

Genesis 3:1-24

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When I was a freshman in high school, my boyfriend took me to see “The Phantom of the Opera” for my 15th birthday. He was a year older than I was, so he had a driver’s license. My parents took a deep breath and allowed me the space to grow. My boyfriend and I got in the car, went to the show in our best 1990s church clothes, enjoyed the performance immensely and felt very grown up through the whole experience. We can handle this adult life! It’s not really so hard!

But then we started to drive home. We discovered pretty quickly that we had not accounted for one major part of the day. We had no idea how to get home. The one-way streets of Minneapolis meant we couldn’t retrace our route even if we had remembered it. We didn’t have GPS or cell phones or any other help except for a paper map. Yes. A paper map, which is actually a pretty effective tool. We grew up a little more than expected or desired that day, finding a shaded neighborhood street, pulling out the map, and teaching ourselves quickly how to read it. We got home just fine.

I wonder if Eve and Adam felt something similar as they stood at the edge of the Garden of Eden, looking out over the new world they would inhabit. Where in the world were they going? How would they get there? Was God really a guide they could trust to get them where they needed to be? I imagine they did not really enjoy this part of growing up.

How did Eve and Adam reach this point of new beginnings? We first learn of Eve and Adam’s existence in Genesis 1 and 2. These two texts were written by different people, referred to as the Priestly writer and the Jahwistic writer. In Genesis 1 we read the Priestly writer’s account of creation where man and woman were made by God simultaneously: “So God created

humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . .”¹ Eve and Adam were birthed by God with a purpose and calling in this world.

In Genesis 2 the Jahwistic writer offers a second narrative of the creation of humankind.

Gen. 2:7, 18, 21-23 states

“. . . then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. . . The Lord God said ‘it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man.’”

These texts tell us the story of Eve and Adam’s birth, albeit a unique birth.

Genesis 1 and 2 have been interpreted by many years as prescriptive of the relationship between women and men. These birth stories, however, are primarily about humanity’s relationship with God and what it means to be God’s children. One pastor observes that these creation stories express “the idea that the most important difference exists between God and creation, not between male and female. Creation depends on God; this is the primary theological relationship concerning creation.”² Genesis 1-3 teach us that we are God’s beloved children, created for a purpose in this world.

Genesis 3 invites us into the story of Eve and Adam maturing as God’s children in the garden of Eden and finding God’s purpose for them. This garden is a safe and protected place where they can grow up. Like most parents, God gives Eve and Adam some boundaries to their

¹ Gen. 1:27-28a.

² Neuenfeldt, *Gender Justice Policy*, 4.

growing up years. God tells them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We tell our children similar things. “Don’t touch a stove!” or “Don’t cross the street alone!” We put up gates at the top of steep flights of stairs when our children are little. These are all actions that will hurt children if they do them too soon. But they do eventually do them. As adults we touch stoves all the time. We cross the street alone. We can navigate stairs without needing a gate to protect us. As we grow and mature we no longer need the safety of those boundaries.

But when we are children we need these boundaries. Like good parents do, God gave Eve and Adam the boundary of not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A child would find the knowledge of good and evil too overwhelming to comprehend, so a child should not eat the fruit of that tree. Yet children universally push against these kinds of boundaries, and Eve and Adam are no exception. The serpent challenges Eve and Adam to question God’s intention behind his rule for his children and his children have matured enough to question and cross that boundary God has put in place. Crossing this boundary does have consequences, which God tells Eve and Adam about, but God does not curse them as God curses the serpent.

The boundary was in place for a reason, but in order for Eve and Adam to go out into the world and be “fruitful and multiply” they needed to leave the garden. In other words, in order for this first couple to do what God had called them to do, they needed to leave the safety of the garden and engage in an adult life with all the joy and goodness alongside the hardship and evil.

As we grow, we find it hard to process that loss of innocence, that growing understanding that evil in the world is real and present. Boundaries are set by our parents so that we do not experience this kind of loss of innocence until we are ready to cope with it.

My boyfriend and I experienced that dose of reality when we were sitting in that car lost on the side of a city street, realizing that in the adult world, a person is responsible for her or his own navigation. This was not a terribly profound loss of innocence, but it was nonetheless a loss in the sense that it marked a before and after in my mind about my own responsibility in the world. The burden of responsibility also came with the freedom to experience new and wonderful things in the world like the opportunity to attend a fantastic musical. Eve and Adam ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it was the next stage in their growth.

We are all children of God, created in his image, capable of profound and deep goodness. We are true and lasting friends to others. We sacrifice personally for the benefit of someone else. We cling to Jesus with a stubborn faith that believes love overcomes all injustice. We fight with passion for the vulnerable in our communities. We show relentless beauty and courage in the ways we face our personal vulnerabilities. This process of growing up is one where we take into ourselves all of these truths and begin to see the rough shape of the clay that God is molding each of us into. We continue to grow and mature throughout our lives. We experience the fullness of all these things because God called us to go out into the world, to leave the safety of our garden, and “fill the earth.”³ We cannot fulfill this mission by remaining children in a safe little garden.

If you have heard this Genesis 3 text as one that subordinates women to men’s authority, or if you have been taught that women are the source of sin in this world, or if you have been told that your belovedness is not as great as a man’s because you are a woman then please hear this: you are God’s beloved child. Like all children you have grown and matured in ways that

³ Gen. 1:28.

God has called you to do. There will be pain and challenges that come with this reality. There will also be much goodness and love. God gave Eve and Adam a purpose in this world and he has given you a purpose, too. Amen.