

THE STORY

The Root of the Problem

Genesis 3:1-13

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "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.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

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?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? 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."

Everything about God's creation is good - very good. When Adam and Eve get hungry, there are all kinds of fruit to choose from. When Adam and Eve get tired, they lie down and sleep - in peace... without fear. There are no aches and pains... no loneliness... no regrets... no shame. Everything is good - very good - everything is just about perfect.

But things haven't stayed perfect. Things are not "very good." Everywhere I look, I see problems.

I mean, take a look back there at Mary Brasfield. Those hats she wears are not for fashion but to cover her bald head. She's half way through 30 days of radiation treatments, so she is exhausted. Her grandchildren are not living with her because she couldn't bear to be without them. She didn't plan to have a blind daughter. None of this is the "very good" God started out with.

I look around this room and I see widows. Women who have lost life-long companions. There are marriages that have ended before “death do us part,” and I know that there are stories of family life that include stories of abuse - even in this room. None of this is the “very good” God started out with.

I pick up the paper - and see that Bo Pellini had to leave the Husker game early. I read about uprisings and protests in the Middle East, about drought, about murders and sexual assaults and... None of this is the “very good” God started out with.

What happened? Why would God allow a world where everything was very good become a world where so much is very bad?

I’ve been thinking about this question a lot. Have you? I’ve been wondering if there had been some way to avoid all this. I’ve been asking myself just what is at the root of all the evil that’s in the world.

And The Story gives us an answer. The Story tells us that though God created a “very good” world, that though God was right there to meet all of Adam and Eve’s needs, that though God never wanted humans to experience death, The Story tells us that death came into the world.

Death came into the world not because of some massive rebellion. No armies of evil swarmed down on this brand new world to turn it bad. Death came because of simple disobedience. God told Adam and Eve not to do something, but they didn’t listen to him.

How many of you could tell me what God’s one law, what God’s one rule was for Adam and Eve? *No eating of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.* Good. Their one rule was that they not eat of this fruit... that they not taste or experience evil.

God had planted this tree in the center of the garden had marked off a boundary around it. God had declared this one tree off limits. God had put restrictions on Adam and Eve - do not eat from this one tree.

We don’t like the idea of limits do we? In fact, we hate limits. Draw a line in the sand, and I want to cross it. Tell me I have to live on a diet, and I will think about nothing but food. Draw an invisible line down the middle of the back seat to keep my brother and I on our sides, and you can bet that I will make sure to stick a toe over. Tell me I have to be home by the stroke of midnight, and I might show up by 12:05am. Post a speed limit sign, and I promise I will set my cruise control to 5 miles an hour over. Okay, maybe ten if I’m – I mean, if we’re in a hurry.

We don't like limits. We think they're unfair. They don't make sense. They're degrading.

But boundaries aren't necessarily a bad thing. Limits aren't always limiting... which sounds crazy - but hear me out. If we were to step up here, up to our Upper Story platform. If we are to look at creation from God's perspective, we find that God, himself, accepts limits. There's at least one limit that God himself chooses to live with. Does anybody know what I might be talking about? Bonus points here!

God choose to live within limits when it comes to his work week. God decides to work six days and then take a day of rest. Creation isn't complete until after the seventh day when God rests.

Now remember, God doesn't need to take a rest. God hasn't run out of energy or power. God hasn't exhausted his ideas. God simply puts a limit on his work week. God accepts this boundary, this rhythm of work and rest, just like he established a rhythm of day and night. Limits aren't always a bad thing. Sometimes they are a very good thing.

As we move back down to the Lower Story, God tells Adam and Eve that they must put a limit on what they will eat. No fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Note that God did not put a fence around the tree, a barrier to keep them out. They were completely free to obey or to disobey. They were completely free to eat - or not eat - of the forbidden fruit.

If we were to use a fancy theological term, we would say that Adam and Eve have freedom of the will. They have the freedom to obey and the freedom to disobey. They face a real choice - to do what's right or to do what's wrong.

This freedom, this choice, is important – necessary even – because love gives people a choice. Love lets people live in freedom - love gives people space to choose. You can't force people to love. You might be able to force people to obey, but you can't force them to love. Love must be won without coercion. Love must be free - love must allow others to be free to choose. If there is no choice, no freedom, there can be no love.

And what Adam and Eve do, what's at the root of their problem, is that they decide not to love God. They decide not to listen to God's story.

The serpent shows up, plants a seed of doubt, feeds them a different story – a story that says that God does not love them, a story that says God has been lying to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve

decide the serpent's story sounds better. And so Adam and Eve decide not to believe what God says. They decide not to walk by faith within the story that God has told them. They see that the fruit looks good, so they decide to turn their ears away from God, turn their faith away from God and to turn towards the serpent, to listen to the serpent, to follow the serpent's script.

And of course, it was the serpent who was lying, who was feeding them half-truths. It was the serpent who was crafty and shrewd. And so by choosing not to love God, not to listen to God, not to live by God's story, Adam and Eve brought death and pain and misery and shame and fear into this very good world. We are what we eat. And as soon as Adam and Eve had taken that bite of fruit, as soon as they had chewed and swallowed it, as soon as they had taken in the poison of disbelief, they knew what evil feels like on the inside.

Adam and Eve took a step across the boundary and found it was a step off the edge of a cliff. They couldn't take it back. They couldn't put things back together. They couldn't cover their tracks. They had unleashed evil into this world. They, themselves, had been infected. They were guilty but unwilling to take the blame. They found that they were naked and vulnerable, even when they covered up. They discovered they were afraid, even when in the presence of the God who is perfect love.

This is the only world we know. This is the way of the world. In hindsight, it looks rather foolish, doesn't it? All God asked was for them to not eat the fruit of one tree. But they wouldn't believe. They wouldn't love God enough to listen.

But we do the same thing all the time. All the time. In so simple and obvious ways.

God says, "Don't work 24/7. Create a boundary, a rhythm, between work and rest." But do we listen? Do we love God's ways? Do we have a rhythm of work and rest? Do we have a regular, set aside time during our week when we can kick our feet up, not do anything but just be – and be with people? Or do we live "patchwork lives" adding an activity here, running another errand there, checking our email one more time – too tired to enjoy our family, our home, our sleep?

God says, "Don't be anxious or worry about tomorrow. Trust me to be a good Father who provides." But do we listen? Do we trust that what God gives us will be enough? All our work and worry and stressing over our retirement, our kid's education, our vacation plans, our health, our bills this month. We get anxious, we worry, we fear.

God says, "Don't store up treasures for yourselves on earth. Give. Be generous." But do we listen? Do we really believe that life isn't determined by what you own? Or have we bought into what the advertisements say? That this house will satisfy you... that this outfit will get you the friends you want... that this car will get you the respect you deserve... That your money is your own - and you are not your brother's keeper...

God says, "When you have a problem with someone, go to them and straighten it out." But do we listen? Do we really believe that God knows what's best when it comes to relationships? Or do we talk to everyone *but* the person we have a problem with?

God says, "Forgive others as you would want to be forgiven." But do we listen? Or do we hold a grudge... keep our distance... say we have forgiven them when no real reconciliation has taken place?

Friends, I'm not pointing fingers. I'm simply painting a picture of the world... my world and your world... Adam's world and Eve's world. If it seems bleak... if it seems dark... depressing, then let me simply remind you that The Story does not end in tragedy. The Story is not a tragedy. There will be a very good ending... a happily ever after...

because the God who is love...

the God who is love...

the God who *is* love... clothed Adam and Eve, and promised that the serpent's head would be crushed, and set the rainbow in the sky as a forever promise. The God who is love did not stay in the garden when we were cast out, but is pursuing us, seeking us, rewriting us back into his good story, recreating this world of evil, death, sorrow into a new world of goodness & justice & peace & life & joy.