

WEEK TWO

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

“But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

GENESIS 2:16–17

The Tree of Life is more than just a backdrop to a Bible story; it can be a way of life. To find out how, let's start at the beginning: Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In Chapter 1, the first Scriptures tell us about the creation of our world and define God as the Creator and Ruler who has authority and dominion. The second story in the Bible tells us about Adam and Eve, the first sin, and the two trees in the Garden of Eden.

It's the second story for a reason: Everything else in the Bible hinges on it. From it we learn humanity has to choose every day between the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Tree of Life

Freedom, Grace, Eternal life, God is good, God is forgiving

Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

Bondage, The Law, Leads to death, God is only a judge, We are condemned

When we study Scripture, it's always a good idea to find the first place a subject is mentioned. In our journey to walk in communion with God in freedom, we must find out why we may be separated from God and why we may be in bondage. The first place in the Bible where separation from God is mentioned is Genesis 3. The first people God created made a bad choice that caused this separation. (See Romans 5:12)

Prior to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve walked with God and enjoyed His presence. The Word tells us God made these two humans in His image and gave Adam dominion over everything He had created. God gave Adam authority through the relationship that He established with him. Without their relationship, Adam would not have had authority. When Adam and Eve sinned, they forfeited this authority.

Through deception and rebellion, the serpent took the authority and dominion that God had given to man. The Bible tells us that satan's desire was to exalt his throne above the stars of God. (Isaiah 14:13) Until the fall of man, he lacked power and influence to set up rulership. Jesus called satan "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31)

Colossians 1:21 tells us that we were “once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions.” Sin separates, and this separation costs us our freedom and the authority over satan that God gives to His children. (See Luke 10:19) Praise God that He made a way to end this separation! It was through Jesus that “God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.” (Colossians 1:20)

Before we proceed any further, you should know that the starting point to a relationship with God and walking in freedom is accepting that you are a sinner and that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin by shedding His blood and dying on a cross.

Write John 14:6

Write Romans 10:13

Has there been a time when you asked Jesus to be the Leader and Forgiver of your life? If not, below is a simple prayer that you can use to invite Him to be the Lord of your life.

Dear Jesus,

Thank You for dying on the cross and making a way for me to come to God. I receive this extravagant gift and ask You to come into my heart and be the Lord of my life. I give You all of me and ask You to turn my life around for Your glory. Fill me with Your Spirit, and help me live the life You died to give me. In Jesus name, Amen.

This is the first step toward your life of freedom!

SEPARATION AND THE FIRST SIN

“The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden He placed the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil... but the Lord God warned [Adam], ‘You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.’”

GENESIS 2:9, 16–17

Read Genesis 3:1–8 and notice who is doing what. In verses 7 and 8, what did Adam and Eve do?

Read Genesis 3:9. What did God do?

Don't miss this part: Adam and Eve hid; God came looking for them. The Bible says God is seeking after sinful man. God is in love with sinful man and sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue people.

Ask yourself: Are there things in my past that have caused me to want to hide from God?

Read James 4:8 and 2 Chronicles 15:2. What do these passages teach us about our relationship with God?

Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the tree that was forbidden to them. This fruit was not just any fruit—it was knowledge of good and evil. They mistakenly thought that this fruit would make them like God. Learning the truth about this fruit will help us avoid making this mistake.

Ask yourself: Have I used knowledge of God as a basis of my relationship?

TRUTHS ABOUT THE FRUIT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

1. The fruit is knowledge.

Most of us think of this fruit as some sort of apple, but it's not. The fruit of this tree is exactly what the Bible says: knowledge (information, data, ideas, worldview, thought patterns)—the knowledge of good and evil. God was basically saying to Adam and Eve, “If you change your way of thinking, it will create separation between us. If you change your worldview, you won't be able to understand Me and relate to Me.” Satan says, “It won't hurt you to think like that.”

Note that God didn't say it's wrong to have knowledge. In fact, God said to Israel through Hosea the prophet, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”(Hosea 4:6 NKJV) The issue isn't necessarily knowledge; rather, it's the motive behind its acquisition. In other words, why do we desire knowledge? Is it to gain God's wisdom and understanding, or is it to somehow exalt ourselves?

We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1 NIV

According to Colossians 2:3, what do we find hidden in Jesus?

From the beginning, human beings have desired to be wise. God is actually pleased with this desire. In 1 Kings, we have the account of God appearing to King Solomon in a dream and saying to him, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!” Solomon asked for one thing: wisdom to govern the nation of Israel and the ability to discern good from evil.

Read 1 Kings 3:10–13. How did God respond to Solomon’s request?

Wisdom from God varies greatly from wisdom from the world. We can tell the difference between the two by observing characteristics of each.

Wisdom from God:

Pure, peace-loving, gentle at all times, willing to yield to others, full of mercy and good deeds, showing no partiality, always sincere

Wisdom from the world:

Jealous, selfish, earthly, unspiritual, motivated by evil

When do we need wisdom? All the time! We are constantly making decisions, and even the smallest ones can be made with wisdom from God. Using godly wisdom allows us to become more like God as we emulate Him. His wisdom draws us closer to Himself. Worldly

wisdom leads us to sin, which alienates us from God. James 1:5 says, “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking”

2. The fruit is deadly.

The Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

GENESIS 2:16–17

Eating from the Tree of Knowledge (consuming knowledge) in your own pursuit of godliness is deadly. Satan didn’t tempt Eve with blatant rebellion. He said, “Go ahead and eat this fruit. It will make you like God.” Satan tempted Eve with her desire to become like God. It’s important to note that often the desire to know is in direct opposition to the desire to trust. We would rather gain knowledge to try to control our own lives than trust God to take care of us.

Read Genesis 3:22–24. Why were Adam and Eve driven from the Garden of Eden?

Adam and Eve didn’t die physically when they ate from the Tree of Knowledge; they died spiritually. Through Adam’s disobedience, death

entered the entire human race, and we are all born spiritually dead in need of resurrection. The good news is that, through Jesus, we have access to the Tree of Life. If we pursue Life Himself in our desire for godliness, we will become truly like Him.

3. The fruit is consumed.

“The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.”

GENESIS 3:6

“Eating” is not just putting food in your mouth. It literally means to “consume” or “ingest.” Ideas are ingested in our minds and then sin is conceived. How did the first sin come about? Eve talked to Adam about it. Through a conversation, they consumed the idea and began to process it. This progression tells us that sin does not begin with the act, it begins in our minds.

We have to be very careful about the things we ingest because they can have a lasting effect on our lives. For instance, watching certain movies or television shows might expose you to images that could trouble you for the rest of your life. Likewise, spending time reading and studying certain types of ideologies has the potential to pollute your mind and lead you to ruin and despair. Just as a parent takes extra care to guide what their children are exposed to, we should take the same caution with what we let ourselves be exposed to.

4. The fruit causes separation.

“The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

GENESIS 3:8 NASB

Again, remember that it was man who hid from God. Many have been taught that Adam and Eve sinned and that God, in His holiness and His righteousness, turned His back on Adam and Eve because His holiness could not stand to be in the presence of sinful man. But that’s not what the Bible says. The Bible says Adam and Eve sinned, their eyes were opened, they covered up, and then they hid from God because they were ashamed and afraid of His reaction. The truth is, Adam and Eve misjudged how God would respond to their sin. He wasn’t watching from behind a tree, waiting for them to fail so He could judge them. God searched for them as He walked through the garden, calling out, “Where are you?” because He loved them. God is not watching and waiting in anticipation for us to fall short. God is love (1 John 4:8) and the Bible says that “love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8) When we see His heart for us, we will run to Him instead of hiding from Him when we sin.

From Romans 8:38–39, name all the things that cannot separate us from the love of God.

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL PRODUCES SHAME AND VICTIMIZATION

"[Adam] replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.' 'Who told you that you were naked?' the Lord God asked. 'Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?' The man replied, 'It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.' Then the Lord God asked the woman, 'What have you done?' 'The serpent deceived me,' she replied. 'That's why I ate it.'"

GENESIS 3:10–13

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil robs us of innocence.

Imagine this situation to see how this process might happen: a young teenage boy has always been a delight to his parents—bright-eyed, enthusiastic, and curious, with no hesitation about him. But his mother begins to notice a change in him. He is becoming serious and angry, coming home with droopy shoulders and his head hung. The sparkle has left his eyes. He barely speaks to his parents and goes straight to his room. One day, while picking up laundry off his bedroom floor, his mother notices pornographic magazines under his bed. She begins to understand what has happened: Her bright, lively son now has darkness inside of him. His innocence has been polluted; he is no longer a little boy. Knowledge of the evil in those magazines advanced the kingdom of darkness in his life. All the things he saw in the magazines were real and true—the issue is, he didn't need to know. Now that he has allowed that darkness inside of him, he is filled with shame, and he isn't able to relate to his parents like he used to. It's not that his parents have distanced themselves from him; his sin has caused him to pull away from them in shame. He is no longer innocent.

Shame causes us to separate ourselves from God, making it so that we cannot operate in the freedom that Christ has for us. Shame is a veil that comes between God and us. It covers us completely, even our eyes, so that we can see only dimly who and where God is. God said to Adam and Eve, “Who told you that you were naked?” His tone was probably like that of the teenage boy’s mother, filled with great sadness and angst. “Who gave you those magazines? You really shouldn’t know that.” God doesn’t want us to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because it builds barriers—like shame—between Him and us. Those barriers break His heart. He wants to be close to us.

Shame causes us to do all sorts of things that keep us from connecting with God. Shame makes us want to hide. Prior to eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were both naked and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). Afterwards, they came up with the idea of sewing fig leaves together to cover themselves and then tried to hide from God’s presence in the trees of the garden.

The Results of Shame

1. Covering up with religion and becoming focused on works
2. Lying, deception, false pride
3. Making promises we can’t keep
4. Getting our self-worth from the things that we do
5. Inability to come to a place of honesty with God because we believe we have no true value
6. Concentrating on our sin instead of concentrating on our Savior

Why is shame so deadly? Because it strips us of the power to change. It keeps us from receiving the provision God made for our sin through the blood of Jesus. There is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is about what we have done, but shame is about who we are. With guilt, we can always get a fresh start. With shame, we are caught in a noose because the problem stays with us. In fact, with shame, we are the problem. In order to be free from shame, we must begin to see ourselves as God sees us.

Ask yourself: Have you ever been overcome by shame? What steps can you take to remove the barrier of shame from your life?

Just as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil produces shame in our lives, it also makes us susceptible to victimization. Victimization is a natural response to our sin. Eve responded, “The devil made me do it.” and Adam responded, “The woman you gave me made me do it.” We blame others, displacing responsibility. When we place blame, we excuse our internal condition or difficult outward circumstances by focusing on the actions of others. We say, “If my husband would just treat me right, I wouldn’t be so unhappy and manipulative.” “If my family were less argumentative, I wouldn’t be so irritable.” “If everybody would just live like they are supposed to, everything would work right.”

The Results of Victimization

1. We notice others’ sins, but not our own.
2. We excuse and condemn ourselves, saying, “I’ve just always been this way. I’ll never change. I’ll never be good enough.”
3. We feel rejected.

Whether we victimize ourselves by blaming others or excusing and condemning ourselves, we are powerless to change. This is why victimization is so deadly.

Are there any areas of your life—perhaps with your parents or other people in your past, in your marriage, at work, with friends, or even at church—where you have taken on a “victim mentality”? How should you change your way of thinking regarding that situation?

With victimization and shame, we’re either the Pharisee or the woman caught in adultery (John 8). We’re either saying, “You’re not good enough,” or, “I’m not good enough”—basing our relationships with

God and others on behavior and merit, but that's not the perspective God wants us to have. That's Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil thinking, and it keeps us from changing and connecting with God. It's a trap of the enemy devised to keep us from changing. The devil wants us to be forever stuck in the world of blame and self-condemnation.

We must get to a point where, no matter what happens, we take responsibility for our own lives. We can no longer blame anyone else for the quality of our relationship with God.

The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil lacks the power to transform the heart. It can provide facts and information, but it is powerless to give you life.

"Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won't have to walk in the darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

JOHN 8:12

Journal: *Below is a space for you to write what you're learning, thoughts on this week's topic, or what you feel God is leading you to do.*