



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

ONE BAD BITE

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Federal Way, WA
January 27th, 2008*

I was in 3rd grade when the country celebrated the Bicentennial. That was a big year. I wrote to President Ford that year with my thoughts on controlling inflation. And I started collecting the special 1976 money that was being printed. I still have a 1976 \$2 bill, a 1976 silver dollar and a 1976 quarter. I think they're worth about \$3.25 now.

One of the biggest symbols from that year is featured on the silver dollar, and that's the Liberty Bell. Did you know that there is a life size replica of the Liberty Bell in every state? Washington actually has two -- one in Tacoma and one in Port Angeles. Queen Elizabeth even presented a replica to President Ford in 1976 that was made at the same foundry as the original bell over 200 years ago. It's one of the most recognizable symbols of freedom in the world.

Now if you were describing the real Liberty Bell to someone who had never seen it, you could go into all kinds of detail about the shape. You could read the inscription on it for them and talk about how old the piece of wood is at the top. But what makes it different from the replicas, what you can't miss is the crack. It's huge -- it's 24 inches long and a half inch wide. Your eye goes right to that when you look at it. That's the one thing everyone asks about. No description of the Liberty Bell would be complete without mentioning its most glaring and distinctive feature.

For the past month, we've been looking at the "Big Picture" in Genesis, asking the big questions about God and humanity. We've talked about God as our Creator. We've looked at how we're created in the image of God and how we're invited to participate in his rest.

But there's a glaring feature we need to talk about, because there's a crack in our humanity. Our big picture description of who we are wouldn't be complete without mentioning what's staring us in the face. Humanity has this giant flaw called sin that for better or worse has become one of our most distinguishing features.

Some people try to ignore or downplay the crack. They would say we are all good by nature and that what we call sin is just people being caught in bad situations. We're tainted by the world around us, but there's nothing wrong inside.

Christianity has always held that the basic problem is an internal. We're born with it and it has to be dealt with on the inside. A good, nurturing environment is great, but we still have to address what's deep in our hearts.

This understanding of humanity goes all the way back to what's called the Fall – that fateful day in the Garden of Eden when everything changed forever. It's the most tragic chapter in the Bible and every page that comes after it grapples with what happened that day. Let's look at it in sections.

Genesis 3:1-18

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'?"

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.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

A first grade teacher was reading the Three Little Pigs to her class. She came to the part where the first pig was trying to buy materials to build his house. She read, "The first little pig went up to man with a wheelbarrow full of straw and said, 'Pardon me sir, but might I have some of that straw to build my house with?'"

The teacher asked her class, "And what do you think the man said?" One boy raised his hand and shouted, "I know! I know! He said, 'Yikes! A talking pig!'"

Other than God and Adam, no one has spoken yet in Genesis. Now as we're introduced to a new character, it turns out to be ...yikes! A talking snake. You would think that would be the first sign to Eve that something is up. But she doesn't seem at all surprised to be having the conversation with an animal.

There are a lot of questions that come up the longer you think about this incident. Were there other talking animals back then? Was this the devil in disguise? How did something so evil find its way into the garden? And what kind of fruit tree was it anyway? Genesis is completely silent on these issues.

Why would the author ignore such basic questions? The answer must be that he didn't think they were the most important questions. He wasn't trying to address whether or not animals can talk, and he wasn't trying to explain how evil entered the world. He's dialed in on the human relationship with God and what happened to interfere with that. So he spends his time on the conversations that took place. And when we direct our attention to what had the author's attention, we find he has a great deal to say.

I think I'd rather debate whether or not this was a real snake. Can't we just argue about what kind of apple Eve ate? I'd prefer to find any distraction or rabbit trail that could help me avoid talking about the choices Adam and Eve made. Because to think about them means I have to think about my own life and my own choices. And that's not nearly as fun as talking animals.

But the author won't let us go there. He's intent on keeping sin in the spotlight – not the other issues. And he doesn't just giving us the history of sin – although that's there. He's also giving us the playbook of sin. Because if we pay attention, we can see sin following the same pattern over and over again in our lives as well.

We can visualize this as a journey with three legs to it. The first phase could be simply called **Deception**. This is where it all starts.

Up to this point, Adam and Eve have only been hearing the voice of God. Now a very different voice is speaking to them, and it's the voice of temptation.

I don't think we need to spend a lot of time defining temptation this morning. We all know what it is from experience, that desire to do something we shouldn't or to acquire something we have been prevented from having. The actual temptation may change from person to person, but the pattern is always consistent. We want to do something that we know is probably wrong, but it has this enormous, overpowering appeal.

You've seen the cartoons with the angel and the devil each sitting on someone's shoulder, trying to convince them to choose the right or wrong path. The difference in our story is that Eve is only hearing one voice. God is noticeably silent. He's not there arguing and pleading with Eve. The serpent is doing all the talking. Eve is having to rely on her memory of what God had said in the face of a real live threat.

That's usually how it is. The voice in the moment that's going to be the loudest is the temptation. Most of the time, we will have to rely on what God has said previously.

God's voice wasn't even audible to Eve in that moment. And the temptation lured her in. But it's more than temptation – there is in it an intentional desire to deceive. The serpent is not playing straight with the information.

Even though God wasn't speaking at the moment, Eve knew very well what he would say. God's thoughts on the matter were clear. In fact, since his words will come into play, let's look at exactly what he had told Adam back in chapter 2:

Genesis 2:16-17

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

That's pretty black and white. Think of a big DANGER sign on a high voltage fence. You just don't decide to go up and touch the wires anyway. What could possibly have convinced Adam and Eve that it was worth violating that instruction?

Most of us don't set out initially to fly in the face of everything God says. We're not that stupid or self-destructive. And yet we regularly find ourselves attempting to climb over the fences he puts up. How does that happen?

For Eve, it all began innocently enough. One commentator I read said, "Temptation started out as trivia." The serpent struck up a conversation with Eve about God that on the surface looked harmless. He just asked her a question:

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

"I heard this rumor about God. Is it really true? He won't let you eat any fruit?"

The serpent says almost the complete opposite of what God said. God had said they **COULD** eat from any tree, with one exception. There was a lot of freedom and generosity in God's instruction. And yet somehow, the serpent managed to make him sound mean and controlling.

Gene Amdahl was the first person to come up with the acronym FUD – Fear, Uncertainty & Doubt. It's a sales tactic used to discredit your competition. You plant little seeds of fear, uncertainty and doubt in the buyer's mind so they think twice before buying the other company's product. It doesn't have to be based on anything true – you're just creating question marks that weren't there before.

That's exactly what the serpent is doing he's creating serious doubts in Eve's mind. He gets her to

Question God's goodness and fairness

"Did God really put you under such tight restrictions? What kind of a God would do that? Wow that sounds harsh. You deserve better." It doesn't matter that the accusation wasn't true – the serpent has succeeded in portraying God in a bad light.

Eve corrects him, but only to a degree:

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.'

God never said anything about touching the fruit. Eve exaggerates the rules a bit and makes it sound ever so slightly more restrictive. Now even that one off-limits tree is starting to seem unreasonable. The serpent seizes the opportunity to further question God's goodness:

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Now God is not only controlling – he's also selfish and paranoid. His whole motivation for keeping the tree off limits is brought into question. Obviously he must be out to prevent Adam and Eve from enjoying something good. They are missing out on what they truly deserve.

That's the root of temptation – feeling justified in taking something because somehow we feel we've earned it or deserve it. I can justify cheating on my taxes because the government wastes my money anyway. I can justify slacking off at work because they don't pay me what I'm worth. I can justify hurting my spouse because they hurt me first.

If I decide that God doesn't understand my situation or is treating me unfairly, if I'm convinced that God does NOT have my best interest in mind, then suddenly it's much easier to rationalize looking out for my own interests.

Is there an area in your life that Satan is working on? Is he pressing you to believe that God isn't who he says he is? Is he whispering in your ear that God really doesn't care about you or have your best interest in mind?

The God who created us is powerful and true. He is faithful and perfect. He is loving and incapable of doing anything less than what is right. And when you start to hear messages that contradict any of those qualities, watch out. Temptation is on its way.

The second hook the serpent uses to deceive Eve is that he convinces her to

Abandon God's word

All Adam and Eve had to go on regarding the consequences of eating the fruit was what God had said. His terms were not vague or hard to understand. He didn't leave them guessing about what he wanted from them.

But the serpent chips away at the credibility of that statement. God says you'll die? Really? Come on. You're not buying that are you?

I'd be willing to make a blanket statement here that the only way sin wins in our lives is when we first walk away from what God has already said. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote,

Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God...It is here that everything within me rises up against the word of God.

When Jesus was tempted in the desert three times by the devil, each time, he reached for the word of God to counter it. That was his weapon and strength. The devil wanted him

to create a miracle of turning stones to bread. Jesus said, “It is written, man does not live by bread alone.” The devil encouraged him to trust that God would catch him if he threw himself off a tall tower. Jesus said, “It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Finally the devil said, “Worship me and I’ll give you the world,” to which Jesus replied, “It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”

The devil couldn’t force a wedge in between Jesus and God’s word, and that was what made the difference.

Now you’re probably thinking, “That’s great for Jesus, but I don’t even have any verses memorized. I can’t sit there and quote the Bible when I’m being tempted because I don’t know it well enough.”

That’s not what we’re saying. If you think about it, Eve didn’t even have a Bible, and she still managed to walk away from the little bit of God’s word that she DID know. I have a friend who has memorized way more verses than I ever will. He knows Scripture like the back of his hand. But his life is a complete mess. Knowledge won’t prevent you from abandoning God’s word.

In fact, God has given multiple ways besides the Bible for us to hear him speaking. One is available to everybody, and that’s through your conscience.

Romans 2:14-16

When outsiders who have never heard of God's law follow it more or less by instinct, they confirm its truth by their obedience. They show that God's law is not something alien, imposed on us from without, but woven into the very fabric of our creation. There is something deep within them that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong.

Honestly, most of us know when a temptation is wrong, not because we can point to a specific chapter and verse, but simply because we don’t feel a peace about it inside. That’s not a foolproof guarantee, but it’s one way God speaks.

Another way we hear God’s truth is through his Spirit.

John 16:13

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.

If we’ve put our faith in Christ, and we’ve invited him into our lives, the Bible states that he puts that Spirit into our hearts. Now we’re not just operating on conscience – we also have God’s presence to teach us and guide us.

We’ve also got the community of faith around us to hold us to God’s word. I can lean on what other people know when I’m in the dark. In fact, Jesus says it’s our responsibility to look out for each other and when we see each other stepping away from God’s word to say something.

Getting back to Eve: She didn't have much of God's word to go on, but she had enough. It was specific and direct – it just was a message she didn't want to hear.

Don't worry about how much Scripture you don't know. What do you know? There is always some word from God that we're in danger of abandoning.

A final piece to the deception is when we **Hype the choice**.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

There's no mention here of the downside to ignoring God's instruction. There are so many positives to making this mistake. It's healthy, it's attractive. Not only that, it will make Eve so much wiser for future decisions.

In fact, this fruit is probably the perfect food. It has so many great qualities it could have its own infomercial. Eve is starting to wonder how she ever lived without it.

The pluses are exaggerated and the negatives are completely overlooked. She doesn't realize it yet, but she's setting herself up for a big letdown.

Here's the thing: **temptation works because it is tempting.**

We went and saw Enchanted a couple weeks ago, and there is this old hag in it, tempting the princess with a poison apple. She's so hideous and scary that it's obvious to everyone (except the princess) that the apple will be poison.

That's how we want to envision temptation – obviously evil. We'd like to think that bad choices will look bad. But they usually look really great. That's why they're so tempting. And the closer we get to them, the more appealing they look, until we are completely blind to the negatives they might bring.

That's all part of the deception. We can begin to recognize temptation in our own lives when we see these road signs:

1. We're wanting something we feel we've been unfairly kept from having.
2. We ignore what we know God has been saying to us.
3. We see nothing but good incentives for making a bad choice.

We almost missed the second leg of the journey in what we read. It went by so quickly. Let's read it again.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

Eve has now reached a place of **Decision**.

Until this point, temptation was just that: temptation. She's been listening to the argument, but she hasn't committed any sin. Then, in a matter of seconds, she reaches out and picks the piece of fruit. She's crossed her own made up boundary of touching it, and she's still alive. That gives her the boldness to go ahead and take a bite.

She took it and ate it. What was once just hanging out there, Eve has now grabbed and internalized. That temptation has now become a part of her, and that's where it turned to sin. When we internalize temptation, that's when it becomes sin.

So quick. Only six words needed to describe what happened. But the tide of history turned in that decision. That's when the crack appeared. You wonder how many times she and Adam replayed that scene in their mind, wishing they could take it back, to erase those words that she took it and ate it.

Big change comes from seemingly small choices. The devil would have us believe that our decisions are casual and meaningless, when in reality they cause a ripple that keeps going.

Many of us live with regrets for past decisions, poor choices that we made in a rush without thinking them through. And we're reaping what we've sown. But I'm not here this morning to rub your nose in the past. I'm not here to make you feel terrible for the history you're stuck with now.

My point is that today is a day of decision. There will be countless moments that go by so quickly we don't even think of them, but our choices will have long term impacts. The devil is right there holding out that fruit to us, saying "Go ahead and take it. We have the chance today to decide differently. If you're caught up in a sin right now, stop. No more putting off a decision.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...

Maybe the lie you're listening to this morning is that it's too late for you. There's no backing away or reversing what's been done. I would challenge you this morning to choose life.

My father-in-law was fasting one time, and Karin asked him, "Dad, what do you do when you fast?" And he said, "I do two things. First, I say to God, today I choose to hunger after you, even more than food. And then I don't eat."

Choose life. First choose to love God and hunger after him. And then don't eat the lie the devil's trying to feed you. Every day is a new chance to decide not to take and eat what's being handed to you.

Eve made her choice, and the repercussions began to show immediately. This phase of the journey is **Disappointment**. After all the expectations, the reality was a big letdown.

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

1. A desire for company

Sin loves company. One of the quickest results of Eve's choice was to convince Adam to join her in her disobedience. There's always safety in numbers.

Adam becomes the first person to give way to peer pressure. He wasn't tricked by the serpent – He had heard God firsthand and knew this was no joke. Yet he cared more about that relationship with Eve than his relationship with God. He set aside his better judgment to maintain that relationship. Sin isn't always about deception.

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.

2. A desire to cover up

Shame had never been a part of the garden experience. Now suddenly, they saw themselves in all their own vulnerability and were immediately ashamed.

Sin may be fun for a moment, but afterwards, it leaves us feeling ashamed of ourselves. We instantly set about sewing fig leaves and trying to cover up whatever we've done.

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?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

3. A desire to escape from God

Adam just wanted to hide. He didn't want to be around God anymore. They used to have such a close relationship, now God's asking "Where are you?"

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

4. A desire to blame

Sin makes us want to pass the blame wherever possible. There's always somebody else responsible – a boss, a spouse, parents. We don't want to own up to our own choices, because the consequences are too difficult to bear.

These are all the unanticipated consequences of sin. They're a huge disappointment. That piece of fruit held so much promise of goodness and yet none of it materialized. Adam and Eve did gain a knowledge of evil, but it was the knowledge that came from committing evil. It was the weight of guilt. God's instruction at the beginning hadn't been random or controlling – it was the desire of a parent to protect his children from being hurt and hurting each other.

Once that line had been crossed, humanity could not go back to that state of innocence. Ever since, we've all had that inborn urge to choose the wrong path. As Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 53:6

*We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.*

Depressingly tragic. But then you get to the second half of the verse:

And GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.

If the sin problem is as real and as pervasive as we've said, then it had to be up to God to do something about it. We don't have it in us. And that's the only way to find hope in this story, is to see that God loved us enough to do something through Jesus.

I don't think it's any accident that there's a second invitation to take and eat in the Bible, coming from the lips of Jesus himself:

Matthew 26:26-29

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

It is as if Jesus is reversing the damage done at the fall, taking the same vocabulary and transforming it from the way humanity fell to the way we find our way back to God. We take and eat. Not that we swallow some bread and juice at communion, but that we grab

on to Jesus' death. We hold on to the forgiveness he offers and we internalize it for ourselves.

The whole point in seeing how terrible sin is isn't to get us to try to beat it. It's so we see how much we need Jesus. Every day we need Jesus. In the face of each temptation we need Jesus. In the moment of each decision we need Jesus. As we grapple with the consequences and disappointments of our past, we need Jesus.

Back in the 1800s, The London Times ran an open invitation to their readers to answer the question, "What's wrong with the world today?" The most profound answer they got was the shortest, which simply said:

Dear Sirs,
I am.
Signed,
G.K. Chesterton

I am what's wrong. Sin wants us to not admit it, not accept the blame, run away from God. But when we DO accept it, when we run toward God, we find Jesus waiting for us with open arms and the scars to prove that the problem is taken care of.

What lie have I been believing?

Am I feeling God is being unfair? Have I stepped away from what I know he's said? What character quality of God has the devil been chipping away at in my mind?

What choice am I facing?

The moments are short. The effects are long lasting. Am I weighing my decisions carefully? Today is a day for saying, "I'm not going to swallow that lie anymore."

What regret am I carrying? Maybe the consequences of past sins are pinning you to the ground. Jesus takes up all our shame.

There is more than enough grace to cover all the sins you and I have committed, all the problems they've caused, all the hurts we've felt and inflicted. We've tasted from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, now we're invited to taste of the tree of life.

Take and eat, Jesus says. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Forgiveness is sweet.