



## Introduction

To begin the new life of relationship with Jesus, you're going to need to know hope. To know hope, you've got to know some history. Why?

- Christian history informs Christian hope. How?
- By revealing in greater depth and clarity the love and perfection of God.

**If we had to sum up Christianity, could we do it?**

At the very least, we can say that Christian faith explains the world and human history with one key term: "Redemption" – which is interchangeable with "recovery" or "restoration."

- We'll use "restoration" because it is a more commonly used term in our time.

**>> Christians believe that God has restored a broken relationship between himself and people.**

He has done all that is needed to bring us back across a gap between us and him through Jesus.

So now, restoration is available.

- This is what we mean when we say things like, "Receive Christ" or "accept Jesus."
  - We mean we accept...
    - That the relationship is broken and needs restoration.
    - The personal and miraculous way God has restored the broken relationship.
    - The meaning this restoration assigns to our lives.
  - We mean we want it to have an effect on how we live and how we see the world.

**The Bible is the long and dramatic history of how this restoration has happened. Like every epic story, it has a plotline we can follow and "chapters" into which it unfolds.**

**>>The Bible raises and answers the following questions, which are our 5 parts of Fresh Start:**

1. What is humanity? (Who are we, where did we come from, why are we here?)
2. How did this relationship between God and people go bad? (What's wrong?)
3. Why did God *want* to restore the relationship? (Who is God?)
4. How did he restore it? (What has he done?)
5. What is the result? (What is God doing and what will he do?)

**There is a story in the Bible that will help us with these questions.**

Part 1:

Jesus told the fictional story of a man who had two sons, the younger of whom decided he wanted his share of the inheritance due him. His father willingly gave it to him. So the younger son left his home and country to go somewhere "distant," there to spend what his father gave him on sensual things - even prostitutes. In that distant country, there was a famine. Because the wild son had spent all of his wealth so frivolously, he had nothing to live on. He took a job as a farm hand, feeding pigs. He found himself so hungry and miserable that he was even content to eat the food the pigs were eating. His thoughts went back to the home he left. He thought about his father's servants. Even they were eating well, but he, the son, was starving to death! At this lowest point, he resolved that he would return to his father and just ask him to be his servant. Jesus tells us "while he was still a long way off," his father saw him and was overcome with compassion for him. He ran out to him and embraced him. The rebellious son couldn't even finish telling him how sorry he was before his father clothed him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, completely restoring him into the family. A huge party was thrown in honor of this son who "was dead and is alive again."

*To be continued...*

***With this first part of the story in mind, let's ask some questions...***

## Part 1: Who are we?

Read & reflect: Genesis 2:7-3:23, 1 Corinthians 15:22-49, Romans 5:6-21

- **People are God's children.**

Adam was God's son, according to Luke 3:38. Genesis 1 tells us that Adam and Eve were created by God in his image and likeness. We're not entirely clear what that means, but we know that, at the very least, people were made to resemble and reflect God. Call it a divine genetic connection. Simply put, God is the father of humanity. As a child bears some of his father's attributes, so do we bear attributes of God our Father. *And what God made them was so good, it did not need to be covered or protected. They were naked and felt no shame (Genesis 2:25).*

- **God's first children lived in a place God made especially for them.**

The garden of Eden was home for God's children and a place where God is said to have "walked" in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). When the Bible says God "put" them in the garden, the Hebrew word for this idea is "nucha." *Nucha* includes the notions of safety and rest, as well as dedication. They were in a special place, a dedicated place, where they were secure and fulfilled. They had everything they could need or want to live well as a direct result of God's loving provision and lasting presence. The man and woman were even given each other to help one another, which is the essence of humanity. In making Adam "good," God determined that the only thing that was "not good" was that he was alone. Also, they were given purpose and fulfillment in tending to the garden, even creatively naming each form of life. In this way, they were actually connected to God's creation as creative managers of it, not unlike God's management of their world.

- **God did not force his children to love him in return.**

*Creation is not synonymous with coercion.* Along with all the blessings of living in the Garden, Adam and Eve were given the choice to influence and respond to their relationship with God – even to reject it. There was a world of options for choosing to enjoy God's provision and his presence. There was *one* specific option for rejecting him – one tree from which they were forbidden to eat. It was a tree that had symbolic significance. It represented distrust in God's knowledge and how he had determined to supply it to them via their relationship. It symbolized the possibility of having God's knowledge and wisdom without relying on God to provide it. It symbolized pride – a view of one's own worth that diminishes and disregards the worth of another. To disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit would mean questioning and disregarding the relationship that God had established with his children. It would mean diminishing the worth of God, the perfect Creator.

## Part 2: How did the relationship go bad?

- **God's Children Rejected the Relationship.**

They ate of the tree. God was not mad that they had simply eaten forbidden fruit. He was furious, as anyone would be, that they had given ear to the deceitful words of a serpent and pridefully suspected that their Father was not trustworthy as a sole source of wisdom. That he was not just or wise in how he made them and established the relationship. That he may be simply guarding against competition from mortals. Though he told them ahead of time that they would die if they ate the fruit, they didn't trust him. As with any relationship, a prideful lack of trust is the ultimate "deal breaker."

Discussion Question:

**Why did God allow Satan's influence in the garden?**

First of all, the serpent was not the Devil himself. Described as cunning, the serpent was actually created a wise (cunning) animal, one from whom Adam & Eve would accept wisdom as an alternative to God as the source. Second of all, the choice to love and obey God comes along with the choice to do otherwise. And the choice to do otherwise is only such if the opportunity really exists. Satan was in the garden for the same reason the forbidden tree was - to give the man and the woman the actual opportunity to love or reject God. To proactively choose him and trust him. Otherwise, their free will was a moot point – unnecessary.

- **God Fulfilled His Word.**

God does not lie. God allowed them the consequences of their actions, the fulfillment of their desires for more than what God had provided. Ironically, because God can absolutely be trusted in what he says, they would be forced to carry the full weight of their decision all the way to the grave.

Discussion Question:

**Could God have just overlooked their sin and not sent them out of the garden?**

No. That would not constitute a relationship, would it? It would have jeopardized God's integrity. Flashing forward: Sin equals death. That's why Jesus had to die. Even to the extent of God's own sacrifice, his integrity and perfection are maintained. That is why the death of Jesus is "applied" to our sin.

**Random Seed:**

**Why is it impossible for God to lie (Heb 6:18)?** When God, speaks he creates. God does not state the facts, he creates the facts. If he were to say that the sky is green and the grass is blue, it would become what he creates with his word and his communicated will.

## Part 2: How did the relationship go bad? (continued)

- **Anyone Who Is Not God Needs God.**

Their happiness and fulfillment were based not on being like God, but being with God. After tasting the fruit and having their "eyes opened," they discovered first-hand a startling truth. They were otherwise frail and utterly dependent on God, who had created them. God loved them so much that he had been willing to sustain them by sheer virtue of a close relationship of love and provision. This tragedy tells us that anything or anyone who is not God needs God. God is not only the maker, but the keeper. He is life. Nothing can live without him sustaining it.

- **The Fall Affects Us All**

Adam's rebellion was deeply embedded in his "moral genetic code." Because his life was no longer sustained in the presence of God, everything he would do, including reproduction, would be stained by his sin and suffer from the distance. That means us. All of mankind must feel firsthand the absence of God's provision and presence. To know what it's like to try to live and be fulfilled by human efforts and shortcomings. We must watch our created bodies age and fail. The distance Adam's pride created between himself and God robbed Adam's children of the opportunity they would have experienced in the garden. Yet this is only one early chapter of the story!

Discussion Question:

**Why did it happen this way? What were God's intentions in allowing this?**

God has always intended to demonstrate that he is the epitome of love. Love is most perfectly demonstrated in the face of adversity. God also intended to demonstrate his love in utter adversity. Because that is the nature of love. Simply because Adam and Eve could possibly reject God meant that love was sufficient to restore a fracture in the relationship, should it occur. In fact, love that forgives and restores and makes a way for restoration reveals the depth of real love. It breaks beyond the surface of provision and even presence to reveal the POWER of love over adversity and evil. Love in the face of humanity's sin was already at work right when sin first occurred. Redeeming love is first seen when God covered their nakedness and allowed them to experience the joy of children.

## Back to the Parable...

Like the younger son who rejected his father's guidance and lusted for the pleasures to be found far away from home, God's children wanted more than the loving Father and their home with him. What they didn't trust was that they had all they needed and more in Eden, as God had told them. Unfortunately, they had to find themselves starving to know how beautiful and perfect their life and home with the Father really was.

## Read & reflect:

Luke 15:11-24, Genesis 2:7-3:23, 1 Corinthians 15:22-49, Romans 5:6-21

## Next lesson: "Who is the Father?"

God still loves people from a distance. He set out immediately to restore humanity to himself. And in studying the long historical process of this unfolding, we are better equipped to answer the question – "Who is God?"

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### Discussion Questions:

(Repeated for use at the end of the lesson, if you so choose)

#### **Could God have just overlooked their sin and not sent them out of the garden?**

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#### **Alternate: Did God know ahead of time that they would disobey him?**

Sure. But by choosing to combine destiny with humans' ability to make moral decisions, he allowed for the possibility that they would *not* disobey him. And that possibility would present the opportunity to love them to even greater lengths, as we will see.