens when we sin – and are then challenged. We tend to blame someone else. Adam blames God for giving him the companion that originally evoked humankind's first recorded poetry – 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'. And Adam also blames Eve. Eve in turn, with perhaps rather more justification, blames the serpent. The reason: fear and shame.

Blaming others for what we have done or what we have failed to do is as easy in contemporary workplaces and homes as it was in Eden. It's an attempt to divert punishment and consequences; it's an attempt to deceive ourselves that we are not what we are. It is lying.

Blame global warming for losing the Ashes. Blame the government for the cost of a hair cut. But if you really want to change the world, stun your friends or colleagues, by saying, 'I'm sorry, it's all my fault.'

Mark Greene