

Session 2. What Went Wrong

Movement I. The Design

Passages: Genesis 3:1-24; Genesis 4:19; Deuteronomy 24:1-4

Part 1. Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. That the group finds in Genesis 3 the specific damage that the fall did to the communion of Genesis 2, and can name it in the vocabulary the text supplies: hiding, blaming, disordered desire, and domination.

Catholic Touchstone. Original sin did not destroy the design of marriage. It wounded the people who enter it. Every marriage now is two wounded people attempting a communion that neither of them can manage on their own, which is exactly why the sacrament exists (CCC 1606-1608).

What You Need to Know

Last week the room was in a garden. Tonight it is not. This session earns its place because your couples are about to promise permanence to another human being, and most of them have a working theory that the marriages they have watched fail did so because of specific mistakes that they personally will avoid. Genesis 3 says the problem is deeper than that and older than them.

Handle this session with a light hand. The point is not to make anyone afraid. The point is that a couple who knows what they are up against will reach for grace, and a couple who does not will reach for blame.

THE SERPENT WORKS ON THE WORD OF GOD FIRST

Notice the order of operations. The serpent does not begin by proposing sin. He begins by asking a question about what God said, and he misquotes it in a way that makes God sound stingy. The woman corrects him and, in correcting him, adds a prohibition God never gave. By the time anyone eats anything, the picture of God in their heads has already changed.

This is worth naming for engaged couples because it is the exact mechanism by which spouses come to resent each other. Very few marriages die from a single act. They die from a slowly revised account of who the other person is.

FOUR KINDS OF DAMAGE, IN THE ORDER THE TEXT GIVES THEM

Work through the aftermath in sequence, because the text is orderly about it.

- **They see that they are naked, and they hide.** The word for the covering is the same energy as the covering that will now characterize every relationship. What was possible in 2:25, being completely seen without fear, is over.
- **They hide from God.** The first religious act after sin is concealment. God asks where are you, which is the first question God speaks in the Bible and one worth sitting with. The serpent asked the first question of all, four verses into the chapter.
- **They blame.** The man blames the woman and, in the same sentence, blames God for giving her to him. The woman blames the serpent. Nobody in the story says the words I did this.

- **The relation itself is disordered.** Genesis 3:16 says that her desire shall be for her husband and he shall rule over her. The rest of Scripture then shows exactly that happening.

GENESIS 3:16 IS A PROPHECY, NOT A PROGRAM

This verse is regularly misread as God's plan for marriage. It is not. It sits in the middle of a passage describing consequences, alongside thorns in the field and pain in childbearing, and no one has ever argued that thorns are God's will for agriculture.

Interpretation of the Hebrew here is genuinely disputed, and you should say so rather than pretending otherwise. The word translated desire is rare, and readings range from a longing for the husband to a grasping for mastery over him, with the same vocabulary appearing in Genesis 4:7 about sin crouching at the door. What is not disputed is the second half. Domination of the woman by the man is named here as a wound, and Christ will reverse it rather than ratify it.

WATCH WHAT HAPPENS TO MARRIAGE IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD

The narrative does not argue this point, it demonstrates it. Within one chapter, Lamech has two wives (Genesis 4:19) and is boasting about killing a man. The patriarchs will take concubines. The law will eventually regulate divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), and note carefully what that passage does and does not do: it presumes the practice, restricts one particular remarriage, and never institutes divorce as a good.

This is the material Jesus will address head on in Session 4, and the phrase he will use is hardness of heart. Genesis 3 is where hearts got hard.

WHAT WAS NOT LOST

Be sure the group leaves with this. The Church teaches that original sin wounded human nature but did not corrupt it entirely (CCC 405). Marriage remains a good of creation, still blessed, still fruitful, still one flesh. What is lost is our capacity to live it unaided.

And the first promise of a remedy is inside the punishment itself. Genesis 3:15 speaks of the woman's offspring and the serpent's, with enmity between them. The tradition has long read this verse in relation to Christ and, with him, to Mary, and the Church continues to read it that way (CCC 410-411). Note honestly that the Latin reading which made the woman herself crush the serpent's head reflects a translation the Church no longer defends on textual grounds, while the Christological reading stands on its own.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight the Old Testament is the root and the wound, and every fulfillment lies ahead.

- Genesis 3:15 opens toward Christ, the offspring who breaks the serpent, and the tradition reads Mary alongside him as the new Eve (CCC 410-411).
- Genesis 3:16 is answered at Ephesians 5:21-25, where the man's rule is redefined as self surrender. Session 6.
- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is answered at Matthew 19:8, where Jesus says the concession was for hardness of heart and from the beginning it was not so. Session 4.
- The hiding of Genesis 3:8 is answered wherever God comes looking, most fully in the Incarnation.
- St. Irenaeus and the tradition after him set Eve and Mary side by side: what was bound by one woman's disobedience was loosed by another's obedience.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IRENAEUS ON THE TWO WOMEN

St. Irenaeus taught that the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by the obedience of Mary, setting the two women deliberately side by side so that the undoing matches the doing.

He did not mean that Mary replaces Christ. He meant that God repairs the story with the same materials he used to make it: a garden, a tree, a woman, a word given and either refused or received.

Against Heresies, Book III, chapter 22. The Eve and Mary comparison recurs in Book V.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON WHAT THE WOUND ACTUALLY IS

St. Thomas taught that original sin leaves human nature wounded rather than destroyed, and he named four wounds in particular: ignorance in the mind, malice in the will, weakness in the face of what is hard, and disordered desire.

Read that list against Genesis 3 and against your own last argument. Both spouses will bring all four into the marriage. Neither of them put them there.

Summary of his teaching on the wounds of nature, Summa Theologiae I-II, question 85.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE BLAMING

Preaching on Genesis, St. John Chrysostom pressed hard on the moment when the man answers God by pointing at his wife, and at God for giving her to him. In substance he criticized the man sharply for shifting the blame onto his wife and onto God rather than confessing plainly.

He is a useful voice here because he is unsparing with the man. In a room of engaged couples that lands differently than a general observation about human nature.

Summary of his teaching in the Homilies on Genesis.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1606-1608 is the paragraph set built for tonight. It states plainly that every person experiences evil around and within marriage, traces it to sin, and insists that the disorder is not the fault of the institution.

CCC 397-401 describes the first sin and its consequences, including the rupture between man and woman.

CCC 405 is the one to have ready for anyone who thinks tonight is bleak: human nature is wounded, not totally corrupted.

CCC 410-411 treats Genesis 3:15 as the first announcement of a redeemer and gives the Church's reading of the passage, including the place of Mary as the new Eve.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

One Flesh. Tonight the thread runs backward: the one flesh union of 2:24 is still stated as a fact, but the two people inside it have started hiding from each other. Do not announce this. If someone in the room notices that the design was not revoked, only wounded, that is the point landing on its own.

The Bridegroom arrives next week. Say nothing.

The sealed sheets. Ask tonight whether everyone has written theirs. Do not ask what anyone wrote. If a couple has discussed their answers with each other, tell them cheerfully to write a fresh one separately and

seal it. The comparison in Session 8 only works if the answers are independent.

IF A COUPLE IS IN AN IRREGULAR SITUATION (LEADER ONLY)

Genesis 3 is the session where somebody's face changes, because it is about hiding and most people in the room are hiding something.

If a participant discloses something serious during or after this session, and this session is when it tends to happen, your job is to receive it without flinching and to route it. Thank them. Do not probe for detail. Do not offer an assessment of whether it affects their marriage. Ask whether the person preparing them for marriage knows, and if not, offer to help them make that conversation happen this week.

If the disclosure involves a previous marriage, an abortion, or an addiction, say clearly that none of these puts them outside the reach of what this study is about, and connect them with the priest and with confession. Do not counsel them yourself beyond that.

If one fiancé discloses something the other does not appear to know, do not become the keeper of that secret and do not disclose it yourself. Tell them plainly and kindly that this belongs in front of the person they are about to marry, that you will not carry it for them, and that the priest can help them do it. Full and honest disclosure before consent is not merely good advice. Session 8 will show them why. Serious deception about a quality of a person can, in particular circumstances, bear on validity, but not every undisclosed fact does, and that judgment belongs to the priest and the tribunal rather than to you.

If anything raises a safety concern, see the safeguarding note in Session 13 and act on it immediately rather than waiting for that session.

Session Goals

1. The group reads Genesis 3 and identifies, from the text alone, four distinct kinds of damage rather than one general idea of sin.
2. Every participant can explain why Genesis 3:16 describes a consequence rather than a command.
3. The group can articulate what was wounded and what was not, using CCC 405 as the guardrail.
4. Each couple names one inherited pattern they are bringing into the marriage from the family that raised them.
5. Nobody leaves thinking that the failure of other people's marriages was caused by a lack of effort they themselves will supply.

Time Note and Pre-Chosen Cuts

Ninety-minute plan. Opening prayer, 5 minutes. Win questions, 12. Reading Genesis 3 aloud in parts, 10. Build questions 1 through 4, 22. Live discovery moment, 10. Build questions 5 through 8 and the steelman, 22. Send and Live It, 6. Closing prayer, 3.

Seventy-five minute plan. Cut the Dig Deeper box and Build question 7. Read only Genesis 3:1-19 aloud and summarize the expulsion.

If the room gets heavy, and it may, take the Couple Conversation early rather than late. Giving them somewhere private to put the weight keeps the group discussion honest instead of performative.

Part 2. Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord, you came walking in the garden in the cool of the day and you called for the two people who were hiding from you. Come looking for us tonight. We have practiced hiding for a long time and we are good at it. Give us enough courage to be found, and enough trust to believe that being found by you is mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win. Getting Started

Open questions. No wrong answers, no answer box. Let every couple speak once before anyone speaks twice.

- A.** What is one thing you have already learned about being loved by someone who has seen you at your worst?
- B.** Think of the household you grew up in. Name one habit from it you want in your marriage, and one you are determined to leave behind.

Build. Into the Text

Read Genesis 3:1-24 aloud in parts if you can: a narrator, the serpent, the woman, the man, and God. It changes how the room hears it.

- 1.** Before anyone eats anything, what has already happened in verses 1 through 5? Track exactly what the serpent does with God's words.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He asks a question about what God said and misquotes it in a direction that makes God sound withholding. Then he flatly contradicts the consequence, and then he supplies a motive: God is holding out on you.

Notice that the woman also adds to the command, saying they may not touch the tree. Whether that addition came from her or from how the man passed it on, the picture of God in play is already a little harsher than the real one.

The eating is late in the sequence. The revision of who God is comes first.

- 2.** Genesis 2 ended with two people naked and unashamed. What is the first thing that happens to them in 3:7, and what does it tell you about what sin does to intimacy?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

They know they are naked and they cover themselves, from each other, before God ever arrives. The first casualty is not their relationship with God. It is their ability to be seen by each other.

Shame is not the same as guilt. Guilt says I did something bad. Shame says I am something that must not be seen. Marriage is the place where that gets tested every day.

3. God asks the first question he speaks in the Bible: where are you. God knows the answer. So what is the question for?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It is an invitation to come out. God does not begin with the accusation, he begins by asking the man to place himself.

This is the shape of confession and it is worth saying so tonight. The sacrament does not exist to inform God of things. It exists so that we come out of the trees and say where we are.

4. Read verses 12 and 13 again and count who accepts responsibility.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Nobody. The man blames the woman and, in the same breath, blames God for giving her to him. The woman blames the serpent. The serpent does not get asked.

The man's sentence is worth reading twice. The woman whom you gave to be with me. The gift itself is now the grievance. Every couple in that room will one day be tempted to treat their spouse as the reason their life is harder than it should be.

COUPLE CONVERSATION (JUST THE TWO OF YOU, NOT THE ROOM)

Just the two of you. Nothing goes back to the room.

When we fight, what is my move? Do I attack, go silent, get funny, get logical, or leave the room? Say your own move out loud, not your fiancé's.

Which of us learned that move from which parent?

LIVE DISCOVERY MOMENT

Do not explain Genesis 3:16 yet. Instead, send them looking for what actually happens to marriage in the pages right after Genesis 3.

Give them eight minutes with Genesis 4:19, Genesis 16:1-6, Genesis 29:21-30, Genesis 30:1-13, and Deuteronomy 24:1-4, and ask a single question: does the design of Genesis 2 survive intact in the story that follows?

What they will find: Lamech takes two wives later in the next chapter. Abram takes Hagar. Jacob is tricked into a double marriage and takes two wives, and concubines follow in the chapter after that. The law eventually presumes the practice of divorce and regulates it.

Then ask: if the Bible records all of this without much visible protest, what should we conclude? Take answers and let it stay unresolved. Somebody will say the Bible seems to permit it. That is the honest reading of the surface, and it is exactly the question Jesus will be handed in Session 4.

5. Now look hard at Genesis 3:16. Is this a command, a permission, or a diagnosis? What in the passage decides it?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

A diagnosis. It sits in a list of consequences beside pain in childbearing and thorns in the ground. Nobody reads the thorns as God's plan for farming, and there is no reason to read the domination differently.

Be honest that the first half of the verse is genuinely disputed. The word translated desire is rare, and the same vocabulary shows up in Genesis 4:7 about sin crouching at the door. Readings range from a longing for the husband to a grasping for control over him. The Church has not settled it, so do not settle it either.

What is not in dispute: the man ruling over the woman is described here as part of the damage, not part of the design. When you reach Ephesians 5 you will find the New Testament dismantling it rather than endorsing it.

BUILD THEN PRESS: THE GOD OF GENESIS 3 IS PETTY, AND THE PUNISHMENT DOES NOT FIT

Build it at full strength.

Build it properly. This is the objection your couples' friends will make at the reception, and a bad answer now makes the whole study look defensive.

On its face the story is about a fruit. An all knowing God plants a tree he knows they will eat from, permits a talking serpent in the garden he made, then curses childbirth, agriculture, and human relations for all time over a single act of disobedience committed by people who, not yet knowing good and evil, arguably lacked the equipment to appreciate what they were doing. If a human father behaved this way we would not call him just. The traditional reading also seems to make a woman carry particular blame, and that reading has done real damage to real marriages.

Then press.

Concede the parts that are true. The reading which pins the fall chiefly on the woman is a distortion, and Scripture itself puts the responsibility on the man (see Romans 5:12-19, where the comparison is between Adam and Christ). And the Church does not require reading Genesis 3 as a literal transcript. She teaches that the language is figurative while the event it affirms is real (CCC 390).

Then press on the nature of the sin. The text does not present it as fruit theft. It presents a decision to determine good and evil for oneself, on the strength of a claim that God cannot be trusted. That is not a small thing and it is not a legal technicality, because it changes what the person is, not merely what the person owes.

Press on the consequences themselves. Read them again and ask whether God is imposing arbitrary penalties or describing what a rupture with the source of life actually looks like. Thorns, pain, domination, death: these read less like a fine and more like a diagnosis.

Finally, press on what God does immediately afterward. He comes looking. He asks where they are. He clothes them, which is a strangely tender detail in a passage about judgment, and he speaks of an offspring who will break the serpent. A petty God does not do any of that.

Do not overclaim in return. This passage remains genuinely hard, and the Church does not pretend otherwise. Leave the difficulty standing where it stands.

6. Look at 3:15 and 3:21. What does God do in the middle of the sentence of judgment?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He says the woman's offspring will bruise the serpent's head, which is the RSV2CE wording, and he makes clothing for the two people who have just betrayed him. The language of crushing comes from the tradition's reading of that promise.

The Church reads verse 15 as the first announcement of the Gospel, and reads Mary alongside Christ as the

new Eve (CCC 410-411). Be honest about one detail: an old Latin rendering had the woman herself crushing the serpent's head, and the Church no longer defends that reading on textual grounds. The Christological reading does not depend on it.

The clothing is not decoration. God calls, questions, and pronounces judgment, and then he clothes the two people who cannot bear to be seen.

DIG DEEPER: WOUNDED, NOT DESTROYED

It matters enormously which of these two the Church teaches, and she teaches the first: human nature is wounded in its natural powers, subject to ignorance, suffering, death, and an inclination to sin, but not totally corrupted (CCC 405).

Some Christian traditions have taught a more thorough corruption. The practical difference shows up in marriage. If your fiancé's nature is wounded, then their good impulses are real and can be strengthened. Some traditions hold instead that sin has so affected every faculty that unaided persons cannot do anything savingly good or move toward God at all, while still affirming real natural and civil goods. State that position accurately rather than as a caricature. The Catholic account, that the wound is real but the nature is not destroyed, is what makes a marriage survivable on ordinary days.

7. Given all of that, what would a marriage need in order to work now, that it would not have needed in Genesis 2?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Grace, and a way to keep receiving it. Also forgiveness, which is not needed where nothing has gone wrong.

This is why the grace of the sacrament matters so much. Christ raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (CCC 1601, 1617), and one central fruit of that sacrament is grace that heals and sustains two wounded people (CCC 1608, and Session 7). The design did not change. Our capacity did.

If a couple in the room says out loud that they are going to need help, the session has done its work.

Send. Carrying It Out

Open questions again. No answer boxes.

- Y. Where is the place in your own life that you are currently hiding, not from your fiancé, but from God?
- Z. What is one habit that would make it easier for the two of you to say I was wrong to each other quickly rather than slowly?

Live It This Week

- **Go to confession this week, both of you, separately.** Not because tonight was about how bad you are. Because Genesis 3 is a story about hiding, and the sacrament is the practice of coming out of the trees. If it has been years, tell the priest that at the start and let him help you.
- **Name your move.** Tell your fiancé, in plain words, what you do when you are hurt. Attack, silence, humor, logic, exit. Naming it in peacetime makes it recognizable in wartime.

- **Break one inherited pattern once.** Choose one habit from your family of origin that you do not want, and consciously do the opposite a single time this week. Tell your fiancé you are doing it.
- **Read Hosea 1 through 3 before next session.** It gets uncomfortable. Keep reading anyway.

Closing Prayer

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we have been hiding since the garden, and we are still doing it. Come looking for us. Cover what we cannot cover ourselves. Heal the four wounds we carry into this marriage, the blindness and the weakness and the malice and the wanting of wrong things, and do it slowly if it must be slow, but do it. Keep us from ever using each other as an explanation for our own sin.

Mary, new Eve, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, Where are you?

Genesis 3:9

Part 3. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

- Genesis 3:1-24. The whole session text, read aloud in parts.
- Genesis 2:25. Read alongside 3:7 for the contrast.
- Genesis 4:7. The same vocabulary of desire, for the 3:16 discussion.
- Genesis 4:19; 16:1-6; 29:21-30; 30:1-13. Found by the group in the discovery moment.
- Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Found by the group in the discovery moment. Do not expound. Session 4 handles it.
- Romans 5:12-19. Responsibility placed on Adam, used in the steelman press.
- Hosea 1 through 3. Assigned reading before Session 3. Matthew 19 is the text of Session 4 and is assigned then.

Catechism Paragraphs Used

CCC 390, 397-401, 405, 410-411, 1606-1608.

Before Next Session

Ask the group to read Hosea 1 through 3 before Session 3, and to keep reading even when it gets uncomfortable.