

STUDY GUIDE:

Are We there Yet? | Fall: "We All Fall Down" Week of January 19-25

This winter we are looking at God's plan is for the world. Some deep thinking Christian converts have declared that the teaching about human failings and sin convinced them that this faith connects to real life in our world. Instead of seeing the story of sin and fall as judgmental against others, what if we saw it as helping us understand the problems in the world?

INTRODUCTION

A common Bible misinterpretation happens when we assume every story refers entirely to salvation. Most Bible stories address very specific questions and situations. Usually the question is not, "How are we saved?" For instance, parables of Jesus often engage a specific question. Jesus told the parable about a Good Samaritan in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29-37) It would be a mistake to assume that this parable teaches us to earn our salvation by taking care of others. It is not a parable about salvation but about how we see those who are different from us as neighbors who deserve our attention and compassion.

Another example is to mistake a Hebrew proverb as God's absolute promise. Proverbs 10:4 says, "Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth." Does that promise that everyone all lazy people are poor? Does it promise that everyone who works hard will be wealthy? We know this doesn't play out entirely. The proverb addresses a question like, "Why should I get up this morning and go to work?" Answer, those who work hard are more likely to do well than those who lie around feeling lazy. Proverbs address common questions about how life works.

So what might be the question addressed by the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

OPENING DISCUSSION

In the sermon Bruce talks about common humor and teasing between men and women related to the story of Adam and Eve. Why do you think the story of Adam and Eve is so often reduced to a story about the battle of the sexes? What about the story plays to common gender stereotypes?

READ & DISCUSS

Genesis 2:15-25

The set up of the story tells us that the first time God saw something that was NOT good was when the man was alone in the garden. In the midst of beautiful plants and animals, the man needed companionship. The woman is "flesh from my own flesh." The entire garden is available to him, but there is one tree withheld from him. He may eat everything but fruit from that one tree. Later we discover that the tree is planted in the very middle of the garden.

1. Why did God place the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the very middle of the garden? Why not just declare some tree at the edge of the garden off limits? What is God testing?
2. What was the relationship of the man and woman and God before the Fall into sin?

Genesis 3: 1-7

The serpent is called “crafty.” In the Hebrew the word has no negative connotation of deception. The serpent talks (no explanation given). The serpent asks a seemingly innocent question. But there is a subtle signal that Eve is in dangerous territory. The name for God shifts at this point in the story from the personal God: “LORD God” to the more generic name for GOD. “Did God really say...?”

Notice that the man is standing there with her as she takes a bite and gives him some of the fruit (verse 6). Adam is as guilty as Eve of the sin.

1. What in Eve’s response to the serpent shows accurate knowledge of the garden and what did she misunderstand? Who instructed her in God’s will?
2. What immediately changed when they ate the forbidden fruit?

Psalm 51: 1-12

King David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba. Yet his confession prayer (Psalm 51) declares he has only sinned against God. He has injured those he loves by his unfaithfulness, yet his sin is ultimately against God? What is sin?

Psalm 51 uses three words to describes aspect of the Fall: transgression, iniquity, sin. Sin means to make a mistake. The intentions were good, but something went astray. Iniquity means we twisted something because we want it to fit our preconceived expectations. The intent is not completely evil, but more looking for ways to make things fit what we want. Finally, transgression is outright rebellion against God and others. We transgress when we seek to hurt others in our selfish desires. We don’t want to follow the same rules as others, but live by our own rules.

1. What connotations do you have with religious words like “Fallen,” “Broken,” “Sin,” “Transgression,” “Iniquity”?
2. What do you consider to be the core sin that infects everything else in our lives?

WRAP UP CHALLENGE: Is there someone you might ask forgiveness for how your sinful actions (no matter how good your intentions may have been) hurt them? In your closing prayer ask God’s forgiveness for ways that your fallen condition has hurt others.

CLOSE IN PRAYER FOR ONE ANOTHER

