

# How to use Explore

## Issue 103

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

## It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

## We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1  
Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2  
Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3  
Ask God to help you understand

4  
Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5  
Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6  
Pray about what you have read

The logo for The Good Book Company features a stylized bird or wing graphic above the text "the goodbook" in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with "COMPANY" in a smaller, uppercase font below it.

BIBLICAL | RELEVANT | ACCESSIBLE

# Welcome

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Company



Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like cooking or stone skipping. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because many Christians view the practice of daily Bible-reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy modern lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we gaze upon his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the one who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☑ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing at night or a mid-morning break might

suit you better. Whatever works for you is right for you.

☑ *Place:* Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (*see Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office, break room or some other quiet corner.

☑ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, you should try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, for the world and for others.

☑ *Share:* As the saying goes: *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group (links below) to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts*: better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything, because it's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.



Join the *Explore* Facebook discussion group: [facebook.com/groups/tgbc.explore](https://facebook.com/groups/tgbc.explore)



# GENESIS: Good to bad

We pick up the narrative in Genesis where we left off last time. The universe has been created, and God is resting. But now the tone, language and focus changes.

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## Read Genesis 2:4-7

- ❓ *We've already read about the creation of humanity in 1:26-28. So why do you think this second account is here?*
- ❓ *What are the differences? Can you explain them?*

Some people believe the account which begins in Genesis 2:4 is different from, contradictory with and even inferior to the account in 1:1 – 2:3. We can't agree if we respect Scripture as the word of God. Nevertheless, there are differences from chapter 1.

Genesis 1 could be described as an overture, while Genesis 2 is like individual musical “movements”. Genesis 1 gives us the big picture—all the themes are there, caught up in one grand and flowing account. But a massive amount is left unsaid, so Genesis 2 begins to give us a closer look.

## Waiting for Adam

- ❓ *What is said here about the plants?*
- ❓ *What is said about the water?*
- ❓ *How might you describe the earth before man's creation?*

Genesis 2 focuses on the human world (not the whole world, but that for which humankind would be responsible) and humankind's relationships with and within it. Creation is waiting for people to come along and the earth is unfruitful because there is “no one to work (literally “to serve”)

the ground”. As every gardener knows, you don't want rain when there is no one to mow the lawn! So there is water in this primitive earth (v 6), but it is not yet harnessed beneficially.

This is the situation in and for which the man is created. He is to serve the earth.

Significantly, therefore, he is formed “from the dust of the ground” (ground' = *adamah* in Hebrew, from which comes ‘Adam’ i.e. “man”). Although man has humble origins, his life comes directly from God, who breathes “living breath” into him.

### TIME OUT

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## Read John 20:22

- ❓ *What is the significance of Jesus' action here?*
- ❓ *What would you say to someone who believes that we are “nothing but” chemicals and animal instincts?*

## Pray

*“Dust to dust, ashes to ashes...”*

Remember who you are—fearfully and wonderfully made, and yet weak and frail—and praise your Creator.



# For God's glory

*Today's psalm is a profound reflection on facing crushing, numbing disaster. How does Asaph, the writer, deal with what seems to be God abandoning them to their enemies?*

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## A desolate scene

### Read Psalm 79:1-4

- ❓ *What do God's enemies see as they observe the situation in Judah?*

The psalm opens with scenes of devastation and desolation after foreign powers have attacked and destroyed Jerusalem. The piles of dead bodies mean that the temple itself is defiled. It is God's servants, his people, who have been slaughtered. The neighbouring nations look on with contempt and they mock. The implication is that God is mocked by this too (v 1-4).

## A desperate cry

### Read Psalm 79:5-13

- ❓ *What does Asaph think should motivate God to deliver his people?*

The plea goes up, "How long?" Is this permanent judgment? Has God turned against them for ever? Will he come to their rescue? Surely it should be the enemy who are punished because they do not know and do not worship God (v 4-7)?

The cause of judgment has been building up through a long history of stubborn rebellion (see Psalm 78) but Asaph begs that his generation are not judged for the sins of past generations. It's not that they are any more worthy of God's favour. However, his plea is that God will hear the cry of repentance from this generation. The plea is for

God to help, God to save—for forgiveness. *Why?* It is for God's own glory so that the nations cannot doubt his existence (Psalm 79:8-10a). The turning point he pleads for is that God will vindicate *himself* and defeat their enemies. Just as the nations have looked on and mocked God, now Israel will look on and praise God (v 10b-13).

Jerusalem would experience such desolation several times, including by the Babylonians in 581 BC. Christ himself would suffer the ultimate desolation of a brutal death at Calvary. His resurrection demonstrates God's vindication and victory.

## ▼ Apply

Grace means that the gospel isn't all about you and me. God's very purpose in sending Jesus to die and rise is so that he will be glorified. This is not about narcissism. Rather, if God himself is the one of greatest worth and glory, it is right that he should receive all the honour and praise. This means that even our evangelism is an act of worship. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, our reason for living is to *glorify him and enjoy him for ever*.

## ▲ Pray

Thank God for saving you. Pray that you will be given opportunities to speak about him today so that his name will be glorified.



# Eden

*The Garden of Eden is a powerful image for us to grapple with. It speaks of God's intentions for the world and for people. It speaks of a world of innocence and glory.*

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## Read Genesis 2:8-14

- ❓ *What do you think was the difference between the world in general at this point and the Garden of Eden?*
- ❓ *What do we learn about God's provision for mankind?*
- ❓ *And God's purpose for mankind?*

## Eden

The world was waiting to be filled and subdued. Note that at the beginning the world was not perfect (i.e. not complete). But a garden is (at least in intention) an ordered and cultivated place. So it was here that God caused attractive plants and fruitful trees to grow. These trees were not just “good for food” but “pleasing to the eye”. God provides beauty as well as nourishment.

The Garden of Eden was designed to show what the world was intended to become under the care of humanity.

## Pray

God is the first “artist” as well as being an architect and builder. He has created beauty as well as practicality. Think of a time and place when you have been stunned by the beauty he has made. Give praise to our awesome God for his creative brilliance.

## The two trees

- ❓ *Look at verse 9. What was unique about Eden?*
- ❓ *Look ahead at verses 15-17. For what other purpose was Eden created?*

Uniquely, two special trees grew at the centre of this garden—“the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. Eden was more than a pleasant location or a model of what man would achieve—it was a testing ground, where man's obedience to God would be tested and where issues of eternity would be decided.

- ❓ *Can you spot the parallel between the gardens of Eden and Gethsemane?*

Gethsemane was also a testing ground—where one man's obedience to God was tested to the farthest limits, and again, where issues of eternal life were decided.

## Beyond Eden

Verses 10-14 give us an idea of the landscape and features of God's world beyond Eden. The picture of abundant water and the details about mineral resources conjure up an image of a land ripe for exploration and enjoyment. At this stage, the future seems bright! God's good world awaits its human rulers.



# Good and evil

Most people today would say that personal fulfilment is impossible without complete autonomy—freedom from being ruled by someone else. Genesis 2 says different.

## Provision

### Read Genesis 2:15-17

- ❓ Look back at 1:26-28. What are the limits of our “rule” and our “likeness” to God?
- ❓ Does life in the garden look or feel like slavery or servitude? If not, what?

The man was put not only in a place prepared by God (Eden) but also in a relationship with God—under his rule. But a rule, wonderfully, like no other. Notice God’s two commands: *Eat anything you like... but not that*. Adam had abundant blessing from God but not moral autonomy. In Eden, Adam found God’s blessing under God’s rule. Eden is actually a picture of the kingdom of God—blessing under God’s rule is the present privilege and future destiny of Christians today.

## Purpose

- ❓ If you were able to go back and ask Adam what he thought of his job, what do you imagine his reply might be?

God’s blessing included purpose and meaning. Adam was to “work” or “keep” the garden (like a park-keeper in charge of a park). Our purpose is found in showing God’s likeness by ruling the creation under us.

## Prohibition

- ❓ What do you think is meant by “the knowledge of good and evil” (2:17)?

This term appears in Deuteronomy 1:39 (little children “do not yet know good from bad”) and in 1 Kings 3:9 (kings need to “distinguish between right and wrong”).

But Adam wasn’t a child—he surely knew there is “good and evil”. He had a capacity and (like kings) a *responsibility* to make right judgments, otherwise God could not have tested him. So here “the knowledge of good and evil” must mean something else. God’s prohibition was intended to show that Adam must not presume to decide between right and wrong independently of God. To do so would mean death (v 17), for it would be to separate from God, and actually oppose him.

## Apply

- ❓ People say, “You can’t tell me what to do”. Why are they passionate about this?

Although we are outside Eden, like Adam, we too must not presume to tell God what is right or wrong.

### Read Romans 12:2

Pray for obedience to what God’s word says is right and wrong.



# On my own

*In this perfect garden, there yet remains something that is not quite right. This outwardly simple narrative has surprising depths to it.*

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## All alone

### Read Genesis 2:18-20

- ❓ *What suddenly surprising statement appears in these verses (compare 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)?*
- ❓ *Who makes this statement?*

Seven times in Genesis 1 we read that God's creation is *good*. Now, for the first time, something is “not good”—specifically, it is “not good for the man to be alone”. Adam isn't complaining of loneliness. It is God, not Adam, who announces what is “not good”. There is a lack of completeness—something more is needed before mankind is finished and God can declare everything “very good” (1:31).

## The missing link

- ❓ *What is needed?*
- ❓ *What for, do you think?*

God also defines what is missing—Adam needs “a helper”. Elsewhere in Scripture, this refers to the help God provides in a crisis (Psalm 121:2) or help given by an ally in war (2 Kings 14:26). What Adam needs is not help with the housework but strengthening from someone “suitable for him”.

## Apply

- ❓ *Is being independent a strength or potential weakness, do you think?*

Remember, God designed us for togetherness.

## The X Factor

A sort of talent parade follows (Genesis 2:19).

- ❓ *What does Adam do here?*
- ❓ *How is he achieving the purpose for which he's been made (see yesterday's notes)?*
- ❓ *How does this demonstrate that there is “no suitable helper” (compare 1:28)?*

Animals have “strengths” that humans lack. Think of what elephants, horses or dogs can do that we can't. Yet none of these is the “suitable helper”—they can't supply the strengthening that Adam specifically needs.

Notice that God waits to see how Adam will name each creature. He gives Adam autonomy here because, by naming the animals, Adam is ruling them, as he was designed to. But the helper is to be with Adam in this (Genesis 1:28—God spoke to “them”).

## Pray

Thank God that he has not made us to be alone. Pray for those who strengthen you, and for people you know who are lonely.

- ❓ *How will you strengthen others today?*

# The woman

*Adam needs strengthening to be complete, but with what kind of strength? It's not physical strengthening, and it's not just company—it can't come from another man.*

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## Read Genesis 2:21-25

- ❓ *Why do you think some modern minds find verse 22 offensive?*
- ❓ *What do the woman's origins tell us about her identity (v 23)?*
- ❓ *How does Adam greet the woman, and what does it tell us about her and him?*

## Just a spare rib?

Is woman simply man's "spare rib"? That's how many today view the message of verse 22. But look at the welcome the man gives to the woman in verse 23. She is one with him, even though she is separate from him. She is of his very essence—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh—and yet she is not a man.

- ❓ *What outcome did God intend from his creation of the woman (v 24)?*

Verse 24 tells us that "that is why" (the same-but-different nature of the woman) people separate from their parents and unite in marriage. And in the rest of the Bible, sexual union is seen as recreating the one-flesh ideal of Adam and Eve, even when that union is itself far from ideal (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 6:16).

## ▼ Apply

Sex is good: God made it! Christians above all should regard sex and sexuality as a

wonderful and beautiful thing. It is a vital and beautiful way that God enables the very first commandment in the Bible ("be fruitful and increase in number", Genesis 1:28).

## United with Christ

But marriage is not the ultimate goal for humanity. In the New Testament the one-flesh union of marriage is a picture of the greater "one spirit" union of each believer with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:17). The creation of Eve points us to our ultimate dignity and the destination of redeemed humanity—union with Christ.

At this stage, nakedness and sexuality bring no shame (Genesis 2:25). Far from it! They are the very creation of God himself—the one who makes all things "good".

## ⬆️ Pray

Many see human marriage as the solution to our "aloneness", but the true solution is divine marriage (Revelation 19:9).

Pray for those (perhaps yourself) who feel loneliness and long for marriage—to be strengthened by God himself.

And pray for the marriages of people you know, that there would be a mutual strengthening, love and unity as God intended.





# The snake

*Revelation 12:9 confirms something that most of us assume but which is not actually explicit in today's reading.*

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## Read Genesis 3:1-5

### Crafty questions

- ❓ *How does the snake's question exaggerate God's prohibition? (Compare 3:1 with 2:16-17.)*
- ❓ *What idea about God would this begin to create in Eve's mind?*
- ❓ *How does the woman's answer (3:2-3) exaggerate God's prohibition?*

"You must not touch it" (3:3) is an addition to God's words in 2:17. Had God said more to Adam than we read in chapter 2? Had Adam tried to put his own "fence" around God's law in what he said to Eve? Or did Eve make this up herself? We do not know.

Whatever the answer, Eve has been drawn into a damaging dialogue with the enemy about God's will and his truth. Every time he speaks, the devil sows doubts and denials of God's words and character and truth into Eve's mind.

### ▼ Apply

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). Dialogue is usually the best approach to resolving moral issues. But sometimes it is better just to run for your life!

- ❓ *What situations do you think you would need to run from?*

### Deadly denials

- ❓ *What is the devil trying to suggest about God in Genesis 3:4-5?*

The snake moves from subtle suggestion to outright denial, "You will not certainly die" (v 4)—implying that God has lied. And from there it is only a small step to trashing God's motives, "God knows ... you will be like God" (v 5)—suggesting God wants to keep the best for himself, so he's not generous at all but selfish.

So far, humans have accepted God's limit on their moral autonomy—they know of good and evil, but have not "taken the fruit". They have accepted that God defines what is good and evil, and have trusted what he has communicated through his word. But now they are offered the opportunity, no longer to trust but to see for themselves (v 5).

The pattern of lies and subtle appeals to our selfish desires continue today as the key part of Satan's devices. He tells us that things are ours by right, that we will mature, and be properly grown up, that the truth will be revealed to us, if only we will...

### ▲ Pray

How is your trust in God's character and word? Pray for God's help in resisting the devil's crafty tactics.



# Heading for a fall

*It's sometimes hard to read a passage like this because of the wealth of cultural ideas that have been loaded onto it. It is the worst day in history...*

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## A delicious prospect

### Read Genesis 3:6-7

- ❓ *Find three reasons why eating the forbidden fruit must have seemed like a good idea.*
- ❓ *An essential component of sin is the suppression of the truth (Romans 1:18). What truth must Eve have suppressed to take this step?*

Eve fell into sin for a series of compelling reasons—the fruit of the tree appeared nourishing, attractive and could make you brainy (Genesis 3:6)! But her overwhelming desire for these things led her to “forget” that God had forbidden it, and accept the enemy’s slander of her Creator, who had shown her nothing other than lavish generosity and total love.

## A devastating outcome

- ❓ *Where was Adam all the time that Eve was being tempted?*
- ❓ *Look at what happened immediately after they ate the fruit. How did this both deliver and depart from what had been promised (v 5)?*

Not surprisingly, Eve gave some to her husband. She wanted him to have what she had got, and he was willing to take it, in spite of knowing what God had said. This story has been used in church history to represent women as the tempters, and responsible for

the fall. In fact, Adam appears to have been beside her during the whole conversation. His inaction to correct her thinking, challenge the snake, deny the lies about God, and to defend God’s honour, are equally, if not more culpable.

They were promised that the fruit would help them see clearly (v 5). And it did, but what they saw first were themselves in a new and unpleasant light. Whereas before their nakedness left them unashamed (2:25), now they felt shame and tried to cover up.

Shame is a complex emotion. In some societies it drives people to suicide. Recollections of shame last far longer than other memories, even though it is often caused by small things. We feel shame intensely because it connects with the depths of our being. Shame is also about the views of others—we are ashamed before them. Adam and Eve hid, not from God initially, but simply from view. Their attempts to cover themselves with leaves, however, were as pathetic as they are understandable.

## Pray

Are there things that you feel ashamed of? Christ bore our shame as well as our sin on the cross (see Hebrews 12:2).

There is no need to hide away from him. Show him your gratitude, right now...



# Restore us, O Lord

*How can we keep going in a world full of so much fear, suffering and sorrow? As we saw in the previous psalms, Asaph is no stranger to pain, disaster and doubt...*

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## A diet of tears

### Read Psalm 80

- ❓ *What imagery is used to describe God?*
- ❓ *How are God's people described?*
- ❓ *What is the repeated refrain through the psalm?*

The psalm opens with a plea for God to listen. We see his sovereign greatness and his loving kindness together. He is exalted above the cherubim, but draws close as the Shepherd of his people (v 1-2). Once again, the plea is “How long?” The people are derided and mocked. It is as though they are feeding on their own tears and suffering (v 4-6).

Israel is compared to a vine, transplanted from Egypt to Canaan by God. He drove out their enemies like a gardener clearing the ground of rocks and weeds. He expected it to be fruitful (v 9-11). Instead, the vine has been cut down and trampled. How can this have happened? The psalmist recognises that God's intervention is needed. The plea of repentance comes with a promise to turn back to God and trust him (v 12-18).

Much of this psalm is a lament. A lot of worship songs focus on praise and joy but there is a place for lament where we recognise the sorrow and suffering that sin causes. However, lament is turned into hope by the refrain that punctuates the psalm. That refrain is a plea that God will

restore us. Asaph prays that God will lift up our heads so we can see God's face again (v 3, 7, 19).

## Apply

When Jesus meets Bartimaeus in Jericho (Mark 10:46-52), he asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind beggar responds, “I want to see”. As Jesus healed his eyes, the first thing Bartimaeus would have seen is the face of his Saviour. Our greatest need is to see Jesus for who he is: his beauty, his glory, his majesty. We are promised that one day we will see him face to face (1 John 3:1-2). In the meantime, as we are reminded of the gospel, our gaze is lifted up from the sometimes fearful and distressing circumstances we find ourselves in and we learn to cling on to Christ.

## Pray

Tell God about the specific things that cause you distress. Punctuate your prayer with the refrain: “Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved”.

# Blame-storming

*The man and woman hide, filled with shame. And then they hear a rustling in the undergrowth. How will they react?*

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## Read Genesis 3:8-13

God could be heard going about the garden (v 8). Could this be God's Son before his incarnation? It's not entirely clear—the Hebrew could mean God's voice, and does not require that he was walking on foot. Yet clearly, this familiar sound meant Adam and Eve knew it was time to hide.

## Respect

- ❓ *Why do you think God asked: "Where are you?" (v 9)?*
- ❓ *Adam's answer (v 10) isn't the whole truth. What's the real reason for his fear?*

God isn't ignorant of Adam's whereabouts. Rather, he shows Adam respect by calling the man to come to him willingly. But the intimate relationship between them has been broken. Where there was once openness, there is now fear. Adam and Eve haven't only tried to cover themselves from view—they have tried to hide themselves from God. What's more, the cover-up is more than physical. Adam doesn't say: "I was afraid because I had disobeyed" but "because I was naked".

- ❓ *Why do you think God asked: "Who told you?" (v 11)?*

God already knows mankind has disobeyed—that's why they now see themselves shamefully and fear him.

Their nakedness was not a problem under God's rule until an outsider changed that perspective. God's question invites them to confess and repent.

## Blame

What comes instead is blame. Adam manages to blame simultaneously his wife and God—"the woman you put here with me" (v 12). Eve is slightly more honest: "The snake deceived me, and I ate" (v 13).

- ❓ *How has God's order and purpose for man, woman and animals been overturned?*

Man was made to rule the animals, yet he has listened to them. Eve was made to strengthen Adam, yet she has weakened him. Adam was told to obey God, yet he has followed his wife into sin.

## Apply

Don't blame others for your own disobedience to God. When you are tempted, God also provides a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Confess any disobedience to God and ask for the strength and courage to obey him in the future. And ask the Lord for reliable helpers around you to strengthen you against the devil's devious lies.



# The curse

*God blessed his creation three times (see Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3). Now we read of the opposite as God curses his creation, beginning with the serpent.*

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## The snake

### Read Genesis 3:14

- ❓ *How is the serpent's position in the animal kingdom affected by God's curse (see also v 1)?*

Whereas the serpent was once renowned for his superiority above the other animals, now he will be cursed “above” them, which means being reduced “below” them—crawling on his belly, where he will literally “eat dust”. People often want to know if snakes originally had legs! Biologists believe they did but Genesis draws a veil over this.

## The promise

### Read Genesis 3:15

- ❓ *The serpent successfully deceived Eve, but in what way is this a hollow success?*

Astonishingly, we move from curse to promise! It's true that the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning (see 2 Corinthians 11:3). But he didn't win *possession* of Eve. Instead, there is to be warfare between him and the woman, and in future generations. The mention of offspring does not mean Satan gives birth to future demons, but that the conflict is to be ongoing—not confined to Eden.

The outcome of the conflict will be the destruction of the serpent—though at substantial cost to his destroyer. The Hebrew

for the level of damage is the same for both, but the object of the damage is significantly different: *he will crush/strike your head; you will strike/crush his heel.*

Verse 15 is known as the “first gospel” because it would, of course, be fulfilled by Jesus. And through him, all Christians share that same victory...

## Apply

“They overcame [the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11).

Satan is a defeated enemy, but not yet a dead enemy. Therefore we must be “alert and of sober mind” (1 Peter 5:8).

Pray for faithfulness and effectiveness in the conflict with Satan and sin.



# The pain

*Just as there was a “chain of blame” moving down from the man, via the woman, to the serpent, so now there is a chain of curse moving in the other direction.*

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## Motherhood miseries

### Read Genesis 3:16

- ❓ *What two areas of a woman’s life are affected by God’s curse?*
- ❓ *Does this feel unfair to you? Why?*

The serpent has been told that Eve’s offspring would eventually defeat him. Now, however, Eve hears that producing offspring will be no easy matter. It will be characterised by severe pain—the word translated “pains” (NIV) can mean struggle or sorrow. So the miseries that were to accompany motherhood were not only physical ones (see Luke 2:35).

### Pray

Pray for pregnant women who you know, that God might keep them safe. And for mothers who are in sorrow over difficult or wayward children.

- ❓ *How might you help them today?*

## Husband hassles

- ❓ *What do you think “your desire will be for your husband” means (compare Genesis 4:7)?*

The wording of 3:16b exactly parallels the warning about sin given to Cain in 4:7, where God warns Cain that sin will control him if he doesn’t struggle against it. If the

example of sin and Cain is anything to go by, Eve’s desire for her husband would not be sexual but a struggle for control.

This certainly makes sense in the context—Eve had earlier sought to do what was “best” in her eyes for Adam, even though she should have known it was wrong. Perhaps this temptation to “improve” her man would be built into their relationship as a permanent reminder of what went wrong.

### Pray

Pray for understanding in your relationships with members of the opposite sex.

And pray for the redeemed marriages within your congregation, that they would resist the pull of these temptations and show the beautiful (and evangelistic!) qualities of marriage as it was meant to be...



# The dust

*Finally, God turns to Adam and puts his finger on his sin. The analysis of his wrongs, and what flows from them are truly devastating.*

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## Adam's sin

### Read Genesis 3:17-19

- ❓ *What specifically was Adam's sin?*
- ❓ *What is the curse he must bear?*

The NIV says: “Because you listened to your wife...” Elsewhere, however, the full phrase “listened to the voice of” means “obeyed” (see, for example, 22:18; 27:13). It's not that a man should never listen to a woman, but that Adam should not have done what Eve said when it went against what God had said. It is no excuse to say, “I was only obeying orders...”

## The cursed ground

- ❓ *Why did God curse the ground (see 2:15)?*

Eve was cursed in her specialist realm of childbearing, and Adam in his specialist realm of ground-keeping. Throughout the Old Testament, this idea of the cursed ground or land recurs (see Deuteronomy 24:4b; 29:27; Jeremiah 44:22).

Mankind depends on the land as well as ruling it, and the specific result of this curse is that food production now becomes a problem. The word for “painful toil” is the same as that used for “painful labour” in Genesis 3:16. Instead of freely available fruit to eat (2:16), the ground now produces thorns and thistles, and only after sweaty toil will there be any edible produce (3:19).

## ▼ Apply

Don't overvalue work. By its very nature it is “sweaty toil” that leads to frustration, as well as meaningful activity.

## Cursed into the ground

- ❓ *Why did God curse Adam to return to the ground (compare 2:17)?*
- ❓ *Why was this appropriate (compare 2:7)?*

God warned Adam that disobeying his command would bring death (2:17)—it wouldn't be instantaneous but it would be absolutely certain. Adam was formed from the ground—his very name means “earth”. Taken from humble beginnings, he now faces a humiliating end. The words “dust to dust, ashes to ashes” may sound dignified at a funeral service, but they really express a shocking fact. We are made to image God, but through sin, we become nothing but floor sweepings.

## ▲ Pray

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:47, 49

Praise God for his great salvation, which raises us from the dust of death to a glorious hope of a secure future with Christ.



# Life goes on

*The Anglican funeral service reminds us that “in the midst of life we are in death”—but it’s also true that, under God, in the midst of death we can experience life.*

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## Continuation

### Read Genesis 3:20-24

- ❓ *What sign of hope can be found in Adam’s choice of name for his wife?*
- ❓ *And what greater hope will this lead to (see 3:15 and Galatians 4:4)?*

Eve is to be “the mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20). Life will go on—a remarkable affirmation of hope amid the curses and tears of Genesis 3. What’s more, the one who will bring eternal life has already been promised—and will be “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4).

## Covering

- ❓ *How does God’s covering for Adam and Eve compare with theirs (Genesis 3:7)?*
- ❓ *What does God’s covering cost?*

God himself now shows the way ahead by providing animal skins for the man and the woman. Clearly, their own attempts at covering themselves up were a pathetic failure. Now they have an effective covering—but at a cost, for these garments are the skins of dead animals (v 21). Atonement—a word whose root itself means “covering”—will only ever come with the taking of life.

## Cut off

- ❓ *What’s the purpose of the cherubim and flaming sword (v 24)?*

By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve have become “like God”—they have decided what’s good and evil—challenging God’s right to decide and separating themselves from him. They mustn’t become immortal like God as well. This means separation from the source of life in the garden.

The cherubim and the flaming sword make it clear that there’s no way back. In the future, the tree of life will be found somewhere else entirely—in Christ, who, “himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

## Pray

Fallen nature constantly reminds us that life depends on the death of others.

### Read Hebrews 9:22

Thank God that the outcome of Genesis 1–3 is not death and dust but the cross and glory.





# Creation and fall

*Today we'll take the opportunity to review the first three chapters of Genesis and think in more depth about what we have seen.*

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What exactly are we reading in these first three chapters of Genesis? Some would reject them as mythological creation stories—similar to (and as silly as) the many stories circulating in the ancient world about how the world came to be. But anyone who has read any of those, will instantly realise that what we have here is far more profound, powerful and poignant than, for example, stories about how humans came from the armpits of an ice giant (Norse); that we are made out of corn (Mayan); or that creation came into being when a giant god called Bumba fell ill and puked us all into existence (the Bushongo people of Congo).

## God and our world

### Read Genesis 1

- ❓ *How is God portrayed in Genesis 1?*
- ❓ *What is his relationship to creation?*
- ❓ *How do you think this fits, or doesn't fit, with scientific views on the origins of the universe?*

Genesis 1 is absolutely foundational to our thinking about who God is and why we are here. He crafts creation—and humanity—carefully, lovingly and intentionally; he delights over it. He is not absent from the world, but intimately involved with it. And it is purposeful, not accidental. The universe has meaning, and we have meaning and value, because we are created by God in his image.

### ▼ Apply

- ❓ *Why are these principles so important as a foundation for our understanding of:*
  - *human value and dignity?*
  - *the care of creation?*
  - *our approach to life as a whole?*

## The fall

- ❓ *How does the narrative of the fall in Genesis 2 and 3 shape our understanding of human nature now?*
- ❓ *Why is it so important to hold together the two key observations of these chapters—that the world is made good, but that it is also fallen?*

## Salvation

- ❓ *What signs are there in these three chapters that this is not the end of the story—that God has a plan for undoing the effects of the fall?*

### ▼ Apply

- ❓ *How would you respond to someone who says that Christians follow an irrelevant ancient myth?*

