

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Trustworthy

How has God cared for you in the crises of your sin?

In what ways that you perceive as denial has God rescued you from intolerable suffering?

What specific behavior are you free for by trusting that this life of struggle and death is for your good?

Genesis 3:21-24 – ²¹And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. ²²Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—²³therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

I) Love in Trouble...

God, who loves us and wants our best, warned us against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He knew it would bring misery and desired that we would never suffer the consequences. Against His wisdom, we ate. God could have abandoned us to suffer the consequences, but He is loving, just, and merciful. He loves sacrificially despite having no part in our sin. There is none other than Jesus willing to suffer the full weight of the consequences of our failing, and there is no other who deserves our resolute trust. He treats the immediate crisis, stabilizes our condition, then puts us on the path to wellness.

♦ **Diagnose the need:** We suffered such swift and severe damage we could not bear the shame. God finds us hiding, crushed under the weight of our guilt. We attempt to unburden ourselves of injustice by

September 10th, 2023

blaming others. God intervenes. He stops us adding to the trouble, stops us doing damage, stops our bleeding. He briefly sets aside the seriousness of what has been done and lovingly calms us so the situation can be handled reasonably. God compassionately diagnoses the crisis of shame and conjures a treatment. "The Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife... (Gen 3:21)" He offers relief.

◆ **Treat the need**: Knowing how to end a crisis is not the same as ending it. There is needless suffering all around us going untreated despite a proper diagnosis. Society and individuals choose to abandon people to the consequences of trouble rather than bear the burden of treating them. Our loving response would be to both diagnose and treat the crises around us before dealing with the lasting consequences. That is Jesus's way. God made clothes for the man and woman and "clothed them (v21)." He supplied and applied the treatment, teaching us how to alleviate the chronic symptoms of our now-permanent condition.

II) Love in Danger...

Our disobedience is the source of our shame, but we could not know it if our nature was not also essentially altered. God knows we cannot bear this condition eternally and prescribes radical treatment. So radical that what one names treatment, another calls punishment. Whether we attribute God as the author of our healing or torment is a question of whether we put our full trust in His power and love.

◆ **Permanent condition**: The crisis has ended but we have changed. We are judgment addicts. We justify our own behavior while we condemn others. We seek flaws and failures, heaping guilt and shame wherever we find them. "The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil (v22)." Parents learning their child has seen some horror obliterating the child's innocence, realizing the child is forever changed and must be treated differently. Our condition changed such that things that were healthy have the potential to do intolerable harm. Once good ways of life must be vacated.

◆ **Not for me**: Looking for evil and having committed it, we are destined to find it, experience it, inflict it throughout our lives. We cannot unlearn this thing we now know. An eternity of goodness was God's original design. Eternal, unchanged life is now dangerous. God recognizes the danger that we "might reach out [our] hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever (v22)." He wants to bless us with death, which He will use as the instrument with which to

remove the knowledge of good and evil. This interpretation hinges on the belief in life after death. Do we trust God past the edges?

III) Love in Exile...

In the Garden there can be no comfort for those who both know of and have committed evil. It is a place of eternity, of perfection, of transparency. We would suffer under the constant burden of shame knowing our failing, sensing God's knowledge of it, with no recourse to correct it nor accept forgiveness. The knowledge of good and evil gives no room for mercy. God's love demands that we be exiled to a land in which we can hide our shame and find comfort. In His love He sends us with a sense of hope for redemption, one fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

◆ **From a distance**: Along with the blessing of death, God gives the blessing of distance. He comforts us by alleviating the perception of being constantly seen as the sinners we have become. He allows us the space to develop a sense of personal responsibility, the desire to repent rather than excuse, and a craving to be restored. "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken (Gen 3:23)." Along with the blessing of distance God ordains a life of toil. Our level of trust in God is tested again as we seek to know the good He intends through the struggles.

◆ **Detour**: God knows the power of temptation in our weakened state of shame. We are capable of justifying anything by assuming the authority to rework the definition of good and evil. Drunk on the mistaken feeling of power, humanity has pursued immortality in the flesh since the moment of exile. He sends us forth for our good but knows we will be tempted to return illegitimately. So, "at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life (v24)." He permits only one way back into the Garden. His Spirit convicts us of our wrongness until we stop with excuses and accept responsibility. When we do, Jesus invites us to believe He is the Son of God and to follow Him. His death and resurrection provide the means of divine forgiveness. They are more than that. They are the sign by which we can trust Him. We can be confident that exile from the Garden is for our good. Death is a blessing in that it purges us of the poison of that fateful tree as we shed our sinful flesh. We will be resurrected in new bodies innocent of the knowledge of good and evil and without any desire to know evil again. Trust Jesus. Trust Him enough to follow Him in all ways. Live the dream by casting off all fear of death and punishment.