

CARING



WRITTEN WITH HOPE

A SCRIPTURE STUDY FROM *CARING*

BY ERIN L. WIKLE, LT.





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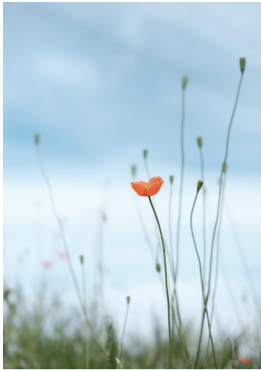
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FIRST THINGS FIRST



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A SCRIPTURE STUDY
FROM *CARING*

As early as the days of dear Adam and Eve, a story of hope was written for all of humanity. No sooner had creation been created—from sea to sky, from what crawls and creeps to soars and swim—did God determine that the *crown* of his creation would be *humankind*. Wholly designed in the image of the triune God himself.

Then God said, "Let us make human being in our image, to be like us."

So God created human being in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27 (NLT)

As history would soon tell, the record of mess-ups, slips ups, and mishaps would grow great. From the Garden on through the account of the earliest church (whose "members" were committed to Jesus, but still struggled to do what he said—cue Ananias and Sapphira). The Bible is teeming with stories of mistakes made and people in need of a second chance and some serious course correction. Don't believe it? It's true. Start in Genesis and just...keep...reading.

But, the reality is that it all began *in the beginning*. The Garden—a place of perfect peace, *shalom* (שלום / wholeness / completeness) is described as a place of opulence and abundance, of life and vitality. This *shalom* is broken when human interest subscribes to the notion that perhaps there was far *more / better* than what God was providing through his very own wholeness and completeness.

שלום // wholeness // completeness

At the suggestion of a serpent, *shalom* is disrupted and sin finds its way into humanity's heart for the first time. And so it begins. A story of hope is written.

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THE BEGINNING: CREATED

(GENESIS 1:2-7)



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BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says in Genesis 1:2-7.

BEYOND THE SURFACE

Need to brush up on *The Beginning*? Read Genesis 1:1-31. Note the number of times God spoke creation into existence and it came to be. Highlight, underline or write down when Scripture says, “*And it was so.*”

And God said [insert created command here] and it was so.

Birthing from the beginning itself is this sense of God commanding creation to *be*...and so it was. From land to sea, dust to human design, creation existed in perfect balance, harmony and *shalom* without argument or disobedience. What wind or wave cried, “No! I won’t rush or run wild!” What mountain or valley shouted out, “Not me! We won’t serve either high or low!” For the first time, God would command something to be and it would *not* be so. But let’s not jump the gun...there are paragraphs yet penned.

Look again at Genesis 1:27-28:

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

CREATED. APPOINTED. SENT.

It is remarkably profound that humanity itself is marked the *crown* of God’s creation. So much so that the same sentiment is reiterated just sentences later in Genesis 2:7:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

The very essence of God is breathed into humankind. If ever we should be assured of the intentionality of the Creator fashioning humankind in his image and likeness, let it be experienced within these few words alone.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Creation lives, breathes and boasts of its creator. Do you? Reflect on that question a moment.

We believe Scripture speaks for itself. What does today's passage speak to you? As you engage with God's Holy Word, explore and go deeper by asking, responding and reflecting with the help of these questions:

- What did I read that seemed familiar? (Reminder of foundational truth) _____

- What did I read that seemed new? (Revelation by the Holy Spirit)

- What questions do I have about what I don't understand?
(Risk not knowing) _____

- What did you read that surprised you?

- What did you read that brought you hope?

THE MIDDLE : CALLED

GENESIS 2:8-25



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BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says in Genesis 2:8-25.

BEYOND THE SURFACE

And the story continues.

Re-read Genesis 2:18-25.

Look again at Genesis 2:8-14.

The place where the Garden of Eden is planted was perfect. Scripture says, *“The gold of that land [was] exceptionally pure...”* describing its four rivers as being the source for its abundance of trees producing good fruit. If there was a party going on—this is where it was. Again, *shalom* (שלום / wholeness / completeness) was experienced in its fullness in The Garden.

There is no doubt of God’s provision for Adam. It seems likely that every sensing ability took careful cue to note just *how good Adam and Eve had it*. We can imagine that the mere notion of wanting and needing more seems preposterous when provision and *purpose* are laid so clearly before Adam and Eve.

Read Genesis 2:19-20:

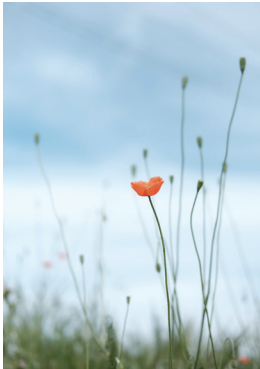
So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

- What tasks were set before Adam? What was he called to do in

The Garden? _____

- Consider the kindness of God that he would provide a helper for Adam. What does this say about the character of God?

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Read Genesis 2:15-17:

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

And in anticipation of temptation and opposition, the first instance of *mercy* is introduced within this creation narrative.

WHAT’S WITH MERCY?

Mercy is most simply understood as a *consequence withheld* when our actions and behaviors warrant just punishment.

Genesis 2:15 may very well be the first reference of God’s mercy toward humanity received in the form of a *warning*. Because Adam and Eve were created *within shalom*, they shared in unbroken fellowship with their Creator. We can perhaps reason that such a warning *should not* have been necessary as sin had not yet entered the scene. (Gasp!) Yet, Adam and Eve experience the care of a *just God* who chose to make clear his expectation of them.

Eat the fruit = Choose death

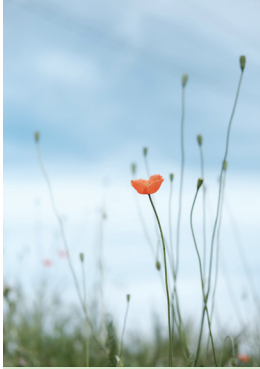
- Have you experienced God’s mercy in the form of a *warning* (preempting an action)? What was that experience like?

- Which is more difficult, receiving God’s mercy *before* or *after* being disciplined? _____

BETWEEN THE LINES

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- What did I read that seemed familiar? (Reminder of foundational truth) _____

- What did I read that seemed new? (Revelation by the Holy Spirit)

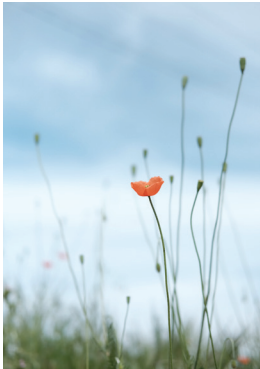
- What questions do I have about what I don't understand? (Risk not knowing) _____

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THE END : CAST OUT

GENESIS 3



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BEHIND THE SCENES

Read what Scripture says in Genesis 3.

BEYOND THE SURFACE

This is it. The final moment. The ending act. We're no more than three chapters into the story of how creation is created...when it all goes to pot.

At the introduction of possibility, sprouting from a craftily planted seed of doubt, growing from mounting curiosity and wonder, enters...*sin*. *Broken fellowship, shalom interrupted, perfect peace but a mere pipe dream.*

Desire was realized and as Scripture says,

"...[Eve] took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to [Adam], who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness (Genesis 3:6b-7).

Read Genesis 3:6:

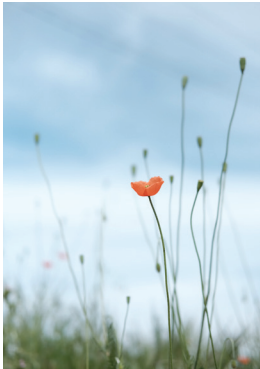
The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her...

Eve was convinced that the fruit she was warned away from would be beneficial to her. What have you been "convinced" of lately that that stems from a want-centric, self-centered, fear-based pattern of thinking?

- What do you "want" that God may be trying to warn you away and protect you from? By rejecting his gift of mercy to you, what are you failing to receive? _____

- Where do you find holes in your thinking when it comes to seeing God's provision for you? Have you placed your hope in the promise of an "apple" or in the One who keeps his promises?

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In their shame, Adam and Eve hide, only to still be discovered and desired by the Creator God. Genesis 6:9 says,

"The Lord called to the man, 'Where are you?'" In his love for them, God finds them.

MERCY GIVES WAY TO HOPE

In their frustration, Adam and Eve blame each other, only to have God first address the snake and his influence on his beloved.

The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the Lord God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it. Then the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed...'" (Genesis 3:12-14).

MERCY GIVES WAY TO HOPE

In their nakedness, they realize their need for a covering. Scripture says,

"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them...So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken" (Genesis 3:21).

Read Genesis 3:15:

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

PROTOEVANGELISM ON DISPLAY

The first messianic prophecy (foreshadowing Jesus Christ the Messiah) is written within the first few pages of the Old Testament. The first glimpse at The Gospel (the Gospel), if you would.

In their rebellion, Adam and Eve receive heavy consequences that would carry on from generation to generation. And then God says..."You have to go." It was no longer possible for Adam and Eve to share in this perfect fellowship with God, in this way, in this place. Mercy gives ways to hope.

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BUT, HOW?

This moment in history looks so much more like rejection than provision. Like everything lost than anything gained.

Yet, three chapters in...God has already made a new way. A plan. A plan wrought with mercy and overflowing with hope. A chance to fully restore *shalom* to his created world, again. An opportunity for broken fellowship with the triune God to be repaired. This restoration would take years and suffer iteration upon iteration of covenant making / breaking / and keeping, rule following and law-abiding. And after many failed attempts at being made right with a Holy God, Jesus would come as The Way (*the only way*) and as the singular source of hope for all humanity.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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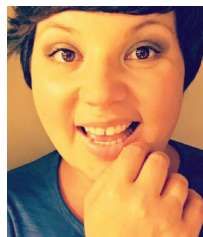
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And so it ends. A story of hope is written. A story that began with three little words—“*In the beginning...*”—and carries on for just three chapters, sets the entire stage for a tremendous journey to come. *Hope is found here.* Scripture is bursting at the seams with story after story of God’s steadfast love for a wildly rebellious people. At the inception of disobedience, humanity fell and would continue to struggle from generation to generation to love God with their whole hearts, to listen and obey and to hope in him (and him alone), no matter the circumstances.

Redemption is written within these sacred pages. Restart (can anyone say, “do over!”) is plastered between paragraphs detailing stories of failure and defeat. Hope is made available at the intersection of giving *in* and giving *up*. But God himself invites us in and beyond the pages of *the beginning* into a story that says there’s more beyond The Garden.



LT. ERIN L. WIKLE is a follower of Jesus whose passion is helping others live missionally. She is gifted in leading worship, engaging others in listening and prophetic prayer, and holds ministry experience in various capacities. Erin holds a bachelor’s degree in Christian Theology with a minor in Spanish from Seattle Pacific University. She and her husband, Chris, have four children and co-lead The Salvation Army in Santa Monica where they work with individuals experiencing homelessness, men who are in recovery, and women who are forcibly employed in the sex-trade industry.

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