



Sermon Growth Guide

August 20, 2023
Tempted to Leave

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Lead Me Home - Tempted to Leave

Genesis 3:1-13

Key Verse: Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

Big Idea: Where is your heart tempted to walk away from God and His good plans?



Foundations

Why is it that we always seem to think we know best for our lives? Theologically, we know the right answer, "God knows best; we should trust God." Yet, functionally, we wander away - again and again and again. Our race is an apple biting race, unending apple indulging! Until Christ, by His power, takes mistrust completely out of our souls forevermore, we are prone to wander away; we are tempted to leave.

The lies we bite into the quickest are the 'two truths and a lie' sorts of lies, the lies that come wrapped in fine linen. "The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made," our text this week reads. It's a horror movie, really. To be attacked by an adversary so cunning and hellbent, this scene in Genesis 3 is horrific.

God creates us free and with an astonishing level of agency, opportunity to choose for ourselves. Recall Joshua's famous words, "choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Pray together that the Spirit weed out the areas in your life where you are compromising truth for a lie. Pray for protection from evil, wisdom to understand the truth, and resolve to fight to stand on righteousness. Pray deeply for one another.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Genesis 3:1-13.

Centering on verses four and five, why do you think Eve trusted the serpent?

Where is Eve's focus in verse six? What would have been a better point of focus?

Adam seems to have blindly accepted Eve's gift. What's going on here? Where was his focus?

Applying God's Word

And now what about you? Where is your heart tempted to walk away from God and His good plans for your life?

How can you cultivate better focus in your life, better safeguards, better wisdom as you walk in a world where the serpent seeks to kill you? Knowing "the serpent" is still loose, how can you walk wiser?

Witnessing God's Word

Given today's theme, in what ways can the Church reflect the love of Jesus to walk lives of faithfulness and wisdom? How can you better model Kingdom faithfulness and wisdom to those who observe you living your life?

Sometimes the worst thing that can happen to you is to get what you want. My PhD dissertation defense did not go well. You have to find an outside reader from another department so I got a friend to say yes, a professor of philosophy I knew as a Christian brother—plus our kids were on the same basketball team. Easy! What I didn't know is that his entire career in philosophy was built on a premise directly counter to the main premise I took from Basil of Caesarea. As soon as the defense began, he ripped into me. I never recovered. After it was over I stood with Abigail on the steps of the Rotunda at the University of Virginia staring at the horizon with what soldiers call a 1000-yard stare. Finally, my supervisor came out and said, "Well, you did pass..." Yikes. Have you ever horribly gotten what you wanted? Augustine said, "What am I to myself without You but a guide to my own destruction?" What am I really good at without Jesus, without the Word? I'm a really good self-destruction coach.

Why do we turn our back on God? God made us a home and it is beautiful. The Creator sure made things beautiful. We look at Adam and Eve and think, how in the world could you mess this up? You had everything. Peace in your own bodies. Peace with one another. Peace with God and the world. Purpose and meaning and delight. You blew it! So do we. Genesis 3 is a guide to human nature. This is not just some ancient myth; this is our origin, and it serves as a roadmap to the human heart and how we fall into temptation. Why do we long for home? Because we were made for home, but something made us leave. You can leave the Lord without moving an inch. Let's peer into the heart. What tempts us to leave our Maker and launch out onto the open road chasing empty promises of better things, things that never satisfy? Bottom line up front, it is about trust.

First, let's understand the text. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1) Okay, can you let me brush by talking snakes? There are a few talking animals in the Bible. I'd agree

that's unusual. Maybe all the animals talked in Eden! There was an intelligence behind this serpent, as in all talking beasts in scripture. In this case it was Satan working to undermine and destroy the trust Eve and Adam have in God. It doesn't take much. Just two statements and they bite. How many statements do you take in every day designed to erode your trust in God?

What is this tree they are supposed to respect? It's the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We read about it last week. God did say to eat of it is to surely die. The serpent introduces just a hair's breadth of doubt. Then the woman adds just a bit to what God said. See if you notice. "The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, '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.'" (Genesis 3:2-3) Did you catch it? Did God say not to touch it? No. Nothing about that. We have now taken just one step away from God's Word. Not by subtracting from it, and not by contradicting it, but by adding to it. That's gap enough for the serpent to move all the way in. "'You will not certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:4-5)

She takes and eats. Adam takes and eats. It isn't the fruit that kills. It is the disobedience. When the presence of the Lord draws near to them in the garden, in the place where they regularly met together, what does God say? Not, "How dare you! Shame on you!" "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:8-9) You can leave the Lord without moving an inch. You can walk away from God sitting here in church! You can hide, but God will never stop seeking. God pursues you and asks, "Where are you? Come home."

Why was the tree there in the first place? Why would God put a tree like

that in the garden knowing that Adam and Eve are weak and vulnerable? There is something of free will in this. If God wanted robots, AI worshippers, he could have programmed for that. He wants freedom there with a choice. The tree stands as an emblem of reverence. It stands as a reminder, “I am God and you are not. I am your Creator and you are my Creation. Your life depends on trust and obedience, on obeying my Word. This tree stands as a reminder.” It’s not the fruit, or the knowledge of good and evil, that brings death. It’s the disobedience, which is ultimately a lack of trust, a ruptured relationship. When you sin, when you open the door and hit the open road in search of better pastures, you are saying, “God, I don’t trust you. I don’t believe you love me. You don’t know what is best for me. I will be like god. I will be my own god. I will determine how to satisfy my needs.” And so, we leave home. God didn’t put that tree there like leaving a jar of poison in the nursery. It was a symbol of their relationship.

Now, a word about blame. Who did it? Yes, Eve had the dialogue with the serpent. Yes, Eve took the first bite. Then we see how sinfulness ripens into blame shifting. Adam says, “Eve did it. The woman you gave me. When you think about it this is all your fault.” Eve says, “The serpent did it. The serpent you made. When you think about it this is all your fault.” This is the narcissism of sin. It is everybody’s fault but mine. Yes, Eve ate first, and scriptures like 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 are clear about her responsibility. However, who does God ask first about it? Adam. What was Adam’s responsibility? To care for the garden and watch over it. Who let the serpent in? Who watched passively while the evil one attacked? There are sins of commission and sins of omission. Should we pin this all on the woman? Let’s check Romans 5, “...just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned ...death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam.” (Romans 5:12,14) Death entered through Adam. Women, do all you can to resist messages that erode your trust in God’s Word. Men, do all you can to guard

yourself and your family from messages that erode trust in God’s Word. We are in the same boat.

So, how does temptation work? The chief theological assertion of the serpent is that you can be like God apart from God, meaning you can be your own god. That is the strong mood of our day, isn’t it? We used the term last week, “expressive individualism.” “I am my own god, I determine my own universe, I shape my own reality from within.” How do we get there? The sliver of doubt that erodes the trust is this little, niggling idea, perhaps God is holding something back from me, something good. “You will not surely die,” says the serpent, “you will know the difference between good and evil. That’s a good thing and God doesn’t want you to have it.” Do you really think God did not want Adam and Eve to know the difference between good and evil? How many scriptures are there teaching us to grow in our discernment of good and evil, to know the difference between the sacred and the profane, between light and darkness, between love and hate? Of course God wanted Adam and Eve to have that knowledge. At most, God’s command is either “Not now,” as in they were not ready to receive it yet, or “Not in this way,” meaning God has plans to give them this gift in His own manner. But, like so many temptations, what we give into is, “I want it now; and I want it my way.”

Listen, this is a truth about temptation that will change your life. I still remember the first time a spiritual mentor named Simon Barnes explained this to me sitting in a Subway restaurant when I was nineteen. Hear this now: Every temptation, every impulse to disobey God, stems from a good desire down underneath that God intends to satisfy. You fall into greed? Down deep what you really want is security and provision. You fall into pride and reputation, or vanity? What you really want is to be known and delighted in for who you are. You fall into sexual immorality? You want to love and be loved with intensity. Down under the surface is a righteous desire. “It is good,” thought Eve and Adam, “to know the difference between good and evil.” Down underneath the impulse to disobedience is a good thing that God fully intends to

give you in His way in His time. The more you can connect that deeper need to its satisfaction in Jesus Christ, the more fuel you take out of the fires of your temptations.

Do you believe that God intends to give you all good things? You say, “Tim, there is a lot of stuff I want that God doesn’t give me. People live their whole lives unsatisfied and in pain.” Yes. I’m not saying it will all come within the span of life on this earth. But look at some of these passages. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:11) Or this, “...the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (Psalms 84:11) How about from Jesus’ own lips, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11) Or this summary verse of God’s gracious providence, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) But you don’t believe that. What should I do? Should I tear those out of your Bible? Want me to take a Sharpie to all those and give your Bible back redacted like a court document, because you don’t believe that. Otherwise, you would not have struck out on your own to satisfy your own needs. You would not have turned your back on God’s Word and determined your own course. You would not have left home. I don’t believe them either when I turn from God. Trust that the Lord is good.

C. S. Lewis wrote an exploration of temptation called *Screwtape Letters*. He imagined letters from a demon named Screwtape to his younger nephew demon full of advice on how to terrorize his client, even after his client has come to Christ. Remember “the Enemy” in these letters is God: “Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research

so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula.” That’s the best the devil can do. That’s how temptation works. Take your deep desire for something good and introduce the idea that God would never want you to have it. Take it. Take it now. On your own and in your own way. Then, did you see that last bit? Install an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure. That’s the trap of addiction. Got him! Got her! We are tempted to leave.

So, here is your conversation challenge this week, your Good News Initiative. How do you talk about this outside of the church? The truth is this is a common frustration. Open a conversation by saying to a nonbeliever, “I wish I didn’t do what I know I shouldn’t do.” There is a disconnect we all feel. We all wander. We all feel tempted to leave home. What open road are you tempted to take? You don’t have to go far. You can leave the Lord without moving an inch. Adam and Eve did it standing at the tree. The tree of knowledge became the tree of rebellion. It wasn’t the fruit that killed, but the disobedience. It wasn’t paradise they lost, but relationship with God. Next week we will look at the impact of that loss, but you already know, because you have felt it yourself.

Here is the good news. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, and He never took the bait. The tree of knowledge became the tree of rebellion; the tree of rebellion became the tree of the curse. Jesus walked up to that tree and said, “I’ll take the place of the rebel.” Jesus allowed Himself to be nailed to that tree and He died in our place. Now the tree, the cross, is where we go to restore our relationship with God. The cross is the tree of knowledge, of love, of grace, the tree of forgiveness, the tree of life. Come home.