

Gen. 2:15–17; 3:1–7

Ps. 32

Rom. 5:12–19

Matt. 4:1–11

In or Out of Bounds?

Goal for the Session

Tweens will confess how they, like Adam and Eve, have trespassed God’s boundaries and commit to ways of living within God’s will.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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

Tweens are beginning to test the boundaries adults set for them. Arguing for later bedtimes, dressing in unconventional ways, choosing new friends to hang out with—these and similar behaviors are ways tweens test and push against limits. It is a natural part of growing up. The developmental appropriateness of resisting boundaries, however, doesn't negate tweens' need for them or the potentially harmful consequences of transgressing them. Help tweens hear in today's Bible story that while grown-ups may not always know best, God does and God has given human beings wide room in which to flourish.

Jesus, friend of sinners, as I begin Lent this year, lead me to embrace my life as your servant. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ purple cloth
- ☐ 6 votive candles in holders
- ☐ matches or lighter
- ☐ newsprint or markerboard
- ☐ markers
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1, materials listed there
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 2, 30
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of your congregation's order of worship, hymnals (optional), paper, pencils
- ☐ option 2: Color Pack 3, poster board, newspapers, magazines, scissors, glue sticks
- ☐ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, egg carton, scissors, markers, scrap paper

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange the purple cloth in the center of your learning space and place Color Pack 1 and the votive candles on it. Gather the materials needed for the activity on Resource Sheet 1 (How Does a Garden Grow?). Make three charts on newsprint or markerboard and title them: Somewhere I'm not allowed to go; If I had children, I'd never let them; Society's most important law. If you are using option 3 in Responding, cut apart egg cartons so each learner will have one egg "pocket."

Greet learners as they arrive. Provide markers and invite them to write responses to the headings on the three charts.

When all have arrived, gather around the candles and say that today is the first Sunday in the church year season of Lent, the season of preparation to celebrate Easter. Ask a volunteer to light one candle. Explain that Lent lasts forty days plus six Sundays. It is a time for Christians to reflect on their faith and on ways to live more closely in line with God's will. Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for bringing us together today to learn more about you. Bless our time together during Lent this year, and open our hearts to your Word. Amen.

Extinguish candles.

Gather around the charts and read them. Invite tweens to comment on any responses that surprise them. Discuss:

✂ What are the consequences of breaking these boundaries and rules?

Say that the Bible story today is about two people who disobeyed God.

The creature God makes in 2:7–8 is described in Hebrew as *'adam*, meaning “human being.” The words *man* (*'ish*) and *woman* (*'ishshah*) don’t occur until Genesis 2:23. In the garden, prior to human sin (see Genesis 3:16b), women and men were equal.

Tweens may giggle when the text says the man and woman knew their nakedness. Wonder together how embarrassment about one’s body and sexuality may be related to the consequences the man and woman faced after eating the fruit.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (How Does a Garden Grow?) and ask learners to complete the seed-planting activity as described on the sheet. After learners have planted their seeds, look at Step 8 and assign each one the place to put his or her cup at home. Invite tweens to hypothesize about the effects these various settings will have on their seeds. Write these hypotheses on newsprint or markerboard for reference next week. Ask:

✂ What are the boundaries within which a gardener must work to help a garden grow?

Distribute Bibles and ask learners to turn to Genesis 2. Introduce today’s Bible story as part of an account of God’s creation of the world and humankind. Read aloud Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17. Ask:

✂ What do these verses say about the place of human beings in creation?

✂ How do God and the human being share responsibility for the garden?

✂ What limit does God put on human activity in the garden?

✂ How does this limit communicate God’s concern for the human being?

Form three groups. Direct each group to read Genesis 3:1–7 and to plan a way to retell the story for the whole class from the point of view of the serpent, the woman, or the man. (Groups can act it out or simply tell their versions.) After all groups present their retellings, ask:

✂ How does the serpent lead the woman and man to doubt God’s concern and care for them?

✂ What does it mean to know good and evil? Why does this knowledge initially belong only to God? (Perhaps the phrase suggests a burden of moral responsibility creatures weren’t meant to have to carry.)

✂ What motivates the woman and man to take and eat the fruit?

✂ What changes for the man and woman once they eat the fruit?

Recruit volunteers to read the parts of a narrator (everything not within quotation marks), God, the man, and the woman in Genesis 3:8–19. Discuss:

✂ How has the humans’ relationship with God been changed? (v. 8)

✂ How has the human’s relationship with each other been changed? (v. 16)

✂ How has the humans’ relationship with the natural world been changed? (vv. 17–19)

Show Color Pack 2 as you read aloud Genesis 3:21–23. Ask:

✂ What new boundary do the man and woman face because they did not live within the boundaries God first set? (v. 23)

✂ God makes clothes for the man and woman. What does this tell you about God?

Assure tweens that God also loves and cares for them, even when they choose to not live within God’s boundaries. During Lent, Christians give thanks for Jesus’ promise that, even though there are consequences for poor choices, God stands ready to forgive and to offer another chance.

**EASY
PREP**

Option: Ask worship leaders in your church about using these prayers in an upcoming worship service.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Tell the Truth** Tweens will appreciate prayers of confession as a way to acknowledge that they, like Adam and Eve, violate God's good boundaries for human life. Distribute copies of your congregation's order of worship or hymnal and find a prayer of confession. (If your congregation uses no printed materials, ask learners to name parts of the service in which worshipers confess sin to God.) Ask learners to identify ways this prayer addresses the damage that is caused to relationships with each other, the natural world, and God when people disregard God's boundaries. Distribute paper and pencils. Encourage learners, working individually or in pairs, to write a prayer of confession to use in worship. Together, read aloud the words of assurance or absolution and ponder their meaning.
- 2. "Do Not Cross" Collage** Help learners identify situations that present boundaries they feel they should not cross. Display Color Pack 3. Ask where learners have seen such a sign. Glue Color Pack 3 to the center of a piece of poster board. Invite learners to cut pictures or headlines from newspapers and magazines that represent boundaries they think people should not cross to maintain healthy relationships with each other, with the natural world, and with God. Have learners tell about their chosen images as they glue them around the edges of Color Pack 3. Display the collage for the rest of the congregation to see.
- 3. Serpent's Head Prayers** Encourage learners with God's promise of a Savior who conquers sin by dramatizing an ancient Christian interpretation of Genesis 3:15. Give each learner a "pocket" from an egg carton and a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Serpent's Head Prayers). Follow the directions there to complete the activity.

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.)

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.)

CLOSING

Gather in a group around the candles and light one of them. Invite tweens to tell what amazed them most in the story of Adam and Eve.

Ask learners to join you in a "popcorn prayer." After you begin the prayer, they are welcome to speak their prayers aloud, without worrying about taking turns or speaking at the same time. Pray aloud:

Amazing God, thank you for creating us and loving us enough to give us second chances. Hear our prayers. (Pause for popcorn prayers.) Amen.

Stand in a circle to sing "Behold, I Am with You" (Color Pack 30, [Singing the Feast](#)). Invite tweens to join you in the actions (see sidebar) as they sing.

Say good-bye to tweens by name. Remind them of their responsibility for their seeds in the week ahead.

How Does a Garden Grow?

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ 2 large plastic cups (14 to 16 ounces)
- ☐ potting soil
- ☐ bean seeds
- ☐ water
- ☐ large nail
- ☐ permanent marker
- ☐ plastic wrap
- ☐ tape

Directions

1. Use a large nail to poke six small holes in the bottom of the first cup. Be careful not to puncture yourself!
2. Use a permanent marker to write "Genesis 2:15" on the second cup. Add a drawing of a growing plant.
3. Place the first cup inside the second cup.
4. Place potting soil in the inner cup. Fill it about $\frac{3}{4}$ full. If the soil is very dry, water it enough to make it damp.
5. Use a finger to push two bean seeds into the soil to the depth indicated on the seed package. Gently cover with soil.
6. Use your fingers to sprinkle water on top of the soil. Don't make it muddy.
7. Cover the cup with plastic wrap, taping it in place.
8. Take your cup home and take off the plastic wrap. Place the cup in the place assigned by your leader. Check off your assigned place below to help you remember it.
 - ☐ In a closet
 - ☐ Near a window that gets quite a bit of sunlight each day
 - ☐ In the refrigerator
9. Check the cup each day and lightly water it if it seems dry. Don't make it muddy.
10. Be ready to report back next Sunday about the growth of your plant, and to compare your results with those reported by others.
11. When the plants get their third set of leaves, transplant them into a garden or larger pot outdoors.



Serpent's Head Prayers

Directions

1. Read Genesis 3:14–15. How do you understand the actions of the woman's offspring?
2. Decorate an egg carton "pocket" to look like a serpent's head.
3. On a scrap of paper, write or draw about a time you chose to break God's boundaries and caused damage to your relationship with another person, with the natural world, or with God. No one will see this paper but you.
4. Crumple the paper into a ball and put it inside the "serpent's head."
5. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God for sending Jesus Christ to be your Savior from sin and death.
6. As you say "Amen," stomp on the "serpent's head" to symbolize your trust in Jesus' victory over sin!
7. Imagine Jesus saying to you: "I forgive you. Go in love and peace, and live in God's ways."

