

A Meal in the Garden

Genesis 2:8-17; Genesis 3:1-24; Psalm 34:8

What We Found

We began where Scripture begins, and we found food at the center of it. God's first gift is a garden of every tree, and his first command to the man in the garden concerns eating. Permission comes before prohibition, and abundance before the exception. The first picture of God in the Bible is a host.

We watched the serpent's method: recast the generous host as a withholder, so that grasping looks like justice. And we said the three verbs of the fall out loud: she saw, she took, she ate. Sin entered the world through a meal, and the consequences landed on food, bread by sweat from a cursed ground.

The story ended with cherubim and a flaming sword guarding the tree of life. Humanity walked out of Eden hungry for a food it could no longer reach. Scripture does not resolve that hunger quickly. This study is about how God does.

Voices of the Church

St. Ephrem the Syrian

Hymns on Paradise, 4th century

St. Ephrem sang of Eden as a holy mountain and a sanctuary, with the tree of life shining at its height like the presence of God. In his hymns, the fruit of that tree was a gift God intended for Adam in due time, and the tragedy of the fall was the grasping of a lesser fruit ahead of the greater one God was waiting to give.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, Book 5, 2nd century

St. Irenaeus taught that God heals the story at exactly the point where it broke. The disobedience that came by means of a tree, he wrote, was undone by obedience upon a tree. For Irenaeus, nothing in Eden is wasted or abandoned; every element of the fall is taken up and reversed in Christ.

St. Augustine of Hippo

Confessions, Book 7

St. Augustine recounted hearing God say to him, in effect: I am the food of the strong; grow, and you will feed on me. But unlike the food of the body, you will not change me into yourself. You will be changed into me. Augustine saw that from the beginning we were made to be nourished by God himself, and that this feeding transforms the one who eats.

Live It This Week

1. Pray grace before every meal this week, slowly, and mean it. Let it be an act of un-suspecting God: naming the food in front of you as gift, not merely fuel.
2. Share at least one meal this week with no phone at the table. If you can, share it with someone rather than alone.
3. Read Genesis 3 once more on your own, and mark every reference to food or eating. Count them. Come next week ready to say what surprised you.

Scripture Memory Verse

"O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!"

Psalm 34:8

Before Next Session

Read Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110. They are short. Read them twice, and notice anything that seems out of place or unexplained.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 374-379; 396-400; 1147

MY GUESS · SEAL IT UNTIL SESSION NINE

In week nine of this study, we will watch crowds of devoted disciples abandon Jesus over a single teaching, and he will not call them back to soften it or explain it away. Write your guess now: what could he possibly have said, and why would he let them go rather than clarify?

Fold this page or tuck it in your Bible. Do not compare guesses. We will open them together in Session Nine.