

Gen. 2:15–17; 3:1–7

Ps. 32

Rom. 5:12–19

Matt. 4:1–11

Trouble in Paradise

Goal for the Session

Third- and fourth-graders will hear the story of Adam and Eve’s temptation and confess how they sometimes fail to choose God’s way.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

WHAT is important to know?

—From “*Exegetical Perspective*” by Judy Fentress-Williams

The serpent’s question is an invitation to question the command of God. The serpent responds with authority, first denying the consequences for trespassing the boundaries established by God and then redirecting Eve by offering an intriguing possibility. Eating of the tree will result in their eyes being “opened.” Then they will be “like God, knowing good and evil” (3:5). The opening of the eyes connotes a kind of seeing that is beyond the physical ability they already possess. It connotes perception and understanding, as does the word for knowing. The promise of the serpent could mean they will understand the difference between good and bad and/or they will have a broad range of experiences, both good and bad.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “*Theological Perspective*” by William Joseph Danaher Jr.

The Genesis narrative offers a stark depiction of the advent of a sin-sick humanity looking for love in all the wrong places, helplessly yearning for health and wholeness. Augustine uses this perspective to emphasize the utter gratuity of God’s forgiveness and grace. Precisely because the decision to disobey God began in the will, it is the will that must be healed, and this healing can happen only through love. The will is not only the seat of all obedience, but the root of all love, and love alone can heal us—first, God’s transformative love working conversion in us, and then, our love returning to God, which is the end of all human striving and the source of true fulfillment.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “*Pastoral Perspective*” by Allen C. McSweeney Jr.

Read from a pastoral perspective, the story lends itself to an exploration of the role of human freedom within limits set by the wisdom and grace of God. The limits God sets to our freedom are not a matter of enforcing conformity to arbitrary rules. The *torah* of God is intended for the well-being of the “image-bearing creature” to whom God has entrusted the stewardship of creation. The flourishing of human life in a good and bountiful, but limited, creation requires both freedom and appropriate constraints on the exercise of that freedom.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “*Homiletical Perspective*” by Jon L. Berquist

Even our nakedness becomes distracting, and we know wardrobes to cover our nakedness can also distract us. Human excuses for avoiding our mission may start in the garden, but we experience a full range of such excuses today that distract us from our mission. For people of faith, distraction may prove more frequently troublesome than temptation. We think of ourselves for a while, or we focus more on other humans than on God’s mission. With just a glance away, we start to wander from God’s mission. God’s mission has not changed, and in the aftermath of our stumbling, God still calls us back to the right path. God calls us back every day, and every Lent.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

**Genesis 2:15–17;
3:1–7**

Focus on Your Teaching

Third- and fourth-graders live with boundaries and rules set by people with more power than they have, but who (hopefully) have their best interests at heart. This may help them identify with Eve's temptation to break God's rules. Most learners will appreciate how boundaries can help them make good choices and how choosing to ignore God's ways can lead to negative consequences. It may be a challenge for learners to understand that sin is anything that separates them from God's ways. As you teach, assure them of God's mercy, which offers second chances.

*Merciful God, forgive me for the times I disregard the boundaries you set.
Thank you for your grace and another chance to live in your ways. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ paper bag
- ❑ stickers or individually wrapped treats
- ❑ purple cloth
- ❑ battery-powered candle
- ❑ Bibles
- ❑ Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 30
- ❑ tape
- ❑ *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 1, crayons or markers
- ❑ option 2: worship bulletins, copies of Resource Sheet 2, pencils, hymnals or worship books (optional)
- ❑ option 3: shaving cream; plastic trays or plates; paper towels; *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, tape together Color Pack 1 and 2 to create the Lent poster. Place the purple cloth in the center of the table and place the Lent poster and the candle on it. Place an individually wrapped snack or a sticker for each learner in a paper bag and fold down the top. (Be mindful of food allergies.)

Greet learners as they arrive. Gather around the candle. Tell learners that today is the first Sunday in the church season called Lent. Ask volunteers to read aloud the information on the Lent poster. Tell the group about any special mission projects or worship services your church has during Lent. Light the candle. Pray aloud, asking learners to repeat each phrase:

Thank you, God, / for bringing us together today. / During Lent, help us learn / to follow Jesus more closely. / Amen.

Place the paper bag on a table in the room. Tell the learners you need to go get something and that no one is to look in the bag while you're gone. Step away from the learning space for a few moments. When you return, set the bag aside without revealing its contents. Ask: ✨ What did you think when I told you not to look in the bag? Did you want to peek? Why or why not?

Invite learners to tell about times they have felt tempted to do something they have been told not to do. Say that the Bible story today is about the very first temptation.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and help learners turn to Genesis 1. Explain that the word *genesis* means “origin” or “beginning.” Have learners turn to Genesis 2:15. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 2:15–17. Ask:

- ✎ Whom did God place in the garden? What was his job (verse 15)?
- ✎ What was he allowed to do (verse 16)?
- ✎ What was he not allowed to do (verse 17)?

Have learners find Genesis 3:1. Ask them to follow along as you read aloud verses 1–7. Discuss:

- ✎ Who is in this scene?
- ✎ Why do you think the woman wanted to taste the fruit? Why do you think the man ate the fruit? (The text does not give clear answers. Ponder the possibilities with your group.)
- ✎ How did choosing to break God’s rule change Adam and Eve?

Show Color Pack 3 and invite learners to comment on what part of the story this picture tells. Ask:

- ✎ If you were painting this picture, what would you add? What would you take away?

Invite the children to think about the many choices God’s people face today. Ask:

- ✎ Which choices might be pleasing to God? Which ones might God not like?
- ✎ Why is it sometimes so tempting to do things we know are against God’s ways?

Read aloud Genesis 3:21. Ask:

- ✎ Do you think that God still loved the man and the woman? Why or why not?

Reassure the children that God continues to love and care for us, even when we give in to temptation. When we confess our sins, God promises to forgive us and give us another chance.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Making Choices** This activity invites learners to consider temptations in their lives. Invite learners to list temptations they encounter (for example, cheating, sassing a parent or teacher, skipping chores, being hurtful to siblings, lying). Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Choices) and markers or crayons. Tell learners to draw or write a description of what happens when they make a good choice in the top box. In the other box, they can draw or write a description of what happens when they make a poor choice. Ask for volunteers to tell about times when it is hard to make a good choice, but do not force anyone to speak this aloud. Remind learners that all people sin—all people make some choices that go against God’s ways. Still, God continues to love us and gives us a chance to try again. In unison, read aloud the prayer of confession and the assurance of pardon. Wonder together about the good news in these words.

EASY
PREP

Check with the worship leaders in your church to see if the children's prayers might be included in worship some Sunday.

2. Prayers of Confession Failing to make good choices is universal to the human condition. Sunday worship often includes a prayer of confession. Pass out copies of a recent worship bulletin. Invite learners to find where a prayer of confession is printed or referred to in the order of service. (If necessary, look up the prayer in the worship book or hymnal.) Read aloud the prayer in unison. Ask learners to identify the temptations and failings named in the prayer. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Prayers of Confession) and pencils. Ask volunteers to read the prayers aloud. What temptations or failings are named in these prayers? Form pairs and ask each pair to write a prayer of confession on the resource sheet. Have pairs read their prayers aloud. Look back at the worship bulletin or worship book or hymnal. What words assure Christians that God forgives? Affirm that God's grace is extended to us even when we make poor choices. This doesn't mean there won't be consequences to our poor choices, but God will still love us and forgive us.

3. Practicing Confession Children know it can be hard to confess poor choices they have made. This activity invites them to practice saying "I'm sorry" to God. Give each child a plastic tray or plate. Put a small squirt of shaving cream on each tray or plate. Invite learners to "finger paint" with the shaving cream as they think about times they have made poor choices. Play "Music over Water" (*Singing the Feast*) as they work. After the song, invite the children to write "I'm sorry" in their shaving cream and to talk to God silently about their temptations and poor choices. Give learners paper towels to wipe away the shaving cream, reminding them that when they confess their sin, God forgives them.

Save the Lent poster for use during Lent.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle. Invite learners to take a treat or sticker from the bag. Ask volunteers to tell one thing they will remember about the story of Adam, Eve, and God.

Invite the group to join you in prayer. Explain that when you pause after each line of the prayer, their response is, "Be with us, God."

Lord, you claim us as your children. (Response.)

When we fall short of what you expect, Lord, lead us down a new path.

(Response.)

When we are feeling separated from you or from other people, send the Spirit to fill us with your love and mercy. (Response.)

Amen.

Form two groups to sing "Behold, I Am with You" (Color Pack 30, *Singing the Feast*) as a reminder of God's loving presence. Ask one group to sing the line first and the other group to be the echo.

Behold, I Am with You

Behold, I am with you,
 (Behold, I am with you,)
 And will keep you wherever
 you go, (And will keep you
 wherever you go,)
 And will keep you wherever
 you go. (And will keep you
 wherever you go.)

Repeat

Say good-bye to the learners, telling them that you hope to see them next week.

Choices

• good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice

• good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice

• good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice

• good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice • good choice

• poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice

• poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice

• poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice

• poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice • poor choice

Prayer of Confession
 Lord, sometimes I make choices that have bad results. I hurt other people or myself or creation. Forgive me and give me another chance. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon
 If we say that we have not sinned, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth isn't in our hearts. But if we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away. (1 John 1:8–9, CEV)

