

Series: Stories from the Past

Title: “What Are our Choices?”

Text: Selected Passages from Genesis 3

Key Word: Choices

Proposition: Everyone primarily two choices: to lovingly obey God and live or to selfishly disobey God and die.

(Contemporary Service) In New York, the simple, modest and naive Andrea Sachs is hired to work as the second assistant of the powerful and sophisticated Miranda Priestly, the ruthless and merciless executive of a fashion magazine. Andrea dreams to become a journalist and faces the opportunity as a temporary professional challenge. The first assistant Emily advises Andrea about the behavior and preferences of their cruel boss, and the stylist Nigel helps Andrea to dress more adequately for the environment. Andrea changes her attitude and behavior, compromising her values. These changes affect her private life and the relationships with her boyfriend Nate, her family and friends. In the end, Andrea learns that life is made of choices. In this scene we see Miranda and Andrea in a conversation which leads Andrea to an important life decision. Let’s watch what happens.

Whatever the opinion of the Genesis story most people recognize that God created humans with the freedom to choose. Everyday we have choices.

We choose what time to go to bed and the time to wake up. We choose what we wear. What food we eat. How we spend our free time. We choose where we

live; where we work; what we do for fun; how we act; what we believe. We make choices.

We choose to tell a lie or to speak the truth. We choose hate or love. We choose to forgive or to hold onto a grudge. We choose to ignore God or to obey God.

In the spring of 1970, my third grade teacher, Mrs. McCloskey, stepped out of the room. I noticed that Jim had a compass that was encased in a tire. I politely asked Jim if I could look at it for a few moments. He held it up and said, "See." Then he placed it back in his desk. I tried again. "Jim, I would like to hold it so that I could see it up close." Jim said, "No." I tried again. I was denied again. I wanted to look at this compass. I could hear it calling out to me. I thought about taking it when his back is turned. Then I remembered God saying, "You shall not steal." It was within my reach though. "I wouldn't be stealing just borrowing. I will put it back before he noticed it would be gone." So, I began to think about easing my hand into his desk while he had his back turned. I envisioned holding the compass, admiring the needle pointing in the same direction. I imagined returning it before Jim knew it was gone.

When Jim turned his back I successfully seized my opportunity. Unfortunately, he turned back around and caught me red-handed. With righteous anger he tried to reclaim his compass. I rose from my seat and fled the scene of the crime with compass in hand. Jim darted after me. Our classmates watched us as weaved in and out of the desks. I ran behind Mrs. McCloskey's desk, losing my

footing. My feet went up and my cheek slid along the chalk board tray like paper sliding across a knife blade. One of my classmates said, “Chris, your check is bleeding.” I placed my hand on my check and held it up seeing that my palm was smeared with blood.

A student quickly found Mrs. McCloskey who quickly administered first-aid and then interrogated me as she walked me to the office to call my mom. I confessed what happened. Neither my parents nor the school added any additional consequences for my sin, believing that my five stitches and my shame were enough.

It was Genesis three all over again. Yes, as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve we re-live their story. Their story reveals life’s most important choices that determine our quality of life and our future. We live in a choice-filled world where some choices leave us scared for life even when the initial pain is gone. We lust after things that we can’t have and so we covet. Sometimes we choose what is good, true, and honorable. Other times our choices result in broken relationships, shattered lives, fractured trust, and sometimes even violence and war. We have internal thoughts or impressions regarding the good we know we should do and the bad we know we should avoid. Sometimes we yield to the good, other times we don’t, revealing how vulnerable, weak, and sinful we are. Mark Twain said, "We're all like the moon—we have a dark side." Deep down inside every human being, there is the seductive lure of instant pleasure and evil. All the positive thinking, political systems and laws, all the

conflict resolution and negotiations can not stitch up the open wound within souls.

What choices do we have?

First we can choose to distrust God's promises or to trust them. Let's imagine for a moment what it must have been like for Adam and Eve before they were attracted to the devil's deceit. They enjoyed walking in the Garden. They freely talked with one another and their Creator in this land of abundance. God told them that they could eat any fruit or vegetable from any plant except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did they would die. God offered abundant blessing with only one boundary. Their freedom allowed them to enjoy God's friendship. With this freedom they could embrace His love or to reject it.

Adam and Eve were free—free to eat of every other tree except one, free to live without pain and aging, free to have a friendship with their Creator, free to have dominion over all the earth, free to enjoy one another without inhibition.

Then the devil comes in the form of a serpent and sows distrust. Genesis says, *"He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* Genesis 3:1 He is saying, "What kind of God would say that? This can not be a good God, a kind God, a gracious God. He must be a cosmic kill-joy and pious prude. The deceiver chips away at faith in a Good God.

Who or what is chipping away your faith in God's goodness? Who or what is sowing distrust in God's promise? A life experience...a tragedy causing you to

wonder about God's goodness and faithfulness? Are you wondering if God can be trusted?

We have doubts. We've been told, "You have to rely on yourself. People won't be there for you. You are alone. Trust leads to betrayal, so keep your heart closed." Some doubts come from deep wounds—abuse, abandonment, rejection, betrayal, or disappointment. These actions pierce the heart with sorrow, hurt, and fear. So we become numb to love. It's hard to trust.

Doubt is part of the spiritual journey, but will the doubt drive us toward God -- sometimes arguing, lamenting, crying out to God—or will it drive us away from God? Will I trust God or will I believe the lies: You are alone. You must make it on your own. You must grab the fruit for yourself. Friends, God allows us to choose. Which will it be? Distrust or Trust in the one who is for us and not against us?

Second, we can decline his will or accept His will. The tempter shifted Eve's focus from the bounty of God's goodness to the one thing that God said she couldn't have, from His blessings to his only boundary. The serpent told Eve that God didn't mean that she "*will not surely die,*" Genesis 3:3, 4 The tempter aroused dissatisfaction with God's will by creating the false impressions that God's will is not good enough.

Larry Crabb tells this story from his childhood. One day at three years old, he walked upstairs, closed and locked the bathroom door, and relieved himself without any assistance. When he was finished he turned to unlock the door. But he wasn't strong enough. He panicked and thought, "I might spend the rest of my life in this

bathroom." Hearing his yells, his mother asked, "Are you okay?" "Did you fall? Have you hit your head?" He said, "I can't unlock the door! Get me out of here!"

Meanwhile, his Dad ran to the garage, found a ladder and leaned it against the side of the house beneath the bathroom window. With adult strength, he pried it open, climbed into Larry's prison, walked past his son, turned the lock and opened the door.

Larry thanked his daddy and ran out to play. Sometimes we confuse this with God's ways. We get stuck in a tight place. We try to free ourselves. But when we can't, we pray. Then we trust God to hear our cry and unlock the door to the blessings we desire.

Sometimes answers our prayers with a resounding, "yes." Other times he doesn't. We realize the Christian life doesn't always work that way. We wonder, "Is God enough? Do we like him when he doesn't open the door we want opened—when a marriage doesn't heal, when rebellious kids still rebel, when friends betray, when health worsens despite much prayer?"

God climbs through the small window into our dark room. But he doesn't walk by us to turn the stuck lock. Instead, he sits down on the bathroom floor and says, "Come sit with me!" He seems to think that He would be more than enough.

When we're not always satisfied with His will, we scream, "Get me out of here! If you love me, *unlock the door!*" Dear friend, we have a choice. Either we can keep asking him to give us what we think will make us happy—to escape our dark room and run to the playground of blessings—or we can accept his desire to simply

sit with us, for now, perhaps, in the darkness, and be content with knowing him better and representing him well in this difficult world. We can decline or accept his will.

Third, we can dodge His Grace or pursue His Grace. Ultimately sin is simply trusting in ourselves rather than trusting in God. It is dodging His grace rather than pursuing it. The tempter said, *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:5) In other words, the Deceiver says, "God knows this fruit is good. He simply wants to keep it for himself. He doesn't want to share it with you. He wants to keep all the best stuff for himself."

That is what (**Andrea Sachs**) was confronted with. That is what I was hearing in Mrs. McCloskey's room. Like Eve, I (**she**) thought about dodging God before actually doing it. The longer Eve gazed at the fruit, the more she thought that she would know more than anyone else.

When and where have you begun to dodge God and His grace by tolerating such preoccupation? One more glass of wine? Two more servings of Mac-n-cheese? A longer stare at that magazine at the counter? That appealing unscrupulous business deal? Thinking you're better than...you deserve more...you're entitled to this or that.

Paul, a follower of Christ, wrote, *"No temptation has seized you except what is common to ma...God is faithful... when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."* We have a choice: to dodge God's grace or to pursue it in order to stand up under temptation.

Finally we can defy God or obey Him. Eve's distrust in God's promise, declining of God's will, and her dodging His grace led to the final step: defying her Creator. She simply did it. I suspect there was an initial thrill of defying her Creator. Nothing happened. She wasn't immediately struck down by lightning. One did not hear a whistle blow, foul. She shared the fruit with her husband who was passively standing near by. He didn't warn her. He didn't object to her actions. He didn't pull her away from the tempter. He didn't pray for her or himself. His silence was consent. Adam and Eve took their focus off God and simply turned it toward themselves and the pleasure that awaited them.

Eve might have said, "Here, Adam, taste this fruit. It is really good. Since nothing really happened to me, God must have simply wanted to keep it for himself. He wouldn't judge us. You shouldn't take his commands so seriously." So Adam ate it, choosing to defy his God.

Has there been a time when our silence regarding sin was our consent? Have we yielded to peer pressure and defied our God? Have we compromised our relationship with God by not taking God and His ways seriously?

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve's choice led to separation which takes many forms. Guilt, shame, embarrassment, poor self-esteem, extreme self-consciousness entered the human race like a bad virus. At one time they were comfortable in God's presence, now they were embarrassed in His presence. We see this today in feeling of emptiness, disinterest in church; disrespect for the Bible and a dislike for God's

people. Adam and Eve blamed another. Marital problems, lawsuits, divorce, gossip, betrayal, and war entered the human race, all because of sin. Because of sin, the ground is cursed with weeds and erosion, floods and droughts, volcanoes and earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes, bugs and viruses, all were introduced because of sin. The New Testament says all of creation groans, longing to be redeemed by the Creator. Finally, because Adam and Eve were prohibited from eating from the tree of life, physical deterioration and death entered into the human race and all of creation.

So how can we be reconciled with God, our creator, with others, and with ourselves? The Bible says, *“The gift that God was kind enough to give was very different from Adam's sin. That one sin brought death to many others. Yet in an even greater way, Jesus Christ alone brought God's gift of kindness to many people. There is a lot of difference between Adam's sin and God's gift. That one sin led to punishment. But God's gift made it possible for us to be acceptable to him, even though we have sinned many times. Death ruled like a king because Adam had sinned. But that cannot compare with what Jesus Christ has done. God has been so kind to us, and he has accepted us because of Jesus. And so we will live and rule like kings. Everyone was going to be punished because Adam sinned. But because of the good thing that Christ has done, God accepts us and gives us the gift of life. Adam disobeyed God and caused many others to be sinners. But Jesus (trusted, accepted, pursued,) and obeyed him and makes many people acceptable to God.”* Romans 5:15-19

When you trust the love of Jesus, accept His truth, pursue His forgiveness and obey

His voice you too will live as royalty. Christ Jesus comes to set you free, free to trust, free to accept, free to pursue, and free to obey. The choice is yours.