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Facing Dependence

Facing Our Stuff: Finding Hope in Our Hurts, Hang-Ups and Habits

Genesis 3: 1-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Every year at this time of year I find myself seeking to better develop my skills in the art of deception. Some people refer to it as the sport of fishing. Fishing when it's all boiled down is the art of deception. It's seeking to convince a fish that it's in his best interest to consume what's at the end of my line. Of course viewing it from his point of view, that's a lie. It's funny, you go both the Old and New Testament and the Bible often uses a fishing metaphor to describe the strategy of the enemy. He is a deceiver and he is very skilled at the art of deception. Now like any good fisherman, he has many lures in his tackle box. But like any good fisherman, he has his favorite lure. His favorite lure is seeking to convince you that you are adequate to be your own god. It comes with a promise of freedom. That if you surrender to God, that's a life of rules and regulations, that's less. But if you choose to become your own god, to depend upon yourself, to run your own show, that certainly would be freedom. And certainly that would be more. Is that true?

Well, if you have a Bible turn with us to Genesis chapter 3. The strategy that the enemy uses is not new. It was his very first strategy, and by far his most popular. Genesis 3 is a text we refer to often, we referred to it just a couple of weeks ago. But every once in a while it is just good to go back to the text and kind of unpack what happened so long ago. In my opinion Genesis 2 is the best picture for what God has always wanted for people made in His image. Just a beautiful picture of what God has always wanted for you. God's never wanted this world the way it is, God's never wanted the pain and the suffering and the hatred and the violence. It was never God's idea, it wasn't His plan. What God wanted for all of us was Genesis 2. But Genesis 3 takes a different direction. Verse 1:

> **"Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"** (*NASB, Genesis 3:1)

The text refers to the serpent, and we would believe to be Satan himself, as being crafty. It's an interesting Hebrew word; it is sometimes used in a positive way, and sometimes in a negative way. It means to be shrewd; it means to be extremely clever. It is a way of saying that what's going to transpire in the next few verses is extremely clever in the art of deception. He says to the woman, "Indeed has God said." That Hebrew that's translated "indeed" is quite a difficult word to translate. As a matter of fact, we have no word or phrase in our English language that can capture it. Basically it carries an idea of scoffing, of mocking. There's a high level of questioning in this term. When you think about Adam and Eve you would have to say they literally had it all. So how do you tempt someone who has it all? For them life was perfect. And the answer is you get them to consider maybe there's still more. And so it begins with a questioning of the goodness of God. Maybe God isn't as good as you think He is. And maybe He isn't as generous as you think He is. Maybe He's actually restrictive and if you were to become your own god, there's still more out there. That's the basic idea of what's happening here. He completely misquotes God from Genesis 2:16-17 when he quotes God as saying, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden." Of course that's not what God said at all. God said you could eat freely from all the trees. There's just one that's off limits. God is a God of unbelievable yes and an occasional no. But the enemy turns it all

the way around. Now I don't think he thinks he's going to get away with this. I think the strategy is let's make God look *really* restrictive and Eve will bring it back. But she probably won't bring it all the way back. And that's exactly what happens.

Verse 2:

> **And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is not in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"** (vs. 2-3)

Now at first glance it would appear that Eve did a good job. Kind of puts that serpent in his place, she corrected his statement. But when we look closely, there are some things about her statement that trouble us. One of the very significant things to look for when you are interpreting a Hebrew narrative such as Genesis, is that you want to look for any time when something is re-quoted or restated. Whatever is re-quoted or restated then the thing you want to notice the most is what are the words that are added, what are the words that are left out? That would never be done for stylistic reasons and it would never be done by accident; always very calculated in order to help us understand the point of the text. So we look at that and the first thing we notice is what are the words that Eve added? 'God said that you shall not eat from the tree.' But Eve became the first legalist when she added, "You shall not eat from it or touch it." God didn't say that. Chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, you can read it for yourself. Already I think the point of the text is already in Eve's mind, God is becoming a little bit more restrictive. And it's reflected in her statement, "You can't eat from it and you can't touch it." You say, well that's not true. That's not really what she meant.

Well if you go up to the earlier part of her statement she says, "But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said that you shall not eat from it or touch it or you will die." In Chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, there's two words that God used that Eve left out. God said, "You could eat from ANY tree in the garden." Eve left out the word ANY. God said you can eat ANY tree freely. Eve left out the word FREELY. Eve left out the words that would make God seem more generous, and she added a phrase that made God seem more restrictive. I think that's the point of the text here. The enemy has caused her to question the goodness of God. Maybe He's not as generous as you think He is. And maybe God is actually more restrictive, which begins to develop the idea that maybe if I took charge of my own life, there's still more for me out there.

The other thing to note is that at the end of verse 3, when she says 'you shall not eat or touch it or you will die'; the consequences. Eve's statement is very mild compared to God's statement. Go back and look at it in Chapter 2. God said, "If you eat from it, you will surely die." In Hebrew language that is very strong. But when Eve came back and repeats it, her statement in the Hebrew is very mild. It's more like, "If you eat from it, you could, I mean possibly, I mean you know, you never know, but you could kind of maybe, die." Now I exaggerate a little bit. But clearly the two phrases are different. And I think that's part of the point as well. When we're beginning to doubt the goodness of God, when we're starting to think that God is more restrictive than generous, when we're beginning to consider that maybe if I took charge of my own life, that would be more not less. Part of that journey must include the minimizing of sin. I think that's a huge problem in our culture today. In many ways it's because we have lowered our view of the holiness of God, and we have raised our view of ourselves. So we bring God down, we bring ourselves up, and when we do that sin is not really that big of deal. When we recapture the holiness of God, we have a new sense of the offensiveness of our sin, and the consequences of those choices.

Dietrich Von Hopper, the great Lutheran pastor who was ultimately executed by the Nazi's in World War II reminded us of that years ago, that when we minimize sin, we cheapen grace. Now there's two basic phrases or umbrellas that I hear people using to somehow excuse sin. One of those phrases would be "we're all sinners." We say that as if somehow that makes it okay. Well we're all sinners. That statement should horrify us rather than become an excuse for our behavior. It is true we are all sinners; that should be a horrible thought. That doesn't make it okay. The other umbrella would be I think a complete misunderstanding of grace. Now we talk a lot about grace around here. Some of our critics say we talk about it way too much. I would suggest to you that that's not possible. But I do think it's possible to have a wrong definition of grace. When you begin to lower our view of the holiness of God, then we begin to misdefine grace and it becomes a shrug of the shoulders. Whatever sin it is, it's okay. It's not big deal, there's grace. That isn't grace. That's indifference. Grace is only meaningful when you understand the offensiveness of your sin. The only way for grace to be properly defined is to have a clear understanding of how offensive sin is in the nostrils of God. According to the text, all it takes is one sin, whatever it may be. That one sin is so offensive to God He bans you from His presence forever. And in God's economy of justice, that is fair.

Now people in our culture today, they don't like that. That doesn't seem fair. That seems very judgmental. What kind of God is this? Well, I want to tell you this morning that you are free to have your opinion, and if you want to disagree with that, you are free to do that. But I have to tell you something. Your opinion does not matter. Neither does mine. At the end of the day there's only one judge calling the shots. There's only opinion that matters on this subject. And it's not unclear in the text. One sin, and you're spiritually dead and banned from the presence of God forever. Why? Because it's that offensive to God. It's only when you recognize the offensiveness of your sin that you begin to realize the scandalous nature of grace. It's not a shrug of the shoulders. Remember the words of the great old hymn, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound." Where's it go? "That saved a wretch like me." John Newton clearly had understood in the eyes of God he was a sinful wretch. That's what made grace amazing. Anytime we're beginning to go down that path of becoming our own God, calling our own shots, running our own show, we begin to minimize sin which is exactly what's happening here.

Verse 4:

> **And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!" For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** (vs. 4-5)

You surely won't die, I mean c'mon. That's God trying to play the intimidation card. It's God trying to scare you. See that's the way God is, He's restrictive. He wants to be in charge and so He's trying to scare you. Well that's not really true. What's really true is if you so choose, you could be your own God. You could decide for yourself what's right and wrong. The idea of knowing good and evil doesn't mean knowing it experientially. God's never known evil experientially. Knowing in the sense of determining what's right and wrong. In our world today we refer to it as relativism. That every individual has the right to determine for himself or herself what's right and what's wrong. That's the offer that is made to Adam and Eve. You can be like God. You can decide what's right and wrong. And what's implied in that is you can take charge of your own life. And I'll tell you this if you do, it'll be better. It'll be better.

> **When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.** (vs. 6-7)

Genesis 2 ends with the statement, "They were both naked and unashamed." It's beautiful. But now suddenly we have the shame factor. And they know they've been had.

> **They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"** (vs. 8-9)

I love that question. The question was not, "What have you done?" which is about behavior. The question was "Where are you?" which is about relationships.

If you were with us on Easter weekend, we started this series with a look at the story of the prodigal son. The father of the prodigal son represents the heart of God. And that was his question, that was his longing. It wasn't so much about what his son had done, it was the longing to restore the relationship. I'm going to guess every morning he got up and thought, "Where are you, and when are you coming home?" It's exactly the question God asked, even though his sin which is offensive to God, what breaks His heart is the loss of relationship. That's what He wants.

> **He said I heard the sound of You in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself. And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."** (vs. 11-13)

There's no doubt Adam and Eve know they've been had. What they found on the other side of that decision was not more, it was less. It was not freedom, it was bondage. When I read through this part of the text, I find that three things that define their behavior to be three of the things that I see consistently defined, people choose to be their own god. People that chose to depend upon themselves rather than God. The first is hiding. The first thing they did was they hid. I find people who choose to become their own god, they're always hiding. They're hiding from other people that might find out, they're hiding from God. And of course we hide from God in lots of different ways. We hide from God, we hide from life, through our addiction, through alcohol, drugs, pornography, whatever it is. It's an escape for hiding because we can't face it. We looked in the mirror one day and realized, "You know I just read my resume, I'm not up to the task. I've decided to be my own god and I'm not adequate." So we escape with drugs and alcohol and pornography and whatever else. We hide behind careers, success and money and bank accounts. We become dependent on them. We hide intellectually. There's a lot of people who would say they have intellectual reasons why they don't believe in God, intellectual reasons why they won't surrender their life to Jesus. That's not an intellectual problem, there are answers to all those questions. It's just a way of hiding.

The second thing that I see in this text that seems to be so common is fear. Adam says, "We were afraid." People that choose to be their own god, that depend upon themselves are characterized by fear and anxiety. I heard the other day that there are now over 30 medications on the market to deal with fear and anxiety in our culture. We are a fear filled culture. I would tell you this, if you have made the choice to be your own god, to depend upon yourself to run your own life, you have every reason to be fearful. You should be anxious because you are totally inadequate for that job.

The third one I noticed in the text, and I see it in people all the time, is blame. People that are choosing to be their own god, it's never their fault. It's everybody else's fault. It's the boss's fault. It's the government's fault. It's this person's fault, it's that person's fault. But it's never their fault. It's part of the deal. God comes to Adam and says, "Adam what's the deal here?" And Adam says, "Well it's not really my fault. It's that woman." As a matter of fact, he came real close to saying, "God it's that woman YOU gave me. And if you wouldn't have given me a defective woman, this never would have happened." That's right on the border of saying that. People that choose to go down this path always blame everybody else. But it's never their fault. At least Eve had the courage to say "I've been had. I was deceived and I ate it."

> **The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field, on your belly will you go, and dust will you eat, all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.** (vs. 14-15)

We believe that 3:15 is the first hint that God is making a promise, that God will do what is necessary, that once again bring life out of death. He is in essence saying to the serpent, "If you think you won, you are sadly mistaken. You may have won round one, but in the end I will win." The promise is that this will come through the seed of a woman. That promise will be developed and ultimately fulfilled in the New Testament. There's a statement that the serpent will "bruise him on the heel," but he will crush his head.

Verse 16:

> **To the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. Then to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you saying, "You shall not eat from it, Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it, all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."** (vs.16-19)

Now we talked about this section a couple of weeks ago. Often it is referred to as the curse to the man and a curse to the woman. But I find that word "curse" nowhere in the text here. I don't think it is a curse. I think there's a curse to the serpent, and a curse to the ground. But I think to Adam and Eve, to men and women, there are consequences. But the consequences are not there as punishment. The consequences are there for a very specific purpose. In essence what is being said is to the woman in conception to childbirth and to man, in sustaining of life, there's going to be pain, and it's going to be hard. And we ask ourselves, you know why those consequences

highlighted. And I think the answer is because of the imagery, from the conception of life to the birth of life to the sustaining of life, God has said "I'm going to make it really hard." Why is he doing that, to punish us? No. I think it's out of His grace and mercy. He said, "Because you were people made in My image, the greatest temptation is to think you can be God. You can be your own savior. You can run your own show. And if you do that, you will miss the salvation that I've promised. So I'm going to make life really hard to knock this idea out of you. So that you will recognize that you're not God, and you do need a Savior or you have no hope to make it back to Genesis 2, what God has always wanted for people made in His image.

We mentioned earlier that people who choose to be their own god have a tendency to hide. One of the ways people hide all the time is in religion. Religion is a great place to hide. Religion gives the appearance that I am kind of interested in God, but all the while maintaining the ability to be my own God. Religion carries the idea that once a week I visit God at church. But the rest of the week I am in charge. The rest of the week I am running my own show. I am really still my own god. Religion also convinces us that we can be our own savior. All you have to do is keep these rules, all you have to do is jump through these hoops, all you have to do is these religious behaviors and you can be your own savior. Religion is a great place to hide. Religion is also a way of saying I can be my own god. I can save myself. This poor temptation to believe we can be our own god is what prevents people from receiving God's gift of salvation. Because God loves us, he uses the circumstances of life to bring us to our knees to say, "I need help." Adam and Eve believed, you see it in Verse 20:

> **Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.** (vs. 20-21)

Now the name Eve means "mother of the living." Adam and Eve had just heard that because of their sin, death now enters the picture. So why doesn't Adam name Eve "mother of the dying." And the answer is because Adam understood the promise that God made in Genesis 3:15. God made a promise that he would do what was necessary to once again bring life out of death. Adam's statement of faith was in naming Eve mother of the living. That was his way of saying, "I believe God, you tell the truth." It was a statement of faith.

It is followed in verse 21 with a reminder that it was necessary to shed the blood of these animals that cover the shame of their sin; which again is just beginning to create a picture of how God would provide this promised salvation. We only need to go as far as Genesis chapter 15 and we can clearly understand that this seed of a woman, meaning a man, who would shed His blood to cover our sin was none other than God in the flesh. Genesis 15 tells us that it would be God himself who would somehow become a man. And it would be His blood that would be shed in order to cover our sins, in order that we might know forgiveness and the relationship be restored. And of course we understand that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of this promise. It's why on the cross Jesus said 'today you shall be with me in Genesis chapter 2 - in paradise.' That's what the plan has always been. It's what God has always wanted for people made in His image. The lie of the enemy is that God is restrictive. He's not as good as you think He is. And if you were to take charge of your own life, if you were to be your own god and call your own shots, certainly that's freedom. Certainly that's more.

Temptation is always the invitation to meet a legitimate need through illegitimate means. It is what it always is. God has made you with legitimate needs and desires, and God has promised in His own way to fulfill those needs and desires. But if you don't really trust Him, if you don't really think He's good, if you don't really think He's going to come through, then you take matters into your own hands, and do it myself. Every time we give in to temptation, what we are ultimately saying is, "God I don't think you can be trusted on this one. I don't really think you are that good. I don't really think you are going to come through. So I think I better take matters into my own hands. Temptation to me is always to meet a legitimate need, but through illegitimate means. Every single one of us here this morning, we're either going to depend on God, or we're going to depend upon ourselves. It's really is no middle ground there. The offer the enemy makes is if you choose to be your own God and depend upon yourself, that means there's more. That's freedom. It's everything you are looking for. But when you get on the other side of that decision, you're going to know you've been had. Every person in this room has the God given opportunity to choose to be your own god, run your own show. But I got to tell you, if that's your choice, you have resigned yourself to be stuck in the enemy's web and there you will be destroyed.

Father, we are thankful this morning that you are a God of unimaginable grace, a God who just keeps pursuing us because you love us. You've made it possible through Jesus' death on the cross to have a broken relationship restored, Lord that we can be reconciled back to you, Lord that we can be with you forever in paradise, everything you ever wanted for us. Lord the one thing that is going to keep every person in this room from receiving this gift is this deceptive lie that we can do it ourselves. That if we take charge of our own lives that there will be more. Lord it is the very lie that will ultimately destroy us. So my prayer this morning is that we would surrender, that we would realize that more is always found in You, that you are the God of generosity, Lord that we would trust forgiveness and surrender our lives to You each day, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Facing Dependence

Facing our Stuff: Finding Hope in Our Hurts, Hang-Ups and Habits

Genesis 3:1-21

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Opening Discussion

1. What does it mean in practical terms for you to try to be your own god? Why do you think we struggle with the temptation to be our own gods?

2. When we seek to be our own god we do so because we think life will be better. Is that the case? Does becoming our own god lead to freedom or bondage? Explain.

3. Temptation is the invitation to seek to meet a legitimate need though illegitimate means. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick summary of Genesis 2. What has God always wanted for us as people made in His image?

2. Read Genesis 3:1-7. What are the lies the Serpent uses with Eve? How do you see those same lies deceiving people today?

3. The formula for disaster in Genesis 3:1-7 has these ingredients:
   - doubting the goodness of God by believing God is more restrictive than generous
   - believing we can be our own god and decide for ourselves what is right and wrong
   - minimizing the consequences of sin (under the umbrella of grace)

   How do you see this formula played out in our culture today?

4. Read Genesis 3:8-21. What was the consequence of Adam and Eve's choice? Was it truly more or less? Was it freedom or bondage? What two behaviors does the text identify in Adam and Eve as a result of their choice? How do you see those behaviors in our culture today?

5. What is God's promise stated in 3:15 and how do the consequences to the man and woman relate to the promise?

Application

1. Describe how Genesis 3:1-13 plays out in our culture today? How can we avoid the deception of the enemy?

2. How can we help others who are falling prey to the enemy's lies? What are the core issues?

3. What does it look like for you to be dependant daily upon God? How can you help one another experience the freedom of dependence on God and avoid the bondage of dependence on self?

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