

Net•Work Notes

Week 3, Day 1: Crisis—A Good Beginning Gone Bad

But the LORD God called to the man..., "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9)

A Good Creation, but then...

We have seen how Genesis tells us that the universe and all its creatures are the direct creation of God. It does not go into detail about the how, but instead gives us a marvelous understanding of the creator. As we have read, God is a creator of amazing creativity, imagination, and power. And to think, human beings are given a privileged place within this creation.

We have said that the goal of our discipleship is Communion with God, a close and life-giving relationship with God. But you may have noticed something in reading the first couple chapters of Genesis: that is exactly what human beings were created for. God created us in His own image and set us in a secure, prepared place to enjoy fellowship with God. So why must there be an effort made to have communion?

A Good Beginning Gone Bad

We were created as a key part in a good and glorious creation. But we all know that everything is not good and glorious now. We are part of a creation in deep crisis! Everywhere around us we see the signs: terrorists flying planes into crowded skyscrapers, refugees fleeing war-torn countries, so-called "social" drug use, marriages crumbling, polluted seas and skies, and mind-numbing boredom. This doesn't look like a well-ordered world living in the glorious presence of God. Perhaps we sense that we are made for better things, but we cannot deny the

depth of the problems of human beings and their acts all around us.

Read Genesis 3. So what happened? Don't be put off by the fact this is a familiar story or because it seems simple. Genesis 3 gets at the heart of the problem: we have rejected our good beginning with God. Human beings have decided they don't want life with God. As Eugene Peterson put it, having experienced God as God, we wanted to recreate the experience *As God!*

What are some of the signs of crisis you see in the world around you?

Have you ever experienced a personal crisis? Try to remember what you thought about God during this time and record your thoughts.

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Week 3, Day 2: Crisis—A Good Beginning Gone Bad

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)

Yesterday you looked briefly at Genesis 3 and we asked the question, “How did things get to be so messed up in our world?” Maybe you wondered how something as simple as the eating of a piece of fruit could lead to war and pollution.

Asking Big Questions

It is a very human thing to do to ask difficult questions. We are constantly trying to make sense of our lives. So how do we answer these questions? How do we frame the answers? Here is how the Bible tries to do it: through stories! For the most part the Bible is a collection of stories which speak about human life and our relations with God and others. So when we ask, “Where do we come from?”, the Bible answers us with a story of a personal, speaking God who delights in creating.

But the Bible is a challenge to understand. Christians believe that the stories told in the Bible communicate truth. Now, there is no way to prove that the Bible communicates truth about us and our world and our God. We listen to the stories and make sense of them, and then we ask, “Does this story make better sense of what is going on than other stories or accounts of the world?” Christians have answered that question with a resounding “Yes!!” Now, does that make understanding the Bible easy? No. Sometimes it is difficult to read and make sense of the Bible.

Simple Stories or More?!

Today, think again about this story in Genesis 3. What do you think of the story of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit? In the space below, write down one thought about what you think it says about human life. Do you think it is just a simple story about a man and a woman disobeying a little rule? Or is this story trying to talk about something more important in a simple story form? What do you think?

What kinds of “forbidden fruit” do believe are being offered to you or to people you know? What about these make them powerful for others? What is potentially destructive?

What stories in the Bible are especially important or memorable to you?

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Week 3, Day 3: Crisis—A Good Beginning Gone Bad

I look up at your macro skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, moon and stars mounted in their settings.
Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, Why do you bother with us?
Why take a second look our way? (Psalm 8, *The Message*)

In Net•Work Notes we are trying to encourage you to come to God's Word in the Bible in order to build you up. Just as Adam and Eve were created to spend time with God, so we can spend time with God when we read and meditate on the Bible (remember, "chew" on the words of the story!).

Roots of Truth

Genesis 3 is the story of Adam and Eve, a story about our human beginnings, our roots. Now, some worry whether or not this story is "historical". I think this misses the point. I think the Bible is telling this story of the beginning of the human race to tell us important, and true things about who human beings are. Actually, I think the Bible asks us to read it this way. Adam was the basic Hebrew word for humankind (not just "man" meaning "male"), for a human being. The name Eve points to the woman as being the beginning of the line of human beings in childbirth (cf. Genesis 3:20). The story is saying, "Here is what human beings were like at the beginning."

What Are We Here For?

And we have learned that human beings were created to be with God, to live with and serve God, to "image" or represent the character of God in the world. That is a great beginning. Our created destiny was, as the Westminster Catechism said (one of our

Presbyterian confessional papers), "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." What other ways are there to understand the beginnings of human beings? What do you find important or powerful in these different ways of thinking?

What are some different ways of thinking about what a human being is?

Why do you think the Bible's story about the beginning of human beings is important to remember?

Who in your life needs to be reminded that they are a good creation of God? How might you remind them of that this week?

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Week 3, Day 4: Crisis—A Good Beginning Gone Bad

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

Take some time to skim over Genesis 3 and then quickly read through or look over the next couple of chapters. You have probably heard some of these stories many times. They are all stories of human beginnings: the beginnings of human families, of human communities, of human work, and of our life before God.

Adam and Eve and the Forbidden Fruit

So what can we learn from the story of the snake and Adam and Eve. This story tells us that Genesis 1 & 2 does not tell the whole story of being human. Here they are at peace with God and the world and feeling "no shame". But that is not our experience. Genesis 3 tells us there is a darker side of life, a lurking evil that is hard to explain. Is the problem that we are ignorant and don't know better? Or were we forced into being bad by a corrupt system? Were we just weak and flawed? How do we explain the brokenness?

Serpentine Ways

Enter the serpent! This creature is described as "crafty" which is a Hebrew pun on the word "naked". In other words, here was a creature who was trying to be what he was not, trying to take on human characteristics. The serpent represents the mystery of evil. How does evil begin for humans? The serpent brings **doubt** into the story: specifically he calls into

question God's goodness and authority—"Did God really say, 'You must not eat of **any** tree...?'" (Notice that God did not say that!) Eve's attention is drawn now to the negatives, the "don'ts" of life.

The basic disobedience of Adam and Eve was to decide that they knew better what was good for them (and who was *God!* for them). They decided to take the one thing that was not **given** to them. They wanted to be their own gods. They wanted life on their own terms. They wanted to know it all!

What are some of the doubts about God or life that you have experienced?

Do you ever struggle with trying to be someone or something that you are not? If so, what is it about this "other self" that is attractive or powerful for you?

What helps you trust God or other people? Take some time to pray to God that He brings these experiences into your life.

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Week 3, Day 5: Crisis—A Good Beginning Gone Bad

...therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man...east of the garden of Eden... (Genesis 3:23-24)

The Great Cover-Up

What happens when human beings cease to trust God? Genesis tells the story. Again review Genesis 3. What happens after Adam and Eve decide to do it their own way? They experience shame and guilt for the first time. They can no longer stand openness with God or one another and so they hide among the trees and sew fig leaves together to hide from one another.

Great Good News

The great picture here is that God comes looking for them. The problem with sin is not that God can't handle it, it's that we can't handle it. God always pursues us even when we don't want him.

The human reaction to sin is, first, to hide; second, to blame someone else; and third, to excuse myself! Notice that Adam and Eve are always looking to blame someone else.

Pain and Alienation

The results of our failure to trust God now become clear. Hatred and frustration enter creation. Both the man and the woman experience pain for the first time: work and childbearing, instead of being joyful, now are experienced as painful toil. Their relationship is now damaged: they had been created to be loving partners, but now there is dominance and separation and rivalry.

What is the final result of this basic sin of choosing to be our own gods? We experience separation and distance from God. We are banished from the living-giving immediate presence of God. This "paradise" no longer belongs to human beings: they are blocked from the Tree of Life. They demonstrated they could not care for the garden so they must leave: an angel with a flashing sword guards the way. All this we can give a name: **Death**. Separated from the source of life, death enters the world.

Why do we find it difficult to be ourselves around others or to tell others what we are thinking or feeling?

When have you been tempted to hide from God?
When have you felt a long distance from God?

When was the last time you experienced God seeking you? Take time to pray and tell God where you think you are and to ask him to draw closer to you. Follow this by thinking about someone in your life who may need to experience the presence of God's seeking love and pray for them.