



Of all the things that sin ruins, what is the worst casualty? _____

- With _____
- With _____
- With _____

Remember: Every _____.

“Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, of who you are, into something a little different from what it was before. With all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature; either into a man that is in harmony with God, and with others, or else into one that is in a state of war with God, and with others.

To be the one kind of creature is joy and peace; to be the other means madness, rage and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.”

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

“People often rationalize their actions by using the old phrase, ‘The end justifies the means.’ I’ll do whatever I need to right now, and then later I’ll do the right thing. The problem is that usually by the end, you’ve become the means.”

Anna Quindlen

The good news: God’s next steps:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

“From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

“How could a good God allow this evil to take place?”

We must learn to “_____ the _____.”

Today’s Equipping Point

Be the _____

The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.’”

They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

Isaiah 62:11-12

Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost...”

Ezekiel 34:2,4

Discussion Questions

1. What one thing from your past was spoiled/ruined far before its time?
2. If you could go back in time, what one relationship marred by sin would you first restore?
3. Whom will you pursue this week, and exactly how will you do it?

Teaching Script

As a kid, what was your dream? Your idea of perfection, your ideal? For some, a peaceful house without shouting. For others, perfection was the centerfolds lining his wall. For another friend, it was his sandbox, building a city with his Tonka trucks and gear. NOBODY could mess with his sandbox.

Story of model car:

- As a kid, have a dream of perfection? Mine was a Corvette. Long way from driving, but that never stopped me from lusting and drooling.
- Friend's hobby, watched him as he meticulously built
- His model looked awesome, picture on box was awesome, I was inspired, bought.
- Started assembling, very careful. Had watched friend, meticulous.
- Also knew had to be done in stages, couldn't rush it.
- The components were perfectly formed – that signature curve of the Corvette hood, the decals, the lacquer paint...the setup was perfect.

The story of creation was much the same:

- God had in his mind a picture, a dream of what he wanted: a creation to be in fellowship with Him.
- The model was perfect – Eden was the ideal setting, environment suited for God's creation.
- God took his time, and didn't rush anything. All the foundations of earth, sky, water, sun, moon, and vegetation were set in place before man arrived.
- He created in stages, each day producing a perfect design.
- All the components were in place – Adam named all the creatures, he and Eve were naked and did not know the word shame.

Reading the first two chapters of Genesis feels something akin to crossing a threshold into another world. God is tending His garden and all is well. God's masterwork is beautiful, believable, and unfolding all according to His plan. The truth, beauty and goodness of creation were higher than our greatest fantasy, other-worldly, like a castle in the air. A dream of perfection that even outclassed my Corvette.

Speaking of my Corvette, even though it was my first foray into model cars, I thought it was going pretty well. I had completed the first phase and gluing all the chassis components in place, and it said to wait 24 hours for the glue to dry before going to the next step. BUT, being more than a little impatient, I thought overnight was too long to wait...and so I deviated from the instructions, which specifically said to wait 24 hours for the glue to dry, and took my flexible desk lamp, put a 100-watt bulb in it, and placed it directly above the plastic chassis frame, and went out to play.

When I came in an hour later, what I returned to did not resemble a Corvette. After baking under my desk lamp for an hour, what I returned to was a melted, bubbling pool of liquid plastic. My perfect model had disintegrated. In fact it was so bad, it was so hot

I couldn't touch it...I had to scrape it off with one of my mom's metal spatulas. There was no way that puddle of plastic would ever again possess the beautiful curved lines of a 1969 Corvette Stingray – it was forever ruined. And what's more, it left a permanent mark right in the middle of my desk – an eternal reminder of the cost of my impatience, of the price of deviating from the instructions.

And so my perfect design was:

- Deformed beyond repair
- Unsalvageable
- Left a permanent marker, a permanent stain
- Smelled awful

I think you see where we're going. Genesis chapters 1 and 2 present a beautiful model of endless potential...and chapter 3 melts a model of perfect design and form into an irreversible mess, an un-erasable stain that is a permanent reminder of our failure to heed God's instruction manual; and a stench in the nostrils of God.

I'm sure every one of us could tell the same kind of story: a time when you received a wonderful gift, or had a prized possession, only to watch it become spoiled, stained, and irreparably damaged, as it melts away before your eyes. Maybe it was a Christmas present that got broken before Christmas Day was over with; maybe it was an earlier marriage you had before you became a believer; maybe it was a son or daughter, or a once-in-a-lifetime job...or just a model car. All of us have seen something ruined, damaged. And, what's more, all of us have done damage, have been the polluters...all of us have been agents of decay. No one is exempt.

We call Genesis 3 "The Fall," but that sounds almost accidental, as though we inadvertently trip and fall head over heels into sin; as though it's not really us to blame, just "Oops, we fell." But as the story makes clear, Adam and Eve deliberately chose their path; and the rest of us have followed in their footsteps.

And so one day we awake from this idyllic dream and everything is changed: our flawless model becomes a puddle of plastic – our marriage is a battle rather than a blessing – our once-promising job is tedious and joyless.

So we face life in the less than ideal world beyond the garden – in a hardscrabble world where nothing is easy, nothing is as it should be – a world broken until the end of time.

Is there anyone here who has not seen a dream turned to dust? A hope of perfection reduced to rubble?

This what sin does...

Adam and Eve tried to make a name for themselves. They believed they could become like God. Cain tried to make a name for himself. He believed there were many ways to God. Those swept up by the flood had just completely abandoned God.

What we've done is try to fashion our own pathways to God. We share Eve's sin and make *ourselves* God. We try to make a name for ourselves. Yet, all our attempts leave us farther from God and farther from the garden than ever.

The sad fact is: Sin changes everything.
And what's spoiled is far more important than a toy or model car.

What would you say is the most devastating effect of sin? Of all the things that sin ruins, what is the most costly? What would you say is the worst casualty of sin?

The most significant change? In one word?

Relationships.

In the beginning, God... God is in a perfectly loving relationship as the Trinity. Father, Son and Spirit desire to share this perfectly giving relationship with people. It's all about the relationships.

- **Relationship with God** - God walks in perfect harmony with his creation – he and man speak as perfect community.
- **Relationship with each other** - Man and woman extend that perfect community to each other - together they reflect God's image as community (naked!, no shame, total vulnerability)
- **Relationship with the creation** - They have a relationship with the earth, which produces its fruit generously, and the animals, over which man has been given dominion.

No death exists – everywhere there is life. It is all about relationships—with God, with each other and with the planet.

But here's the thing about relationships: you can't force them. Relationships exist because they begin and thrive only with mutual consent. I can't force my wife to love me, and God doesn't force relationships either. When we choose to listen to a creature rather than the Creator, the first and greatest casualty are the relationships.

- Sin severs the relationship with God;
- Sin infects Adam and Eve's marriage relationship: they feel shame, and jockey for position with each other.
- The sin nature is inaugurated by Adam and Eve, and its tragic consequences are passed on to their offspring. Cain killing Abel demonstrates that every family relationship is infected with sin.
- The whole earth is cursed and begins to die – the relationship between man and his world changes forever.

This first chapter of The Story is vital to understanding God's Upper Story. The major doctrines of our faith are rooted here: sin and redemption. In the Bible, only the first two

chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation give us a glimpse into life in a world without sin, a world as God intended it to be. When we compare our world with what the world was like before sin, we learn that nothing is as it should be. Nothing. Sin changes everything.

And here's why: it's infectious. Sin is an aphrodisiac in the worst possible way – sometimes it's one whiff and that's the ballgame. Said another way, sin is a communicable disease – it metastasizes throughout your life and your family. Just ask Adam and Eve about the effect of their sin on Cain and Abel. Ask the man who has told himself over and over again, “Just *one* drink.” Ask the man whose experience with porn began with a magazine or two, and now has metastasized into a 2-3 hour online orgy every night, after his wife goes to bed (incl. example of youth pastor and mags needed to rev his engine.)

Sin is virulent and noxious so, so, here's the next point on your outline:

Remember: every bite matters.

Sin is a virus that circulates throughout the body. And so while the easiest thing to do sometimes is to excuse a dalliance – to rationalize an indulgence, another drink, a dishonest expense report, an affair, because hey, it's just this one time...it's *never* just one time. Sin is a stench that is distributed through the ventilation system where it penetrates every room, every compartment of our lives. And so, before you blow off the hundreds of small, seemingly insignificant decisions you make every day, think about what C. S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*:

“Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, of who you are, into something a little different from what it was before.

With all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature; either into a man that is in harmony with God, and with others, or else into one that is in a state of war with God, and with others. To be the one kind of creature is joy and peace; to be the other means madness, rage and eternal loneliness.

Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

One more quote...this one from Newsweek:

People often rationalize their actions by using the old phrase, “The end justifies the means.” I’ll do whatever I need to right now, and then later I’ll do the right thing. The problem is that usually by the end, you’ve become the means.

- Anna Quindlen, Newsweek, May 26, 2008

And so before you take the next drink, or a second look, remember: those small, insignificant choices actually define you. As you pluck the apple from the tree, just remember, *every bite matters*.

But now, the good news.

Immediately after the fall, God begins His plan to get us back into a right relationship with Him; and that Upper Story never changes even to the last chapter of the Bible.

1. **Promise**
2. **Covering**
3. **Provision**

1. **The first step is a promise and a prophecy:**

“From now on, you and the woman will be enemies, and your offspring and her offspring will be enemies. He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

2. **Second, God Himself makes a covering – clothes for Adam and Eve.**

This signifies two important things: First, He loves them and wants them to be protected, now that the earth is cursed. But second, God clothes them specifically from an *animal’s* skin — the blood of an animal is shed to cover their sin. God is inaugurating the precept that Blood is required – Death is required – to cover sin.

Later, an elaborate system of sacrifices of bulls, goats and lambs would be instituted to atone for the people’s sins. And then, thousands of years later, to complete the perfect work of the spotless Lamb, blood and death would be required once more...just this one last time...for the finished work of the salvation of mankind. What starts in the garden – blood shed by an animal for covering – ends at the cross, with the blood of a God dressed in humanity.

God third step is to preserve a remnant of humanity by saving Noah and his family from God’s judgment on the world in the flood.

3. **God provides for his entire creation by saving those faithful to him..**

And so today, the church represents the Ark. Jesus is captain of the Church no less than Noah was captain of the Ark, because the church is the Ark in which God dwells, where he saves a community of people from a storm-tossed world full of death and defeat.

We live in a fallen world where people constantly ask the question, “How could a good God allow this evil to take place?” But God has only given us what we asked for: the ability to choose. Sin can come in the form of “natural evil” including natural disasters, disease, and death, or from intentional evil perpetrated one against another. Nothing is as it should be.

But God has promise that He will recreate the earth in the future and once again there will no more evil, no death, no pain and no tears. The world to come will be infinitely better than even the garden, because we will no longer have an opportunity to sin – Satan will be vanquished and God will once again dwell among us as He did with Adam and Eve.

In the meantime, gentlemen, as the last point on your outline, our mission is this:

We must learn to “reverse the curse.”

Learn to reverse the curse – break the cycle – by resisting the temptations of the evil one, by representing God in the fallen world, by striving to restore broken relationships, and by remembering that *every bite matters*. Adam set a sin nature in motion for all of us – but it is possible...not just possible, but critical – for us to reverse the curse by remembering that

Every bite matters.

The Upper Story of God is that immediately after the first sin, the final act of redemption was promised. And with each successive story: Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Brad and Bill, Dick and Eric, Jim and Ron...with each successive story, including yours and mine, God shows His repeated faithfulness to redeem both ourselves and our choices. God is always the pursuer – following Adam and Eve out of the garden, following Joseph to Egypt, pursuing his people as they wandered for 40 years in the desert, as they were exiled to Assyria and Babylon, and as they were dispersed in the first century. God is *always* the pursuer.

And so here is today’s Equipping Point. You’ll remember that each week, we are dedicated to equipping men to lead their families well, to be great spiritual leaders, and giving men one thing each week to focus on.

So here’s today’s **Equipping Point: to be the spiritual leader of your family:**

Be the pursuer.

We are still His image bearers. In His image. His likeness. You are a reflection of God to your family. I’ve said it 100 times – as a father, you are *God’s designated hitter*. YOU are the father figure that represents Him to your kids. And as a husband, again, YOU are the image bearer. You represent Jesus Christ as you love and serve and give yourself up for your wife, because Jesus loved and served and gave himself up for his church. You were made in His image, in His likeness, to carry out that mission.

And here’s the mission:

The LORD has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.'"

They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD; and you will be called Sought After, the City No Longer Deserted.

Isaiah 62:11-12

And if there's one thing that the entire Bible tells us about God, this "Upper Story," is that God is in relentless pursuit of man. God is always the pursuer. We will see in the next few weeks and months that there is no place He will not go, literally to hell and back, to pursue and redeem his children. And so let me ask...to what lengths would you go for your family's sake? How far would you pursue them?

You know, I've noticed something. I've been married over 23 years, and I'm starting to see a pattern. Almost every time Cheryl and I have some sort of disagreement, or I get my feelings hurt, I get upset because of one thing: she stubbornly refuses to read my mind.

Just about every time we have a misunderstanding, I get all bent out of shape because she hasn't guessed what I'm upset about...she just refuses that telepathy thing and cannot, for the life of her, read my mind and magically discern what is bothering me. So I get this stupid, self-centered idea in my head that it's her job to have this miraculous discernment and anticipate my every need. After all, if she weren't so self-centered, she'd be more in tune with me, do this mind-meld thing like Spock, and instantly and miraculously know what I need before I say it.

Sorry for the sarcasm, but do you see where I'm going? If the one consistent, never-wavering characteristic of God is that He is the eternal pursuer of mankind, then as His image bearer, I must be the pursuer of my family. I must take the initiative. I can't be pouty and childish and wait for everybody to come to me. I have to be the one to be a man, to take the first step, to open up first, to say "I'm sorry" first – as God's image bearer I must be the pursuer.

Listen to God's reproof of the pastors in Ezekiel:

Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost..."

Ezekiel 34:2,4

I've got news for you: You are the primary shepherd, the pastor of your family. May it never be said of us, "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those

who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost...

Perhaps, just perhaps, if Adam had been more attentive to Eve, if he had pursued her more deeply, perhaps she wouldn't have been alone when Satan approached her and tempted her. And today, this week, the ONE THING you can do to lead your family well, to be the spiritual leader, to represent God, is to be the pursuer. Listen intently as your wife and kids relate their day...volunteer to read *The Story* to them...be the first to apologize and pursue reconciliation...stop moping and sulking because she can't read your mind and open up.

To lead your family this week, be the first to speak up, the first to confess, the first to heal. Pursue your family as God has tenaciously pursued you, called you back from sin, called you to a higher purpose.

Sin has changed everything...everything but one thing: God and His character. Nothing can change that – and as His ambassadors, let us reflect His relentless pursuit of us.