

As with many families, one of the traditions in our family was to hide an Easter basket full of candy on Easter morning. My mom hid the baskets, and I thought they were too easy. So I said to her one year, "Ok mom. You need to hide my basket a lot better this year." She took me up on it.

She put the basket in a bottom cupboard, way in the back, a cupboard I rarely ever opened. I woke up and looked for that basket for what felt like an eternity. At some point, I basically had a tantrum and started crying that I couldn't find my basket. I feel like I still carry that wound today. I eat lots of chocolate to make up for it. Eventually, she showed me the basket.

We heard our first reading from the opening pages of Genesis many times. Unfortunately, you have heard it so many times you can just tune out and say, "I already know this." I thought we could take another look.

God created a beautiful garden – a paradise – filled with life. God gives the man the opportunity to name all the animals. In the Scripture, to name something means you have authority over it. "That one's a giraffe. This one's a chipmunk. That is a kangaroo." After naming all the animals, we sense that he realizes he is alone. "I am not like all these animals. I am different. None of these animals will be a suitable partner for me."

The man needs a companion (to "break bread with"), someone with whom he can share his life, i.e., his hopes, dreams, joys, sorrows and suffering. Consequently, God puts the man into a deep sleep, and forms a woman from his rib or his side.

The rib is the bone that protects the heart. Essentially, the woman is formed from the heart of the man. The man is called to protect the woman, his bride, just as the rib protects the heart. While the two are created so differently – man from the dust of the ground – and the woman from the heart, the two are literally made for each other, i.e., shared unity.

From the Scripture, we learn that they are naked and have no shame. Their nakedness symbolizes their innocence and that there is a real vulnerability between the two. The woman is not afraid that the man will see her as an object of gratification, and vice versa. Instead, they see each other for who they really are – as persons, uniquely created and loved. There is, then, a real intimacy (“to-see-into-me”) between them. In short, their nakedness symbolizes that they really see each other, their persons.

In the story, we also remember that God gave them great freedom to eat from the trees in the garden. They can eat from 99% of the trees. From this, we learn that God not only gives life, but He is very generous.

There is only one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which they cannot eat. If they eat from this tree, they will die. The idea here is that it is God’s prerogative to determine good and evil. God determines good and evil, not arbitrarily, but in accord with His nature. God is Good. Good things/actions bring you closer to God. Evil things/actions take you away from Him. By eating from the tree, essentially the man and woman say, “We will determine for ourselves what is good and evil.”

This brings us to our verses today where we hear about the aftermath, or the consequences from their choice to eat from the tree. Let us take a closer look.

First, God calls the man and asks, *"Where are you?"* This is not a question of location – like where are you located – but rather, "What is our relationship with each other?" We also see a critical point – a thread that runs throughout all of Scripture: God looks for us. He seeks. He wants a relationship. God is a lover, in search of his wayward children, whom He loves! God seeks you. He wants a relationship with you!

In this question, we also see God's patience and mercy. He does not condemn the man, but rather gives him an opportunity to confess and ask for forgiveness. God is not just a seeker, but rather a "merciful seeker."

The man answers, *"I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."* This line is packed with meaning. Prior to the fall, the man saw God as a Creator, a loving Father who provides. Now He sees God as a judge ready to condemn, out to get him.

How often we are prone to run from God! We run because we have a distorted vision of His true identity. In this light, I think of our patron Saint Therese. As a little girl, when she made a mistake, or said something mean, she quickly ran to her parents asking for forgiveness. She even once said, "Punish me with a kiss." She knew her parents were merciful, loving, and so ready to forgive if she asked for mercy and tried to do better.

It's interesting that we see the first hint that the man refuses to admit his guilt and seek God's mercy. He doesn't say, "I was afraid because I ate from the tree – a confession – but because I was naked." In other words, I wouldn't have run had you given me clothes. The blame game has begun.

After giving him another chance to ask for forgiveness, the man says, *"The woman who you put here with me – she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it."* He blames the woman directly, but notice that he blames God indirectly. The woman "whom *you* gave me." In other words, if you hadn't created her and given her to me, this wouldn't have happened.

Unfortunately, the blame game gets worse. The woman blames the serpent. "He tricked me, so I ate it." It's his fault.

We learn so much from these rich verses! First, we learn that **God's identity**: He creates and gives life. As a generous Father, He gives tremendous freedom (99% of the trees and names all the animals). He is the one who determines good and evil. After the fall, we learn that God seeks. He searches for His children out in love. We learn He is merciful.

We also learn about **ourselves**. Out of a distorted image of God, we run in fear. We are tempted to blame God and others for our sins. We also learn that we are in need of redemption and healing.

Our temptation is to run and hide, and to blame others. However, put yourself where God can find you! Allow God into your brokenness, your wounds. Ask God for forgiveness and healing, and He will delightfully do it!