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Faith > Fear

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lesson **1**

Fear: A Result of the Fall

MAIN IDEA

The fall of man ushered sin and fear into the world.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How did fear enter the world?

TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to understand how fear is the result of the fall of man



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The first chapter of Genesis paints the creation event with broad brushstrokes, unveiling a wide-angle perspective of creation. The theme of goodness permeates each aspect of the universe, the world, and human existence. The second chapter of Genesis offers a more detailed perspective, showing people blessed with God's presence and provisions. The Garden of Eden pictures life within this sphere as God intended it to be. It is a picture of *shalom*, the Hebrew term of greeting, rich in meaning: peace, tranquility, health, well-being, unity, completeness, prosperity, safety, wholeness, contentment. God blessed humanity with *shalom* in the Garden of Eden. The term *Eden* means *delight*, and Adam and Eve were living in a delightfully perfect relationship with God, each other, and creation itself.

God graciously provided for all of the needs of this couple. The writer describes God using human terminology (anthropomorphic language) to emphasize the closeness of God to creation and with the man and woman. God "formed" the man (Genesis 2:7) and also "formed" the wild animals and the birds (2:19) out of the ground. This verb depicts God as a potter, carefully shaping his creation. God also breathed life into the man (2:7), planted the garden (2:8), and fashioned the woman out of the man's rib (2:22). Every description reflects how much God cared for Adam and Eve and provided for them.

The final verse of the second chapter (2:25) serves as a prelude to the events described in Genesis 3. The nakedness mentioned here implies a stage of innocence in which there was no sin, guilt, shame, or fear. Man and woman were completely exposed, yet their exposure revealed nothing evil or anything that needed to be covered up. This picture of *shalom*, however, shattered to pieces as sin entered the world.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Temptation Rooted in Fear (3:1–5)

3:1. The third chapter of Genesis opens with the introduction of the serpent as being “more crafty” than any of the other animals. The Hebrew term for *crafty* (*arum*) functions as a wordplay with the word *naked* used in Genesis 2:25 (*arummim*) and in Genesis 3:7, 10, and 11 (*eyrom*), creating literary connections for the narrative. The term for *craftiness* can have a positive meaning, such as wisdom or prudence (Proverbs 1:4; 12:23; 13:16; 14:8; 22:3), but it becomes a negative trait when employed for evil intentions (Exodus 21:14; Joshua 9:4; Job 5:12; 15:5; Psalm 83:3). The serpent used its craftiness to plant a seed of doubt in the woman’s mind about God’s character and motives. Although this passage does not identify the serpent as Satan or a supernatural being, Satan may have used the serpent to tempt this first couple to doubt their Maker, eventually leading to their disobedience.

3:2–3. The serpent initially questioned God’s benevolence by suggesting God had refused to allow Adam and Eve to eat from any of the trees in the garden. While Eve corrected this misconception, the serpent’s question caused her to focus attention on the little God had restricted rather than on the abundance he had permitted. Eve omitted the words “free” and “any” in the original command (Gen. 2:17), thereby dismissing God’s generosity. Her answer also heightened the sense of forbiddenness. God had simply instructed them not to eat of it. The woman added another prohibition—not even to touch it. This addition made God seem restrictive rather than generous.

3:4–5. The serpent’s craftiness became most apparent with its revelation of half-truths that misled the couple, casting more doubt on God’s trustworthiness and motives. First, the serpent, by claiming that death was not a guaranteed result, suggested God had lied about the consequences of eating the fruit. Second, the serpent implied God did not have their best interests at heart; rather, God was selfishly keeping valuable knowledge from them to keep them on a lower level. The serpent caused Adam and Eve to doubt

God's goodness toward them. They feared they could not trust God, and they feared God was excluding them.

The Result of Unchecked Fear: Sin (3:6)

3:6. The anxiety caused by fear led to disobedience. If God did not have their best interests at heart, Adam and Eve believed they needed to assert their will over that of their Creator. This assertion of their will over God's became clear as the woman put herself in God's role by becoming the judge of what was good and beneficial for her. Just as God looked upon different parts of his creation and judged them as good, the woman looked at the fruit and judged it as good for her to consume. The Hebrew words for *delight* and *desirable* both stem from the Hebrew verb "to covet." Once this desire for wisdom apart from God captivated them, both the woman and the man quickly succumbed to the temptation and made the wrong choice. After eating the fruit, Eve did not have to search for her husband. Adam, though silent, was clearly complicit with her and made the same catastrophic decision. They both fell together into disobedience.

Immediate Consequences of Sin (3:7–13)

3:7–8. The results promised by the serpent found fulfillment in unexpected ways. While the couple's eyes "were opened," they only saw their nakedness from a perspective of guilt and shame. This knowledge prompted them to make coverings in an attempt to hide their sin. When they sensed God's presence in the garden, they tried to hide from their Creator. Their fear of missing out had changed into a fear of God's judgment. Fear permeated their lives, breaking down everything that was once in harmony.

3:9–11. When God "called" to the man, it was a summons into the divine courtroom. God's questions served as an indirect form of interrogation, enabling the man to explain his actions. God already knew where Adam was and that he had eaten the forbidden fruit. The man's answer to God's first question revealed both his fear and guilt. Adam and Eve's nakedness was now filled with shame in contrast to their prior state (Gen. 2:25).

3:12–13. In response to God’s questioning, the man refused to accept responsibility. Instead, he blamed the woman because she “gave” the forbidden fruit to him, and he placed ultimate blame on God because God “put the woman” with him. By making such a defense, the man revealed how sin had damaged the relationship with his once-beloved human companion, as well as his relationship with his Creator. Adam’s sin separated him from those he loved most. The woman likewise refused to accept responsibility, blaming the serpent for deceiving her. Not only had the first couple alienated themselves from each other and God, but their sin had also ruptured their harmony with the entire environment.

Extended Consequences of Sin (3:14–19)

3:14–15. The divine trial next moved into the punishment phase. God addressed each of them, beginning with the serpent. The snake was “more crafty” (3:1) than the other animals but used this shrewdness for evil, so God declared it was now “more cursed” than all of the other animals. This punishment does not imply God cursed the other animals; rather, it highlights the seriousness of the consequences for the serpent. “To crawl on its belly” (Leviticus 11:42) and “to eat dust” (Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23; Micah 7:17) both reflect extreme humiliation.

While hostility often exists between people and snakes, Genesis 3:15 speaks of an even greater struggle than the occasional snakebite and retaliatory killing of the offending snake. The ongoing hostility between the serpent’s offspring and the woman’s offspring is a reference to the continual battle people will have with temptation, evil, and sin. In a much larger sense, Jesus Christ is the one who gained the ultimate victory over temptation and sin. For this reason, some theologians refer to the second half of this judgment as the *protoevangelium* or *first gospel*, believing it to be a prophetic statement of the victory Jesus Christ experienced over Satan (Romans 16:20).

3:16. The woman suffered two long-term consequences for her actions: increased pain related to childbirth and power struggles within the marriage relationship. The pain associated with the childbearing process includes fear about not being able to conceive, anxiety about the physical pain involved

with the actual birth process, and fear of potential loss due to the dangers involved in bearing children. The “desire” for her husband may refer to her desire for male companionship and a father for her children, but it may also refer to a desire to control her husband.

3:17–19. The man also incurred a judgment of pain related to an essential part of life: acquiring food from the land. God cursed the ground so that it would produce thorns and thistles. People would only be able to survive through the efforts of painful toil. Work itself is not the curse. Even before the fall, God had commissioned people with the responsibility of cultivating the land and watching over the garden (Gen. 2:15).

The curse is the resulting difficulty—the thorns and thistles—of work. The land would no longer easily yield its produce. The Hebrew term for “painful toil” (3:17) comes from the same root word used to describe the pain the woman would experience in childbirth. Both must now experience “hard labor” as a result of their sin. Both must now deal with fear and uncertainty about the results of their labor.

The final pronouncement for their sin was death itself. From this point forward, people would struggle for their daily existence, knowing that they would eventually lose this battle and “return to dust.” Human awareness of the brevity and fragile nature of their existence produces one of the greatest fears of all: the fear of death.

Focusing on the Meaning

The Garden of Eden was God’s sphere of life in all of its richness for Adam and Eve: life in harmony with God, each other, and creation. After sin had entered the world, fear began to drive them away from God and away from a harmonious relationship with one another.

The security of being in God’s direct presence and a secure relationship with others in a safe environment is gone. People no longer trust God, and they must deal with the uncertainty of life from the womb to the grave. Conception is not guaranteed. A healthy birth is not guaranteed. Daily bread for one’s survival is not guaranteed. Such uncertainty is a breeding ground for fear: fear of being left out, fear about other people’s motives, fear of

judgment, fear of pain, and fear of death. These fears push people toward sinful actions when they are left unchecked.

Cain's insecurity produced jealousy of his brother. His fear of being less favored became a motive for killing his brother (Gen. 4:1–10). Anxiety over resources and their possible scarcity have become embers that have burst into flames of war, causing widespread death and destruction throughout human history. In such a world, people hesitate to trust one another; rather, they seek to dominate others and take everything they can get from those around them.

The antidote for all fear is the presence of Christ in our lives through God's Spirit. Through Christ, we can face every struggle and uncertainty with confidence (Philippians 4:13). The stock market may tumble, making financial security elusive. People may disappoint us, causing relationships to break down. Sickness and disease may rob us of physical or mental health, allowing death to cast its shadow over us. Nevertheless, we know God loves us to the point that he sent his only Son to die on our behalf that we might have forgiveness and everlasting life within the perfect Garden of Eden, heaven itself. We know God loves us. We need not fear any of the struggles or brokenness of the world, or even death itself. God's perfect love drives out all fear (1 John 4:18).

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Before the session, find pictures of things that illustrate phobias. You can look online at www.phobialist.com for ideas. Write each phobia on a different note card. Before class, randomly tape the pictures and note-cards on a wall. Direct class members to match each picture with the correct fear. Transition by saying, *Today, we are beginning a unit that deals with fear. Ask, Why do you think fear is so rampant in our culture? Where does fear originate? Say, Today, we will be discussing how fear became a part of the human experience.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Read aloud Genesis 2:25. Encourage class members to describe the setting in Genesis 2 by recalling the facts they know about the Garden of Eden and the relationship Adam and Eve enjoyed with each other and with God. Say, *Genesis 2 ends with the couple living in paradise. But that was about to change.*
3. Group the class into small teams and instruct them to read Genesis 3:1–7. Challenge them to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal fresh insights from this familiar text. Encourage discussion about new insights God revealed as they read the passage. After a few minutes, instruct teams to create a thirty-second news story about the events in the passage. Allow each team to share their work. Use information from the “Bible Comments” section in this *Teaching Guide* and material from the *Study Guide* to supplement their stories.
4. Ask, *What was the worst punishment you received as a child? Why was the punishment so severe? Ask, How did you feel as you anticipated the discipline?* Read aloud verses 8–13. Distribute construction paper and instruct the class to draw images that symbolize what happened in these verses.

Allow class members to share their drawings. Lead the class to answer the following questions:

- What emotions do you think Adam and Eve were experiencing in these verses?
- What do you think God was feeling during this experience?
- Why do you think God asked, “Where are you?”
- What explanation did the couple give to God for hiding?

Read verse 10 aloud and point out the phrase, “I was afraid.” Say, *When Adam and Eve sinned, fear entered the human experience for the first time.* Ask, *What do you think it was like for them to feel fear for the first time?*

5. Instruct each group to list on a piece of paper the specific curses God pronounced that day. Encourage them to discuss how those curses can produce fear in people (such as men being afraid that they will not be adequate providers, etc.). After a few minutes, discuss the answers.

Encourage Application

6. Ask the class to name real fears people face. List those on a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper. Challenge class members to think about their personal fears (even if not listed). Ask, *How do we deal with our fears?* Direct attention to the “Facing Fear” sidebar in the *Study Guide*. Point out the steps for dealing with fear:
 - Acknowledge the fear.
 - Pray with and for each other.
 - Face the fear by taking action.
7. Ask class members to pair up, share a personal fear, and then pray for each other regarding those fears.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Place a large sheet of paper on a wall. As class members arrive, direct them to write their worst childhood fears on it. Review the answers.

Ask, *What happened to those childhood fears?* Then say, *Each of us had childhood fears. As we age, what scares us may change, but fear remains. This lesson is the first of a new unit on fear, and today's lesson will answer the question, "How did fear enter the world?"*

Guide Bible Study

2. Ask class members to describe the Garden of Eden before the fall of man. Highlight the emotional, relational, and spiritual peace Adam and Eve enjoyed. Say, *Genesis 2 ends with a beautiful scene. The couple lived in a literal paradise. Perfection. No sin and no consequences of sin. But in Genesis 3, things quickly changed.*
3. Enlist a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 3:1–7. Encourage the class to listen for new insights God shows them. Use this week's "Bible Comments" section in this *Teaching Guide* to present a mini-lecture on the difference between the word *naked*, as used in Genesis 2:25, compared with its use in Genesis 3:7. Note the *Study Guide* section entitled "Paradise Lost" that discusses this so class members can refer to it. Say, *In that one moment, when Adam and Eve sinned, fear entered the world. Ask, What do you think it was like to feel fear for the first time?*
4. Read aloud verses 8–13. Then lead the class to answer the following questions:
 - What does verse 8 tell us about the relationship between God and the first couple?
 - Why did Adam and Eve hide?
 - Do you think they thought they could hide from God?
 - What question did God ask the couple? Why do you think he asked the question?
 - What is the key word in verse 10? (afraid)
 - What did God ask the couple in verse 11? How would you read the emotions in this verse?
 - How did Adam respond to God? How did Eve respond to God?
 - What unique question did God ask in verse 13? How would you read the emotions in this verse?

5. Early in the week, recruit a volunteer to research Genesis 3:14–19 and prepare a short lecture on the curses God pronounced in these verses. Afterward, supplement the lecture with any information not covered. Use the “Bible Comments” section in this *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* for help. Discuss with the class how these curses could create fear.

Encourage Application

6. Ask, *What fears have plagued you lately?* Discuss negative ways to deal with fear (ignoring it, running away from the source of the fear, obsessing over the fear). Talk about the positive ways to deal with fear (prayer, talk with other believers, memorize Scriptures). For more ideas, refer to the “Facing Fear” sidebar in the *Study Guide*.
7. Close in prayer.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–10 are from the New International Version (1984 edition).