

The Fall and the First Promise

Genesis 3

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the anatomy of temptation in the serpent's technique, the real wound of the fall, and the astonishing fact that God's first response to sin includes a promise: the seed of the woman will strike the serpent's head.

Catholic Touchstone. Original sin, contracted not committed, described in figurative language but affirming a real primeval event; and the protoevangelium, the first announcement of the Gospel (CCC 385–390, 396–405, 410–412).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Genesis 3 must be read with both hands: one on the genre, one on the event. The Catechism is exact: the account “uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man” (CCC 390). The account as a whole is inspired figurative narration (which features are figures, the Church does not itemize); the rupture is real, and we all live in it. Do not let the group treat the chapter as mere fable, and do not force it into newspaper prose. Both errors lose the text.

The serpent (Hebrew *nachash*) is called “more subtle than any other wild creature.” Scripture will eventually name him: “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan” (Revelation 12:9). Watch his technique, because it has not changed: first a distorting question (“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree?’”, 3:1, twisting one prohibition into total prohibition), then a flat denial (“You will not die,” 3:4), then a slander of God’s motive (“God knows... you will be like God,” 3:5), as if the Father were a rival hoarding something good. Every temptation since runs some version of this play: doubt the word, deny the consequence, distrust the Giver. One pastoral line worth saying aloud: recognizing the tempter’s grammar does not mean every intrusive or unwanted thought is a demonic message or a sin; unchosen thoughts are not consent (see *Leading With Care* in the front matter).

Notice who is silent. The woman answers the serpent, and her report of the command has grown an addition (“neither shall you touch it,” 3:3) not found in 2:16–17. And 3:6 lands the quiet bombshell: she gave “also to her husband with her.” The text places Adam at the scene of the eating; how long he stood there it does not say, but its silence about any protest from the man entrusted with the word and the guarding of the sanctuary is loud. The failure the chapter shows is not only eating; it is a guard who did not guard. Handle this without turning it into a blame contest; the New Testament assigns headship of the fall to Adam (Romans 5:12–19).

The wound is instant and relational: eyes opened, shame discovered, fig leaves sewn, and the saddest verb in the chapter, they “hid themselves” from the God whose sound in the garden, we may suppose, had once been their delight; the text shows us only the hiding, and the hiding tells us everything has changed. God’s first word to fallen man is not a thunderbolt but a question: “Where are you?” (3:9). He is not gathering information; He is giving Adam a road back. Confession begins with letting God find you.

Then the sentences, and inside the sentence on the serpent, the promise (3:15): enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his seed and her seed; “he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (RSV2CE renders both blows “bruise”; the tradition’s “crush” for the head-blow reads the

asymmetry of head against heel.) The Church calls this the protoevangelium, the first gospel (CCC 410–411): a Son of the woman will deal the serpent a head-wound at the cost of a heel-wound. Before God clothes them, before He exiles them, He promises them a Champion. And note the mercy in the exile itself: banishment from the tree of life prevents fallen man from being immortalized in his fallen state; even the locked gate is medicine, a reading the Fathers made explicit: St. Irenaeus taught that God removed man from the tree of life not out of envy but out of pity, so that sin would not become immortal (Against Heresies III, 23, 6). The cherubim posted “at the east of the garden” (3:24) turn Eden into what the sanctuary will always be: a holy place with guarded access, awaiting the one who can reopen it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 3:15 is the acorn of the whole Bible. Track the seed: to Abraham (“in your seed shall all the nations be blessed”), through Judah, to David, until Paul writes with a rabbi’s precision: “It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many; but, referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). (RSV2CE’s “offspring” renders the Greek sperma, “seed,” the very word the study is tracking.) The New Testament closes the arc in two places: Romans 5:12–19 sets the two Adams side by side (one man’s trespass, one man’s obedience), and Revelation 12 shows the woman, the male child, and the dragon, “that ancient serpent,” thrown down.

The garments of skins (3:21) deserve a long look: for them to be covered, some creature died. The text narrates no ritual and says nothing of atonement; but readers from antiquity on have heard here the first whisper of a costly covering, a thread that runs through Abel’s flock, the Passover lamb, and the Lamb of God. And the tree: the Fathers loved the symmetry that as death came by a tree, life came by the tree of the Cross; the Church still sings it on Good Friday.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book III (as quoted in CCC 494)*

“The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.” The Church has read Genesis 3 next to the Annunciation from her earliest centuries: where Eve believed the serpent and grasped, Mary believed the angel and gave; the New Eve’s yes begins unwinding the old no.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

The Church’s Liturgy · *The Exsultet, Easter Vigil (see CCC 412)*

On the holiest night of the year, the Church dares to sing of Adam’s sin: “O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!” The fall is not celebrated; the Redeemer is. God did not merely repair the ruin; He answered it with a gift so much greater that the Church, staring at the risen Christ, can call even the fault “happy.”

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *Enchiridion (as quoted in CCC 311)*

“For almighty God..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.”

This is the Church's deepest answer to the mystery of why God permitted the fall: not that evil is good, but that God is so good He makes even evil serve a greater good, supremely at the Cross.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 311: God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of moral evil; and CCC 385: the mystery of sin is illuminated only by the mystery of Christ.
- CCC 390: figurative language, real primeval event: the whole of human history is marked by the original fault of our first parents.
- CCC 396–401: the first sin was a disobedience born of distrust: man preferred himself to God, wanting to “be like God” but without God, and sin then flooded the world.
- CCC 402–405: original sin is transmitted to all (Romans 5:12); it is “contracted,” not “committed,” a deprivation of original holiness, not a personal fault in Adam's descendants.
- CCC 410–411: after the fall, God did not abandon man; Genesis 3:15 is the protoevangelium, announcing the New Adam and, in the Church's reading, the New Eve.
- CCC 412: why did God permit it? “O happy fault”: Christ's gift is greater than the wound.
- CCC 494: St. Irenaeus and the knot of Eve's disobedience untied by Mary's obedience.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

- SEED THREAD PLANTED (the study's spine). From tonight, track the word “seed” silently: 3:15 to Abraham (Session 7–8), to Judah (Session 14), to Christ (Galatians 3:16). Do not preview the route for the group.
- The sealed My Guess from Take-Home 1 is now fully in play: tonight the group has met both the wreckage and the promise. Do not open the guesses; Session 8 is the reveal.
- Garments of skins (3:21): the first covering that costs a life. This feeds directly into Abel's acceptable offering next session, then Noah, Melchizedek, and the Aqedah. Touch it lightly tonight; let it accumulate.
- Cherubim at the east gate (3:24): the sanctuary thread continues; guarded access returns at the tabernacle veil. The rest of Genesis moves east of Eden until God starts calling people back west.
- “Where are you?": God's pursuing question returns as “Where is Abel your brother?” next session. Same divine technique, worse answer.

SESSION GOALS

1. The group discovers the serpent's three-step technique from the text and names its modern forms.
2. The group can state the Church's both-hands reading: figurative language, real primeval event, real inherited wound.
3. The group finds Genesis 3:15 and understands why the Church calls it the first gospel.
4. The group works the steelman on the fairness of original sin and can answer it with CCC 404–405 and Romans 5.
5. Each participant identifies the serpent's favorite opening line in their own life and one concrete counter-practice.

TIMED PLAN (75–90 MINUTES)

- Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)

- Win questions (10 min)
- Build: read Genesis 3 aloud, Q1-Q3 on the temptation (25 min)
- Build: “Where are you?” within Q3, then 3:15 and the live discovery chain (20 min)
- Steelman: the fairness of original sin (15 min)
- Send, Live It, memory verse, closing prayer (10 min)

If time runs short: *Cut the Dig Deeper on the garments first, then merge Q1 and Q2 into one pass over the serpent's speech. Never cut the 3:15 discovery or the steelman; they are the session.*

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Father, we have all heard the serpent's voice, and we have all hidden among the trees. Tonight, ask us again: "Where are you?" Give us the honesty to answer, the humility to be found, and the joy of hearing Your first promise with new ears. Through Christ, the seed of the woman, our Champion. Amen.

WIN • OPEN THE ROOM

W1. What is a rule you broke as a kid because you were sure the rule-maker was holding out on you? How did it turn out?

W2. When you were little, where did you hide when you were in trouble? Why did hiding feel safer than being found?

BUILD • INTO THE TEXT

Read Genesis 3 aloud with assigned voices (narrator, serpent, woman, God, Adam). Instruct the serpent's reader to make it smooth, not hissing; the danger of this voice is that it sounds reasonable.

Q1. Put the serpent's three statements side by side (3:1, 3:4, 3:5). What exactly is he doing in each one? Build his playbook.

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Step one, distort the word: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree'?" turns one prohibition into total prohibition, painting God as stingy. Step two, deny the consequence: "You will not die." Step three, slander the Giver: "God knows... you will be like God," as if the Father were a rival hoarding the good.

Doubt the word, deny the cost, distrust the Giver. Ask the group where they have heard each step this month; the playbook has not been updated because it has not needed to be.

Q2. Compare the woman's version of the command (3:2–3) with the original (2:16–17). What changed? And read 3:6 to the end very carefully: where is Adam when the fruit is eaten?

ANSWER • SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Her version adds "neither shall you touch it" and trims the lavish permission ("you may freely eat of every tree"). The word has grown harsher and less generous in transmission; a God made to seem stricter than He is, is easier to distrust.

3:6: she gave "also to her husband with her." He is there at the eating; the text records no word of protest at any point from the one who received the command firsthand and was set in the garden to guard it (2:15). Many readers hear in that silence a failure of the guard as well as of the eater, an inference from what the text does not say, standing alongside the explicit sin of eating. Romans 5 will lay the fall at Adam's feet.

Q3. After they eat: what do they do with their shame (3:7–8), and what is God's first word to fallen humanity (3:9)? What kind of question is it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

They manufacture coverings (fig leaves) and they hide. Shame's two oldest strategies: manage the appearance, avoid the presence.

"Where are you?" God is not consulting a map. The question is an open door: it invites Adam to come out, own it, and be dealt with by mercy rather than found by justice. Every confessional in the world is God still asking it. Notice the group's own answer strategies in 3:10–13: blame the woman, blame the serpent, blame (implicitly) God: "the woman whom you gave to be with me."

LIVE DISCOVERY

Live discovery chain. (1) Have someone read Genesis 3:15 aloud twice. Ask: "Inside a curse on the serpent, what is God promising, and to whom will it happen?" (2) Then send readers to Galatians 3:16 and Revelation 12:1–9. (3) Ask the group to connect the three passages themselves before you say anything.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

3:15 promises war (enmity), a lineage (her seed), and an outcome: the woman's seed will deal the serpent a head-blow while taking a heel-wound himself. Inside God's first judgment is God's first promise; the Church calls it the protoevangelium, the first gospel (CCC 410–411).

Paul, tracing this same seed-line at its Abraham station, reads it as arriving at one man: Christ (Galatians 3:16 interprets the promise to Abraham, the next stop on the line the study will reach in Session 7). Revelation 12 unveils the cast: the woman (a layered figure: Israel, Mary, and the Church at once), the male child, and "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil." The head-blow is dealt in Christ's obedience, Cross, and Resurrection, and lands finally at the consummation (Revelation 20:10); the heel-wound is its cost at Calvary: the Champion is struck in the striking. From tonight forward, this study tracks one question: where is the seed?

BUILD, THEN PRESS · STEELMAN

Build it at full strength.

"Original sin is simply unjust. I was not in the garden. I did not eat anything. A God who holds me guilty for another man's act, and lets babies be born already condemned, is not a God worth worshiping; He is a cosmic landlord charging me for damage done before I moved in. The doctrine should embarrass Christians."

Press it: this objection is felt, not just argued. Let it sit for a moment before answering.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First, concede what is true in it: you did not commit Adam's sin, and the Church agrees. Original sin "is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed,' a state and not an act" (CCC 404); in Adam's descendants it "does not have the character of a personal fault" (CCC 405). No one is punished for Adam's act as if it were his own. What we inherit is deprivation: human nature wounded, handed on without the

original holiness it was meant to carry, like heirs born after the family fortune was gambled away. Second, the objection quietly assumes we are unrelated individuals. Scripture assumes we are a family, a body, a solidarity, and honest experience backs Scripture: the pull toward self comes bundled with our nature before any schooling (though homes and cultures form it further), and every generation hands the next both its gifts and its wounds. If human solidarity is real enough to transmit trauma, language, and love, it is real enough to transmit a wounded nature.

Third, and decisively: the same solidarity that carried the wound carries the cure. “As one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men” (Romans 5:18). Reject solidarity in Adam and you have removed the very principle by which Romans 5 says Christ saves: as sin came through one man to the many, so righteousness comes through One to the many. God’s answer to the unfairness of Adam is the greater generosity of grace: One who owed nothing paying for all. And He has given the remedy a door anyone can carry a baby through: baptism, God’s free gift received in the faith of the Church (CCC 1250–1252).

DIG DEEPER · THE GARMENTS OF SKINS

Genesis 3:21: “the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.” Their fig leaves were self-made and inadequate; God’s covering cost a life. It is the Bible’s first whisper that shame is not managed by human craft but covered at a price. Keep your hand on this thread; it runs to a hillside outside Jerusalem.

SEND · OUT THE DOOR

S1. Which of the serpent’s three moves (doubt the word, deny the cost, distrust the Giver) works best on you, and what does it usually sound like in your head?

S2. God’s question was not “What did you do?” but “Where are you?” If He asked you that tonight, what would the honest answer be?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Go to confession this week if you are able. Walk in as an answer to “Where are you?”
- Pick the serpent-move that works best on you and write one true sentence about God that answers it. Put it where you will see it daily (mirror, dashboard, lock screen).
- Pray one Hail Mary each day this week, slowly, hearing it as the untying of the knot: the New Eve’s yes answering the old no.
- Read Genesis 4 and 5 before next session. The genealogies are not filler; read every name.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You did not abandon us at the tree. Before You clothed us, You promised us a Champion; before we asked, You planned the Cross. Untie in us tonight every knot the old serpent has tied, through the obedience of Jesus and the yes of Mary, and lead us home from our hiding places. Amen.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in the Discussion Guide, in order.

Where It Is Used	Passage
Read aloud to open Build	Genesis 3
Q1 the serpent's playbook	Genesis 3:1, 3:4, 3:5
Q2 the command in transmission	Genesis 3:2–3 with 2:16–17; 3:6
Q2 Adam's guarding duty	Genesis 2:15
Q3 shame and the question	Genesis 3:7–13
Live discovery chain	Genesis 3:15; Galatians 3:16; Revelation 12:1–9
Steelman answer	CCC 404–405; Romans 5:12–19
Dig Deeper	Genesis 3:21
Exile and the guarded gate	Genesis 3:22–24
Memory verse	Genesis 3:15