Today I begin a new sermon series entitled, *Gems from Genesis*. Do you like the bulletin cover? Thanks to Shawn Zimmerman for his graphics! The sermon series will involve studying the lives of Biblical characters from the book of Genesis and lessons they have to teach us about living a life of faith in God. Have you ever noticed how Genesis seems to be full of interesting people like Adam and Eve, Noah, Cain and Abel, Abraham, Sara, Jacob and Joseph?

My message today begins with our first parents, Adam and Eve. God created them and placed them in a beautiful garden, the Garden of Eden. Trees were everywhere! There were beautiful trees and trees which produced fruit. In the middle of the garden God placed two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were told they could eat of any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The third chapter of Genesis surprises us. Up to this point everything seems so great, so perfect, so ideal! But the author introduces us to the serpent in the beginning of chapter 3. The serpent, speaking to the woman questioned God’s command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve confirmed God’s command but the crafty serpent challenged the truthfulness of God’s command. He told Eve that she if she ate the fruit she wouldn’t die but rather her eyes would be opened and she would be like God, knowing good and evil. The serpent’s lie inspired Eve to take a fresh, new look at the tree. She saw three tempting things about it: first, it was good for food, second, it was pleasing to the eye and third, it was desirable for gaining wisdom.

We learn: **Temptation often looks good!** Can you relate to any of these temptations? You fudge just a little bit in reporting your income to the IRS because you think, “what are the chances of being audited, really?” Or, you’re tempted to access an internet porn site just for a few minutes because it won’t really affect you. Or you spread hurtful comments about someone at work that you don’t like, someone who has said cruel things about you.

Eve succumbed to the serpent’s temptation! She ate the fruit and gave a piece to her husband who also ate. What happened as a result of their willful disobedience to God? There were several consequences.

The first consequence concerned their **nakedness**. Have you ever wondered, “Why does nakedness seems to be such a big deal in this passage?” Nakedness in scripture represents shame, dishonor, guilt and weakness. After yielding to temptation and sinning, Adam and Eve both felt a deep sense of shame, guilt and dishonor.

We often share these same feelings of shame and guilt when we yield to temptation and commit a sin, don’t we? If the IRS contacts us for an audit and they discover that we’ve lied in reporting our income, we feel a sense of shame. Or, accessing an internet porn site can lead to a sense of shame and guilt. Spreading hurtful comments about a work colleague can backfire on us if a supervisor confronts us and this can lead to shame and guilt.
The second consequence of sin includes blaming others or circumstances for our sin. I want to focus on this consequence this morning. Isn’t it true that when we sin we often try to shift the blame from ourselves to others or circumstances beyond our control? I call this “The Blame Game”. Please turn your bulletin to the middle and note the life lesson for today: Avoid blaming others or circumstances for mistakes/sin you have committed. Let me say it again: Avoid blaming others or circumstances for mistakes/sin you have made.

Police arrested a woman in Atlanta in March of 2004 for attempting to use a fake million dollar bill in Wal-Mart. The woman, named Alice Pike went to the register with $1,675 worth of merchandise. She tried to use two gift cards but didn’t have nearly enough on the cards for her purchase. So, she pulled out the fake million dollar bill. She handed it to the cashier and expected change! Math has never been my strongest subject but by my calculation, that’s a heck of a lot of change! Was Alice really expecting that the cashier would give her $998,325? Did she envision the cashier on the loudspeaker saying something like, “hey, we need thousands of 100’s, 50’s and 20’s on register 5”? What was she thinking? Police reported that when they arrested her she blamed her estranged husband for giving her the fake million dollar bill which he had purchased at a gag store. Alice’s sin of greed landed her in prison on charges of first degree forgery.

Recognizing and confessing our own responsibility for our sin is the first step in receiving forgiveness from God. Where does this propensity to blame others for our sin come from? It comes from original sin, the very sin which prompted God to send Adam and Eve away from the Garden. Let’s consider some lessons on sin from this text:

1. Pride is at the very heart of sin. Look in vs.5-6 where the crafty serpent tempts Eve: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 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”.

Why did Eve respond favorably to the serpent’s lie? Why did she yield to temptation? She wanted to be like God! The sin of pride entered her heart! She wanted to know good and evil. God had given Adam and Eve free will but pride caused them to abuse their free, moral choice.

We struggle with pride today! Pride prevents us from humble confession and repentance. Pride prevents us from thinking we need a Savior! Pride fools us into thinking we don’t need to take responsibility for our mistakes and failures. So, we blame others or circumstances for our sin.

Many years ago, famous writers were invited by a newspaper in England to respond to the question, “what’s wrong with the world?” They were supposed to limit their answers to 800 words. But GK Chesterton didn’t need 800 words. He needed only one word, for in response to the question, “what’s wrong with the world”? Chesterton wrote simply, “me”.

When I attended seminary I had a very proud spirit. I envisioned myself serving a large mega church with thousands of people attending. I would be world famous! I’d hob-nob with Billy Graham, Lloyd Ogilvie, Charles Swindoll and other well-known Christian leaders. Well, big
surprise! My life and ministry didn’t turn out that way! The Lord gave me a wake-up call in my first pastorate. I learned that ministry was about serving the Lord and people not making a big name for myself. I endured some very difficult trials as the Lord taught me many lessons about ministry and life. When I left my first pastorate five years later I was a completely different person. Please don’t misunderstand. I still struggle with pride but not to the degree I once did.

Do you struggle with pride? Is it hard for you to admit personal failure or sin or do you often blame others, circumstances, or lack of opportunity? Do you have a hard time accepting gifts from others? Often our pride prevents us from accepting gifts, including the gift of salvation!

2. Sin is progressive.

Observe the progressive nature of sin. Look in vs.12-13: “The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate. Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done? The woman said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate”. Both Adam and Eve blamed others for their sin! They played the “Blame Game”! Note the progressive nature of their sin. Adam began his answer to God by blaming God. He said, “The woman you put here with me”, as if were God’s fault that He had made Eve and brought her to Adam and made Adam eat of the fruit! After initially blaming God, Adam then blamed Eve: “she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate”. When Eve’s questioned by God she blamed the serpent.

We’ve already observed that the first consequence to their sin was a realization of their nakedness, their feelings of shame, guilt and dishonor. Now, after recognizing their shame, guilt and dishonor, Adam and Eve progress with their sin to blaming others. They blame God, each other and the serpent. Remember, sin has a progressive nature to it!

In next week’s message we will see how the sin of pride that began in the garden progressed to the point of murder in the next generation. Generations pass and we read in Genesis 6:5: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”.

You might remember Ted Bundy, an infamous serial killer who was executed on January 24, 1989. Just before he was executed he granted an interview to Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family. Ted Bundy shared that he grew up in a loving, Christian home. Ted was good looking, intelligent, had friends, and seemed to be a normal guy. As a young teenager he encountered pornography for the first time. Over a period of time he grew addicted to it. In order to feed his addiction, he found more explicit, more graphic and more violent material. This constant exposure to harder porn wore down his inhibitions against criminal behavior. Finally, he began his crime spree in which he murdered 28 young women and girls. Bundy’s sin progressed from soft porn to hard, violent porn to rape and to murder. His shameful experience serves as a powerful warning of the progressive nature of sin!
Ted Bundy also serves as a strong warning to all who dabble in pornography today. You might think it’s harmless but look what it did to Ted Bundy! Remember, he had been a normal, intelligent, good looking man with friends. It’s not only weirdos and wacko’s who become serial killers. Sin can progress in a seemingly normal person’s life to the point that they become rapists and murderers! Bundy’s addiction to pornography led to sexual deviancy, rape and murder. Ted Bundy paid for his heinous sins with his life. Finally, his experience with sin reminds us that:

3. Sin has painful consequences.

In vs.14-15 we read of the consequences for the serpent but I want to focus on the sinful consequences for humanity in vs.16-19. Look in vs.16: “To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband but he shall rule over you”.

The woman’s painful consequences of sin involve pain in childbirth, a struggle for leadership in the marriage relationship and the husband ruling over his wife. We understand the first consequence of pain in childbirth clearly. But what does, “Your desire being contrary to your husband” mean?"

Pay close attention to this explanation. Many English translations, including older versions of the ESV simply say, “your desire shall be for your husband”. This more recent translation does a better job reflecting God’s intent. The word for “desire” in the original text means, “to have a violent craving for a thing”. Isn’t that interesting? That definition goes far beyond what most of us would define as “desire”. The same exact word for “desire” appears in Genesis 4:7b where God warns the angry Cain about sin. “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it”. Cain failed to follow God’s instructions and in the very next verse we read how he rose up and killed his own brother due to his jealousy and pride! In that case, the definition of “desire”, that of having a violent craving for a thing” certainly played itself out!

Let’s get back to Genesis 3:16 and the way we should understand what happened to women. In Genesis 2 we read about God’s creation of man and woman and how God established marriage. The woman was created not to compete with man but to complement or supplement him. God created the man to be the head in the marriage relationship. But in Genesis 3:16, we observe an ongoing struggle for leadership between the man and woman in the marriage relationship. This is what God meant when he told Eve, “your desire shall be contrary to your husband”. The original perfect relationship of chapter two has been damaged and distorted by sin, and thus God’s word to the woman, “your desire shall be contrary to your husband”. God mentions a final consequence in the last part of Gen 3:16. “but he shall rule over you”. Originally God had designed a husband to lead, guard, protect and care for his wife. But as a result of their sin in the Garden, the husband will rule her and have dominion over her. As we know, many men have sinfully abused their wives as a consequence of this sin.

We read of the painful consequences of sin for men in vs. 17-19. Life would become a struggle for survival and so, men must work the ground in order to produce food. Please note that in
2:15 before the Fall, Adam and Eve were to work the Garden of Eden and take care of it. It says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it”. So, what’s different in chapter 3:17-19? Note, vs.17b-18 especially:”cursed is the ground because of you: in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life: thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field”.

In other words, Adam will expend great amounts of energy working the soil only to experience various kinds of failures with his crops. Hard work does not necessarily produce great crops. Finally, death stalks human beings. Note the very last phrase, often used in funerals: “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

This final consequence of sin affects both men and women. In the original Garden, Adam and Eve would have lived there for eternity. God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. So, the warning God issued occurred. This last consequence is the most difficult and painful of all of them. Death is an enemy! Death is our enemy! But thanks be to God who sent Jesus to die in our place so that we do not have to face spiritual death. Jesus rose victorious from the grave and opened the gates of heaven for us. So, physical death, yes! Spiritual death, no! Hallelujah!

God wants all of us to avoid blaming others or circumstances for mistakes we have made! Accept personal responsibility for your mistakes and sin! Quit blaming others! As I close this morning, I invite you in this quietness of your heart to reflect on this challenge. Is there someone in your life, that you have been blaming for a sin or mistake you have made? It could be a parent, a boss, your spouse, a colleague at work, a brother or sister, aunt or uncle? Or, perhaps you’ve been blaming some kind of situation or circumstance for your sin. Quit playing the blame game! God help us to take responsibility for our sin and confess it to God. Let us pray.