

Genesis

Week 1

(Genesis 1:1-3:24)

Wheaton Chinese Alliance Church Youth Group Devotionals

We encourage you to use this as a resource with your consistent time spent with God. Our group wants to be dedicated to rooting ourselves in God's Word and growing in an intimate relationship with Him. It is our hope that we do this as a community so we highly encourage that you share what God has been teaching you with one another. These devotionals are written by brothers and sisters in our community as a reflection of what God has been teaching them. If you would desire to be part of this team to write devotional material, please talk to Michael Rau or Israella Chan.

Where shall we begin...the Beginning is a good place!!!!

Welcome to our journey together through the book of Genesis. It is our desire that we all spend time with God and this is designed to be a tool you can use to see how God wants to help you look into God's Word for teaching, guidance, and action. The great thing is that we hope to find time to spend with God and then see how that impacts all of us as we are reading the same things and hopefully it will allow us to discussion and grow together.

Now why Genesis? As we have been desiring to see God speak to us through our theme **Seeking Wholeness – Being Good News to the Broken**, I am going to quote our Doulos teaching ministry leader – “I am reminded of how we were whole as a race (of people) at the dawn of Creation, yet became broken at the Fall. Genesis is a story about God's people seeking wholeness by finding their identity in God and how they were called to be different from the nations around them. Likewise, their struggles and triumphs can be good warnings and reminders for us regarding the challenges we face in an ungodly world. And although the Israelites never see Jesus bring full restoration to our relationship with God, I believe that a study into the Old Testament will be both challenging and fulfilling. It will hopefully help the youth to understand that there are many things in this world that will stand between us and a healthy relationship with God, but as God's chosen people, as His Church, we are called to be different and to truly *be* Good News to all the people who may or may not have been exposed to the Gospel yet.”

When you read God's WORD, I want to challenge you especially as we are doing Genesis. Don't read it with the thought, I know this story. I heard it so many times during Sunday School. Please read it as if it is your first time reading it (and if it is, please don't worry about that either, we are excited for you to see more of God through it). So I am going to encourage you read it, then try reading it again out loud.

READ GENESIS 1:1- 2:3

As you read it, I hope you pay attention to the fact that God just spoke, and it came to be. God is the Creator and we must see the power in that. As God created the heavens and the earth, God declares them to be “good”. I am not asking you to memorize what was created on which day and or to focus on the meaning of what does a “day” mean, but focus on the fact that our mighty God created this world and it was “good”.

So notice the main repetition of the word “God” with the word “made” or “created”. “God” appears 35 times in the first 34 verses. The Scripture shows that He is the main focus of all. Nothing is made or created without Him.

There is an extremely vital lesson we learn from the design of the universe. If the universe was made up of random forces as we see commonly taught in our schools in Science class, then how we live is up to us. We can create our own “purpose” in life, and devise our own standards of “right” and “wrong”. But most that live with this viewpoint usually do not consistently live with these thoughts. It becomes quite clear in our lives that there is absolute “right” and “wrong”. Where does that idea come from, it comes from God who shows us that He is Absolute Truth and sets the standard of “right” and “wrong” in this world. Here is our challenge though, do we know God and are close to him that we have the right view of Him as being mighty and powerful and bigger than anything we can fathom? Also, am I searching for Him to teach me to live by His standards of what is “right” and “wrong”? What ways do I want to dedicate myself in doing those things (doing these devotions is a great start, by the way ☺)? Take some time to pray about these things.

Worship & Obey

Genesis 2:3-17

Have you ever looked at Google Maps and started with the satellite view of the United States, then kept zooming in until you got to your house? Its really fascinating; as you zoom in closer and closer, you see more and more detail. For some houses, you can even look at the street view and see a detailed picture of your home. You should try it out sometime. In Genesis 2, the author does the same thing Google Maps does. He zooms in on the Garden of Eden to give you a detailed picture not only of the garden, but God's interaction with man. Where chapter 1 was the zoomed out satellite big picture, Genesis 2 is the zoomed in and in high definition.

Read Genesis 2:3-17

The author of Genesis describes in extreme detail what God was doing when he planted the Garden at Eden¹. Every tree that was good for food and pleasing to the eye was there. At its center there was a river which meant this was a fertile planting ground. This was the perfect place to live. God provided for all of Adam's physical needs in the Garden. God really only gives Adam one command, which is to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good & Evil (We'll look at this in just a few days)

What I want to draw our attention to is Genesis 2:15. It says, "the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to **work it** and **keep it**." God gave Adam a job, a role in the place where He had put Adam. Pretty simple, to take care of the land. For each of us, God gives us a role in the places He puts us. For example, in your school you were given the task of studying. In your homes, you were given the role of submitting to your parents. Garden, school, work, home, seemingly different places and different roles. But what's interesting is that in the Hebrew, the words "work it" and "keep it" were not exclusively used in reference to gardening or farming. Instead, those two words were used most often in reference to the Levitical duties of the priests in the tabernacle. "Work" referred to the service in the tabernacle worship. "Keep" similarly referred to being faithful to all the duties God had given to the priests. Numbers 3:7 says, "They shall **keep guard** over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they **minister** [work] at the tabernacle.

So really what Adam's task boiled down to was God placed him in the garden not only to work it and keep it, but to **worship** and **obey**. So that's the question for us today. In the places God has placed us (our schools, our homes, wherever), God has given us a role, not only to be a student or a son/daughter, but to worship and obey Him. Are we living that out in our daily lives? Do we seek to worship and obey God at every moment in every place?

¹ For anyone confused by a comparison of Genesis 1 to 2 why God seems to create vegetation first and then man in Genesis 1 but does it in reverse order in Genesis 2. It is important to see that in Genesis 2, the author says God "planted" (2:8) a garden in Eden. The continuity between Genesis 1 & 2 remains. The accounts do not contradict each other.

Relational Wholeness

Read: Genesis 2: 18-24

Humans are social creatures. This shouldn't surprise you - psychological studies have pretty much validated the fact that we need each other. There is simply this something within us that desires companionship. It was something that was evident from the very beginning. Even though there were so many animals to name, Adam was still very much alone. These were, after all, not humans.

So God created Eve. And, as verse 23 shows, Adam was - shall we say - thrilled with her. Finally! Here is someone who he could truly identify with, walk with, do things together with, love! They could share meals together meaningfully (try doing that with a lion). In other words, Adam is no longer alone, having found a wholeness to his identity in Eve.

Unfortunately, as many of you might guess, sin has taken apart this wholeness. Thus, we are forced to find wholeness in all the wrong places. Sometimes, it gets pretty sickening. Take for example the story of a Japanese guy - who's name is Sal9000. Last year, he decided to pop the question to his girlfriend, Nene Anegasaki. What's strange is that Nene is a character from a Nintendo DS relationship game. Most of our relationships are probably not that ... ridiculous, shall we say. But do we find wholeness in other things that are not quite so ridiculous?

It would be awkward for me not to address the white elephant in the room while thinking about this passage: dating/marriage. It is natural to desire a close companionship - there's no shame in that. But it's hard to keep this desire from evolving into lust when we see our peers at school holding hands with their significant others. Whether or not the relationship is truly based on love is something I question. I can say that because in the Church fellowship is a web of mutual relationships that is based on *agape* love, the highest love that God calls us to embody in our lives!

The relationship between each of us at church is the same relationship that exists between brothers and sisters. There is no love closer than that. As my mom has often said when I was young whenever I argued with my brothers, "Henry, you must sacrifice for your brothers, because you all came into this world from my belly!" So likewise must love our brothers and sisters in Christ - because every first Sunday of the month, we observe communion, the powerful symbol of this relationship. Are we that kind of a Church? Do we truly regard each other as brothers and sisters? Or just close friends? Perhaps if we truly loved each other, we would not struggle to find a relational wholeness in the wrong places.

In talking to a few seminary folk, I've noticed that many churches are struggling with similar issues. Many Christians are finding wholeness in things that are fundamentally of this world. But we see the dangers of it in 1 John 2: 15-17. "If anyone loves the world," cautions John, "the love of the Father is not in him."

So in the next few minutes, just reflect on your life. Pause and put away your homework, take a shower, sit down, pause and reflect: is there something or even someone of this world that you're trying to pursue in order to have wholeness? I completely encourage you to maybe get together with your discipleship mentor and just talk about this. Is there something of this world you're going after instead of Jesus Christ? But go further - reflect on your church. Are we, as the youth group, truly pursuing wholeness? Do we take seriously the fact that we all are brothers and sisters, who are related to each other by Jesus Christ?

"O Lord, you have made Man so that he should delight to praise Thee, for Thou has made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until it comes to rest in Thee." Let these words of St. Augustine ring true in our lives.

Naked and Not Ashamed

Read Genesis 2:25-3:7

One of my truly favorite things about growing up, becoming less prudish, and getting my own apartment is the ability to walk around naked when no one else is at home. It's a very freeing experience that I highly recommend. It's all about being comfortable in your own skin; and, let's face it, you know God already knows what you look like because he made you that way. The one catch about it is that you have to be alone and have to be in private somewhere for this to ever really work out. One cannot simply go parading about in their birthday suit whenever they see fit, there are laws against that kind of thing aside from it being totally inappropriate.

Before the fall of man humanity had that comfortableness with themselves before others and before God. In the beginning, *"The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* (Gen 2:25) We see a wholeness of trust and honesty between both man and wife and between them and God. There's no need to hide anything, and there is completeness about their relationships that only God can provide. What I think is interesting to note is just how Satan tries to go about breaking this unity up. One of the first things he asks the woman is, *"Did God really say . . . ;* questing the goodness and truthfulness of God. Reflect for a moment on your own life, do you ever hear those questions being asked of you? Is God *really* good? Is God *really* faithful? Does God *really* have your best interests in mind? I hear it at least on an everyday basis. Satan plants the seed of doubt first, even before he begins to lie.

Another thing, let's take a look at this dialogue:

Satan: *"Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"* – No, only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But there's a definite try to make Eve doubt.

Woman: *"You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."* - Hold on Eve, God only said not to eat it. Best to defend God using God's words not your own.

Satan: *"You will not surely die."* - Well not if you touch it no, but if you eat it you're toast. Now there's the original doubt and the twisted lie.

Satan: *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* – Technically your eyes will be opened, but not to anything you would want to see, so lie. You will be like God. Sounds familiar, isn't that Satan's greatest downfall? I guess if it worked on him he figured he could try it out on others. Lie. Knowing good and evil. Ironically, man is oh so much better at knowing evil than we ever were at knowing good because of that choice. Lie.

Lots of deception. We can see it clearly, why couldn't Eve? Already the doubt had taken hold. In the moment that she took her eyes off God and his goodness, the lies surrounded her and she foundered, but then again, isn't it the same for us? John the apostle speaks of the sinful nature of man in 1John 2:16 *"For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."* Temptation is the same now as it was then. *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food (cravings of sinful man) and pleasing to the eye (lust of the eyes), and also desirable for gaining wisdom (boasting of what he has and does), she took some and ate it"*(Gen.3:6). Eve's sin was the same as ours today. Her temptation was the same temptation.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." Gen.3:7. I was just thinking about what it must've been like for Adam and Eve who were enjoying the fellowship of God, the completion of themselves, each other, and creation in Him, to suddenly feel the loss of it upon sinning. Us

without God was never what God created us or intended to be. We were never meant to be focused on the self, we were always created to be focused on God, fulfilled by God, and to be bearers of his image. So, there is this sense of profound loss, brokenness, and shame when we come to the realization of what we are without communion with God. We are naked in so much more than just a physical state of being, we ourselves are bare and utterly helpless. I think that this is the nakedness that Adam and Eve felt in those first moments of loss. It must've been a death in itself in some way, a terrible foreshadowing of the real eternal separation from God.

Notice Adam and Eve knowing the moment they sinned that they were utterly alone and naked tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. You feel the sense of everything being not as it should be and you want to fix it, but you make the second great mistake by presuming you are the type of person that can fix the problem. Adam and Eve perceiving that they are naked try to clothe themselves immediately creating another barrier –a physical barrier- between them and God, and also between each other. All the relationships become broken when we are not united in God. What are the barriers we put up in trying to restore our relationship with others and God on our own strength? However, all hope is still present. Jesus who is our great Healer and Reconciler created through himself the Shalom that reconciles us with God as we continue to grow and have faith in Him; and it *is* also reconciling us with each other. Reflect and ask God to work his reconciliation in your brokenness with Him and with others.

The Story is About God's Love

Read Genesis 3:8-24

I think that even by the time we reach the end of the third chapter of Genesis, we have already been taken on a roller coaster of emotions. Initially, we are in complete awe of how God created EVERYTHING in this humongous universe, from the smallest ant abdomen to the largest galaxies out there. Then, we share Adam and Eve's extreme joy when they are united by God to "worship and obey" Him together. The intimacy they experience with God is something we Christians today can only dream of. And then (Darth Vader music)...something we now call "The Fall" occurs. Adam and Eve, so lovingly created by God to live in such a perfect environment (It's the Garden of Eden for crying out loud. It's the absolutely perfect place for humans to live and flourish), enjoying such deep intimacy with God – BOOM! They sin. Adam and Eve have practically – no, they do have – everything they could *ever* possibly want; yet, they still choose to disobey God and they sever humankind's once-whole relationship with God.

Wow. My reaction to this story is sometimes anger. I look at all that Adam and Eve had, all that God had given to them, and I am overwhelmingly confused, mad, and shocked at how our ancestors could have given up all that good stuff just so they could eat a little fruit off the *only* tree that God commanded them not to eat off of. One tree, that's all that God ever told them to stay away from. Everything else, go right on ahead. But no, do not eat from that tree. Yet, what do Adam and Eve do? Eat from that *one* tree God tells them *not* to eat from. And the argument could be made the serpent did tempt Eve to eat from the tree initially, who gave it to Adam to eat, who blah blah blah. The point is Adam and Eve chose to consciously disobey God and reject everything that He had provided for them.

Yet, each time I continue to think more about the situation and my own life, I begin to see times in my own life where I have sinned and consciously rebelled against God, at times, even sinning deliberately against God even when I know, not too deep down, that I should not be doing what I am doing...while I'm sinning against God. And when I'm reminded of those times, I realize that I have absolutely no right to be mad at Adam and Eve for what they did because, frankly, who am I to judge them, a fellow sinner? And, at this, I begin to understand the deep sadness and fear that must have gripped their hearts the moment they bit into the forbidden fruit. In fact, Adam and Eve actually physically try to hide from God when they *"heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden."*

I remember going on a vacation to Oregon the summer after Kindergarten. We stayed at a nice hotel/apartment called Boulders on the River. It was a really nice place and, best of all (even though I didn't even play volleyball at the age of 6), there was a sand volleyball court behind the place we were staying, in the middle of a big grass field. One day, my two sisters and I went out to that sand court to play with the sand and probably try to make sand castles or something. We also decided that it was a good idea to bring my mom's umbrella/parasol outside because we thought it would be a good idea to all try to hide underneath it while playing with the sand. I also remember distinctly my mom and dad both telling us: "make sure you don't break it." That's the one command they gave us. Of course, we reassured them that we wouldn't and hurried outside to play. Luckily for us, there happened to be a bunch of people playing volleyball on the sand court that day and, lo and behold, the ball smashed into my mom's umbrella that we were hiding underneath and, yeah, broke it. I don't remember what exactly went through my mind the instant I realized what had happened, but I can imagine it was similar to how Adam and Eve felt when they too broke the single command given to them: shock, fear, anxiety. After we realized the state of the umbrella, my sisters and I quietly crept back into the house, tried to fix up the umbrella as

best as we could, put it away, and hid from my parents. I can imagine how terrible I must have felt and how the worry tore at my heart that afternoon. After all, it was the *one thing* my parents told us not to do, and we did exactly that. We could have just as easily played somewhere else, but we consciously chose to stay where we were, in a very likely position for a ball to come in and break my mom's umbrella. Later that afternoon, I remember my dad calling out to the three of us, similar to how God called out to Adam and Eve in the garden, asking us where we were. We came out from hiding in our rooms and when my dad asked about the umbrella, there was absolutely no hiding the truth.

Now back to Adam and Eve. At this point in their story, God has just confronted them about their sin, asking them, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" Not that God needs their answer to know the truth. But our God is also a just God whose absolute abhorrence of sin demands payment for sin. And thus, Adam and Eve are given difficulty working the ground and pain in childbirth respectively as well as banished from the Garden of Eden and, more importantly, God's presence.

I think that it's important to note that, despite our sins and the extreme grief that it causes God, just as my father was probably grieved (on a smaller scale) that we couldn't come to him and admit our faults, God still loves us. No matter what we do to disrupt God's original intent, He still has our best interests in mind. I want to highlight the last part of today's passage: *"And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever—' therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken."*

I think both of these gestures, clothing Adam and Eve, and driving them out of the Garden of Eden are significant in showing God's desire and love for us. In fact, the first thing God does after he declares his punishment on humans is to clothe them. This is still a very intimate action; it brings to my mind the image of a mother lovingly dressing her young child for his/her first day of school. It also shows that God, even right after the first human sin, still loves us! And that is way cool. Also, regarding how driving humans from the garden is reflective of love, here is a commentary from my ESV Bible regarding verses 22-24:

*"The couple is expelled **from the garden**. God begins a sentence in v. 22 and breaks it off without finishing it – for the man to **live forever** (in his sinful condition) is an unbearable thought, and God must waste no time in preventing it ('therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden')."*

Now what does all this mean for us today though? I think that we've established that we are in no position to judge Adam and Eve for their downfall, but I do not believe that is the true purpose of this passage or of Genesis as a whole. In fact, I believe that the story is primarily about God's love despite our sin and not simply about our sin itself. For even amidst our sin and the mandatory consequences for sin, God's love shines through and is the climax and finale of the story of our lives.

So how have you, even with all the sin in your life, been able to see God's love shown by you, through you, or to you? Really reflect on this, because I know from firsthand experience that it is extraordinarily easy to get distracted from what is the true story of all of creation: that is, God's love.