

Beginnings...

A Closer Look at Genesis 1-3

a *Good Soil* series
for small group study

Part 5: *Just One Thing...*

Bible Reading: Genesis 3:1-13

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

We continue our series exploring the opening chapters of **Genesis**. In this issue, the story of **Adam and Eve** arrives at the episode that is often called '**The Fall**'. The story brings up issues of sin, disobedience and temptation. Although it can often be treated lightly as a caricature or myth, it may raise some issues that are painful or difficult for some. Please approach it with care, and pray for your group before and after.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)

Back in **chapter 2**, God had warned Adam NOT to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil *'for in the day that you eat of it you will die'* (**Genesis 2:17**). (I wonder what God meant by 'you will die'.) Presumably, Eve was later informed of this prohibition too. Eden was full of everything they needed, and there was **just one thing** they were to avoid! It doesn't sound too difficult. But sometimes, the things that are forbidden become irresistible! Our curiosity gets the better of us. A fear of missing out, perhaps.

In **chapter 3**, another voice enters the story and calls God's instruction into question. We are introduced to the cunning snake (or serpent) who appears as a representation of...? *Temptation? Free will? The devil? Satan? Evil?* Whatever it is, its subtle voice loaded with doubts and accusations is familiar in human experience. It questions the motivation of God. It threatens to derail the relationship God has established.

You will **not** be asked to share these things in the group, so reflect honestly with yourself (and God): *Are there temptations you struggle with? What negative or potentially harmful things do you find hard to resist? Where have you struggled or been hurt in the past, and have you been able to find help? Are there any things you would like to seek help or prayer with? Who can you talk to?*

STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER

Holy God, as our maker, you know what is good for human beings,
and in your love for us, you only want the best for us.
Forgive us, we pray, when we ignore or forget your commandments;
when we think we know better; or when, through our weakness, we fail to live our best lives.
We thank you that, by your grace, you offer us a way out,
forgiveness, and the chance to make a fresh start.
Help us to listen for your loving voice above all others; through Jesus your Son, we pray. **Amen.**

FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore in small groups

*What do you think **temptation** is? Where does it come from? How would you define **sin**?*

Does the story of Adam and Eve resonate with anything in your experience or the world today? Where in our society can you see temptation and sin at work? What are the causes and the effects?

What have you learned from experience or scripture about how to resist temptation?

READING THE SCRIPTURES with background information and reflections

Read together the Bible passage: Genesis 3: 1-13

The snake contradicts God and offers a theory: *'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'* (**verses 4-5**). The seed of doubt is planted, and the way to **temptation** open. Eve sees that it is good fruit and will lead to wisdom. She eats, and her instinct is then to share it with Adam. Perhaps not evil, but they both know they are disobeying God.

After the first disobedience, the man and the woman become very conscious of their **nakedness** (**verse 7**). Before they had been content with the skin God had given them. But now they feel that this natural state is something to be ashamed of. This sudden self-awareness probably simply reflects a sense of guilt.

Despite temptation and sin, there are also **signs of hope** in this passage. God is pictured as walking in the garden, in the cool of the evening. While Eve and Adam hide in their shame, the God of love and grace searches for them, calling: '*Where are you?*' (**verse 9**). Notice that God doesn't stop talking to them or seeking them out. Poor choices have been made, but (despite their sin) God seeks relationship with them.

Adam is the first to reply. He expresses his **shame**, focussed in his nakedness. But God asks how he knows this. God presents him with truth and an opportunity to take responsibility (to 'be a man', as we might say!). Despite having been the first informed of the rules of the garden, Adam instead looks to **blame** another. When his partner was created, Adam cried out in delight: '*At last!*' (**2:23**). Now, in shame, he blames: '*That woman whom you gave me…*' (**3:12**). Eve too blames the serpent. They reveal their immaturity.

REFLECTION: There were two special trees in the garden. One was forbidden to them, and one would soon be denied them. The fruits of these trees combined (eternal life and wisdom) would have made them rather like God. They may have needed wisdom, but **it was not theirs to snatch**. It is a gift that should only be bestowed by God. By trying to snatch it in an act of disobedience, they have already failed in their attempt to be godly. (Thanks to John Goldingay for this insight from his book *Genesis for Everyone, Part 1*, SPCK.)

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

How important is this story of disobedience in your understanding of our relationship with God?

If you are confronted with the truth of your sin or mistakes, do you naturally want to blame others?

How can God help us to accept responsibility graciously? Or when should we defend ourselves?

Does this story give a helpful portrayal of male-female relationships? What can we learn from it?

How can we encourage one another to resist temptation and live healthier and more fulfilling lives?

How can we ensure support for those who have been hurt by the sins of others?

Do you think this is a TRUE story? Whether 'true' or not (as in 'historically accurate'), can we see the deeper truth in it? Does it resonate with human experience and our relationship with God?

PRAYING AND WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

Share a time of prayer together. Allow for members to offer their own prayers, perhaps leaving space for silent confession, followed by reassuring words of God's mercy and grace. Pray for those who are affected by the sins or abuse of others, for God's transforming and healing love. **Hymns** to sing or use as prayers include: *Singing the Faith* **110**, **419**, **429**, **432**, **507** and **832** (**Psalm 130**). Share **The Lord's Prayer** together.

WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME…

Before praying for forgiveness, try to imagine God calling out to you in love: *'Where are you?'* Then approach God as a beloved child returning to the arms of a compassionate and gracious parent.

JUNIOR GOOD SOIL – ideas for children and young people

Read the story from **Genesis 3**. Talk about what Eve and Adam did wrong, but how God still loved them and came looking for them. Make **fig leaves** and write 'Sorry' prayers on them. Find a way to bring these prayers to Jesus: perhaps pinning them to a cross, or bringing them into church to place at the table for communion.