

Marriage Story: Connecting your Marriage to God's Story

"The Brokenness of Marriage"

Session 2

I. Introduction

God's story begins with creation where we see life the way it ought to be. But the age of "ought" doesn't last. Genesis 3 introduces a cosmic shakeup to the "shalom" God created. Adam and Eve rebelled causing the disintegration of their relationship with God, with his creation, and with one another. This second movement of God's story, the historical account of Adam and Eve's rejection of God's benevolent rule, is known as the fall.

If Genesis 1-2 is marriage the way it ought to be, then Genesis 3 is marriage the way it is. We all know glimpses of Genesis 1-2, but we live day to day under the weight of Genesis 3. Today, our covenant companionship is tested at every turn. There are two scenes in this second chapter of God's story- the temptation and the fall/curse.

II. The Temptation

A. The Nature of temptation (Genesis 3:1-7)

1. Question God's Word

The serpent asks, "Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?" (Gen 3:1b).

"The tempter, who is Satan (Rev. 12:9), makes a bold move. He repositions the woman's angle of vision on all of reality by casting doubt on God. What the Serpent understood, and what we modern people tend not to see, is that everything in human existence, including marriage, is most deeply a God issue. If God is good, then we should trust him and obey him in everything. If God is not good, then we have to find our own way in everything. But either way, we cannot think piecemeal." (Ray Ortlund, Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel, p. 34)

2. Add to God's Word

Eve foolishly enters the dialogue and responds by also misrepresenting God's word. She rightly affirms that they may freely eat from all the trees of the garden but one; however, she adds her own restriction, "...neither shall you touch it, lest you die" (v.3b).

3. Deny God's Word

The serpent then denies God's word outright. "You will not surely die" (v. 4). Notice, the first place Satan challenges God's word is at the point of judgment.

4. Replace God's word

Next, Satan offers a substitute promise, a false hope. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 5). The heart of his deception is "you will be like God." And since the fall, humans have sought to rule their own lives, determining their own right and wrong.

The fall teaches us that the root of everything wrong in the world is a rejection of God's Word/authority. Since the fall, we have all wrestled with autonomy; we want to do what we want to do. This temptation assaults our marriages daily.

5. Reject God's word

They ate, and the results were devastating. This event is the single greatest tragedy in human history. Their eyes were opened, and they saw their sin and shame and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves to hide from God. The first couple rejected God's goodness. God gave them freedom to enjoy his indescribable abundance, yet they chose to flee his benevolent rule in order to rule their own lives.

B. Our story: The temptation to control

Often, we minimize our desire for control. We treat lusting for control like a mild personality flaw. "Well I'm just a controlling person," we say. But isn't control the motive behind Adam and Eve grasping for God's throne? Satan's temptation was "you will be like God." But rather than submit to God's way, they wanted their own way. Sound familiar?

"In my brokenness, I feel the pull to worship me. I hear the whispered lie that Adam and Eve first heard: 'Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God' (Gen. 3:5). Why serve? You rule! You have everything you need to be your own god. Every day is a trip to that orchard; every day the snake is waiting. I must face this same choice: Will I worship God, and find my true place in this universe, the perfect place he has arranged for me? Or will I worship me and decide I can somehow come up with a better life

than the Creator of all could design?" (Kyle Idleman, Gods At War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart, p. 232)

III. The Fall

God approaches the couple in judgment, but his arrival has all the marks of mercy. He asks a question to give opportunity for the couple to confess. God asks, "Where are you?" (v.9b). Immediately, we are confronted with the effects of the fall- hiding and blaming.

A. Hiding

In v. 10, Adam confesses that upon hearing God's approach he hid himself because he was naked and afraid. Sin thrives in the darkness. Sin flourishes in hiding. Their transparent relationship with God was shattered, and now they seek to cover their sin with fig leaves.

With their fig leaves, they also hide from one another. The last verse before the introduction of the serpent into the garden reads, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (2:24)

The couple no longer experiences the blessing of vulnerability. Now, vulnerability is a risk. Covered in shame, it now feels uncomfortable to be known for who they are. Because of the fall, we all default to hiding before God and before our spouse. We think, "If she really knew me, she would judge me, become angry with me, or reject me." Knowledge is power. "If he knows this about me, it may come back to hurt me," she imagines. So we cover ourselves to manage our image, even with our own spouses.

B. Blaming

God pursues Adam (v.9) because he bears a unique responsibility in the marriage. Adam was commissioned to work and keep garden. In his protective role as keeper of the garden, he should have destroyed talking snakes rather than passively standing by while his wife carried on a dialogue with Satan. When God asks if he has eaten of the tree, Adam's immediate impulse is to blame Eve (v. 12). In turn, Eve blames the serpent. And so it begins.

C. Our story: The blame game

We are tempted to laugh at Adam and Eve's passing the blame because it is absurd. And yet, don't we see our own reflection in their excuses? If my husband would lead better, I'd be happy to be more supportive, encouraging, loving, and gracious. But he's not doing his job. "It's the

husband you gave me, Lord.” If my wife would show some appreciation and respect and support, I’d be happy to talk but everything always ends up my fault. I try to lead but she just criticizes me. “Lord, it’s the wife you gave me.”

Seeing ourselves in this story is essential, for we realize we can’t hide. God knows. Later in God’s story, we learn that once we are in Christ, we have nothing to hide. We are forgiven, accepted, and welcomed before God. Redemption in Christ frees us to be real with one another. The gospel is the antidote to our instinctive impulses to hide and to blame. More to come on that.

IV. The Curse

A. The serpent (Genesis 3:14-15)

B. The woman (Genesis 3:16)

1. Pain in bringing forth children

Delivering children will be painful but briefly so. The language likely indicates far more suffering for Eve and all mothers to come. For some women, the curse means it will be hard to become a mother. All mothers will know pain as they raise children. Consider Eve. In the next chapter one of her sons will murder the other, and the murderer will be sentenced to a life of wandering.

Motherhood brings great joy, but it may also bring profound suffering. Many mothers know the anguish of losing a child or losing relationship with a teenager or an adult child. Other mothers ache for a child that suffers physically or mentally. Some mothers know grief over a child who has walked away from the Lord. After the fall, motherhood involves pain, and this often brings challenges to the marriage as well.

2. Rivalry with her husband

The fall distorts Eve’s relationship with Adam. She was created to be his companion, his helper. But now her desire will be “contrary” to her husband. In place of harmonious complementarity, she will experience rivalry. She will challenge his leadership. He will be tempted to be domineering or passive, and she will be tempted to dominate him or to lead in his place.

“Here, then, is the ultimate reason for our broken promises, shouting matches, resentments, abuses, separations, divorces, and all marital tragedies: God gave us up to the powers of our own sinful confusion. These sad words he declared in Genesis 3:16 predict our cycle of dysfunction whenever a wife steps in to fill the void created by her husband’s failure to care and provide, with the husband resenting his wife for the implied criticism of his own passivity and silently or aggressively punishing her for it. Each one aggravates the weakness of the other, as they spiral down into mutual incomprehension, bitterness, alienation. Both defiant feminism and arrogant patriarchy fall short of the glory of Eden.” (Ortlund, p.49)

C. The man (Genesis 3:17-19)

The curse against Adam focuses on his identity as well- his calling to work and keep the garden. Exercising dominion over the creation will no longer be trouble-free. Work remains a blessing, but now it will be difficult. Because he obeyed Eve rather than protected her, Adam will now contend with thorns and thistles in the garden and eat by the sweat of his brow. Because of the curse, Adam will have physical limitations, weakness, and sin to battle as he seeks to be faithful in his callings. Work will tend to come between him and his wife as his capacities are now limited while his responsibilities remain varied.

D. Our Story: Life under the curse

Covenant companionship no longer comes naturally. Intimacy and vulnerability are strained. Rivalry is our reality. Death is now part of our marriage story, and it invades our lives with weakness, fatigue, illness, grief, hormonal challenges, emotional instability, and a thousand other trials and limitations. The companionship of the garden is now tainted by our sin- pride, selfishness, anger, unforgiveness, laziness, jealousy, fear of man, bitterness, lust, greed, and on and on. We need to acknowledge the brokenness of marriage because only when we acknowledge that we are sinners and sufferers can we access hope in the power of the gospel. In terms of the storyline, we must own what “is” before we experience what “can be.”

Four common hazards to our covenant of companionship under the curse:

1. Domineering or passive husbands

2. Unforgiveness or bitterness

3. Other relationships

“In real terms, two selfish me’s start learning to think like one unified us, building a new life together with one total everything: one story, one purpose, one reputation, one bed, one suffering, one budget, one family, and so forth. Marriage removes all barriers and replaces them with a comprehensive oneness. It is this all-encompassing unity that sets marriage apart as marriage, more profound than even the most intense friendship.” (Ortlund, p. 31)

“Is your marriage partner the best friend in your life, or has your dream of this kind of companionship evaporated?” (Paul Tripp, What Did You Expect, p.145)

4. Parent-centered relationship

V. Hope in Judgment

During this dark chapter of God’s story, there is hope. We will cover that in the next session, but we must note the thread of hope which is woven into the fabric of God’s judgment in the garden.

A. God delays judgment.

B. God covers the couple.

C. God promises redemption.

“The most remarkable thing about marriage today is not that it can be troubled but that we still have this privilege at all. When God justly expelled us from the garden of Eden, he did not take this gift back. He let us keep his priceless gift, though we sometimes misuse it. But what every married couple needs to know is that their marriage is a remnant of Eden. This is why every marriage is worth working at, worth fighting for. A marriage filled with hope in God is nothing less than an afterglow of the garden of Eden, radiant with hope until perfection is finally restored.” (Ortlund, p. 54)

Discussion Questions

1. Read Genesis 2:24-25. From these verses Ray Ortlund describes God's design for marriage as "sacred and safe." After the fall, however, vulnerability is hard. What difficulties do you face in exposing your real self to your spouse? Ask your spouse how you can make it easier for her/him to be transparent.
2. Review the "Four hazards to our covenant companionship." Are any of these hazards hindering your companionship? If not, what other hazard can you identify? How should you address this hazard?
3. How are you currently playing "the blame game"? What is God calling you to take responsibility for in your marriage?
4. Why does confessing what "is" in your marriage prepare you to experience what "can be" in your marriage? In what ways does the gospel give you hope for your marriage?