

God Tells Adam and Eve to Go
Gen. 3
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One of my favorite Far Side cartoons shows this peaceful landscape setting with a shady tree and a grazing deer. And in the middle of this serene meadow is a giant jar with the label “Humans” on it. The jar is broken open, and in the background, there are two naked people running off. And you see a voice from the cloud above saying, “Uh-oh.”

Yes, uh-oh. You have to wonder if God was thinking that after the events of today’s passage. God creates this wonderful idyllic paradise full of butterflies and hummingbirds and cute little bunnies, and then humans come along and build casinos and film reality TV shows and mess the whole place up. So, God kicks them out, evicting them from the paradise God created for them.

We’ll get to that part in a second, but it’s important we know the events leading up to it. In this version of the Creation Story – the first is in Genesis 1 – God creates man and puts him in the garden to work it and take care of it. That’s a bit distressing to those of us without green thumbs, but I trust that, unlike me, Adam could tell the difference between a daisy and a dandelion and knew what he was doing.

Or maybe he didn’t, because right after that God literally says, “It’s not good that the man should be alone,” as if God knew that if you give us men a few chores around the house and access to power tools, we might cut off an appendage. So, God creates Eve as Adam’s helper. Genesis tells us that the man and his wife were naked, and they felt no shame because they didn’t know better.

When you think about it, they were a lot like toddlers. For most toddlers, clothing is optional. They don’t care if they’re naked. They’ll run around the house all day without clothes on, and much to our chagrin, they’ll do the same thing in Target. But at some point in their life, every toddler will become self-conscious about being naked, at least at Target. But for now, Adam and Eve are as innocent as toddlers.

Enter the serpent. The serpent was more crafty or cunning than any of the other creatures. Notice that he never calls God a liar or directly contradicts what God said. Everything the serpent said was kind of true. Instead of forcing Adam and Eve to sin, he does what most temptation does: he plants a seed, and lets it grow within the person.

The serpent asks for clarification of God’s statement to Adam and Eve. He starts off with, “Did God really say...?” That is a loaded question. When I hear the voice in my head start a question that way, I know I’m in trouble. “Did your mom really say no cookies before dinner? Maybe. But she didn’t say anything about eating a part of a cookie. Or a hunk of cookie dough. Or a scoop of cookie dough ice cream. And ice cream has milk in it, and milk is good for you! You’ll be doing your mom a favor!” And so goes the temptation, planting seeds in us that grow into doubts and rationalizations and acts of disobedience.

If God loved Adam and Eve, why the prohibition? God created this beautiful setting for them and gave them dominion and use over the entire garden except for one specific tree, which is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why would God create this tree and then tell Adam and Eve to stay away from it?

Here's what I think. At this point, humans are a grand experiment. God created them and then gave them free will. That's huge. Instead of controlling them, God decided to let them choose for themselves. So I believe God was genuinely curious to see how humans would respond. If they were told not to do something, would they still do it? If they have every need cared for, would they still seek out something that is forbidden? So, God builds a City BBQ and a Lyle's BBQ and an Edly's BBQ and says, "Eat any of this, just don't eat from this one tree." God is testing Adam and Eve to see if God's creatures will be obedient to their Creator.

What's wrong with eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Let me try to answer that by way of an analogy. Driving is a good thing. I like driving. I'm glad to be able to get places in my car. But driving is not good for a five-year-old. Flying is an amazing luxury. What a privilege to be able to fly a plane hundreds of miles in a short span of time. But when I go to the airport, they won't let me fly the plane. Only the trained pilots can do that. Or, on a more serious note, we tell little kids to keep away from strangers, but we don't go into detail about all the bad things that could happen to them. We give them the knowledge they need and can handle for their age.

I believe God intended for Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when they were ready for it. I believe God wanted Adam and Eve to grow and mature and learn about life in order to be able to handle the knowledge the tree offered, the understanding of the presence of good and evil. They are still toddlers and not developmentally ready for the knowledge the tree would provide. But Adam and Eve couldn't wait, they didn't listen, and gave in to temptation. In a sense, you could say they tried to grow up too fast, to move from spiritual toddlers to adolescence before they were ready.

Notice the result of their transgression: they realize their nakedness and are so ashamed of it they make some clothes to cover themselves. It's the world's first cover-up, and it sets the stage for humanity's continual transgressions against God, and then our feeble attempts to cover them up. For the first time, they are self-conscious in the truest sense. They are conscious of their self apart from God, and that consciousness makes them embarrassed.

In my mind, that is the greatest sin here. It's not the eating of the fruit. It's not the disobedience. It's their failure to take responsibility for their actions. Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and God has to deal with the mess. A city employee in Lodi, Calif., sued the city for damages after a dump truck backed into his parked car. The man says that because the city's vehicle damaged his private vehicle, the city owes him \$3600. The catch? The man who owned the car was driving the dump truck. He backed into his own car, and now wants the city to pay him.

If Adam and Eve were alive today, they would be filing lawsuits against the serpent. Why? Because then they could blame somebody else for something they did wrong. I believe failure to take responsibility for our actions is one of the worst sins we can commit, because it not only denies the truth about what we have done, it usually shifts the blame to someone else. Adam and Eve made me do it!

So God does something that I believe absolutely broke God's heart. God curses his own creation and then takes Adam and Eve, his two kids, made in his image, and puts them out on the street. God said, "If you live in my garden you will obey my rules!" But they didn't, so now they are going to have to grow up and make it on their own. They no

longer have access to the garden and all its delights. They are no longer toddlers. If they want to be adults, they're going to have to act like adults. They are now conscious of themselves and will have to live with that.

But they won't be alone. Even though they have directly disobeyed God, even though they took this grand experiment and dumped it in the trash, even though they turned on God at the first opportunity, God still loves them. Have you ever felt that way toward your kids? You know, you love them, but you don't like them? I'd give you a personal example but I want to be welcomed back into my own home after church today. That's how God feels. So even as God is kicking Adam and Eve out, God makes for them garments of skin, because God still loves them and doesn't want them to be ashamed of themselves.

Adam and Eve disappointed God, and we've been disappointing God ever since. God has provided everything we need to live, to thrive, and instead we turn to false gods, worshipping idols of our own making, listening to the voices of the slithery serpents around us instead of tuning into the voice of God. Every day we do something that warrants our eviction from God's presence.

And yet, God is still here, watching over us, clothing us. Jesus Christ came to show us that God loves us so much that, in spite of our disobedience, God has clothed us with grace and forgiveness and a tenacious love that refuses to kick us out again. We still have to endure the consequences of our disobedience, but like a loving parent, God still holds us, even when we kick and scream and try to get away.

I really wish Adam and Eve hadn't eaten that fruit. But I'm glad we have this story, because it reminds us that every time we make the same choice – to disobey God, to focus on ourselves, put our own desires above the good of those around us – that God doesn't kick us out us. Because of Jesus Christ, we know that God is still with us, loving us, clothing us with the kind of stubborn grace only God can give. God's goodness will always be stronger than our brokenness. So, remember, even on your worst day, you haven't gone too far for God to find you.