



# Sermon Growth Guide

**September 6, 2020**

**The Beautiful Story – Beauty Threatened**

**Genesis 3:8-19**

**Key Verse:** Genesis 3:10

“(Adam) answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

**Big Idea:** In Christ, you are found and offered full restoration.

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## Foundations

Welcome to week four of *The Beautiful Story*. After laying a firm foundation of the goodness and beauty of creation we come to the most tragic reality of all—that humanity, created in the very image and likeness of God, created to eternally walk in right relationship with God, has fallen from that original place of peace through willful disobedience.

Because of The Fall, everything is off balance. Our thinking is off balance. Our emotions are off balance. Our relationships are off balance.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy...” did not turn away. This week we also learn more about the character of our Creator, about God’s relentless pursuit of us, of you. Ken Gire writes, “Our greatest hope is that God is more persistent in His seeking than we are in our hiding.”

And so it is: though we hide from God, God pursues us still and His pursuit and His love is greater than any wall we can build, yet we must eventually say, “Yes, God. Here I am. You found me. I’m sorry for hiding. I love you.”

Open and close your time of further study and application in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to guide and guard your time in His Word.

## Understanding God’s Word

What is God doing at the beginning of our passage?

What do the man and the woman do when they realize that God is approaching them?

Host a conversation about the blame shifting and consequences that are found in this text.

## Applying God’s Word

Pastor John offers us the Latin phrase “incurvatus in se” (turned inward on oneself) to explain humanity’s general reluctance to receive God’s offer of restoration with joy.

What about you? How have you responded to being found by God and Him offering you full restoration? How can you better embrace the opportunity to daily “walk with God to and fro in the cool of the day”?

## Witnessing God’s Word

Think of one person who continues to reject God’s loving and relentless pursuit. Take a moment to close your time by praying for that person. Discern an action step you can take in moving toward this person with the love of Christ this week.

Things are not the way they are supposed to be. The evidence is all around us! There have been riots in pretty much every major city in our nation this summer. We're in the midst of an election year during which government officials are working to divide the population into Red or Blue and are lobbing insults at the other side in an attempt to grab power. Even the earth is against us! We're still in the midst of a global pandemic. Tropical storms have slammed the coasts in the last few weeks. Wildfires have threatened acres and lives. Even allergies! The air we breathe is making us sneeze, tear up and struggle to breathe. It's hard to imagine that there is anything more obvious right now than the brokenness of the world. But the fact that we identify something wrong with our world actually points to some good news... You see, our longing for something better points to the fact that there IS something better.

Think about this: Thirst>H2O. Hunger>Food. We long for a better world. For a better way of being. And that points us to the truth that we probably actually have been designed for something better. We're in a series call **The Beautiful Story**. We've been talking about beauty the last few weeks, and the reality that beauty in this life is like a signpost that points to the Creator. Beauty serves as a sign pointing to the Creator's intent for this world. InterVarsity developed a great little tool to help describe this beautiful story. And there are four main parts. Part 1 is that we were "Designed for Good." We've talked about how God created a beautiful world, beautiful people. We were VERY good. When I was in college there was a popular bumper sticker that talked about this: "God's original plan was to hang out in a garden with some naked vegetarians." Sounds great! We just planted a garden for the first time this summer. It's been so fun! How awesome would it have been to just hike around a giant garden every day, hanging out with God eating tomatoes and zucchini! So much zucchini! But this obviously didn't work out. The plan in the garden didn't play out like it was supposed to.

We look around now and the world is a bit like a wrecked car. We can see what it was meant to be but also that it is not currently working. It forces questions like, "How did we end up here? Why is life so hard/frustrating? Why is our society so broken? Why are people so terrible to one another? Why do tiny little microbes infiltrate our bodies and bring sickness and death? Why do natural disasters claim the lives of so many?" Well, we may have been designed for Good, but we've since been "Damaged by Evil." And it's not just us! Our relationship with God, our relationship with each other, and our relationship with creation are all distorted! Our text today digs into this. It's one of the Bible's most familiar scenes. And it's also one that people are often

quick to dismiss. I mean, there's a talking snake, so I understand. But I want to challenge us today to set any skepticism or concerns about the historicity of this passage on the shelf for a minute and just take the text as it stands. We're going to look at Genesis 3:8-21. Before this passage, God tells the humans they can eat from any tree in the garden except one. Gives the man/woman the opportunity to practice "obedience." But they fail. They decide they want to run the show. They want to be like God. And, as soon as they eat the fruit, there is a change. It's an irreversible change, like seeing or hearing something you cannot unsee or unhear. Their childlike innocence dissipates and they realize they are naked. In my Bible, this chapter has a little subtitle. It's called "The Fall." But, it could also be called "A Story of Broken Relationships." There are three relationships that take a major hit here:

#### I. Humanity's Relationship with God

First is Humanity's relationship with God:

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:8-9).

Growing up, we often took after-dinner walks as a family. We'd finish our meal, clean up a bit, and then head out to a bike path near our house. (If we were really good, we might get to stop for ice cream on the way back.)

This is what's going on. God shows up in the cool of the evening to spend time with friends. But he doesn't find them. They've hidden themselves. The first image that comes to my mind is my 3-year-old playing hide-and-seek without telling me. Sometimes, I'll be walking around the house and will just randomly hear, "You can't find me Daddy!!" It's a sweet image, but that's clearly not what is happening in the garden. The man and the woman used to walk with God. They used to spend time with the all-powerful creator of the universe as you would a friend. But now the relationship has become plagued by fear and shame. And they hide from God. Obviously, God knows where they are. As the Psalmist would later write, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there" (Psalm 139:7-8). God knows what they've been up to, but he gives them a shot to explain themselves. And the result is heartbreaking.

#### II. Human Relationship with One Another

The second relationship that unravels in this scene is human relationship with one another.



God said, "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:11b-13). How does the man respond when asked if he'd done something wrong? He blames the woman and blames God. He says, "The WOMAN... YOU put here with me..." This has continued to be our pattern, hasn't it? When our back is against the wall we can so easily shift into a blame game in an attempt to wriggle away or to use someone else as a shield to lessen the blow. But that's not how it's supposed to be. I mean, think about a time when you saw someone actually take responsibility for their actions. It's always a bit surprising, and it's almost a thing of beauty.

Well this chasm that is opening up between man and woman gets further expanded in the consequences that the couple must now endure. "... Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16b). The only other place that this Hebrew word for "desire" shows up in Scripture is Gen 4:7, and there it has a connotation of conniving and control. So, it's not necessarily that woman is simply destined to fawn after man forever, but in these relationships, there will consistently be manipulation and resentment. Instead of being co-equals who care for creation together, the relationship between man and woman will be filled with dispute and power struggle. Or as one scholar put it, "The two who once reigned as one now attempt to rule each other." Let me pause and say I cannot even scratch the surface of the history of flawed relationships between men and women here today. The ways that women have been relegated to the margins, abused, demeaned, not taken seriously, etc., throughout history are known to many of you much better than they are to me. I do know it's really not that long ago when women became allowed to vote in our nation. There continues to be a gender pay gap. The #metoo movement from a couple of years ago exposed ongoing atrocities and abuses in business and the church. Suffice to say, this is not how things were supposed to be. Just last week we talked about God's beautiful design for humanity. There was no male domination in Genesis 1 and 2. It's only after humans determine they want to take the reins that things fall apart. In Genesis 1 and 2, God sets a world in motion that is governed in mutuality and equity. But now, in Genesis 3, control and distortion become the norm.

III. The Relationship between Humanity and

Natural World/Bodies

The third relationship that is fractured is the Relationship between Humanity and the Natural World/Bodies. "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:17b-19). Listen, we pretty much had one job: care for creation. But now, because humanity rebelled against God and our vocation, that is going to be painful and difficult. This is obvious to us today. Drought, natural disaster, even animals! A recent study determined around 200 people in the USA are killed each year by animals. (Not a huge amount but still that's a problem!)

C.S. Lewis wrote a science fiction trilogy in which the first two books describe a world that didn't experience the fall, and a world that was basically the garden of Eden. In that second book, *Perelandra*, he describes creation and humanity functioning in harmony, so much so that even the dolphins swim up to the shore to help humans travel across the sea. We were supposed to be in charge of this world, to work it, to care for it. But instead Adam and Eve let the world control them. And this part of the consequence/curse obviously extends beyond farming. ALL of our work ends up being frustratingly difficult. All of the natural order gets bent out of shape. The woman is told that she'll experience pain in childbirth. This vocation that is unique to her will become a source of pain. And maybe even foreshadows the pain of parenting? The man is reminded that he will return to the dust. Even the human body will break down. We've been especially aware of our own mortality over the last six months, but this is nothing new! It's part of the world we live in. Nothing functions the way it is supposed to, not even our bodies!

I remember reading a really creepy short story as a kid about a haunted carnival in which the children who looked into the funhouse mirrors would actually get distorted to match the image in the mirror. I had nightmares for weeks, but it's a pretty good description of what happens to humanity because of

Genesis 3. We've become distorted to the point where our bodies work against us, distorted to the point of not even being able to trust our own logic and intuition. And so, because of human desire to take the reins, to view God as a barrier to our true happiness, there is a crack in the cosmos. There is



a fracture in all relationships and all ways of being. Humanity consumes a poison that ends up affecting every aspect of creation (Total Depravity), God's beautiful creation, beautiful earth, beautiful people, all become infected. I got food poisoning last week. Let me tell you, that affects everything around you. It's not how life is meant to be lived. But I recovered after a couple days. The healing of food poisoning just requires a bit of time and some Pepto Bismol. But that's not the case here in Genesis 3. Healing creation requires the Creator. Only God can fix what's gone wrong here. We'll talk more about this in the coming weeks of our series, but today we get a sneak peek.

God begins a healing process almost immediately after He finishes describing the curse that has descended on creation. Look at this: "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). They have rebelled against God. They have destroyed the perfect creation that they were supposed to care for. They have engaged in mutiny! And yet God loves them so much that He continues to provide for them. When their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, instead of running to God, they immediately tried to solve the problem themselves. They made coverings with fig leaves. But God provides real clothing. He continues to sustain them and care for them even though they have rejected Him and twisted the beauty of His creation. But that's not it. Let's look back to verse 15. When God addresses the serpent, He says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Martin Luther called this verse, "the very first Gospel proclamation." By the second century, church fathers started to look back and see a connection between this verse and Jesus. It is Jesus, the offspring of Eve, who crushes Satan, who defeats the powers of sin and darkness in this world. But it is not without cost; the serpent strikes his heel, for Christ comes into the world, is rejected, and is executed in a painful manner. But it is in His sacrifice that the Curse is reversed.

You see, we were Designed for Good and Damaged by Evil, but in Christ, God has Restored us for Better. When Jesus becomes the Lord of our lives, we become one with Him. We experience the forgiveness, grace and peace that God longs to pour out on us. Our relationship with God is healed in Christ. God offers us new life. And, in that new life, we are invited into His healing mission. We are called to participate in God's healing work in the world. The followers of Jesus are Sent Together to Heal people, relationships, and the systems of the world. So, while things are not currently as they are supposed to be, there is hope. And that leads us to the table. God has

continued to call out, "Where are you!?" God has invited you into relationship with Himself through Christ, and has invited you to His table. As we come to the table we remember the sacrifice of Jesus to restore creation, to heal creation, and in the Lord's Supper, we are united to the ascended Christ by the Holy Spirit. We are transformed, nourished, strengthened ... formed ever more into the likeness of God which we were created to exhibit. I know that many are quick to dismiss these early chapters of Genesis as fables and think that they have little relevance in our lives. And so, today it's perhaps helpful to think about this passage less as something that happened to our oldest ancestors, and more as something that each one of us participates in in our own lives.

In his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul reminds us that, "ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We have all found ourselves in this place of rebellion against God, against God's instructions for right living, against God's call for us to participate in His mission. I mean, just think about it, what exists in your life that you hope no one will ever find out about? What have you done that you'd be embarrassed to have traced back to you? What thoughts do you have that you are glad remain unspoken? Have you lied recently? Have you wished someone ill because you are jealous of them? Have you perfectly honored your parents? Do you cease from all work on the Sabbath? Have you put other things (or people) ahead of God in your life? We know that things are not as they are supposed to be, and yet we continue to contribute to that brokenness with our own actions or inaction. And so now we go to the Lord in prayer, confessing these things... Lord our God, we are broken people. So often we have failed to give ourselves to the welfare of our city. Lord we have been consumed by greed, pride, fear, and anger. We often hide from You, ashamed of our nakedness, our flaws, our humanity. We surrender these things to you now and ask for your forgiveness. Amen.

Things are not as they're supposed to be. The world has become infected, but God provides healing. God wants to walk with us and He calls out to us. May you be aware of the places in your life where you continue to choose distorted creation over the kingdom of God. May you hear the voice of the Lord calling out, "Where are you!" May you place your trust in Christ and surrender to Him for healing. May you be an agent of reconciliation and healing in the world, loving others as you have been loved. And may you go this week knowing the Love of God the Father, the Grace of Jesus Christ, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

