

The Discipleship Project-Winter 2018–2019

Series 1: The Big Story

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Series Big Idea: The big story of Scripture shows us the importance of experiencing God’s divine plan and purpose.

Lesson 1.2: The Choice That Brought Bondage

Lesson Big Idea: The big story of Scripture shows us the bondage sin has brought into our lives.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Romans 5:12–14 (PPT)

A gentle breeze tickled at their skin—skin now crudely shielded with thatched-together fig leaves. Blood had crusted around a jagged rip on the side of his finger. She had recoiled when she saw it—a strange crimson-indigo color they had not yet seen. Just one of so many things that now were thrust before them in an ugly parade of horrors.

What a different parade only a heartbeat ago. With contagious joy, the pure and holy One had marched before Adam a visual symphony of animals with sounds and colors that now all but taunted his twisted thoughts.

The memory of how perfect everything had been before the choice made the agony of deception more acute. That serpent. How he had twisted words, made Eve doubt the Master’s instructions. She replayed it all again—what had the Creator said? Why had she even given pause at the sight of the fruit? She shuddered as she thought of how many lush fruit trees she had walked around to get to the cursed tree.

Too late to redo or reason away the ugliness of the choice. Only now to cope with the agony. But how to cope when every breath was suffocated with despair? Hiding, frantically trying to stop the nightmare. No direction. No hope. No plan.

And then His voice: “Where are you?”

Mixed with the overwhelming fear and the shame was a new feeling—something they had never had a need to give voice to: hope. His voice and the possibility that maybe He could still care—it was too much to believe. Yet they dared to hope.

And after failed excuses, with a rush of breath the first man, Adam, confessed. Practiced speeches were gone. What could you do in the face of the pure and holy One but let the truth tumble out. And in that moment of vulnerable reconnection with Him, the path to restoration began.

FRAME

The big story began with God’s plan for a perfect relationship with the people He made. (PPT) The drama unfolded on a flawless stage: a majestic garden. Even popular culture seems fascinated by the concept of the Garden of Eden. People today still attempt

to emulate it with utopian societies that seek perfect harmony. However, what made the Garden singularly unique and impossible to emulate was the absence of sin and the novelty of unfettered, intimate communion with God.

God created humanity with love and the intent for relationship. (PDG, PPT) This detail of the story is crucial and makes the sad turn in the drama that much more heart wrenching. God’s original plan was for unity in the Garden. God’s infinite love cannot be emphasized enough—it is the context for understanding His big story. The depth of His love shatters our human expectations and limits we place on love. With absolutely no strings attached, God loved His people.

We love him, because he first loved us. (I John 4:19, KJV) (PPT)

- **Do you grasp that God deeply loves you—not out of obligation or with conditions, but genuinely loves you? What impact has that knowledge made on you?**
- **Are you intentional in regularly expressing your reciprocal love to Him? In what ways?**

Before Adam uttered one word or did one thing that could have endeared Him to the Lord, God infinitely loved Him. Much like the parent who is handed a newborn whose limited actions, in a sense, only inconvenience the parent who in turn lavishes affection, God loved the man and the woman He made—instantly, deeply, and unfailingly.

Life before sin was perfect peace and joy because of pure communion with God. (PPT) Adam and Eve lived with purpose, caring for the Garden and enjoying intimate fellowship with God. They did not need a twenty-minute appointment for prayer because life in the Garden included full and perfect communion between God and His people.

However, from that place of provision and communion, the first humans chose a difficult path—one of obstinate disobedience that changed everything. So while Almighty God’s first words to humans were words of provision and purpose, man’s first recorded words to God were words of confession.

God presents His people with the choice to love Him. (PDG, PPT) God could have made human beings with no will and a robotic impulse to praise Him like the angels. Instead He chose to create us in His image with the power of reason and the ability to freely choose what and whom we will love.

- **Have you made the choice to follow God? How do you reaffirm that in a world that undermines the Christian’s choice to follow Him?**

The power of choice could only exist if there were the option to choose something other than God. (PDG, PPT) So in the same command in which God gave Adam dominion of the entire Garden (Genesis 2:15), God also commanded him not to eat of a single tree (Genesis 2:16–17).

God never explained why Adam and Eve could not eat of the tree, only the

consequence. As the audience watches the drama unfold, the curious scan back through the playbill, wondering if a scene had been left out accidentally. Surely God had a reason, and surely if He would but share it, the man and the woman could make an informed decision. Yet God chose only to make a request of His people. We sense the foreboding rest of the story and find ourselves screaming at the players on the stage: “Don’t do it! You’ve got too much to lose!” But the choice is theirs, much like it is ours today: listen to God’s Word and choose His ways or choose to pursue what He warns us against.

What we value determines our choices. (PDG, PPT) We can say we love something, but our actions will tell the true picture. We can have noble intentions, but when faced with a choice between something we believe in theory versus something we value in reality, our values trump beliefs and determine our choice.

- **What are your values and where does your relationship with God fit within them?**

Teacher Option: Give students time to write out their values. Challenge them to review the values prayerfully during the week.

In Eve’s case, perhaps she walked through the Garden that day with no intention of disobeying God. Maybe in her innocence she had never paused to even question God’s command. However, for some reason she found herself near the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and she paused to listen to the serpent. The big story takes a devastating turn as this key character succumbs to something all too common to us all: sin. Why wasn’t life in the Garden with perfect communion enough? Did Eve not value her relationship with God enough to protect it? For that matter, the same questions can be asked of Adam. Though many theories circulate as to why he too ate of the fruit, the end result was that they both sinned against God and were instantly consumed by sin’s partners—bondage, shame, and anguish.

We must reject sin and its bondage and look to God for freedom. (PPT) The lessons that cost us the most are usually the lessons most remembered. If Adam and Eve could but pause the story’s action on the stage and speak to us today in an aside, they would likely tell us in dramatic fashion to avoid sin at all costs. While our world today makes a joke of the very idea of sin and takes delight in brazenly flaunting disobedience of the most basic societal morals, stories abound all around us that testify of the devastation that comes from violating God’s plan. Perhaps it may seem a smaller stage than that of the first man and woman in the Garden, but our disobedience and sin today likewise carry the terror-inflicting consequence of being separated from God. But there is hope.

With God’s help we can recognize and flee from Satan’s formula for deception. Close study of the story reveals how the deceiver approached Eve and how he still attempts to thwart us today.

First the serpent positioned himself near the object of temptation. It is not clear from Scripture why Eve was in that area of the Garden, but one could argue if she had stayed away from the forbidden tree, perhaps she could have safeguarded against the temptation.

In our present-day lives, we too need boundaries. God's Word warns us of things that can do danger to our souls. **Out of respect for what pleases God and out of care to preserve our relationship with Him, we should build guardrails that protect us from those temptations.** (PDG, PPT)

- **What safeguards can you place in your life to protect you from areas of temptation?**

Teacher Option: Give time for students to consider guardrails they can build in their lives to defend against spiritual dangers. Encourage the group to take time this week to establish accountability partners.

Next the serpent began his conversation with Eve by attempting to undermine what God said.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (Genesis 3:1, KJV) (PPT)

When Eve countered with the parameters for the tree, the serpent lied to her and mischaracterized God, all a subversive attempt to undermine what Eve knew about God's word and His very nature (Genesis 3:4–5).

It baffles the mind to consider how Eve could have believed the serpent's lie. Yet how many times do we let the voices of society, media, and people of influence in our lives dull and manipulate our interpretation of Scripture? In a world where tolerance is championed at the expense of integrity and principles, **we must know God's Word if we are to remain faithful.** (PPT) It holds the key to following Him and not being deceived.

- **Do you make time each day to look to Scripture for ways it can strengthen you in your relationship with God?**

The serpent's next move was an appeal to Eve's pride. Whether or not it registered on Eve's subconscious level, the serpent claimed the fruit would make Eve "like God"—much like Satan would later tempt Jesus three times on the grounds of His deity (Matthew 4:1–11). As Eve began to investigate the fruit, she perceived that "the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6, NKJV). (PPT) Is it any wonder that John would later classify sin into three corresponding categories?

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. (I John 2:16, NKJV) (PPT)

In the face of all these temptations, Eve should have so valued her relationship with God that the serpent's false allures were no match for the intimate communion she had with God. Instead she cashed in that sacred treasure for the allure of pride and pleasure, and Adam joined her.

- **How can you take time to reflect on and intentionally celebrate the treasure you have of God's presence so nothing else becomes a more valued priority?**

With Adam and Eve's choice, sin entered the world and with it, death. Dying is not only a cessation of life as we know it, but it is also a separation. Spiritual death resulted from Adam and Eve's choice to turn from God; that choice separated them from Him.

The most exciting truth in God's big story is that He always, without fail, offers grace in exchange for sin. (PDG, PPT) And so the big story finds our hero, not incinerating planets in rage, but walking in the cool of the Garden, looking for His people. He knows precisely their location as they hide like the children they are in a corner of the stage. Methodically He asks questions of them, not because He does not know their transgression, but to give His children the opportunity to confess and come to Him in honesty.

- **Is there any area of your life you need to confess to our merciful God?**

The man and woman fumble the scene. He blames her (and God). She blames the serpent. It is a mess. And now the audience cringes in suspense. The script calls for destruction. Will the big story end in a single act?

But the author of the story and its hero breaks the rules and turns the tables. In a shocking reversal of events, He assigns the justice and destruction to the serpent.

So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust 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 your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:14–15, NKJV) (PPT)

The audience draws a breath at the sweeping proclamation, hearing in the verdict the hope and promise of one to come and set the story right once and for all.

To the man and woman, He pronounces the consequences of their disobedience. And then there was death. Not theirs, the audience realizes in relief, but an animal they had guarded and cared for became their substitute. Its bloody hide covered their shame. And to the observant audience member, one notices as the lights go down on the scene, a glimpse ahead in the story.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. (Romans 5:12–14, NKJV) (PPT)

The story can never be the same now. There will be no reverting back to the Garden. Adam and Eve have changed the setting and plot of the sweeping epic. But in this

moment, as we hear the Master’s triumphant declaration of crushing the serpent and witness His infinite mercy in cloaking His people’s sin and shame, we grasp the promise of a coming Savior who will bring salvation to all humanity once and for all.

FINISH

“Thirty-two years, three months, and fourteen days,” announced Alexander Leander Wilson as he stepped into the sunshine. It was the first moment in all that time that he had been able to step outside of the barbed wire confines of a California prison.

It all began in 1984 when twenty-one-year-old Wilson was arrested and put in jail on robbery and murder charges. Over the course of the legal proceedings, which have now been deemed unconstitutional, Wilson was convicted of crimes and sentenced to prison. For all of those thirty-two years in confinement, Wilson’s mother—now ninety-six—never gave up. She wrote countless lawyers and legal organizations to appeal for help, hired private investigators in attempts to revisit the case, and tried to incite media attention.

Finally in 2017 a group from Loyola Law School took on the case. They brought to light suppressed evidence and additional research to indicate Wilson did not get a fair trial and was wrongfully imprisoned. Through their efforts, a California superior court judge exonerated Wilson and ordered his release after prosecutors conceded he did not get a fair trial.

Wilson greeted his freedom with joy, smiling at the many law students and reporters who gathered to witness his release. He stood side by side with his sister, daughter, and granddaughter (whom he had never met) and shared his joy to be free, declaring that he was going to see his mother.

Can you imagine how it felt for Wilson to walk out of his prison after being confined for over three decades? What emotions might you feel at the injustice of being wrongfully imprisoned?

In our spiritual lives, we can face imprisonment as well. Perhaps we have been put in a prison of pain as a result of someone else’s sin and how it affects us. Like Wilson, we may be unjustly suffering because of others’ transgressions. Yet even if we have not experienced that injustice, all of us have to confront the prison our personal sin can bring. Without repentance and without redemption, we face spiritual imprisonment. Jesus is the only answer, but thankfully He is more than up to the task. Paul explained, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14, NKJV). Yes, sin imprisons, but Jesus brings freedom. Like Wilson, you can experience the glorious freedom of deliverance from bondage, but even better: eternal freedom. Turn to Him today for your deliverance!