

What Really Happened in the Garden? Resetting our Hearts, pt.1

1. One of the best known stories in the Bible, and one of the first ones we tell our children, is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We've all heard many sermons about creation, how God made Adam and then Eve, how they were charged with tending the Garden and how they listened to a snake, disobeyed God, and were driven from the Garden. But I have a question: why is this story the opening story? And have we really looked at it to see what it means?
2. Jewish rabbis through the ages told us that the Creation story was to counter the other creation stories in Mesopotamia and that Adam and Eve were the first people God separated for a relationship with Him. (refer to John Walton's "Lost World of Genesis One" and "Lost World of Adam and Eve"). In the early centuries of the Christian faith, most of the writers seem to agree.
3. But our story picks up after the creation accounts in chapters 1&2. Sometime after creation – perhaps a very long time – Adam and Eve were not doing what they were told to do: rule over the earth, guard the Garden. An enemy had entered the Garden.
4. We all know that something went wrong. This world does not look or feel like the world we would have made if we were God. We see pain and evil, the rubble of war, tears in the night and we think "If I were God, I would fix that." The "Wonder Woman" movie of a few years ago was based on that question – "why is this allowed?" The answer there was direct action, including mass violence. Genesis 3 is there to give us another story to counter the stories of other religions and the stories in our head about what went wrong and how to fix it.
5. There are two overriding, immutable facts in the universe: 1) there is a God. 2) You are not Him. The second fact is what is going to be challenged in this story.
6. The serpent opens with what appears to be a simple question about God and boundaries: did God really say you were not allowed to eat from any tree in the garden?

7. Of course, God said nothing like that. He gave them license to eat from any and all trees and plants in the Garden save one and only one. Eve responds...but goes too far. "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 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.'"
8. See what happened there? The serpent posited a world in which "everything is forbidden." Eve responded by saying the truth: "Most things are not forbidden" but then she added to God's words and made them far more strict than God intended. "You must not touch it or you will die." Eve was narrowing the list of the allowed, shrinking her liberty by adding extra rules like narrowing the width of a football field or a golf fairway.
9. The serpent disagreed with the consequences of eating the fruit. Note that it did not deny that eating the fruit was forbidden; it just denied the consequences. Then...and here is where we have, as a rule, lost the plot and missed the point of the story. Genesis 3:5. The serpent promises that, if they eat this fruit, they will no longer need God because they will be god, knowing what is right or wrong, good or evil.
10. The woman looked at the tree and made her own judgement on it. She decided it was good, it was pleasing, and it would be beneficial. Adam was with her the entire time and he agreed with her judgement, disregarding what God had to say about it.
11. Immediately, they started making judgements: they were naked and needed to be covered. The beautiful bodies that God made were now, in THEIR eyes, shameful and should be hidden. (religion has made countless judgements such as this, Victorian England, In The Name of the Rose, etc.)
12. When challenged by God, the man made a judgement against the woman and the woman made a judgment against the serpent. They shifted blame, saying that the true fault lied in someone other than themselves. They were doing exactly what the serpent said they'd be able to do: declare themselves wise, the arbiters of right and wrong.

13. The sermons I've heard and the many, many books and articles I've read about this story go off into lessons on obeying God, sex and sin, and stop there. The Catholic Church looks back on this story as another proof that sex and our bodies are the problem. Protestants picked up this banner and ran with it. Both Catholic and Protestant also used this to warn against disobeying God and the surety of punishment to come.
14. But what about Genesis 3:22? What the serpent said, was true and THAT was what created the break between God and humankind. We no longer relied on the judgement of God, but of our own judgment. We even said that God agreed with us! We were here to disapprove of our neighbors, find fault in their lives or faith, and to call them to OUR standard which we had confused with HIS. ("you are in disagreement with God! No, I'm in disagreement with you.")
15. (the exercise with students – find a reason to disapprove, to dislike. Tell yourself a story to back up your disapproval, to make it reasonable, right, and proper...maybe even Christian)
16. When you go to check in at the airport, or go to check out at a store, buy a ticket, etc. are those ahead of you impediments or people? (my discussion with a nurse about my mother's history and her reaction) People bring their history, fears, worries, successes, ideas and judgements with them. They are not NPCs (none playing characters) in some game; they are humans.
17. And the root of all sin is the fact that each of us acts like little gods instead of the children of God who, alone, can make judgements about right and wrong.
18. Want further proof? Some of you are already thinking certain thoughts, justifying your judgements but saying that they are, indeed and in fact, the true judgements of God. You will open your Bibles (always a good thing) and read them out. If you are reading in context and if the passage applies to the situation at hand, then it is not you but God making the judgement. However...

19. Even then, it is to be offered as that of God and with humility. Ephesians 4:1-7, 14-16. Look at verse 12 as well. Notice that you are being built up, equipped, growing up all of it – to love. There is no gift of judgment given to us.
20. Matthew 7:1-5. We do not judge others; we serve them. We do not disapprove of others; we love them. The world will not believe in heaven until they see it in us. (reading from Gregory Boyd's "Repenting of Religion" p.14)
21. (the man complaining about traffic in Myrtle Beach) We will never be able to deal with the problem unless we acknowledge our part in it. We need a reset. We need to acknowledge the two immutable facts...and act accordingly.

For Ivanna and Sarah, here is the reading mentioned in #20.

"So, I stopped. I determined to have one thought, and one thought only, about every person I saw in the mall on that afternoon; it was to love them and bless them as people uniquely created by God who have infinite worth because Jesus died for them. Whatever they looked like, however they were behaving, whatever their demeanor, I simply agreed with God that each of them has infinite worth. I just loved them. I began randomly selecting people in the crowd to love and bless.

"As I replaced judgmental thoughts with loving thoughts and prayers of blessing, something extraordinary began to happen. I began to SEE the worth I was ascribing to people, and I began to FEEL the love I was giving to them. As I ascribed worth to people, not allowing any other thought, opinion, or feeling to enter my mind, my heart began to expand. In fact, at certain moments I felt as though I would explode with love. I was waking up to the immeasurable value and beauty of each person in the mall that afternoon."