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Genesis 2:15-17, 20-24 ESV, edited for brevity.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

²⁰ The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. ²² Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

The innocence of Eve.

When I was in college, I had a friend whose mother was schizophrenic. She drove a station wagon, which she had hand-painted, by brush, in a myriad of colors. In the back seat was a typewriter, and on the back seat, on the floor of the back seat, and on the passenger’s seat, were the many hundreds of pages of scripture she had written. She thought that God had commissioned her to write a new Bible, a sort of the next Testament, or, as we used to cruelly joke, the *New and Improved Testament*. Everyone in the dorm knew about my friend’s mother because she would call the dorm whenever she needed help. This was in

southern California and my friend was going to college an hour or so from where he had grown up. He used to tell me that he dearly wished he had gone to college out of state. To put it mildly, my friend was very embarrassed about his mother. She had a habit of driving around, stopping to type a few pages, driving some more, then stopping to spread the faith, driving some more, then typing more, spreading the faith some more, and then driving, until she ran out of gas. Then she would call her son at the dorm for him to come rescue her. His mother lived in a tortured mental state - and her behavior tortured her son. It showed in his bearing: he was in a constant state of high, nervous anxiety.

I happened to be the one who took the call one day when she called. This was back in the late seventies and the phone was in the hallway, and whoever was passing by typically answered it. My friend's mother was at a pay phone, needing someone to come and bring her gas. I, too, was from southern California, and when she told me where she was, I realized that she was in a poor Hispanic neighborhood that had a lot of gang activity. Worse, when I asked her if there were any other people around, she calmly said yes, that there were some young men there, and that as a matter of fact, they were armed. Interestingly, she seemed oblivious to the immediate danger I thought she was in. Her real concern was simply that she was lost and stranded. She had to get on with God's mission,

she told me. How could God allow her car to run out of gas yet again? She was only going to live so long, she said. She had so much more to write and so many more mission journeys to take. You've got to help me, she begged, when I told her that her son wasn't around. I'm going to get back to my friend's mother.

Let's talk about the Garden of Eden and the casting out from Eden of Adam and Eve. Here's some Genesis background. Among the trees in the Garden of Eden were two special trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Note that this second tree is not the Tree of Good and Evil, but rather the Tree *of the Knowledge of* Good and Evil. God put trees in the Garden in part to supply food for Adam and Eve, but he made one very serious restriction. This is from our reading today, from Genesis 2:16 to 17, where God gives Adam a warning - ¹⁶*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* We all know that Adam and Eve broke this rule and got tossed out of Eden as a result. Now, immediately after eating the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they had a revelation. Here is Genesis 3:7 - *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths.* Now, they hadn't done any clothes shopping

during their tenure in the Garden of Eden; they were naked long before they ate this fruit. But eating the forbidden fruit made them somehow vulnerable to shame. What's going on here in this story? It's an allegory. Eating from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil represents Adam and Eve striking out on their own and trying to comprehend and live in the world without any guidance from God, without letting God take the time to teach them how to live. So, this naked stuff is of course symbolic. They suddenly knew all about evil and how it differs from good. They were overwhelmed. They had been poisoned spiritually by gaining knowledge that they weren't yet ready to comprehend. God was to be the judge of when they were ready for that fruit – but they had jumped the gun.

The story gets heightened and the symbolism of it grows. God then tells Adam and Eve that they should never eat the fruit of that other special tree, the Tree of Life – because it would make them live forever. Now, what's wrong with living forever? Well, you don't want to live forever in a state of sin and corruption – and that's what would have happened if they had eaten the fruit from the Tree of Life after disobeying God and eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil before they were ready. But now, life outside the Garden was going to be tough. They would have to fend for themselves. Here is what God said would happen, now that Adam and Eve were no longer innocent, now that

they knew about evil: *cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.* They would have to work desperately hard for a living. If they had obeyed God and not eaten the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would have eventually learned about these things, but only when they were ready, when God had prepared them. Then they would have eventually been allowed to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life and they would have lived forever in comfort and happiness.

After Adam and Eve get tossed out, God goes on to guard the Tree of Life by placing a cherubim with a flaming sword near the tree to make sure Adam and Eve didn't sneak back for a taste of its fruit. God, you see, even though they disobeyed, is now protecting Adam and Even from themselves. He didn't want them to live forever in a state of knowledge they were not prepared for, so they had to be kept from the Tree of Life. They had to die, as all people on Earth do, so this would not happen. If they had just trusted God – and that was their true sin, not trusting God to know what is best – they would have lived forever in bliss.

You see, we were meant to become morally autonomous, to be able to control our actions, to do what's right and not do what's wrong. But we are

supposed to have a moral autonomy that is under the guidance of God. Adam and Eve thought they didn't need God. They thought they could become like God, to know about good and evil, and do it without God having any authority over them. The story of Adam and Eve *is an allegory* about a misplaced attempt at taking on the terrible complexities and challenges of life without the help of God.

Some people focus on the difference between a literal versus a non-literal view of the Bible. I think this concern is misguided. Many people have drifted away from their childhood faith, many have raised their kids outside of the faith, many reject Christianity outright – because they simply cannot believe the wild tales found in the Bible. I have had agnostic and atheist friends of mine ask me many times if I actually believe all that mythical stuff in the Bible. I tell them that I do believe the Bible. I believe – because the Bible can be literally true and figuratively true at the same time. Even the same part of the Bible can be both factual in a literal sense, as well as being an allegory. Let me continue.

Consider the name Adam. This word, when translated from the original Hebrew found in the Bible means “human” or “person”. The name Eve is related to the word “living”. Adam represents humanity and Eve represents the source of all human life. The story of Adam and Eve is in many ways symbolic, and perhaps the original writers of it did not mean for us to take it literally. This story tells us

an important lesson: if we want direction in life, if we want to know good from evil, then we need to do the right thing - we need to listen to God.

But there is another view of the story of Adam and Eve – that it is literally a true story, that there was a real Adam and a real Eve. Now, we don't have any scientific evidence that Adam really existed. But there is evidence that there was indeed a sort of Eve. There is evidence that a “mitochondrial Eve” – the single, maternal ancestor of all living humans, did exist. Scientists have used a technique that leverages profiles taken from random blood donors. Based on the similarity between the genetic material of people, scientists assign a number that defines the degree to which any two donors are related to each other. Using mitochondrial genetic material, which we always inherit from our mothers, simplifies the task of finding common ancestors because, while humans have more than 20,000 genes, the mitochondria contain only 37 genes. More importantly, this material rarely changes as it is passed down from mother to daughter, and it changes at a predictable rate. So, by knowing how related people are, that is by measuring how much the mitochondrial pool has changed over time, we can infer the approximate time of the so-called mitochondrial Eve – and that turns out to be 200,000 years ago. Yes, we seem to all have a common female ancestor. But this only means that all other DNA lines before the

mitochondrial Eve was born have died out. And, if this Eve hadn't had any children, none of us would exist. She was, in a scientific sense, Eve, the single, female ancestor of all of us.

So, what about my friend's mother? Let's get back to her. When I was on the phone with my friend's schizophrenic mother, and she told me that she had some armed young men around her, I asked her if I could please talk to them. So, one of them got on the phone with me. Now, I had grown up in a largely Hispanic neighborhood, and there had been a lot of gang activity and a lot of weapons. But I had been an A student who never got involved in anything illegal. I was deathly afraid of gang members. You know what that young man said to me? That young man with a gun who was talking to my friend's schizophrenic mother? He said don't worry about this lady. We'll give her some gas and tell her how to get back on the freeway. Even though she's kind of worked up, we like her. She says that God talks to her all the time and she types it up. What God has told her is on paper in her car, man, all over it. We read some of it and we think it's mostly a bunch of stuff from the Bible kind of rehashed. That's what this armed young man told me. She's got Adam and Eve in there, he said. It's a little different, but it's mostly the same. Want to know why we like her? It's because

she says all of us in East L.A. are equal to everyone else. She says we should believe in God because we are all children of the same Adam and Eve.

Of course, she was right. We even think we know when Eve lived. But there is a reason I wanted to talk about my friend's mother. She was schizophrenic, and in her deluded way, she was doing her best to serve God. She was a very good woman. She never ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. She never learned about good and evil at all, not on her own, and not from God, either. She was totally innocent. She was like Eve before the fall. Our job is to be an innocent as her, while perhaps not being schizophrenic. The only way we can do it - because unlike my friend's mother, we cannot avoid learning about good and evil - is to do it with God's guidance. We are descended from a true, actual mitochondrial Eve - that is the literal part of the story. The allegorical aspect of the story is that God doesn't want us to go out and live in the world on our own. We must let God take our hand. Please pray briefly with me.

Thank you, God, for that mitochondrial Eve who bore children and led to the existence of all of us. Thank you for placing yourself in our lives, so that we do not have to go out there and learn about good and evil on our own. Let us not be deluded and live in a fantasy world; let us see the world as it is. You are our guide. Let us know as much as Adam and Eve - but let us be innocent. Amen.