



Discussion Guide

Brokenness: Genesis 3.1-24

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Describe how you respond when something you own breaks. Can you explain why you respond in this way?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *Broken.* This one word pretty much describes the world as we know it. Deep down we know that this world is not the way it is supposed to be. Something is wrong. We just can't seem to put our finger on it. The brokenness of the world brings out a different response in each of us. Some of us have the desire to fix it. We roll up our sleeves and become crusaders for right. Others of us react with revulsion. We are so offended by what we see that all we want to do is withdraw. Still others of us throw up our hands in dismay and surrender. We can do nothing but endure. The world and its brokenness is simply a footnote in a long list of things outside our control. Are there any other responses? Perhaps. What about hope? What would it take to have hope? What would have to happen for a people who live in a broken world to respond with hope? Hope, not that we can fix it but hope that the brokenness can be fixed.

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Genesis 3.1-24. (You might consider reading Genesis 2 as a group for context.)
- What steps toward brokenness do you see in the text? (Tip: Look down through the text to draw out all the possible ideas.)
- What role do mistrust and doubt play in these steps?
- What are the actions of God as He addresses brokenness? What do these actions say to you about God's character? In what ways, if any, might God's revealed character provide hope?
- How, if at all, does this text explain the world as we experience it today?
- Do you think that mistrust and doubt still play a role in brokenness today? Can you elaborate?
- When you consider your own life, do you see mistrust and doubt influencing your actions? In what ways?
- Do you think there is any hope for fixing the brokenness of the world? The brokenness in you? Can you elaborate? (Leader tip: Consider the character of God revealed in the text.)
- What would it take for you to rely on this hope?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group Prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)



Group Notes

Brokenness: Discussion Guide

Genesis 3.1-24

Context and Background

Temptation: Temptation arises when one encounters a narrative that competes with God's own narrative about the proper path to life. As the author and creator of life, God designed life to be lived a certain way. We encounter temptation when we face choices to depart from the way in which God designed life to be lived. The presence of temptation does not indicate the presence of evil, nor does it imply that one has engaged in an evil act. Temptation is a reality that comes with God's gift of freedom. As creatures bearing God's image, people have been created to exercise dominion/rule. Inherent in this role is the need and opportunity to make choices, choices rooted in freedom. With the freedom to choose comes the freedom to choose something other than God or His will. Thus the reality of the statement, "In every Eden there is a bit of Hell." However, having the ability to choose something other than God and His will, even the recognition of these choices—temptation—is not inherently evil. To face temptation is not to err, but rather to follow temptation leads one into error.

Sin: The presence of sin is prominent from the earliest chapters of Scripture. Though not named specifically, the nature and origin of sin is adequately defined in Genesis 3. Sin comes when one chooses to act upon temptation, though not when one is tempted. Temptation is the recognition that one has the freedom to choose a path for life other than the path God has designed for life. Acting upon this temptation, willfully choosing to depart from God's will is sin. Sin is therefore a breach of trust between people and their creator, a move toward autonomy on the part of the creature. It is birthed in the belief that a life autonomous from God is better than a life under the reign of God. In this way, sin can consist of both one's actions and one's thoughts. Because sin is the willful choice to be autonomous from God, the result of sin is separation from God. Such a separation results in the removal of oneself from the life and blessing of God. According to Scripture, the sin of the first people has resulted in the reality that now sin is inherent to life as all people experience it. People sin and experience the full effect of sin (Romans 1.18-32, 3.9-20; 1 John 1.8). Sin has become part of the human condition. While a measure of debate has been had over the means by which sin has become entrenched in the human condition, it is reasonable to say that sin has found a foothold as each person has been born into the new reality created by the first sin. Prior to the willing choice to be autonomous, people existed in a state of connection with God. After their disobedience, people were separated from God, thus their life was marked by the consequence of sin. Every person born afterwards is born into this separated state, not because of what they have done but because life itself was forever changed. Thus people are born "in a sinful state," that is, they are born into the full consequences of sin, separation from God. In this state, one will inherently make choices that lead to further autonomy from God thus continuing sin's tragic effects until its cycle is somehow broken by external means.

Curse: Cursing was a part of ancient cultures. In its simplest meaning, to curse something is to declare it anathema, to separate or marginalize it. In the biblical text, cursing is used in connection with God as a means of disciplining those who have placed themselves outside of a relationship of obedience to God. When used in this way, God separates Himself from the object or person that is cursed. Thus, cursing is rooted in God's holiness. It is in this way that cursing is used in Genesis 3. God pronounces a curse, separates Himself because of the willful choice of autonomy made by the first people (sin). However, it is important to note that while God curses the serpent and the ground, God does not curse people (Genesis 3.14-15, 17-19). God removes His blessing from the serpent and the ground, but not from people. People have cursed themselves by willfully separating themselves from God. That God does not solidify this separation with His own curse indicates a path back to intimacy with God. However, this path will be one that God Himself will have to make.

The Text

Too great a temptation (Genesis 3.1-7): The people created by God live for some time in the Garden of Eden experiencing a life of peace, purpose, and provision as God intended. At some point they face the inherent reality that the freedom they have as beings bearing God's image holds the prospect of freely choosing to reject God. This prospect comes in the form of temptation from a serpent. The serpent blatantly twists God's own words of provision and instruction to focus on God's prohibition rather than God's provision (Genesis 3.1; See Genesis 2.16-17). The effect breeds mistrust and potential contempt for God as one who is mean-spirited. The woman yields to this view of God somewhat by countering the serpent's words with a retelling of God's words that soften yet still possess the same image of God as found in the words of the serpent. God has a character such that He strikes dead those who touch the tree. Seeing an opening of mistrust, the serpent plants a seed of doubt. God has not spoken the truth, but rather He is seeking to keep people from becoming like Him. This phrase is interesting as people already are like God (Genesis 1.26-28). Thus, the serpent's words probably bear the meaning of people not becoming like God but becoming gods themselves. The woman is thus faced with a question about God's character and the life He has given her. Is God to be trusted or has He sought to withhold a path to becoming a god like Himself, one in which a person could live in complete autonomy? The woman chooses to believe the later and willfully eats of the forbidden fruit and in short order has her husband doing the same. The effect is the immediate recognition of their true state, nakedness, a state which they seek to rectify.

The trial and verdict (Genesis 3.8-24): The man and the woman hear God approaching and hide, an action that leads to something of a trial scene in which God seeks to determine what has happened and why. The trial reveals that people have disobeyed God, willfully sought autonomy. This results in the issuing forth of a verdict from God that outlines what a life separated from God will be like. The first two aspects have already been seen in the introduction of fear and presence of shame (Genesis 3.7, 10). Inherent to both are a separation from God. People cannot bear to be in God's presence (Genesis 3.8). In this separated state, life becomes marked with blame, pain, strife, relational struggle, barrenness, and death (Genesis 3.12-13, 16, 17, 18, 19). Life itself bears God's curse. It does not exist in God's blessing. However, people still have God's blessing upon them. God is willing to be gracious to them by providing clothing and protecting them from a life of perpetual separation from Him (Genesis 3.21-24). While primarily tragic in weight, the verdict of God indicates hope, a gracious God who leaves a way back for people, a way yet to be specified.

Application: The world is not the way it is supposed to be, not the way it is supposed to be because of the continuing presence of sin, the willful choice to reject God and the life He offers. Our sin lies at the root of much evil that happens in the world. However, even as people abandon God, He has not abandoned people. He is gracious, giving both His protection and provision to those who have rejected Him, leaving a way back for people to once again be connected to Him, a way that God Himself will have to make.