

2

THE FALL

Why Apples Are like A-Bombs

Ever since I was a child I've had a certain fear of snakes. There's just something about them. Some animals are cute—and some are not. Snakes are *not*. Not everyone feels this way, of course. For those of a certain age, you may recall a guy with the Van Halen hair, a Black Sabbath T-shirt, and a terrarium that he kept in the basement. He loves snakes. Just ask him. And then there's the other guy, from the county fair, who never misses an opportunity to parade around with Lulu the pet python coiled around him like a fashion accessory.

But those people are exceptions. The rest of us are made a little nervous by the creatures. Maybe it's the slithering, or the forked tongue, or the portrayals in movies and on TV. Then again, maybe it's the thought of a legless lizard latching onto your jugular, injecting

battery acid, and causing you to flail about like a manic celebrity on *Dancing with the Stars*. Yeah, maybe that's it.

When I was little, our family went to visit a distant relative who still lived on the family farm. It was supposed to be an educational experience. It was a chance for the kids to visit the homestead, hear some stories, and perhaps contract a tick-borne illness. Stuff like that. So for the better part of a day we walked around the farm, between tumbleweeds and rusted tractors, as someone showed us where the old house was and where the cast from *Little House on the Prairie* used to fend off wolves and churn the butter. It was a good day. Then somewhere in the middle of the tour, we paused for a few moments by a dilapidated barn. You know what's coming.

As we stood there in the entrance of the creaking structure, I remember my little sister beginning to swing herself around a wooden pole that ran from the dirt floor to the dusty rafters. While the adults were talking, she wrapped her little fingers around the pole and spun around in that way that makes people over the age of eighteen sick to their stomachs.

I'm not sure how long she did this. But eventually someone took the time to notice the small depression that lay at the base of the pole. Coiled snugly inside was an enormous rattlesnake—who was just now beginning to shake his backside faster than Beyoncé at the Super Bowl halftime show.

Someone screamed! People scrambled. And somewhere in the midst of the chaos, a parent grabbed my sister and pulled her away to safety. No one died.

(Except the snake.) No one was even bitten. Yet somewhere in the midst of the commotion, perhaps while I was running like a politician from the truth, I grasped another reason for my distaste of all things serpentine. It's not *just* that we've been virtually preprogrammed to dislike the creatures. And it's not *just* that a few of them happen to be dangerous. That's part of it, of course, but there's more.

For me, another thing about snakes, and a further reason why I fear them more than some more dangerous animals (e.g., rabid possums, blood-thirsty ice weasels), is the fact that snakes *surprise* us. Think about that for a moment. For obvious reasons, snakes sneak up on us in ways that cows and donkeys and golden retrievers do not. We don't see them coming. They slither up beneath the shrubbery. They startle us, *even* when they've been there all along.

Surprised by a Serpent

It happens in the Bible too. In Genesis, the surprise comes *one sentence* after some of the happiest words ever uttered: "naked and unashamed." Life is fresh and good. It's the honeymoon after the wedding night of Genesis 2. Then right in the middle of Sandals Mesopotamia, we're surprised by a serpent. And if that weren't enough, he (the snake) starts asking questions. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). It's a loaded query, especially coming from an animal—and the whole scene leaves us scratching our heads. It raises questions:

Question: Where did this crafty serpent come from?

Answer: God made him.

Question: *Why?*

Answer: . . .

The writer of Genesis doesn't tell us much about the snake. The story just moves on. Hence, we're left wondering: Why would a loving Creator allow a crafty talking serpent into a world where he could mislead the happy honeymooners? Why would God do this? No answer. But the snake does teach us something crucial about God's Story. It's a lesson we'd do well to learn early in our study of the Bible. Here it is: *the universe is complicated*. Not every question that we have is answered by the Scriptures.

Despite what some Christians would like to believe, God's Story is more beautiful and complex than an after-school special or a 1970s sitcom. In the Bible, there are surprises, unanswered questions, and not every episode ends with the cast all smiling, freeze-framed into the camera. *There's a snake in the garden*. And from the moment we look down and see him coiled there on the page, that previously mentioned lesson hits us: the universe is complicated.

To many of us, this is hardly welcome news. Complexity is frustrating. If you're like me, you like things simple. Most of us do. We like things cut-and-dried. We like bullet points and bottom lines. But as we dive into God's Story we discover that the Bible disavows such false simplicity. There are some answers we'll have to wait to hear. And while we may be uncomfortable with that, the Bible doesn't seem to be. It's as if the writer

embraces a complex reality without feeling the need to extrapolate. “Oh yeah, did I mention there is a crafty talking snake? Now on with the story.”

Having noticed such unresolved complexities, we can choose to see them in one of two ways. Option One: we can view them as *proof* that the Bible is a ridiculous fiction that should be discarded. Many intelligent people have chosen this path, and it is a realistic option. “Snakes don’t talk!” we shout. “And anyway, where’s he fit within God’s *good* creation?” To the first point (the talking animals one), we should say that ancient people were well aware of this reality. They didn’t see the world as one big Disney film in which all the creatures sang and spoke life lessons to wayward princesses. And as to the next question about where the serpent fits amid the goodness of God’s world, we might note the following: the Bible never states that the creation was safe; it only says that it was “very good.” And while this goodness seems to rule out the presence of human sin in the beginning, it apparently does not rule out the presence of a tempter in the garden.

If Option One is to cry foul at the first sign of unexplained anomalies within the Bible, Option Two is to remain open in the face of the unanswered questions. We are dealing, after all, with the subject of an infinite and transcendent God. What’s more, this God reveals himself through literature written (in some cases) millennia ago and filtered through the personalities of ancient people who do not share our language or our customs. Perhaps, then, we should not expect everything to make perfect

sense according to the criteria of modern thought. If it did, we could be quite sure that we invented it.

Having said all that, if we sit within this strange story long enough, we may begin to see that even the oddities often bear the tell-tale marks of life as it is—that is, complex, and (gratefully) lacking in simplistic Sunday school answers. Because as any scientist can tell you: *real things* are complicated. C. S. Lewis made this point by referring to an item as common as a kitchen table. When you look at it from a distance, Lewis said, it seems quite boring—perhaps just wood and nails and finish:

But ask a scientist to tell you what it is really made of—all about the atoms and how the light waves rebound from them and hit my eye and what they do to the optic nerve and what it does to my brain—and, of course, you find that what we call “seeing a table” lands you in mysteries and complication which you can hardly get to the end of.¹

Translation: real things are not simple. Reality is mysterious and complicated.

Some of us have caught a glimpse of this truth while lying on a bed of grass and inspecting the world of creepy-crawly things that move unseen beneath our feet. We glimpse this tiny world living in our lawn, and we know our ecosystem is complex. The world is mysterious. So am I. And because of this, I need to inhabit a story that is at least as complex as I am. To be clear, this open perspective remains a far cry from somehow proving that all

of Scripture's claims are true. Jesus never promised to answer all our questions. And the quest for certainty can be an idol. Still, for those of us who sense the underlying mystery in our world, even some of the question marks within the Bible can begin to have the ring of truth. There is a snake in God's good garden. It's complicated.

Why Freud Was Right

To review, chapter 2 in the biblical storyline (the one we sometimes call "the fall") opens with a talking serpent. But as Sigmund Freud would likely tell us, sometimes a snake is *more* than just a snake. As we read on, we begin to see that the crafty talking serpent represents something—or someone—far darker than just a scaly legless lizard. There is a villain in this story. There is an enemy, an accuser. And while Genesis says little of this dark spiritual force, the book of Revelation gives us some other names for Eden's hissing tempter. He is "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9). So while creation is born without human sin, it doesn't stay that way.

If chapter 1 is about creation *from* and *for* community, chapter 2 is about the way things fall apart. But more importantly, the story of the fall is not just about something that happened way back then. It's about something that happens now. It's not just about the fall, it's also about *falling*. It's *our story*, not just that of Adam and Eve. It's for everyone who has watched as their life and dreams and plans come apart at the seams. It's about

broken marriages, broken hearts, death, and dead-end jobs. It's about falling, and all of us do that.

Chapter 2 in God's long Story starts with a talking snake, but it gets going when we talk back. A conversation takes place between the serpent and a person. God's truth and goodness are questioned (that's how sin almost always starts), and then it happens. The honeymooners thumb their noses at the Creator, and things are never the same (see Genesis 3:2–7). Creation starts with naked, honest community. But it's by the tree that we begin to sense that even naked and honest community is vulnerable. To quote the poet John Milton, things are "happy, but for so happy, ill secur'd."² In the story, they want to be like God but in the wrong kind of way (see Genesis 3:5). Normally, we would think that being God-like is a virtue. But it isn't always. There is a vast difference between mirroring God's faithfulness and parroting his power. Sometimes a desire to be like God is actually a desire to *be* god—or rather, to be my own god. And when that happens, suddenly just being my naked self isn't what it used to be.

We could spend hours dissecting this chapter. Almost every word in Genesis 3 is an exit ramp along the highway of biblical understanding. And many exits lead to interesting places. Unfortunately, there isn't time for much sightseeing. We need to see the big picture of the fall, and we need to answer just a few of the big questions that emerge after reading this part of the story. Questions like: How does a simple bite of fruit result in a fatal fracture of the whole creation? How does that happen?!

Apples and A-Bombs

It's a simple question really. How does a seemingly insignificant choice have such cataclysmic consequences? Some of us who have read the story a hundred times have become immune to this strangeness, but that's not necessarily a good thing. The strangeness *ought* to strike us.

In the beginning, God builds a lovely biosphere. He places people in it, he puts them in charge, then he tells them to eat at any restaurant they wish—except for *this* one. This one is off-limits. This eatery is taboo. In fact, if the happy honeymooners should visit this forbidden restaurant—the one just up the street, with the delicious entrees and the snooty waiters—they will trigger a chain reaction more terrible than a nuclear bomb.

It's a peculiar story, and it raises questions. Why is this God such a controlling kill-joy? I mean, really! What's the big deal with a piece of fruit? Isn't this just one more example of pointless religious legalism? "Eat from this tree, and I'll kill you!"

These questions may be honest ones, but I'd like to suggest that they are not the best ones. Because just as Christians sometimes get caught up on squabbles over talking snakes, so too can we miss the forest of Genesis 3 for our talk of fruit and trees. As with Genesis 1–2, we cannot read this story with the same wooden literalism as we would a copy of *USA Today*. Especially if it was never intended to be read like that. Don't just ask why the serpent talks; pay attention to what he *says*.³ In its ancient way, Genesis 3 gives what Christians believe to

be a true and moving picture of how sin wormed its way into our world.

Perhaps the command against eating from a particular tree may have less to do with an apple (which is never mentioned), and more to do with a missed *opportunity* to fulfill the human calling. Here's what I mean.

When God blesses Adam and Eve with the status of his image-bearers, this blessing brings a calling. They are to "image" (or reflect God's will) within God's world. And in so doing, they are to *rule* and *care for* God's creation in ways that honor him. One translation says that humans were placed in the garden "to work it and take care of it" (Gen. 2:15)—which means (among other things) that conservation matters to the God of the Bible. We are commanded to steward the good world that God has given us, both then and now.

More specifically, the image-bearers are to: "rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 1:26). To be clear, that last part includes the snakes—regardless of their verbal skills. But what does it mean to rule over animals? The language could conjure up odd images of a kingly figure perched on a tree stump, surrounded by a royal court of squirrels, rabbits, and field mice. So why does God give Adam and Eve this peculiar vocation? And come to think of it, why does he reiterate the same command, just a few verses later: "God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said to them, . . . 'Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Gen. 1:28).

I'd like to suggest a simple possibility. Perhaps the reason God reiterates the command to rule over the animals is *not* that he wants Adam to set up a literal serfdom with chimps for knights, and monkeys for court jesters.

Perhaps one reason for the command's repetition is that God is preparing Adam and Eve for a *showdown* with an animal that moves across the garden floor.⁴ To be more specific, God is preparing the honeymooners for a showdown with a snake that, as Freud would tell us, is more than just a snake.

The setting for this showdown is a tree. And this matters too. In the Ancient Near East, prominent trees often served as both the courtrooms and the gallows of the day. If a king's commands had been spit upon, the offenders would be taken to a large tree and judged under its branches. If found guilty they would then be strung up, quite literally, as a sign that justice had been done. This was the world inhabited by the first readers of Genesis. It was the world they understood. Thus the ancients may have known exactly what Adam *should* have done to anyone denying the commands of the King.⁵

The showdown at the tree was not just a sneak attack by a crafty serpent. Nor was it a pointless bit of religious legalism. No, the showdown at the tree was an *opportunity*. It was an opportunity for Adam and Eve to do what rulers always did to traitors under trees.

In commanding Adam and Eve to rule over the animals, God was granting the honeymooners both the *authority* and the *opportunity* to crush the head of evil before it could grow and worm its way into everything.

It was an opportunity to make the universe a safer place for generations to come. It was a chance to make sure words like “rape,” “hunger,” and “Reality TV” never entered the human vocabulary. (You heard me.)

This is what the conversation at the tree is about. It is an opportunity for Adam and Eve to exercise their divine authority and do at the beginning of the story what God must later do at the end. The conversation at the tree is an opportunity for humans to put evil in its place and secure a future in which true community would flourish. As we will see, this dream is not lost forever, but it will take a far more terrible tree to resurrect it from the ashes.

This is the point so often missed when Christians talk about the fall. The tragedy of the honeymooners was not so much about an apple that was eaten. The tragedy was about an *opportunity* that was missed. God’s command was not given simply to fulfill some bit of religious legalism. It was given to make the world a better place. And this insight about the first sin tells us something about all the ones that follow.

The Thing about Sin

I met a young woman long ago who was having questions about her faith. These were real questions, mind you, not the superficial style-of-the-music variety that pastors sometimes have to spend their time on. These were genuine questions. She told me her primary problem with Jesus and the Bible and the whole faith-thing was not that she didn’t believe in a God, but that she didn’t

understand why certain things were considered, well, *sinful*.

“Don’t take this the wrong way,” she told me, “but I just don’t get it!” She was looking a little embarrassed. “I mean, I’m not married,” she said, “and I don’t know if I ever will be. But I don’t understand why God should care if someone like me were to go out and have sex. Why is it any of God’s business? Why is *that* a *sin*?! How do I know it’s not just a random rule made up by some fundamentalist prude?”

It is a fair question. And it boils down to an even shorter one: Why is sin, *sin*? In other words, why does sin bother God? And why should it bother us?

Importantly, this is precisely the kind of question that can’t be answered by those who see the Bible merely as a cosmic rulebook. Rules are great at telling us *what*. They can tell you not to spit on the sidewalk, sleep with your girlfriend, or pull the little tag off the bottom of your sofa. Rules are great at telling you *what*. But rules are terrible at telling you *why*.

And this is one reason why the Bible-as-mere-rulebook approach makes things so frustrating for people who have honest questions. It’s why it can be frustrating when well-meaning Christians answer every question with: “Because the Bible says so.” In its most exaggerated form, the conversation sometimes goes like this:

Question: Why shouldn’t I do X?

Answer: Because God says so.

Question: Why?

Answer: Because if you do X, you might burn in hell.

And this is where things usually end. There's something about the threat of eternal damnation that has a way of throwing a wet blanket on a conversation. So why is sin, sin? What would you say?

The Fullest Kind of Existence

As I listened to this woman, I couldn't help but think about the story of Adam and Eve. I thought about how God wanted the best for them. God wanted them to live a life of harmony with creation, peace with their Creator, peace within themselves, and love between each other. Jesus called this kind of existence: life to the full (see John 10:10).

This is why (in the story) God gave them so many good things: good food, good sex, good stuff as far as they could see. God wanted us to have the best kind of life. Perhaps this is also why God gave humans the opportunity to judge evil at the tree, instead of crafting us entirely as a race of robots. Love requires some amount of freedom. So God gave people the opportunity to be his *stewards* of creation, and to strike the deathblow against evil. It was a profound opportunity. But in the story, Adam and Eve choose to reject the good life for a cheap generic knockoff. They reject lasting fulfillment for a momentary craving, and it hurt them the same way it hurts us.

Rather than enjoy peace with the Creator, Adam and Eve hide from God. Rather than enjoy confidence within themselves, they feel uncomfortable in their own skin. They reach for fig leaves because they feel ashamed.

Rather than enjoy love between each other, they begin to pass the buck. They blame each other and they blame God. Rather than enjoy harmony with their environment, they now fight against the soil in order to enjoy its fruit. To quote W. B. Yeats, “things fall apart.” And we all can attest to that reality.

Not all of this went through my mind before I answered the young woman’s question. But enough of it did that I decided to respond with something different than: “Because the Bible says so.” I told her that I thought God wanted us to live the very best kind of life—not an easy life, mind you, but the best kind of life. Jesus called it “life to the full.” And because I believe this, I also believe that sin is not just an arbitrary breaking of a religious rule (like pulling the tag off the underside of a sofa). It is an offense against God’s perfect holiness. And it is also a destructive jab against the *shalom* (peace) that God wants for our world. But in addition to these traditional answers, sin is also something else. Get this. *Sin is a choice to embrace an inferior existence.* It’s like drinking dirty water from polluted wells.⁶ It may not seem like it at the time, but it is—in every single instance. It’s like choosing a TV dinner over filet mignon. And because of this, when viewed rightly, God’s commands are actually conduits to deeper joy (more on this in later chapters).⁷

Of course, there are religious rules that God wants nothing to do with. There are extra add-on rules that have more in common with the sofa tag than the God of the Bible. There are legalists today, just as there were in Jesus’ time. And they need confronting. Yet as I read the story of creation, I am more convinced that obeying the

God seen in the Scriptures truly is the best way to live. I am more and more convinced that treating others like people instead of products is a more gratifying existence. Sacrifice is more fulfilling than selfishness, conservation is more satisfying than reckless consumption, and sexual fidelity is more satiating than a fleeting Vegas escapade.

I said this to the woman (though in fewer words) and then I asked her something else. I asked her if at some level she already sensed as much. Because at some level, all of us have a sense that what the crafty talking serpents have been telling us isn't quite working. For most of us, just like Adam and Eve, it doesn't take a booming voice from above to tell us that our choices haven't ended up the way we hoped. I find it interesting that the first humans hid themselves before God ever came searching for them. We do the same. We have our own fig leaves. We hide behind long work days, full schedules, and the drone of a television. We hide too.

We fill our days with activity and our nights with distraction. And we do it because we know as well as the first humans that our choices have damaged us. We know it; and we don't need a preacher, or a prophet, or a shrink to tell us. You believe in the fall because you've experienced it. It's not just a part of the biblical story; it's a part of yours too. And it hurts.

Even so, the British writer G. K. Chesterton reminds us that this painful portion of the story actually contains some good news hidden deep within it. He wrote, "The Fall is . . . the only encouraging view of Life. It holds . . . that we have misused a good world, and not merely

been entrapped into a bad one.”⁸ Rather than evil having been baked into our world from the beginning or, worse, baked into God, such evil is actually an intruder.

And that is not the only good news to be found in Genesis 3. In spite of humans raising their fists to God’s loving rule, there is mercy to be found within this text. While the serpent and the ground are cursed, the humans are not cursed (despite what you may have heard). They face consequences to be sure, but God never curses them. Go back and read it for yourself. Instead, God *clothes* his sinful people (see Genesis 3:21). And these garments have at least two meanings. First, they cover our shame—which is something God wants to do for you as well. And second, they symbolize that they have been made God’s heirs (his inheritors) once more. This is the symbolism that is present all throughout the Bible with the giving of a sacred garment to one’s child. God clothes Adam and Eve just as the father in Jesus’ famous parable does his prodigal son (see Luke 15:22). The clothes mean that you are still his beloved child. And while you may be ashamed of you, he is not.

But even that is not the end of the hope that comes seeping through in this dark chapter. In Genesis 3:15 we receive a promise that is sometimes called “the first gospel.” We are told that, one day, the “seed” (son) of the woman will crush the serpent’s head, even as the serpent strikes his heel. In this cryptic prophecy, some see a kind of double deathblow. The snake will die and so too the Son. Whatever could this mean? How could such a death bring victory?

After Eden: Genesis 3–11

Genesis 3–11 show how a missed opportunity spirals into a cycle of pain and violence. There are moments of joy. But even these are bittersweet. Adam and Eve give birth to sons and sibling rivalries. Their children multiply, but as they do, their memories of the garden fade. There are accomplishments. There is progress. People learn and grow. They raise livestock, build tools, instruments, and even cities. But despite their numbers and proximity, they often lack communion. Like some of us, they live together but alone. The cycle of selfishness crescendos.

It gets so bad at one point that God decides to start all over. In one of the most shockingly toned-down Sunday school stories of all time, the Creator judges the creation through the blunt instrument of a colossal flood. Yet even this judgment does not solve the problem. It is as if the tale of the flood is meant, in part, to demonstrate that even the best among us carry the fatal virus. Noah ends up drunk and naked in his tent—proving once again that misusing God’s good fruit (this time of the vine) has painful consequences. The pathogen is now a part of us, despite our corresponding potential (by God’s grace) for acts of beauty, brilliance, and compassion. This is what it means to be fallen. It is to have the dual status of having been made *from* and *for* communion, while also being pulled backward toward sin and shame and death. Apart from God, not one of us resists the pull.⁹

So humanity begins to fill the earth again, and once more the good God gets forgotten. They build a city and a tower with a high-tech wonder called “the brick”—not much bigger than a smartphone (remember that point).

Unfortunately, the building program, like many others, is merely a prideful effort “to make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). And, unfortunately, the high-tech wonder that was supposed to connect everyone across the world leaves us feeling more scattered and divided than ever. Thankfully, we all learned our lesson, though, and that never happened again with new technology.

With the collapse of this tower, called Babel, one begins to wonder if God won't just call it quits. We wonder if he won't just throw up his hands and say to hell with this whole project (literally), to hell with these humans and the way they hurt each other! But he doesn't. And the next chapter proves it. Because amid the dust of a fallen tower in a fallen world, a rescue operation is about to begin, and the story is just getting started.

Apples and Opportunities

Before skipping ahead, however, it is important to remember what the story of the fall has to do with us. In one sense, the talk of an enchanted garden, forbidden fruit, and a talking snake sounds about as real as Snow White and her dwarves. It sounds like a fantasy. Yet in another sense, it strikes us as the most familiar thing imaginable. The fall is as familiar as our own life story because as we look back on the pages of our lives, we can't help but remember our own apples and missed opportunities.

The relationship that went sour, the words we wish we never said, the divorce, that night that still haunts us. We can doubt the existence of the garden, the talking serpent, and the forbidden fruit. But at some level we

feel it to be true. As Paul the apostle once put it: all of us have sinned. We've all *fallen* (see Romans 3:23). It's universal. Just turn on the news.

The fall is not just a chapter in God's Story, it's a chapter in ours as well. But there is good news. Things don't end here. Because in the Scriptures snakes may talk, but not even talking serpents get the final say.

Engage the Story

Having read about the fall in God's Story, it's time now to engage with it yourself. Read the following passages this week, reflect upon their meaning, and be prepared to discuss them with others:

- Genesis 3–4
- Genesis 11:1–9
- Romans 5:12–21

Discuss the Story

1. Chapter 2 in God's Story (the one we call the fall) starts with a talking snake, but it really gets going when humanity talks back.
 - Read the conversation between Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3:1–7. Discuss what stands out to you about the way the conversation proceeds.
 - Do you see any connection between this first temptation and the temptations in your own life?

Take some time and look at the progression of emotions and desires within the text.

- Over the last few days or weeks, how were you tempted and what was the result?
2. People sometimes scoff at Christianity for the idea that the results of this first sin could be so cataclysmic. With this criticism in mind, discuss the following questions:
 - Has the story of the fall ever seemed strange or ridiculous to you? How so?
 - Have you ever seen the command about the forbidden fruit as a pointless bit of religious legalism? Why or why not?
 - In what way does God's command (about ruling over the animals and rejecting the forbidden fruit) actually create an occasion for people to judge evil at the beginning of the story? In other words, how was the proverbial apple really an opportunity?
 3. Recall the woman who asked the questions, "Why does sin bother God?" In other words, why does God care if we do certain things, and why does God say that some things are off limits?
 - How would you answer this young woman's question?
 - What about when Jesus says he wants us to live "life to the full"?
 4. Read the following statement and discuss the questions below:

For most of us, just like Adam and Eve, it doesn't take a booming voice from above to tell us that our choices haven't ended up the way we hoped. The first humans hid themselves before God ever came searching for them. We do the same. We hide behind fig leaves and long work days, behind the constant drone of a television, or the glow of a smartphone. We fill our days with activity and our nights with distraction. Sometimes, we do it because we know as well as the first humans that our choices have damaged the relationships that matter most—and we don't need a preacher, or a prophet, or a shrink to tell us that.

We believe in the fall because we've experienced it. It's not just a part of God's Story; it's a part of our story too.

- Does this statement ring true to you? How so?
 - When in your own life have you made a choice that made you want to hide from God as Adam and Eve did? If the story is appropriate for group discussion, discuss what this experience was like, and what it taught you.
 - On the flip side, in what ways have you experienced the effects of the fall apart from a poor choice that you made yourself? In other words, how does sin hurt us even when we are not the ones at fault?
5. Read Romans 3:23–24 aloud together from your Bibles.

In this passage, Paul talks about the way in which we are all sinful. We have all fallen short of God's will for our lives. Yet there is hope. Paul also references

the way in which God has begun to reverse the curse through Jesus. In light of the forgiveness offered through Christ, take a moment to reflect on the following questions together, or silently through a time of repentance and/or confession.

- Over the past days and weeks, how have the effects of the fall wormed their way into my own life?
 - In what ways have I sensed the brokenness of this world?
 - In the past weeks or months, how have I repeated the sin of Adam and Eve by distrusting God and seeking selfish interests over the good of others?
 - Knowing that God calls me to true repentance, how can I make amends with people I have hurt, even if it is uncomfortable?
6. Although the fall is a painful chapter in God's plotline, in the Scriptures snakes may talk, but not even talking serpents get the final say.
- Spend a moment thanking God that his grace gets the final say in our lives. How have you experienced that grace and redemption in spite of sin and brokenness?