

Come to the Garden: 2. Paradise Lost

Genesis 2:7-8, 16-18, 3:1

March 4, 2018

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I grew up in the southwest corner of the United States in an area some consider a garden paradise. With an average annual low temperature of 60° and an average high temperature of 77°, sunny mornings, warm days, cool ocean breezes and breath-taking sunsets, San Diego can certainly seem like paradise. And because of the temperate climate, lush vegetation grows year around. Plants that we have never even heard of in Minnesota grow year round in San Diego. When our family moved from Boston to California in the 1970's, my father took up the hobby of rose gardening. He enjoyed finding new varieties and types of roses to add to his garden. Each day, he'd spend time trimming, weeding, fertilizing, watering and deadheading the row of rose bushes that lined the driveway to our house. In the garden, he was an artist and there he found a special peace and joy.

Today we are in week two of our six part series we're calling *Come to the Garden*. In this series we are looking at the motif of a garden as it is found throughout the Bible. We heard last week that the Bible begins in Genesis, in a garden, in paradise. The Bible also ends in a garden in the book of Revelation. In fact, one of the trees, the Tree of Life, that we are going to read about today, is also found, by name, in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible, Revelation 22. It's like a perfectly crafted symphony that begins and ends with the same theme. This is our story as human beings and God's redemptive work in our lives.

Last week, as we read Genesis 1, the first creation story, Pastor Steve reminded us that it is not intended to be a science lesson but instead a Hebrew poem, a liturgy or creed where we see God's intentions for creation coming to full fruition with God's will and desire. God is portrayed as speaking from afar, bringing order out of chaos with just a spoken word. A well planned and carefully structured design that takes six days to complete. And at the end of each day, God repeatedly pronounces, "It is good". And at the end of the last day, God says, "It is very good." In this telling of the story, God created humans as a simultaneous community, both male and female, at the same time and in the image of God.

In today's scripture, we find a different telling of the creation story with a different image of God and a different creation order. It's a story, a theological narrative that is intended to help explain the aspect of human life throughout the ages including human-to-human, human to creature and human to God. It is not written to tell us about actual people who lived long ago and far away but instead it's intended to be a mirror in which to see ourselves; who we are as human beings and how God's beautiful creation got so messed up. This is our story. This is not the far off God that we read about in Genesis 1, but instead, a God who gets "down and dirty" with creation, forming the human from the dirt and the clay. The Hebrew word for human is *adam* and the Hebrew word for clay is *adamah*.

This last week as I was thinking about what the artists who I know look like when they are working, none of them are neat and tidy. They all wearing old clothes, sometimes their studio is covered to protect it from the collateral damage that may occur during the creation and they are all covered in paint or clay or dust! I instantly thought of my friend,

DeAnne Parks, a Christian artist who mostly works in the medium of canvas and paint. I poked around on her Facebook page looking for a picture of her working but I couldn't find one. So I sent her a message and asked if the next time she was in her studio would she send me a picture of herself in her "work clothes." I told her a little bit about my message and why I was asking. She responded that she was actually in her studio at that moment but she wasn't painting. She was carving clay hearts with her hands. Clay hearts! Just like the creator, hands in the clay creating love. I love it when the Holy Spirit nudges me in a certain direction and I'm actually paying close enough attention to realize it.

So can't you just see God, hands in the clay and dirt, creating love! The Great Artist at work takes this newly formed lump of clay and, like the first CPR, breathes life into it. God breathes "the breath of life" into this creature's nostrils. The first human is born. This is why on Ash Wednesday just a couple of weeks ago we said, "from dust you came and to dust you will return" as we make the mark of the cross on our foreheads. It reminds us that from the earth we came and to the earth we will return.

Next, God plants a garden, the Garden of Eden and put the human in it along with the all kinds of trees and plants that were pleasing to the eye and filled with food. These included two specific trees; the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God tells Adam that he can eat from any tree in the garden that he want except from this one tree, Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And if he does eat from it, he will surely die. But the Tree of Life, the Tree of Life is just that and as long as you eat it, you will live forever.

God steps back and surveys his creations and for the first time senses that something is wrong... "something is not good." God looks at the man alone in the garden and says that it is not good for you to be alone. You need a partner, a companion. God announces what is fundamental to our human nature and the first point of my message today. We were not meant to do life alone. So God created all the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air and allowed the man to name them all but still there was no suitable companion for the man.

I want to stop here for just a minute and talk about this idea of animals as companions. We, like a lot of you, have a beloved pet. We got Carson as a puppy when our youngest daughter was in high school. Now, 8 years later, with just a blink of the eye, she has graduated college and we are empty nesters and Carson has become our constant companion. In fact, my husband Jerry grew up with just one sibling, an older sister. He has such a strong bond with Carson that he calls him, "The Brother I Never Had." We love our dog. He thrives for our constant companionship and he loves us unconditionally. I'm guessing that some of you may be able to relate to what I am talking about. But no pet, no matter how much we love them, is the same as having a human friend. Human friends and companions make life better.

So God assumes the role of chief surgeon, puts Adam into a deep sleep, removes a rib from Adam's side and lovingly shapes this rib into the second human being, Eve. The Hebrew word used here is *ezer*, a helper. This is not a subordinate but one who will be an equal. "A helper" is someone who comes to help those in need. Eve is like Adam but at the same time, the opposite of Adam. Like a two puzzle pieces that perfectly together.

Adam awakes and recognizes the fulfilling of his deepest longing. This is the telling of the first marriage but it's not just about marriage. It's about our need as human beings for companionship and helpers. In fact, the apostle Paul says that the highest calling as a Christian is not to be married. Jesus was not married. Paul was not married. Mother Teresa was not married but they still had helpers and friends with which to do life. We are social creatures who thrive in close, intimate relationships with other humans. I do want to take a minute here and focus on the mission of marriage. The mission of marriage is not to always be madly in love with your mate, like giddy, doe-eyed teenagers. That is just never going to happen. But instead, we're to be the *ezer*, the helper to our partner. The mission is to help them, to partner with them, to be their companion in life. The word companion literally means to break bread together, to share a meal. Sometimes marriages are not able to last. There are some marriages where one person is all in and one is not. Or in cases of abuse or neglect, marriages should not last. The reality and mystery of human love is that sometimes it endures and sometimes it does not. But Genesis 2 reminds us of God's original intention and desire is for us is to find in at least one other person - a bond of love that runs so deeply that we will never feel alone. The mission of marriage is to wake up everyday and ask God, how can I help my partner? How can I bless them? How can I champion them to be the best person that they can be in sickness and in health, in the fun times and in the difficult times? The mission can be hard and messy but it is at those times when you are most fulfilling the mission of marriage. I do this every day for Jerry. In fact, it's part of what I say to God before I get out of bed each morning. Lord, I offer my life to you. Help me to be the person you want me to be. Show me the ways that I can bless and encourage Jerry to be the person You want him to be.

My mom and dad were married for 55 years before my dad passed away in June of 2015. In fact, tomorrow will be their 58th wedding anniversary. In December of 2011, my dad underwent a planned open-heart surgery that during the course of the surgery went terribly wrong. It was no one's fault. The doctors just found things once they were inside that they could not have known before they started. For 2 months following the surgery, my dad was in a coma. For another 3 months, he was in intensive care. And every day for 5 months, my mother would get up in the morning, cut a couple of the prettiest and best roses from my dad's rose garden and go to the hospital. The roses were for my dad's bedside, the nursing station, a doctor or another patient who needed a little day brightener. My mom would stay with my dad until he was settled down for the night and then return home, eat dinner alone and go to bed. This was her routine everyday for 5 months. And then when my dad was finally able to return home, he came with an oxygen tank, a walker, no ability to take any food or liquid by mouth so he had a feeding tube. He had to sleep in a special bed and needed help with his personal care. For the next 3 years, mom took care of dad. What I saw there was the mission of marriage being lived out. It wasn't about romance; it wasn't about physical intimacy or fun. It was all about the mission; in sickness and in health until death do us part. This is my solemn vow.

Okay, back to our creation story. Unfortunately, this happy union is quickly marred and takes an unexpected downward turn into Adam and Eve's disobedience and expulsion from the Garden. It's Paradise Lost, also known as The Fall; the fall from goodness, innocence and paradise.

Enter the serpent. I'm at Genesis 3. "The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really tell you cannot eat from any trees in the garden?'" Hang on a second! That's not what God said. God

didn't say any tree, God said just this one tree. See, that's what Satan does. He takes something that can be good and twists it around and makes it sound worse or different than it actually is. Author Richard Rohr, in his book, *Wondrous Encounters*, writes, "We can only be tempted by something that is good on some level, partially good, or good for some, or just good for us and not for others. Temptations are always about 'good' things, or we could not be tempted. Most people's daily ethical choices are not between total good and total evil, but between various shades of good, a partial good that is wrongly perceived as an absolute good, or even an evil that disguises itself as good. These are what get us into trouble."

Eve responds with, "God said we could eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree in the middle of the garden and the day that we do, we'll die." And do you remember what the serpent says? "You will not certainly die. God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." We all know that when something is evil we should stay as far away from it as possible. The longer you look at something the more attractive it looks, especially if it is something you are not supposed to have. But what does Eve do? She walks right up to the tree and she looks at the fruit and she sees that it was good and pleasing to the eye, and in her desire to gain knowledge, she takes a bite. When we're tempted by something, is it good to stay near it? Should someone with drinking problem hang out in bar? Or someone with a gambling addiction spend time in a casino? No, we should get as far away from our forbidden fruit as possible. And if we're honest, we all have some forbidden fruit in our lives. This is our story.

There are two voices that speak to us. There's the voice of God that tells us this is the way to go, the Holy Spirit guides and nudges us throughout the day, we hear God's voice in Scripture, here in worship, in our small groups and many other ways throughout our lives. But there is also the voice of Satan saying, "Psst, look over here. This is where the fun is. This is where the good fruit is." At some time in our lives, we all hear the voice of the serpent whispering to us and it's seductive and hypnotic. So what is your forbidden fruit? What is that thing that you know you shouldn't do but you find yourself thinking about a lot? Is it gambling, food, alcohol, gossip, pride, jealousy, materialism, pornography, an extra-marital relationship? I don't know what it is for you but I know that there are times in my life where I think about eating a fruit that I shouldn't. This is our story.

Adam and Eve immediately knew that they had done something wrong. "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

They did the one thing that they knew they were not supposed to do and they instantly ashamed of what they had done, their innocence was lost and they were afraid of what God would say. So like children, they hid. And when God found them what did they do? Like children, they started blaming each other. Adam said Eve, the woman you gave me, God, made me do it. Eve said the serpent tricked her into doing it. God said it doesn't matter who made you do it, you did it! Something terrible has happened and something beautiful has been lost. And God banished them from the Garden, to work the ground from which they had been taken. This is our story.

When we watch the evening news and see all the terrible things that are happening in the world it is because in every instance, someone knew the right thing to do but they chose to do the wrong thing. It's war, the hoarding of food, it's the school shootings, it's the gossiping and backbiting that happens every day. It's the fighting in a marriage because two people can't figure out how to put the other person first. In a thousand ways, paradise is lost everyday. In each of our lives, we've all heard the voice of the serpent and we've all eaten the forbidden fruit. This creation story uses the image of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" to say that God gave human beings—us—the freedom and responsibility to make choices between good and evil. It raises the basic moral question and my question for you today: whose wisdom and purposes will you follow? Will you try to be your own God, doing whatever pleases and intrigues you? Or will you honor and be guided by the God who created you? My hope and prayer is that we'll all say, Lord help me to say "yes" to your voice and "no" to the serpent, and eat from the Tree of Life.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of March 4, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Master Artist, your voice called out over the deep and darkness and brought forth light. Your voice called out over the waters and brought forth life. Your voice called out over this earth and brought forth our very beings. Your voice continues to call out in our Universe and bring new hope and new life. Help us to hear Your voice above the hum of the highway and the buzz of the business talk. Help us to hear Your voice in the cries of children, in the soft tones of the sick, in the pleas of the poor. May we hear, listen, and respond to Your voice in our lives and in our world. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Monday, March 5

Scripture: Genesis 2:4-14

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. On the day the LORD God made earth and sky—before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land—the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides into four headwaters. The name of the first river is the Pishon. It flows around the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. That land's gold is pure, and the land also has sweet-smelling resins and gemstones. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It flows around the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris, flowing east of Assyria; and the name of the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Observation: Genesis' second creation story was folksier and less structured than the one in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It said God created a human first, before any plants or animals. (If read as literal history, as science, it would contradict Genesis 1.) It used "Yahweh" (translated "LORD") rather than the more generic "Elohim" as God's name. Here God gave the newly created humans a "garden," a perfect setting in which to thrive, with a river running through it that returned in Revelation 22:1-2, along with the tree of life.

Application: This creation story used the image of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” to say that God gave human beings—us—the freedom and responsibility to make choices between good and evil. The image raised the basic moral question: whose wisdom and purposes will humans follow? Will they try to be their own God, doing whatever pleases and intrigues them? Or will they honor and be guided by the God who created them? In what area(s) do you face similar decisions today? Ask God for the clarity and wisdom to make wise choices.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for the gift of life on a beautiful, nurturing earth. Thank you for the gift of moral freedom. Help me to use these gifts well, in ways that honor your name. Amen.

Tuesday, March 6

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-25

The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The LORD God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!" Then the LORD God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him." So the LORD God formed from the fertile land all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky and brought them to the human to see what he would name them. The human gave each living being its name. The human named all the livestock, all the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. But a helper perfect for him was nowhere to be found. So the LORD God put the human into a deep and heavy sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh over it. With the rib taken from the human, the LORD God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being. The human said, "This one finally is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She will be called a woman because from a man she was taken." This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh. The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they weren't embarrassed.

Observation: Ancient Near Eastern cultures, including the Hebrews, valued men more than women in many legal and practical ways. Even so, in the Hebrew creation stories, God made male AND female in God's image, and the woman was man's helper and partner, not his servant. Genesis described human innocence with the phrase “They were both naked, and they felt no shame.” God intended male and female to become “one flesh,” said Genesis, in delight and bonding free of shame.

Application: In 1706, preacher Matthew Henry wrote that Eve was “not made out of [Adam's] head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.” Have you known couples who live out this quality of mutual companionship with each other? How can partners combine their unique strengths in a bond of mutual respect and love?

Prayer: Lord God, as I read these stories of a harmonious, innocent creation, I feel an inner homesickness. I want to live that way again. Thank you for promising that, by your grace, one day I can do that. Amen.

Wednesday, March 7

Scripture: Genesis 3:1-9

The snake was the most intelligent of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say that you shouldn't eat from any tree in the garden?" The woman said to the snake, "We may eat the fruit of the garden's trees but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. God said, 'Don't eat from it, and don't touch it, or you will die.'" The snake said to the woman, "You won't die! God knows that on the day you eat from it, you will see clearly and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was beautiful with delicious food and that the tree would provide wisdom, so she took some of its fruit and ate it, and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then they both saw clearly and knew that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made garments for themselves. During that day's cool evening breeze, they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God in the middle of the garden's trees. The LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

Observation: In the story, Eve and Adam listened to the serpent, who twisted and then contradicted God's words. They knew good—it was all around them. Yet they gave in to the temptation that maybe they could be like God if they knew about evil, too. When "they both saw clearly," they found a world where innocence was gone. Now they felt ashamed and tried to cover themselves, and fear and guilt replaced the joy and harmony they had known.

Application: Such a simple act: "she took...and ate." How easily we can lose innocence by curiosity about evil! The ripples of that fateful choice were enormous. "Take and eat" only became words of salvation after Jesus went through poverty and a terrible, redeeming death. In what parts of life do you long for a fresh start? How does God's saving grace offer hope of restoring what you may have lost?

Prayer: Lord God, I'm so often tempted to think that you're out of date, that you don't know what's best for me. You won't force me to resist the forbidden fruit, but please help me to see clearly the ugly consequences if I choose to distrust you. Amen.

Thursday, March 8

Scripture: Genesis 3:10-24

The man replied, "I heard your sound in the garden; I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree, which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman you gave me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate." The LORD God said to the woman, "What have you done?!" And the woman said, "The snake tricked me, and I ate." The LORD God said to the snake, "Because you did this, you are the one cursed out of all the farm animals, out of all the wild animals. On your belly you will crawl, and dust you will eat every day of your life. I will put contempt between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. They will strike your head, but you will strike at their heels." To the woman he said, "I will make your pregnancy very painful; in pain you will bear children. You will desire your husband, but he will rule over you." To the man he said, "Because you listened to your wife's voice and you ate from the tree that I commanded, 'Don't eat from it,' cursed is the fertile land because of you; in pain you will eat from it every day of

your life. Weeds and thistles will grow for you, even as you eat the field's plants; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread—until you return to the fertile land, since from it you were taken; you are soil, to the soil you will return." The man named his wife Eve because she is the mother of everyone who lives. The LORD God made the man and his wife leather clothes and dressed them. The LORD God said, "The human being has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." Now, so he doesn't stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever, the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to farm the fertile land from which he was taken. He drove out the human. To the east of the garden of Eden, he stationed winged creatures wielding flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life.

Observation: John Milton gave us a phrase that echoes as we read this tragic story: *Paradise Lost*. The human side of the story is one of disaster, but glimmers of God's love showed through. Genesis 3:15 foreshadowed a hard-won victory over evil by the woman's descendant(s). In 3:21 God began giving his children the covering they needed in their no longer innocent nakedness. Centuries later, the apostle Paul wrote, "Where sin increased, grace multiplied even more" (Romans 5:20).

Application: One of the first consequences of choosing to know evil came in the way the human couple related to one another and God. "When confronted with their disobedience, the people pass the blame instead of accepting responsibility. The man even blames God indirectly (The woman you gave me...)." When has someone else tried to blame you for a mistake they made? Have you ever tried to "pass the buck" for a bad choice of your own?

Prayer: All-seeing Lord, too often I think I can hide from you, when all I do is blind myself to the truth. Deliver me from destructive blame and shame, and help me to live honestly. Amen.

Friday, March 9

Scripture: Genesis 4:1-10

The man Adam knew his wife Eve intimately. She became pregnant and gave birth to Cain, and said, "I have given life to a man with the LORD's help." She gave birth a second time to Cain's brother Abel. Abel cared for the flocks, and Cain farmed the fertile land. Some time later, Cain presented an offering to the LORD from the land's crops while Abel presented his flock's oldest offspring with their fat. The LORD looked favorably on Abel and his sacrifice but didn't look favorably on Cain and his sacrifice. Cain became very angry and looked resentful. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why do you look so resentful? If you do the right thing, won't you be accepted? But if you don't do the right thing, sin will be waiting at the door ready to strike! It will entice you, but you must rule over it." Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. The LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's guardian?" The LORD said, "What did you do? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Observation: Once sin came into the world, the primeval story said, things went downhill rapidly. Eve had two sons, but all too soon, one of them lay dead, and the other had his brother's blood on his hands. Devotion to God and devotion to God's people were central values during this period. We sometimes get stuck asking "why" God

looked favorably on Abel's sacrifice. The author(s) of Genesis did not say. Their focus was on Cain's rebellious response to the Creator.

Application: The Genesis story showed God warning Cain of spiritual danger before he let his anger run wild (verses 6-7). Yet after he killed Abel, Cain claimed he was not his brother's keeper (i.e. not responsible for Abel's well-being). Are there ways in which we are guilty of the same failure? Are there brothers and sisters we have wronged? How can we reconcile with any people we have abandoned?

Prayer: God, help me hear your call to look out for my brothers and sisters. Keep me growing into a healing force in this world. Amen.

Saturday, March 10

Scripture: Genesis 6:5-6, 13-14; 37:3-4, 23-28

The LORD saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. The LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken.

God said to Noah, "The end has come for all creatures, since they have filled the earth with violence. I am now about to destroy them along with the earth, so make a wooden ark. Make the ark with nesting places and cover it inside and out with tar.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons because he was born when Jacob was old. Jacob had made for him a long robe. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him and couldn't even talk nicely to him.

When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped off Joseph's long robe, took him, and threw him into the cistern, an empty cistern with no water in it. When they sat down to eat, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with camels carrying sweet resin, medicinal resin, and fragrant resin on their way down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain if we kill our brother and hide his blood? Come on, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites. Let's not harm him because he's our brother; he's family." His brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, and they brought Joseph to Egypt.

Observation: The "plot" of the Genesis flood story was not unique; its God was. In Babylon's story, the gods aimed to wipe out humans. Only one dissenting god warned Atrahasis (their "Noah"). In Genesis, God sought out Noah, and made careful plans for human and animal survival. Evil kept happening as the story moved from pre-history into history. Joseph's brothers acted on their outrage at being lorded over by their brother and undervalued by their father. They wanted to kill Joseph (echoes of Cain). Reuben and Judah talked them out of that, but they sold him to slave traders.

Application: Joseph's brothers' murderous urges grew from insecure feelings, because their father openly loved Joseph more than them. Jesus taught the interior nature of sin forcefully in his Sermon on the Mount. "I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment" (Matthew 5:22). "I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart"

(Matthew 5:28). Were you taught to think if you avoided a wrong outward act, that was all that mattered? What has helped you learn to be aware of and to grow toward greater purity in your inner life (cf. Philippians 4:8)?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I wish I didn't live in a broken world where too much is shaped by human rebellion against you. Help me, like Noah or Joseph, learn how to live as your child regardless of my surroundings. Amen.