

Presence Distanced: The God from Whom We Hide (Adam/Eve)

Genesis 3

Chaotic guilt drives Adam and Eve from open freedom into closeted fear. Worse, God once again sounds his daily arrival. Crouching low, sin produces even greater foolishness. "Perhaps He won't find us," Adam whispers. Their grandchildren, we repeat the silliness when putting created things between us and a relentlessly searching Creator. Stuff never provides much of a hiding place. Positively, *Genesis* implies that the Lord God came every day for warm, renewable, life-giving interaction with those He created in His image. The earliest weeks signaled what followed centuries later: *God would incarnate*. He loves being *with* people. Negatively, the first couple forfeited the natural flow of holy joy at the prospect of seeing God. "Woe is me," Isaiah lamented, "I am unclean" (Is.6). Generations would now all begin in hiding before being found (cf. Ps. 51:5, Rom.3:23).

When I was a boy growing up on 19th Avenue on the north side of Kenosha, Wisconsin, there came a day when I realized I could run faster than my father. Today, I'm not so sure...but back then, I was certain. And because I knew I could run faster than my dad, I somehow was also convinced that this fact changed the game.

Or so I thought.

My bubble of confidence, however, burst late one afternoon. For reasons I now forget, it had become a "wait until your father comes home" kind of day. And when dad finally did arrive, mom unloaded the truck. Suddenly, I heard my name called out, and I resorted to my new "ace in the hole." I took off. I ran like a bandit out the front door and headed south down the sidewalk. To my surprise, I did not hear any footsteps closing in behind me. I thought at least he'd give chase.

But in fact, I heard nothing.

So pulling up about 2 or 3 houses down the street, I looked back to see my dad standing calmly on the front porch steps. For a few moments, an eerie silence. And then, Dad confidently spoke 9 words that I have never forgotten.

***You are going to have to come home,
sometime.***

Yep, that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach was telling me something I couldn't deny – I had no where good to go, and he was right. Slowly, grudgingly, I walked back to the house and through the front door with my dad.

Once again, I had proven that I was a son of Adam.

Why do we think we can successfully run from God? And, what does God do when we try?

Our attention needs to be in Genesis chapter 3:1-8.

Genesis 3 Now the serpent was more *crafty* (i.e. subtle, shrewdⁱ) than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that **when you eat of it your eyes will be opened**, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ 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 wiseⁱⁱ, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then **the eyes of both were opened**, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

In the moments we have, let’s ask this passage to answer for us some of the most important

God-and-us questions we can ask. These questions are:

- #1 Why do we run from God?
- #2 What’s the problem with running from God?
- #3 What does God do when we run?

The God from whom we run away is still
the God who desires to be close

QUESTION 1 - Why do we run from God?

Answer: we run from God as a consequence of SIN. Nothing could be clearer than this in

Genesis 3.

Gen 3:6b she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **Then the eyes of both were opened**, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

What is sin? Interestingly, the Hebrew term for **sin**, “**hattah**,” first occurs in the next chapter (4:7), when God himself warns Adam’s son (Cain) “if you do not do well *sin* is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

What is “crouching at the door”? HAT-TAH’s root meaning is “to miss (a goal or a way), to go

wrong.”ⁱⁱⁱ Sin, therefore, is the action of missing the right target, of choosing a wrong alternative.

In **Proverbs 8:35-36**, wisdom insists
*Whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Lord
But he who fails to find me (lit. he who misses me) injures himself
All who hate me (i.e., God’s wisdom) love death.”*

Proverbs 19:2
*Desire without knowledge is not good
and whoever makes haste with his feet
misses his way (i.e., “sins”)*

When we take a more careful look at Genesis 3, we might ask the question – What wrong path was offered by Satan? What alternative approach to living were Eve and Adam leveraged to take?

Look again at verses 4-5. It was, first, the alternative view that their Creator-Provider had lied to them, that God’s very words could not and should not be trusted. “You will not surely die.” Kidner: *“It is the Serpent’s word against God, and the first doctrine to be denied is judgment.”*^{iv}

But there’s more. Second, it was the alternative view that their Creator-Provider was purposefully limiting them, deceptively restricting their full potential development. There was more life to experience than God was permitting. He hadn’t given them the whole story. Satan promised they could **see** something they had not seen before (disobeying will *open your eyes*). Satan promised them a **personal becoming-like-God** experience (disobeying will help you *become like God*). And, Satan promised them a **new knowing** they never understood before (disobeying will usher in a full knowing of good and evil).^v

Bottom line (Serpent argues) – “Here’s the best way to fully experience all that life can offer:”

- Disbelieve God’s Word
- Desire God’s status
- Disobey God’s command

In other words, *Take full, independent control of your own life*. That’s the target to be aiming for. The **ONLY** way to see what you’ve not seen, to become what you cannot haven’t yet become, and to know what you have not yet known...is disbelieve, desire, and disobey.

But may I show you one more aspect of the Serpent’s shrewd appeal? Will you notice in your text the NAME of God the Serpent uses?

- Vs. 1 Moses writes, “the serpent was more crafty/shrewd than any other beast of the field which (note!) the LORD God had made (i.e., **Yahweh Elohim** – the dual name for God which stresses both His personal nature – *Yahweh*--and his powerful capabilities—*Elohim*).
- But in vs. 2, what name of God does the serpent use? He does not use *Yahweh* (the name stressing the Lord’s personal relationship with the man and the woman)...and simply uses *Elohim*, the name stressing God’s power. From verse 2 through his entire appeal, it is not *Yahweh Elohim*...it is simply *Elohim*.
- Will you also notice that only after Adam and Eve have sinned, and begin their hiding, and the Lord comes looking for them, that (vs. 8) the personal, relational, faithful promise-keeping name of God (*Yahweh Elohim*) appears again?

What are we to make of this? Some might suggest nothing. I would suggest that Scripture is precise.

That what the Serpent (Satan) wants to do in offering us an alternative pathway is to de-emphasize God’s personal, relational, faithful, promise-keeping name...to ever so subtly suggest that God doesn’t really care about being “personal” with you, just “powerful over you.” Which is all the more reason to disbelieve His word, and desire your own God-like status, and disobey God’s command.

Why do we run from God? Because we buy-the-lie that God is not actually for us, but against us...and we sin. We independently run down another path, away from *Elohim* dismissing that He is also *Yahweh*. Let’s ask the 2nd question --

QUESTION #2 **What’s the problem with running from God?**

Well, quite simply put, *If running from God is the consequence of sin, the consequence of sinful running from God is what the Bible calls DEATH. DEATH – the absence of real life, the ongoing destruction of that which is good, free and joyful, confident and eager.*

Genesis 3:7-8 describe the death-like disorientation of Adam and Eve. Having disobeyed God, some how their “opened eyes” began seeing things through the lens of shame. Having disobeyed God, some how, some way their nakedness felt terribly wrong. Having disobeyed God, when they heard him coming, rather than running toward Him, they took off running “down 19th Avenue.” In his excellent book entitled SIN: A HISTORY, Notre Dame’s Gary A. Anderson writes,

Sin is not just a thing, but a particular kind of thing. When one sins, something concrete happens: one’s hands become stained, one’s back becomes burdened, one may fall into debt (we might say, “one sews fig leaves together and hides”). It is though a stain, a weight, a bond of indebtedness is created ex nihilo when one offends against God. And the thing that sin has created will continue to haunt the offender until it has been engaged and dealt with.^{vi}

Quite honestly, God never describes sin and running from Him in any kind of “No worries!” way. God will never tell you “*it’s just a cold*” when it is actually cancer. He loves you too much. Running away from God, Paul writes, actually looks like this:

Ephesians 2:1 And you were **dead in the trespasses and sins** ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, **following the prince** of the power of the air, the **spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience**— ³ among whom we all once lived in **the passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.

Sin, and running from God, does “that” to the image of God: the exit and absence of real life, the ongoing destruction of that which is good, free and joyful, confident and eager. Thinking you will get more by disbelieving, desiring independence, and disobeying...you actually settle for so much less. So, let’s take on

QUESTION #3 – What does the TRUE GOD DO when we run?

The God from whom we run away is still the God who desires to be close

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ **But** the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

Jesus put it this way:

Luke 15:1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ **Just so, I tell you**, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ **Just so, I tell you**, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

He said, “The Son of Man has come to seek, and to rescue (save) that which is lost” (Luke 19:10)

The God from whom we run away is still the God who seeks us out to be close

CONCLUSION

So what does that look like...that God comes looking for the one running, or ignoring, or

avoiding, or hiding from Him? God has ten thousands ways of looking for you, and all of them are good.

One of the advantages of reading a magazine like **Christianity Today** is that they regularly put a “testimony” on an issue’s final two pages. Like this one from David Nasser, a “child of the Iranian Revolution” who would tell us “I escaped from Iran but not from God.”

I was nine years old when I decided that I hated God. I hated him because I believed he hated me first. It was 1979, during the middle of the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini and his religious zealots had recently overthrown the existing government and seized political power. Hundreds of thousands of people had their lives turned upside down in the chaos.

My father was a military officer in the previous regime, and we had grown up on a military base. A couple of weeks into the revolution, I was at school when we were called outside for an unexpected assembly. A soldier read off three names, including mine, and called us to the front. Removing a gun from his holster, he quoted from the Qur’an and told me he would kill me to deliver a message to supporters of the old regime. Fortunately the school principal intervened, and the soldier relented.

Traumatized, I rushed home to tell my father what had happened. Despite his usual sternness, he took me into his lap and pledged to keep us safe, revealing that plans were underway for an eventual escape.

To me, this felt less like escaping from Iran than escaping from God. We were leaving our home, our family, our wealth, our friends, everything we held dear—all because our country had been victimized by religion gone wrong.

It wasn’t easy leaving Iran. His father was initially arrested and publicly brutalized. But somehow through a series of remarkable twists and turns, the family first made its way to Switzerland and then to the United States, to Fort Hood, Texas. His mother suggested to praying to the “God of America” named Jesus. Maybe he would let us into “his” country. “Her plan sounds silly in retrospect, but it worked!”

Yet as an Iranian teenager in Texas, David was ostracized and bullied. Finishing high school alone and confused, one day a friend invited him to a church youth group. And there, he met Larry Noh...the one young man who made sure David Nasser would not be left alone.

The next night, 17 teenagers from church showed up at my house. For three hours they visited with me and shared the gospel, even though I wasn’t interested. They kept coming each Monday. And every Sunday and Wednesday, I was at their church. One Sunday night, the preacher invited people forward to give their lives to God. Afraid, I slipped out quickly and drove home thinking I was finished with this “church stuff.”

Arriving home, I wanted to show God who was boss of my life, so I took one of the youth group’s Bibles, doused it

with lighter fluid, and set it on our backyard grill. But I couldn't find a match! Frustrated and curious all at once, I opened the Bible and began reading. When I came to the story of Peter walking on the water toward Jesus, it came alive! God was calling me to step out—out of myself, out of my excuses. That night, in my bedroom, I trusted Jesus.

My father immediately reproached me: "You can't be a Christian," he said. "We are Muslims." Assuming I would get over it, like any other teenage phase, they let me keep reading the Bible. But getting baptized sent them over the edge. When I arrived home, my father had a duffel bag packed. I was dead to him, he thundered, and I had to leave.

That night I called Larry Noh and told him I was homeless. He invited me to come live with him and six other interns in a house that belonged to the church. In the months to come, they helped me grow tremendously in my walk with the Lord. Meanwhile, one by one, God started saving my family.

First my sister came to faith at a Campus Crusade event. Then my mother and brother were saved. We prayed relentlessly for my father, and eventually he too gave his life to Christ.

God, in his amazing grace, has turned my family's tragedy into testimony. Though I hated him as a child, I can see now that he was holding us all along.^{vii}

Nasser today is the Sr. Vice-president for spiritual development at Liberty University.

**The God from whom we run away is still
the God who desires to be close
who comes looking through...
for you**

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ⁱ Cf. Proverbs 12:23, 14:18 translated (ESV) "prudent." Positively, it can be a word describing someone who sees more than others, which brings affords extra advantage in decision making. Negatively, it denotes the ability to make something look or appear differently than it really is, to leverage the trusting nature of another and thus, through deception, to facilitate someone taking a wrong step, making a poor decision. In Joshua 9, the Gibeonites "shrewdly" made themselves look as if they had traveled a long way and lived afar off, in order to get Joshua/Israel to make a treaty of peace with them. At core, it speaks of skill in deceiving.)

ⁱⁱ The Hebrew term here (BDB, 968b) suggests a true insight and discernment about the way things actually are, a clarity to comprehend

ⁱⁱⁱ BDB Hebrew Lexicon p.306

^{iv} Derek Kidner, GENESIS: AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY (1975), p. 76.

^v They could know not only good (which they were already experiencing), but they could also add to their experience the knowing of evil.

^{vi} Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 4.

^{vii} <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/january-february/david-nasser-escaped-iran-not-god.html>