

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Bible Themes 3: What is wrong with us and the world?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session is one of several on great themes that run through the Bible. In the book 'The Drama of Scripture' the authors write this: "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." By looking at its themes we can begin to get a sense of how to "enter" the Bible.

### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What is wrong with the world? Why?



### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

What is important that we understand about how the story of the Bible describes the problems we face in the world and ourselves?

The Bible describes the root of the world's problem. "And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.'" (Genesis 3:22)



The Bible begins with a description of the original dignity and calling of human beings, but also the reality of how far we have universally "fallen" from the glory given to us. As Paul wrote, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3: 23) The story describes this as the result of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The issue in Genesis is not about whether we should be able to distinguish between good and evil – rather, the root of our human condition is **our attempt to be wise like God is wise**. To define in ourselves what is good and evil, effectively becoming our own gods.

The Bible describes how the fall affects three relationships:

**With God...**“He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in 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.’” (Genesis 3:1,9,10)

The cause but also the effect of this disobedience is the breakdown of the relationship of trusting love between human beings and God. **The story portrays the serpent as suggesting that God cannot be trusted.** “Did God really say...?” Humans are portrayed as falling from seeing God’s love and holiness, and so beginning to view God as less than trustworthy – thinking that His way is not necessarily the best. As a result, humans become estranged from their Creator – they hide from Him. We can sense the effects of this today in the cooling of our desire to worship and obey Him. We find that we may not want to talk to God, we may only want to talk about God. Yet the tone of God’s question to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” is not of anger, but of pain.

**With one another...**Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked...(Genesis 3:7) There is breakdown of relationship between human beings. In losing God as the centre of their identity, and having to define themselves, they become vulnerable in front of each other, and self-protective.

**With creation...**“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.” (Genesis 3: 17-18) Human disobedience to God’s offer of life has touched everything – it’s most obvious in our personal lives, in our greed, self-obsession, hatred, lusts, lies etc, and in our physical and mental diseases. Yet it also affects the material creation.

We live in a culture where the term ‘Act of God’ has a negative connotation with legal documents and insurance companies often referring to natural disasters as ‘Acts of God’. Beneath all of this lies the assumption that God is directly responsible for natural disasters, so the final explanation for why a particular disaster happened is to be found in why God would punish whomever the victims happen to be. It is important to note that, as revealed in Christ, God never wills suffering or disaster. Natural events such as earthquakes are not attributed to God’s will, but to the groaning of a fallen world.

It is essential to know the order of the beginning of the story – human beings and God’s creation do not start out as broken and sinful, but as “very good”. Human beings are sinners, but remain made in the image of God. We are affected by evil, but we are not evil in ourselves.

The Bible describes a human and spiritual fall. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth..... After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 1:1; 3:24)

From the beginning of the story, the Bible reveals creation as containing two realms of existence – the heavens and the earth, a spiritual realm and physical realm, initially created to be united.

Just as God delegated responsibility to humans to have to dominion over the earth, God also gave responsibilities and authority to angels. Like human beings, spiritual beings too have freedom – to choose to obey or disobey. But a mysterious glimpse into the spiritual structures of reality reveals that they, like us, fell from God’s rule.

In our lived experience the spiritual effects of the Fall have yet to be cleared up completely. The New Testament is clear on this point: creation itself still groans for the restoration of the children of God to their proper place so that creation itself will be set free from bondage, decay and violence (Rom. 8:19--23; Mark 4:39; Luke 13:4--16).

Discuss: Where do you see evidence of how we try and leave God out of the picture, defining good and evil for ourselves? Where do you see evidence for the three broken relationships which result from this?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Genesis 3: 1-13 which describes the reality and root of human disobedience.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of living in the world with all its brokenness. How have you acknowledged the sin in yourself and others, while still trusting in God’s goodness?



## Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



## Group prayer (5 minutes)



Generous in love—God, give grace!  
Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.  
Scrub away my guilt,  
soak out my sins in your laundry.  
I know how bad I've been;  
my sins are staring me down.  
You're the One I've violated, and you've seen  
it all, seen the full extent of my evil.  
You have all the facts before you;  
whatever you decide about me is fair.  
I've been out of step with you for a long time,  
in the wrong since before I was born.  
What you're after is truth from the inside out.  
Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.  
Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,  
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.

God, make a fresh start in me,  
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.  
Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,  
and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways.  
Unbutton my lips, dear God;  
I'll let loose with your praise.  
Going through the motions doesn't please you,  
a flawless performance is nothing to you.  
I learned God-worship  
when my pride was shattered.  
Heart-shattered lives ready for love  
don't for a moment escape God's notice.

Amen.

From Psalm 51 (The Message)



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