

Our Story

God's Plan, Human Sin, Jesus' Love



Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (all make the Sign of the Cross).

All respond: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 1: God, You made us good, both body and soul.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 2: God, You saw that it was not good for us to be alone, so You gave us one another for loving relationships.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 3: God, You are love, and You made us for love.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 4: God You made us without anything to hide from You.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Reader 5: God, You made us to be happy with You forever.

Response: In the divine image, Lord, You created him; male and female You created them.

Leader: Jesus, You taught us to address Your Father as You did, and so in the Holy Spirit we pray...

All: Our Father...

STORY STARTER

He-Man in the Garden of Eden

When I was five, my mom took me shopping to buy a present for my friend Matthew's birthday. His big party was the next day, and I had been thinking about it all week. Like all five-year-olds, I loved birthday parties: games, friends, excitement, and—let's just be honest—that cake-and-ice-cream sugar high! I knew Matthew's party would be one to remember.

We went to Ray Willis Toy Store to buy the gift. Ray Willis wasn't a chain store with a tiny toy department hidden behind endless aisles of groceries and other boring adult stuff. Ray Willis was 100 percent toys and games, every kid's fantasy. Wall to wall, from aisle to aisle, it was packed with

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games, action figures, trucks, bikes, even candy. Ray Willis Toy Store was so awesome that my heart beat faster just thinking about the paradise inside.

As I walked down an aisle, something caught my eye. Among the hundreds of other toys, this one grabbed my attention: a sword. But not just any sword. This sword talked, had working lights, was bright and shiny, and looked exactly like the sword He-Man used to defeat evil villains on TV. He-Man was my favorite action superhero when I was a kid, and this sword mesmerized me. I was awestruck.

"Mom!" I yelled in an awkwardly loud voice. "He-Man sword! He-Man sword! I need it! It's what I've always wanted!"

As mothers sometimes must, she burst my bubble. "Honey, remember why we're here. Tomorrow is Matthew's birthday and we're here to shop for him. You can get a toy for yourself some other day."

Like a typical five-year-old, I persisted: "But Mom! It's THE HE-MAN SWORD. I NEED IT!" And then I threw an outrageous tantrum right there in the middle of the store.

As I flailed and screamed on the floor, my mom kept her cool and made the following deal with me: "Okay. You can have the sword. But I am going to give you a choice. If you get the sword, you can't go to the party because you won't have a gift. And you have to call Matthew and tell him why you can't come."

In my child's mind, I thought, *she's bluffing*. Without hesitation I snatched the sword from the shelf, clutched it tightly to my chest, and hustled to the cash register to seal the deal. Mine, all mine! My He-Man sword! My precious He-Man sword!

My mom kept her word. She looked disappointed but paid the cashier. Without saying anything, she walked with me back to the car. I gripped the sword and fantasized about all the cool stuff I could do now that I possessed it! But then, as my mom buckled me in, something deep inside my young self lit up. I suddenly worried that maybe she had not been bluffing. "Uh, Mom?" I gulped.

"Yes?"

"Do I really have to skip the party?"

She answered firmly, "Yep. That's what you chose."

The words hit me hard. I was afraid to ask the next question: "Do I really have to call Matthew?"

"Yes. That was the deal."



And then the crying started: hot tears, followed by runny snot, followed by loud sobbing. "I don't want it anymore! I want to go to Matthew's party! I want to take the sword back!"

But my choice had been made. My mom stuck to her guns. She had given me a choice: to be a giver or a taker. She warned me what would happen if I made the wrong choice—I would be alone and possibly hurt my friend's feelings.

The afternoon I called Matthew to tell him I had chosen a plastic sword over him is one I will never forget. A week later, I was alone in the backyard playing with the sword when it broke. In the end, I had nothing to show for my selfish choice.

— Colin MacIver

IF YOU ASK ME ...

1. The toughest lesson I learned from my parents was when _____.
2. The best birthday or holiday party I ever went to was _____.
3. One time I chose _____ when I should have chosen _____.

BRIDGING THE GAP

All of the questions we asked about identity and happiness in Chapter 1 can be traced back to one moment in human history: the first sin. Why? Think about what makes sense. God is perfect and everything He does is perfect. If God never makes mistakes, then it is impossible that He would have created the first human persons in a way that made them incapable of living His plan of happiness for them. Before the first sin, the first humans needed to discover who they were, but it was not a struggle. They didn't experience the confusion we experience now. They didn't struggle with questions the same way we do, because their minds were truly free from the confusing tug of sin. They knew who they were and what their purpose was. They were free.

But if the first human persons were created without sin, how did the disaster of sin happen?

Well, some things never change. Within every temptation to sin is a dangerous scam. The benefit we think we see in sin is a trick designed to lead us into destruction. Just as the He-Man sword seemed so desirable that it justified selfishness, so does sin.

If you've ever dealt with email spam, you have a good idea of how sin tricks us. We are attracted by the promises of pleasure and fun and freedom. But when we pursue it, spam infects us and slows down the functions the computer was made for. Clicking on a link in just one spam email triggers a flood of even more spam that is almost impossible to remove. Without correction, spam eventually destroys the hard drive altogether.

When we sin, we are attracted by the false promises of pleasure and freedom. We choose a false good instead of trusting that following God's laws will lead us to what is really good. We have chosen the sword instead of the party, but now we're alone in the backyard with a broken toy instead of enjoying cake with friends. We are never satisfied when we focus only on ourselves. Have you ever met someone who was both selfish and really happy?

If we really examine our human experience, we see that not only are the toys broken, but so are we. We need serious repairs. Think about the ways we show our brokenness. Even if we know sin will hurt us, we keep choosing sin because it seems good in the moment. Even when we know sin will hurt others, we convince ourselves that it's okay.

Have you ever had a moment when you realized how bad and selfish some of your choices have been? Sometimes, we have moments of really wanting to take back our sins and do good. We experience regret but still find ourselves sinning over and over again. We find it so hard to stop on our own.

So what can we do about it?

We can look to God, who is the exact opposite of self-centered sin: God is love. Instead of thinking only of Himself, He never stops thinking about you. Every law God ever gave was to help you get to His party and enjoy that wonderful, sugar-soaked cake. Then sin distracts us, and we begin to think that we know better than God who made us. But when we follow our own way instead of God's, the only place we end up is alone.

IF YOU ASK ME ...

God is _____. (Write the first word that comes to your mind.)

TO THE CORE

How did things get like this? Surely God did not make us for this mess!

We need to go back to Eden—to the **beginning**—to a story many of us heard as children. God did not need anything or anyone else. God is love, first and foremost because the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three truly



In Your Faith

"God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them."

— Genesis 1:27

The Catechism helps us understand what this verse means. You and every person you know are made in God's image and so reflect some aspect of God to the world.

Yet human persons reflect God most clearly in our relationships with one another, especially when we form loving relationships with our friends and families (see CCC 1702).

"When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice ... Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him." — Sirach 15:14, 17

distinct Divine Persons—have loved each other eternally. God is complete in Himself. Yet God's love is so great that He wanted to share it. He created man and woman in **His image and likeness**. This meant that when Adam and Eve loved one another, they would be like a model of the Trinity's love. God gave Adam and Eve all good things, including a perfect paradise where they could live without suffering, or any problems in their relationship. They could not have asked for—or even imagined—anything better than what God gave them freely.

Imagine the blessing this life was in the beginning! No insecurity. No drama. No family problems, no homework, and no wondering whether or not you fit in. All they needed to do was continue trusting God to provide.

Because God's only desire was for them to love Him and each other, He gave Adam and Eve **free will**, which is the ability to choose. God gave Adam and Eve free will because love is not possible otherwise. True love is not possible without choice because you cannot force someone to love you, and nobody can force you to love him or her. Love is not love at all unless it is freely given.

You have probably experienced this reality in your own life with things less significant than relationships. Maybe you have been encouraged (or even forced) to try a hobby or eat a food that you just didn't like. No matter how much someone encouraged or pushed you, your heart just wasn't in it. If it is impossible to force people to love hobbies or food, how could it be possible to force the most important love of all—human love for another and for God?

Free will makes love possible, but the ability to choose what is right goes together with the ability to choose what is wrong. God knew that Satan, the enemy of love, would try to take advantage of Adam and Eve's free will and trick them into choosing wrong. But God loved Adam and Eve so much that He prepared them to face that temptation. He was like a parent telling a child, "If you touch that hot stove, you'll burn your hand!" God told His children what would happen if they used their free will to choose wrong—they would die! (Genesis 2:17)

Sure enough, Satan soon told Adam and Eve a very tempting lie. He said God was like a dictator trying to repress them so they wouldn't become as powerful as He. Despite the overwhelming evidence that God loved them, Adam and Eve chose wrong. They disobeyed God. And just as God had warned, death followed sin.

Death came to four different relationships that had been perfect before sin.

First, Adam and Eve's relationship with the physical part of their world was damaged. All kinds of bodily suffering began: injury, defects, disease.



In Your Faith

"For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist." —1 Corinthians 8:6

Instead of always having everything they needed for their bodies, they would now have to struggle constantly to maintain food and shelter. Even now, we experience this consequence in our own lives. We get sick, we get hurt, and, someday, all of us will die.

Second, another type of death is a spiritual death. Death, by definition, is the ultimate separation of the body from the soul. This is what Adam and Eve experienced individually. Before the Fall, Adam's bodily actions always followed his pure soul. The same went for Eve; her actions followed her pure heart. This is holiness. But when they went against the law God had placed in their heart and sinned with their bodies, they experienced a split within themselves, a sort of death.

Third, Adam and Eve's perfect relationship with each other died. Instead of perfectly loving and accepting each other, they began to experience tension and misunderstanding. They covered their bodies because sin made them feel insecure. Don't we still deal with the same issues? We fight with family members; we feel insecure about our looks; we worry whether or not we are loved.

Fourth, and worst of all, their perfect relationship with God died. Instead of being in total union with Him, they were cut off from God, like a kite being cut off its string. God did not stop loving Adam and Eve, but they chose to reject His love, thinking they would find something better. Of course, because God had made them, He knew what was really best for them. Adam and Eve soon saw that nothing better than God's love exists, because all good things come from His love.

After being cut off from the source of love itself, Adam and Eve's ability to love suffered major injury. Imagine a car having its engine yanked out from under its hood. You wouldn't get very far in that car, would you? In a similar way, we won't get very far in our relationships without the "engine" of God's love.

Original Sin

Adam and Eve's sin was passed on to the whole human race. We call this **original sin**. Original sin is something like a lost inheritance. Adam and Eve had been given a perfect world, but their sin wasted this treasure like a stack of money being set on fire. Money that has been burned is not misplaced or saved for later; it is simply gone. In the same way, original sin spent humanity's inheritance of holiness.

God designed human nature to desire holiness and choose good easily. With our spiritual inheritance gone, we now find it really difficult to overcome sin. It's like not having enough money. When you have easy access to lots of money, you can purchase what you need without a second thought. Without



In Your Faith

When it comes to defining a human person, our faith teaches us that we are each created in the image and likeness of God. So to be human is a call to be like God, but how? The Catechism says that when we are together in love, we are like the Trinity (see CCC 1702). God is not a lonely old guy with a beard. God is three Persons in a perfect relationship. We are made for relationship, too, and when we are together, we reflect God!

Mind
Glue



Sin destroys relationships. Here is an easy way to remember the four relationships that original sin destroyed:

1. Adam and Eve's relationship with the physical world—NATURE
2. Adam's body and soul relationship; Eve's body and soul relationship—SELF
3. Adam and Eve's relationship with each other—OTHERS
4. Adam and Eve's relationship with God—GOD

enough money, though, it's a struggle to buy anything, because you just don't have the cash.

Original sin triggered the cycle of broken relationships and selfishness that we all recognize. After Adam and Eve, their son Cain killed his brother, Abel, simply because Cain was jealous. Just like his parents, Cain had been warned by God that choosing wrong would cause a domino effect of misery. He knew his wrong choice would hurt himself and others. He did it anyway.

Sound familiar?

Cravings of the Heart

Have you ever had a craving for a very specific food, like vanilla ice cream, but you didn't have any ice cream in the freezer? Trying to find a substitute for what you really want, you open the fridge and stand there with the door open until your mom yells at you to stop air-conditioning the whole house. Maybe yogurt will do. It's creamy and sweet like ice cream, right? One bite, though, and it's obvious that Yoplait ain't no Ben and Jerry's. You still want ice cream, now more than ever! And the more you try to substitute for what you really crave, the more intense the craving gets.

But if you do find a pint of Ben and Jerry's tucked in the back of the freezer, what happens? Heaven! You scoop a big bowl, grab a spoon, and start slurping it down before you even get back to the couch. Your craving is satisfied; that annoying urge lightens up and you feel ... content.

More important than a craving for temporary pleasure, our hearts have even more powerful cravings for happiness, purpose, and love. You can probably guess that when God made Adam and Eve, these cravings were totally satisfied by their closeness to God and to each other. Sadly, when sin cut off humanity from God's love, our heart's deepest desires remained, but we lost sight of how to satisfy them.

So what do craving hearts do? They try to find substitutes for what they really want. They try one thing after another, but because nothing really hits the spot, the cycle just continues. The world offers all kinds of substitutes. Just consider some commercials you've seen. Almost all of them try to convince us that if we buy the product, we will be happy and successful.

But if that were true, then we would need to buy the product only once and we would be happy for the rest of our lives. Is that reality? Has a product ever made anyone say, "That's all I need until I die. Don't give me anything else. I don't want anything more because this thing is enough to keep me happy for the next sixty years."

We can just walk into any shopping mall to see the craziness of the idea that stuff can make and keep our heart's cravings satisfied. We return again

and again to buy something different, something new, because it gives us excitement for a moment. But then the excitement washes away.

So, what is lasting? What can satisfy the hungry heart? Before sin, the perfect relationships that Adam and Eve enjoyed kept them content and satisfied their hearts. We can conclude that if we could somehow experience perfect relationships with nature, with our bodies and souls, each other, and God, we would also experience happiness and satisfaction.

However, without the engine, it's pretty hard to move the car. Even if we do realize that real happiness, purpose, and love are found in relationships, we find ourselves choosing sin, being selfish, and sabotaging our own joy in the process. We use our free will to choose wrong instead of love. We choose the He-Man sword instead of cake with our friends.

We end up alone. And if happiness, purpose, and love are found in relationships, when we are alone, we are miserable.

What a crazy dilemma! It can seem like enough to make you give up and think there's no point in trying to choose good when the whole system is crashed.

IF YOU ASK ME ...

1. When I crave _____, having _____ instead is an unfulfilling substitute.
2. It seems like many people wrongly think _____ will satisfy their craving for love.

But be not afraid! The Bible is called the "Good News" for a reason. In Scripture, God reminds us that "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). We are broken, yes, but don't forget that God never stopped loving Adam and Eve—or us—after sin. Scripture also says, "For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son" (John 3:16). God wants us to be happy, to find purpose, and to love and be loved, so He would not let sin and selfishness have the final word. Nothing is more powerful than God's love for us. This is why Jesus came and gave His own life on the Cross—to defeat sin and death.

And the good news? He won.



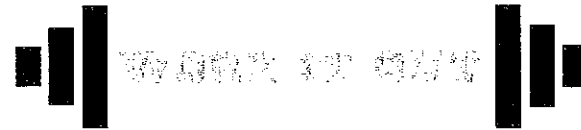
In Your Faith

"For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life." – 1 Corinthians 15:22

Our faith is full of hope. Even though original sin caused death and separation, Jesus brought life and unity.

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned, we were all affected. We are not guilty of committing the original sin, but we all suffer because of the sin of our first parents. When Adam and Eve sinned, humanity lost holiness and the experience of perfect love (see CCC 416).

notes



A. Genesis Theater

Produce a Genesis skit. Your leader/teacher will break you up into groups and give you a few props. Your assignment is to act out the scene in Genesis 3. You can reenact the biblical story or make up a modern-day version.

B. Genesis Comics

Make an Adam and Eve comic strip illustrating the lie that the serpent told Adam and Eve.

C. Genesis, Dr. Seuss Style

Retell the creation story through a children's story in a way that would make Dr. Seuss proud. Focus especially on the creation, temptation, and fall of Adam and Eve. Express the truth of Genesis clearly while using your imagination and creativity to make it "come alive" in a new way.

D. Freedom Essay

Adam and Eve misused their freedom, but Blessed Pope John Paul II stated: "Freedom exists for the sake of love." Write an essay exploring this question:

How would the world be different over the last hundred years if even ten influential community, national, and world leaders used their freedom for the sake of love? Which male leaders come to mind? Which female leaders come to mind? Why?

Let us thank God for the Good News we have heard in this chapter as we pray:

Instruct me, O LORD, in the way of Your statutes, that I may exactly observe them. Give me discernment, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.