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***The Choices We Make***  
***Adam and Eve: Genesis 2:15 - 3:24***  
***Fall Focus 2007: My Story, God's Story***

Today we begin a series of messages called "My Story, God's Story."

The idea for this series came from Dan Allender, who I heard tell as story and it got me thinking. His book, *To Be Told: Know Your Story*, invited me to think about the importance of knowing our own story, our own lives.

For, knowing our own story not only enables us to remember what we have done, but to also gets us to see how God—whether acknowledged or not—is a part of our story.

You and I have a story. Who we are, what we do, why we do what we do is our story. Yet we often live as if we are unaware of our own story. Maybe we even forget our story.

Everyday we forget. We forget details, appointments, and keys, but all this is nothing compared to the amnesia of self in which we forget who we are.

Some of us know bits and pieces of our story but how they work together, what they have to teach us is uncertain as we have never stepped back and reflected since we are so busy just living.

Others of us forget much of our story, but something nags at us, pulls at us and reminds us that there is more, that we are more, that life is more.

Some of us forget totally. Our lives of survival, of anger, of disappointment, of confusion and disorientation. We don't have that unified core, that reality that binds us to people and places. We are lost.

Not knowing our story has consequences. It can cause us to find ourselves in the same place over and over again as we have not yet learned the lesson we needed to learn. Or, it can make us restless causing us to try every new thing, thinking *maybe this is it*. For some of us we may even find ourselves using drugs and alcohol or other substances.

What will "pierce our amnesia and point us to who we are and to what is beyond?"<sup>1</sup>

What we are going to do over these seven weeks is explore that truth that we each have a story—a sacred story.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Allender from n <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr02/rem1.html>, *Remembering that We Forget*.

Our story is one in which God has been working out our redemption--which is just a big way of say that God has been working to bring us to wholeness, to make us into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we will also see that our story isn't only our story but it is part of a larger story, God's story.

We will explore this through focusing on 7 biblical stories and looking at how these ancient stories—these God stories—are part of our reality also.

Sunday worship will be more about the big God-story, but in the five-week class—one meets starting a week from tonight we will spend more time looking at our own personal stories.

If you are new, I really want to invite you to be part of this study—this is a great way to rekindle, deepen or even jumpstart your faith. You will want to be part of this.

As we begin, let's start with a prayer:

I was in my early thirties when I realized I no longer remembered much of my life. Childhood teachers, no. Childhood friends, no. Childhood family things, no. I couldn't recall much of anything. I have always had trouble remembering numbers, but forgetting all this stuff? Why did I forget?

I think some of it had to do with my head filling up other stuff. These past things seemed gone; why would I want or need to remember them? What do they have to do with anything?

But there was a nagging feeling that, while I had moved on, that little girl I was was actually very much a part of me. That child who moved so much she couldn't remember where she lived or what classroom to go to, that child who fiercely protected the underdog on the playground, the child who struggled with a learning disability, that child, while forgotten, really wasn't gone.

We are a culmination of all we have experienced, all we have known, all we have lived. We each have a sacred story, our own story of how God sought to shape us and form us. It may be a story of how we turned away and wanted little or nothing to do with God. It may be how we learned to trust. Maybe it is a story that, as we live it right this day, we have no idea how it will turn out.

Thinking of our lives in this way is different from how the world sees *living*. In the world, most of us don't matter, for we are unimportant. Few of us possess the money or fame to have our lives covered by the weekly news; few of us have done anything worthy of note to matter.

Yet our lives, in their ordinary, day-to-day-ness are sacred. And God calls us to see them as such. But this is not to say that every part of our life is good.

Life can get fairly icky (today's theological term). You know what I mean, icky, *pertaining to things that we don't really want to admit to doing, or remember as happening to us*. And, rightly so.

Who wants to remember abuse, neglect, loss, mistakes? Some of us have had years of learning how to forget. Why do we need to remember?

Let me say that, during this time, as we look at our stories, you don't have to remember those things you have purposefully put behind you. But I am imagining there are probably many unexamined stories in your life that have something to say to you, stories that need your attention. Those stories will, I hope, become what you give your time to over these weeks.

OK, today's first story is basically, *The 1<sup>st</sup> story*, as it is the story of Adam and Eve. You may already know this story. This is a BIG Sunday school story. And because you may know it, you may have already filed it away.

Maybe you learned important lessons from this story, lessons like, *Don't take the advice of a talking snake*. Maybe it was an embarrassing story from Sunday school because it had the word "naked" in it.

As we begin to remember God's stories, we need to do a couple of things.

First, we need to take what we think we already know and put it aside. Let's hear the story fresh.

Second, we need to be open to what the Spirit might have to say to us in the text. Scripture is alive. It can be understood in all kinds of ways, and that is why we need God's leading to hear what God has to say.

Third, I want us to realize that we are just scratching at the surface of our text, especially today. I say that because this is a story that has been written about and expounded upon for centuries and to sum it up in ten minutes just isn't going to happen.

Here is the story, listen to ***Genesis 2:15 - 3:24 (at end of text)***

My husband, Jeff, begins the day by reading the newspaper. I used to as well, but over the years I have found it a depressing way to begin the day. I read the paper now at night, which probably isn't any better for one's outlook.

Doesn't it look most days like we have made a mess of it?

If the oldest and most primitive humans date back about seven million years (according to a skull found in Central Africa), then it seems we'd be further along by now.

It is depressing that in seven million years we haven't evolved any further than THIS.

This world, where some put statistics at half the people living on less than \$2 a day, 1 billion going to bed hungry every night, 115 million children never going to school and 27 million held in some kind of slavery, doesn't seem to have made much progress.

It is into this mess of a world that we hear this story, a story of beginnings, a story making mistakes, a story of...well, what do you think it is a story about?

Turn to your neighbor and talk for a minute. (Response)

This is a story, one of the greatest, although it has often been used in confusing ways.

For instance, what is the deal with the talking snake?

And why would God say, Hey, you can eat of everything but this one tree? Isn't that like telling someone, *don't think of the chocolate cake in the kitchen while you are home working today?*

And what about sin? Isn't this a story about original sin—whatever that is?

What is this God-story talking about?

Before we get to this, let's deal with the history question.

Is it literally true this story of Adam and Eve? Did it happen this way?

For me, it is not whether this happened in this way exactly, but that it happens this way all the time. I can believe there was a first time, so sure, this could be it, but it doesn't need to be.

Doesn't this story, one of going other than the ways of God, sound like everyday life?

We often think we know better, and we get in all kinds of trouble—this story matters so much as we begin to look at our personal stories because, frankly, you and I *are* Adam and Eve. This God-story helps me see not how someone a long time ago was, but how I am—we are—today.

I hate being responsible for myself, don't you?

I just wish there were someone else I could blame for all my mistakes. I try to blame others but it seldom works. I say the weight I have gained is Jeff's fault, he is a good cook. My not getting the exercise I could is the church's fault, I am so busy.

But you know, when I make others responsible for my behavior, I find I still get the consequences. If I get the consequences, then I have to get that I am responsible.

Do you know what a boundary is? A boundary is a fence line that denotes or defines where one person's space ends and another's begins. It also is a way of talking about what clarifies, shapes and defines who we are and what is our area of control. In other words, boundaries talk about what I am accountable for and what I am not accountable for.

My behavior? I am accountable. Your behavior? I am not accountable.

I am responsible for my feelings, attitudes, behaviors, choices, limits, talents, thoughts desires, loves, and values. These lie within me. If I make bad choices or act badly, that is my responsibility.

The story of Adam and Eve is God's story about the foundational place God gives in scripture for having stewardship, for taking responsibility, over ourselves.

If we don't take this responsibility seriously, we do things like have:

- Controlling relationships in which people try to have power over each other.
- Faith that is practiced out of guilt and drudgery instead of freedom and love.
- The replacement of love as a motivator with guilt, anger and fear instead.
- The inability to stop evil in significant relationships and cultures.
- The inability to gain control of our own behavior and solve problems in our lives.
- The loss of control to addictive processes<sup>2</sup>.

God calls us to embrace healthy and balanced boundaries in order to have the best in relationships and in life; to control what we can exercise control over, that is, control over ourselves.

You may have noticed that God lays out what Adam and Eve can choose. They can eat of all these trees, BUT not this one. They get a long list of what they can do and short list of what they should leave alone. And what do they want to do?

It seems from the beginning we have wanted to make up the rules but make others take the fall. We have wanted things to work our way because we wanted it. And, like spoiled children, we kept stomping our feet and saying, *more, more, more, mine, mine, mine*.

Today's God-story talks about God's limitlessness and our limits; God's majesty and our humanity; God's big picture and our not so big picture. Boundaries are an important balance to free will.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Simple Scoop on Boundaries* by Henry Cloud, Ph.D, internet article

Let me share the ten boundaries that Christian authors Cloud and Townsend set out in their book, *Boundaries*. We are working on this in our weekly Boundaries group and I think they are so important I want to share them with you all.

Also, this should give you a more practical sense of what I am talking about. As you hear them, think about how these universal truths apply to health—mental, emotional, physical and spiritual.

1. **The Law of Sowing and Reaping:** Our actions have consequences.
2. **The Law of Responsibility:** We are responsible to each other, but not for each other.
3. **The Law of Power:** We have power over some things; we don't have power over others (including changing people).
4. **The Law of Respect:** If we wish for others to respect our boundaries, we need to respect theirs.
5. **The Law of Motivation:** We must be free to say no before we can wholeheartedly say yes.
6. **The Law of Evaluation:** We need to evaluate the pain our boundaries cause others.
7. **The Law of Proactivity:** We take action to solve problems based on our values, wants and needs.
8. **The Law of Envy:** We will never get what we want if we focus outside our boundaries onto what others have.
9. **The Law of Activity:** We need to take the initiative in setting limits rather than be passive.
10. **The Law of Exposure:** We need to communicate our boundaries to each other.

Every one of us falls short on these and lots of others. That is life. Yet one piece of God's story is that there are ways to live and behaviors to embrace, and other ways and behaviors, if embraced, will only demean and diminish us. The challenge is often discerning which is which.

The story of Adam and Eve is a story about God's gift of free will, that is, of choice. It is a story about how much we like to do just what we like to do and forget about what God says. It is a story about how we don't really want to be responsible.

Here is the link to your life:

This story of Adam and Eve, this God-story, is our story because we too don't want to take responsibility.

So let me ask you: For what don't you want to take responsibility? Your health? Your diet? Your relationships? Your education? Your negativity? Your lying? Your ...(fill in the blank).

Another way to ask this is: For what do you blame others? The problems at work? In your marriage? In your life?

And yes, I know this is easier to figure out for others—it is so obvious what *others* aren't taking responsibility for! But, this is about **your** story. Don't push this part of you away. Don't let the shame of being human stop you from hearing what God says to you about today's God-story.

I invite you to spend some time in silent prayer about what God might be saying to you.

**Genesis 2:15 - 3:24**

**15** The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

**16** And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

**18** Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." **19** So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **20** The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

**21** So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. **22** And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." **24** Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" **2** The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; **3** but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " **4** But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; **5** for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

**6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. **8** They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

**9** But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" **10** He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

**11** He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" **12** The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." **13** Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

**14** The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. **15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

**16** To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

**17** And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; **18** thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. **19** By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

**20** The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

**21** And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

**22** Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"? **23** therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. **24** He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.