

Today we're starting a new series called "Stories of Beginning Again." How many of you know what a mulligan is? **A mulligan is a second chance to perform an action, usually after the first chance went wrong through bad luck or a blunder.** Its best-known meaning is in golf, in which a player is informally allowed to replay a stroke, even though this is against the formal rules of golf. In life, we often wish we could have a mulligan; that we could easily start over after a blunder or a mistake and erase the hurt, pain or damage that it caused. Sadly that isn't possible. We begin today with the first people we meet in the pages of the Bible, Adam and Eve.

The verses I am about to share from *Genesis 3* have inspired countless artists, authors, preachers, and theologians, for centuries. More is often read into this biblical passage than is given in the text, while some of what is given is missed. The first temptation we need to resist is thinking we already know exactly what this story is about. Listen to God's word for our lives.

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?"'

"The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You shall not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, '**Where are you?**' He said, '**I heard** the sound of you in the garden, and **I was afraid**, because **I was naked**; and **I hid** myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and **I ate.**' Then the Lord God said to the woman, '**What is this that you have done?**' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and **I ate.**'"

Understanding this story begins with the first two chapters of *Genesis* that affirm God is the Creator of the world and all its creatures. Among all the fish, birds, animals, and mammals,

God created human beings with a unique purpose and role revealed in *Genesis 2:15-17*; humanity's vocation is to till God's Garden and to keep it. God grants permission for man to eat freely of every single tree in God's Garden except one, and this prohibition is given as a boundary to protect man from death. So the Lord God gives a vocation or purpose—"care for my garden and all its creatures and plants" —permission to enjoy and savor it all, and only one prohibition for humanity's own protection. God took the initiative creating this beautiful place calling us to be God's creatures, living in God's world, on God's terms. **This story is largely about the purposes of God and the trust of humanity. God's desire was to live in intimate loving relationship with Adam and Eve, unhindered by guilt or fear. Sadly this mutual relationship of love and trust doesn't last long.**

**The oldest temptations in the Bible are found in these verses, and they begin with failing to trust God and a willingness to listen to voices that cause us to mistrust God's love and good purpose for our life.** Among the wild animals that the God made was the serpent. The serpent has been interpreted as representing death and Satan among other things; neither is suggested by the story as presented. The serpent opens up an alternative to trusting God's command and from then on things go downhill. The first woman's original mistake was not eating the fruit, but listening to the serpent. Before she reached for the fruit, she had already surrendered her position of leadership and responsibility, and she let the serpent tell her what to do. Mistrust, doubt, suspicion, and anxiety are all present before Eve takes a nibble. Adam and Eve represent Everyman and Everywoman and how we fritter away our freedom and our God-given destiny by letting some snake tell us what to do. **According to *Genesis*, to be human means to care for other human beings, for all God's creatures, and for God's good creation. To fail to carry out any of these responsibilities is to violate the trust God has placed in us and is a sin.** Sadly humanity continues to fail at these responsibilities with increasingly serious consequences.

**The snake plays on the human desire to focus on God's prohibition, rather than what God has provided. "Did God say you shall not...?" Mistrust leads to focusing on what we can't do and/or can't have—this is the path to discontentment, dissatisfaction and disobedience. Trust leads to focusing on what we can do and on all we've been given—this is the path to contentment and satisfaction.**

Adam and Eve violated God's trust, and they needed to confess what they had done to overcome not only their sin but their refusal to take responsibility for their own actions. God continued to act toward them like a loving parent who is hurt, but still desires the best for one's children while also acknowledging that the relationship had been impacted by the lack of trust they showed. Steven Covey who wrote the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, declared, **"Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships."** *Proverbs 20:6* says somewhat longingly, **"Many proclaim themselves loyal, but who can find one worthy of trust?"** Think for a moment about this question: Who is someone in your life that you trust? Try to picture their face or even write down their name. Why do you trust that

person? A simple, common answer is because they've proven trustworthy. What do we mean by that? **Usually people we trust have earned our trust by their consistent actions over time.**

**Trust is “firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something.”** Trust is so important for relationships because we need to know that we can rely on, depend on, and count on someone in order to have a healthy relationship. This is true of God and of other people. Just as importantly, we need to be the kind of person that other people can trust, rely on, depend on, and count on. Trust creates a sense of comfort, stability and security that we know what to expect from someone else. In the same way, when we prove ourselves worthy of trust, it creates a sense of comfort, stability and security for other people.

When we trust someone we believe she or he will honor their commitments, their word and be dependable. Without trust relationships, families, communities, and even nations fail and fall. Without trust a society ceases to be a safe and prosperous place to live. Yet, because human beings are selfish and flawed, the reality is we break trust sometimes with other people and other people will do so with us. **Trust is built slowly over time, but it can be lost in a moment.** This can happen between spouses, friends, family members, even co-workers. When trust is violated or broken, the result is painful and depending on the circumstances, often embarrassing.

Broken trust in any relationship leads to hurt, anger, fear, and confusion. It can lead to lost opportunities. **Trust is rebuilt slowly through our actions over time. God created us for relationships based on trust.** Some people have trouble trusting God because key people in their lives have not been trustworthy; they haven't kept their word, honored their commitments, or proven reliable. Everyone loses when trust is violated. We win when we trust God, when we prove ourselves trust worthy, and when we're willing to forgive others who've let us down and seek to re-build our relationship and our mutual trust. We can trust again. **Gandhi said, “Among the most essential qualities of the human spirit are to trust oneself and build trust with others.”** While trusting makes us vulnerable, if we choose not to trust, we can miss out on so much joy God desires for us. We were created for relationships based on both trust and forgiveness. We may move slower in trusting others, but don't let fear steal your joy and imprison you in anger and hurt. You can trust again ... with God's help.

Adam can't answer God's question, “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” with a simple “Yes.” Violating trust not only leads to sin; it leads to excuses, lying, and a refusal to accept responsibility for our actions. So Adam blames Eve, “The woman whom you gave me,” even though he was with her the whole time. Eve blames the snake, claiming she was tricked. And so it goes throughout history, humanity has been blaming it on the snake ever since. This is a temptation for ordinary people like us as well as for those who are powerful; to fail to accept responsibility for our actions and to say straight up, “I blew it, I was wrong, it's my fault.”

The destiny of people was, and still is, to live in God's world with God's other creatures on God's terms. When we fail that ancient mandate, everyone and everything suffers. Our purpose involves trusting the God who created us, loves us, and wants to have a personal relationship with us. God is trustworthy and not only has a purpose for our life, but the commands and prohibitions of the Lord are not threats but boundaries given for our health and well-being.

Looking at Adam and Eve, one can say they failed to trust and follow God's word, and then compounded their mistake by failing to accept responsibility for their actions. It's crucial for us as individuals to understand the importance of trust, humility, and accepting responsibility. We cannot hide ourselves from God. Regardless of the heartache we have caused the Creator through our lack of trust, our fear, our failure to carry out our God-given responsibility to be in communion with God and other people while caring for and tending God's creation—God still seeks us out, God still is asking, "Where are you? What is this that you have done? Why are you hiding from me? Is life in the trees, hiding in shame, eyes open to your weakness, failure, fear, and anxiety where you want to stay?"

God is gracious and loving so Adam and Eve are given another opportunity to live life in God's world on God's terms, but because of their lack of trust and subsequent sin, that life will now be more painful, difficult and challenging—just as it often is for us when we sin. The good news is even though God sees us as we are God still loves us and wants to be in relationship with us and to help us become who the Lord desires us to be. We can confess to God how we have violated God's trust, fallen to temptation and pray for forgiveness. God's love is shown in the extent that God goes throughout all the rest of the Bible and of history to get back the people God loves. When you wonder if God loves you or how much God loves you, the answer is Jesus' blood stained arms stretched out on the cross. Even in this ancient story, God responds to human failure, not with death, but with life. We can be gracious to others who have violated our trust because God has been so gracious to us.

Trust is the foundational principle that holds all relationships. As you work through trust issues, remember that even if everyone else fails you, Jesus Christ will not. Trusting in Him and His promises found in the Bible, we can learn to respond to God's undeserved love and forgiveness by offering those same gifts in our relationships.

Let's pray: God we thank you that you are a God we can trust. We thank you for sending Jesus, who will never leave us or forsake us and who even died on the cross, that the trust we broke could be forgiven, and we could be in renewed relationship with you and other people. Help those of us who have a relationship that has been damaged by trust that was broken, to be able to extend or receive forgiveness. Enable us to be trustworthy people so that other people can rely and depend upon us and know that they're safe and secure in our presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Proverbs 3:5-6**, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. The oldest temptations in the Bible are found in *Genesis 3:1-13* and they begin with failing to trust God and a willingness to listen to voices that cause us to mistrust God’s love and good purpose for our life. Why do you think Eve and Adam listened to the snake? Why was that a mistake?
2. Why do you think people are so susceptible to listening to bad advice that is harmful for themselves, others and God’s creation?
3. In *Genesis 3* the snake tries to get Adam and Eve to focus on what God has prohibited rather than seeing all that God has provided. How does what we focus on tend to lead either to greater trust or mistrust?
4. How easy or difficult is it for you to admit when you’ve made a mistake, that you’re wrong, and to accept responsibility for something you said or did? Why do you think that’s the case?
5. In your experience, what is the worst thing about violating God’s trust and disobeying God?
6. For further study, compare the testing of Jesus in *Luke 4:1-13* to the response of Adam and Eve in *Genesis 3:1-13*. How was the temptation of Christ similar? How were his responses different?