

Chapter 11.

God's Survival Plan

Genesis 3:14-24 is sometimes referred to as "the curse." Read without negative preconditioning, it is evident that the curse was addressed to the serpent and to the ground; it was not applied to the man or the woman. Actually, God instituted a new regime at this time which would protect us from ourselves. For the woman, he reinforced the authority needed to shield her in her female vulnerability. To the man he gave the therapy and discipline of work. In it all, God revealed the way in which the tensions between good and evil would be resolved within his own redemptive plan. A word from Dorothy L. Sayers will be helpful here: "God did not abolish the fact of evil: He transformed it. He did not stop the crucifixion: He rose from the dead."

Hear Jesus' own words:

"For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." John 3:17

In the spirit of those words, we have in this Genesis passage not a condemnation of God's creation, but a plan for its redemption. It is well to remind ourselves that it simply will not do to be defensive with God. He is not the enemy; we are. He only seems our enemy when we oppose him, and resisting him we oppose ourselves.

This Genesis passage is both prescription and description; that is, in it the Lord God is prescribing the cure to conflict as well as tracing the course of human relationships. He begins by addressing evil personified in the serpent, and, to symbolize its humiliating defeat, sentences it to crawling on its belly, eating dust. And dust is humanity without the life of God. We are vulnerable to evil only when apart from Him. Satan brought off his great con of the woman when she met him alone; Adam surrendered the integrity of his headship when he encountered the woman alone. The race fell in Adam, who chose to be motivated by the woman, who chose to be motivated by the serpent, who usurped God's prerogative to motivate his people to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Now God reinstates the order of headship by declaring an end to the coalition between the serpent and the woman, exposing him as a figure-head, and declaring open warfare between the two:

"Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.' The Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel'" (Genesis 3:13-15).

What blind unbelief, what satanic delusion, has prevented us from seeing the tender love, the forgiving grace of God, restoring the woman to dignity and worth as the means by which he would enter the stream of humanity and purify it with his redeeming death and life? The promised seed of the woman who would conquer Satan is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, born of Mary, the virgin--born of woman! No, God did not condemn the woman; he forgave her, restored her perspective and reinstated her to the security of his loving authority. Another day Jesus would extend such mercy to a woman taken in adultery: "...neither do I condemn you! Go, and sin no more."

In a world rampant with chaos, childbirth can seem futile, if not disastrous, to human reasoning. If life is a tyrannical trap, a futile maze of meaningless choices, then the biological function of producing another human being is without significance. Extinction becomes the preferred alternative to functioning as a "baby machine," and thus perpetuating the human tragedy.

It becomes a question of sheer faith. Either we believe in the answers or non-answers of science and philosophy and react inevitably with despair, or we must believe that God is "nearer to us than breathing, closer than hands and feet," and that this personal God is in sovereign control of human affairs.

This personal, sovereign God addresses the woman. This time he addresses her first. One reason is that the topic is now God's redemptive plan in which woman will figure prominently as the instrument of the Incarnation. Only the redemptive intervention of God in Jesus Christ will give significance and meaning to the survival of the human race, and dimension, therefore, to motherhood.

But we so easily forget that life is a fragile and precious gift from God, that the act of procreation is a serious and sensitive function of our humanity necessitating godly wisdom and perspective. "Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb," is the reverent declaration of the psalmist, giving the dimension of worship to the function of reproduction. This worship acknowledges that in it all God is at work to bring order and meaning to life. In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis says, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

The pain of childbirth, and indeed of child-rearing, is divinely designed to draw us back to the source of Life and Love and Wisdom without which we flounder hopelessly in our inadequacy. If "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world", the global redemption of motherhood is long overdue and we need desperately to return that rule to the hand of our Creator-Father, so that we in turn may learn of him what our intended functioning is and be fulfilled in it.

"To the woman he said:

"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain, you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3 :16,17).

The Lord God now gives the therapy, creativity and discipline of work to both the woman and the man, but in different contexts, consistent with their sexuality. Childbearing will be the biological norm for the woman, the implications of which must necessarily invade her entire psycho-sexual function. The entire procreative process, from conception through lactation, deeply involves the woman in the nurturing of life, an intimate relatedness which can hardly be severed by cutting the umbilical cord.

Doris Lessing, quoted in *Harper's* magazine, July, 1973, says, "I know a lot of girls who don't want to get married or have children. And very vocal they are about it. Well, they're trying to cheat on their biology....It will be interesting to see how they're thinking at thirty." It is difficult to deny that a woman's creativity is largely involved with relationships and with the nurturing of life, symbolized and exemplified by the physical act of childbearing. When we soberly face the demands of motherhood, we may well be driven to despair or evasion, nonetheless the creative urge is undeniably there. God designed it not only for the perpetuation of the race but also for our human fulfillment as we demonstrate the mother aspects of God's character in society.

To assure a fruitful and complementary relationship with the man, the woman is given desire for her husband. The character of that desire will determine the kind of rule exercised by her husband. We may as well acknowledge here that biblical and secular history both record the results of man motivated by woman, beginning with Adam, who responded to Eve's desire rather than to his own objective appraisal and his spiritual responsibility. Many battles have been fought over a woman whose lustful and self-centered desire has provoked a raging conflict among men to possess her. Much is being said today about women enslaved by men, with little outcry against predatory and designing females. Men may, on the whole, protest but feebly because, as a wise man once told me, men are not really deceived by this approach they simply like the ego-trip. It is, however, a serious perversion of womanhood, and one which the Scriptures everywhere

attempt to correct, with such words as "modesty," "decorum," "sensible," "seemly" (not seedy!), "serious," "temperate," "faithful," "well attested for good deeds," "devoted to doing good in every way," "chaste," and "reverent."

These are not negative words. They describe a godly woman, the woman who is the glory of man, the flower of humanity, who in turn motivates men to godliness, "without a word," as Peter says. The godly and mature woman's chief desire for a man is that he should be godly and mature. I believe a woman motivates a man to godliness not so much by bringing him to God as by bringing God to him, through a life that consistently tells the story of God's giving, sacrificial love. She motivates him to be a godly father by being a godly mother. She motivates him to emotional stability and tranquillity by being peaceful in her inner spirit, evidenced in gentleness and quietness. It is legitimate to desire him to be a good lover, as well, since that is a part of his own fulfillment. And good lovers are motivated by good lovers.

I am told that the Hebrew word for "rule" suggests a possible retaliatory connotation. A woman whose desire for her husband is centered in self-interest may badger him into resigning his headship or becoming tyrannical. A female letter writer in *Psychology Today* suggests an alternate form of dominance: "It's better to let them think they're king of the castle, lean and depend on them, and continue to control and manipulate them as we always have." This kind of pseudo-submission knows nothing of the dignity of servanthood, and is just as effective in defrauding a man as is a more overt form of dominance.

And to Adam he said:

"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3: 17-19).

A man's creativity is largely involved with his work. I believe work is given to man as a therapy, and an outlet for sexual energy. It is interesting that men who think of themselves largely as "studs" are known as "play-boys." The way in which a man approaches his work is critical to his development as a mature man.

Mr. Gilder, in July 1973, *Harper's* magazine has stated that a man is dependent upon woman to tie him into the family unit. The Scriptures tell us how she can do this: by giving him headship in the home! A man who is the acknowledged head of his home will not be inclined to make his work his mistress. He will be motivated to provide for his family by means of his work, but he will not need to use his work to define his sexuality. If he has a home base in which his emotional, physical, and spiritual needs are acknowledged and lovingly attended, then he will be free to view his work as an outlet for his creativity, but without using it to displace his family function and enjoyment. A home which is in a state of upheaval and disorder will either disorient him so that he cannot work or cause him to take refuge in his work as an escape.

Again, a man is motivated in his view of work by the woman's view of her work. The industrious, creative, secure woman of Proverbs 31 provides an atmosphere of strength and dignity. Her wisdom, kindness and inner beauty provide emotional security for her husband ("the heart of her husband trusts in her"). The Living Bible adds "and she will richly satisfy his needs." Her husband is thus freed for leadership: "he sits among the elders of the land."

There are thorns and thistles in everything we do. We work in a hostile environment. The perils of working in today's industrial society are certainly no less demanding than in an agrarian culture. The tensions and pressures symbolized as thorns and thistles are used as God's goads to maturity. Blessed is the man who finds an uncritical, sympathetic and alert listener in his home at the end of a day's toil. A woman who cares, who will pray with him through his stresses, is a balm in Gilead, a healing mercy. She can, by her example of an inner, spiritual calm and responsive gentleness, set the behavioral tone for the household.

It would be well for us to be aware of certain crisis periods through which both men and women pass, having to do with performance frustration. For the man, one of the most critical, psychologists say, is approximately age 40, give or take a few years. It is a kind of vista point from which he views the past and the future. The disparity between what is and what he had dreamed can be troubling. A woman's most unsettling time often coincides with major changes in the home structure, such as children leaving for college or marriage, or a geographical uprooting. Secular research can be valuable to an understanding of symptoms during these critical periods. However, we must know that these periods of stress graphically demonstrate the need to know who we are in terms of God's loving and wise purpose for our lives. Who we are rests upon who He is and not upon what we do. Our intimacy with God and his purpose for our humanity will be the focal point of our security and stability for such times as these.

Dorothy L. Sayers, quoted in *A Matter of Eternity*, writes: "The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly--but what use is all that if in the very centre of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? No crooked table-legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth."

True, we do not establish our identity through performance, but in the same way that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17), so we evidence who we are by the diligent, orderly, creative function of our God-given abilities. If a choice must be made between financial affluence and work which suits the temperament, talents and spiritual gifts of either man or woman, then the truly godly choice will surely be to honor our humanity and live within the framework of who we are. In the beautiful words of Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus taught us to live with simplicity, an art for living which has been swallowed up in our materialistic society. In some families the man's only motivation to work is overspending or the mismanagement of household affairs, with the result that the man is so driven by financial indebtedness he is literally swallowed up by the necessity to provide materially for his family. Sometimes, then, the wife will also take a job, and the children are virtually orphaned, family communication breaks down, and spiritual goals are abandoned.

Your heavenly Father knows that you need to be fed and clothed, Jesus says, but anxiety concerning these needs belies our trust in Him and gives priority to the transient, temporal things, rather than to the eternal realities of the spirit. The Apostle Paul reminds us, in 1 Corinthians 7: 28-35, that even the proper desire to please one another in marriage can be perverted with anxiety and pre-empt our primary reason for life: undivided devotion to the Lord. I believe we need to make periodic evaluation of the encroachment of worldly affairs in our lives. The work and worry syndrome, which never satisfies the insatiable demand for more and more things, fritters our God-given lives away on the nothingness of worldly status. In such a materialistic rat-race, we bear only "the image of the man of dust," by-passing the satisfaction and eternal glory of bearing "the image of the man of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:45-50).

"The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live for ever'" --therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:20-24).

Until now, the woman is simply called Woman, translated from the Hebrew *Ishah*, which means "Out of Man." Now Adam changes her name to, *Chavah*, which means Life. Eve is the English translation of *Chavah*. Adam may be affirming and assenting to Eve's believing response to God's promise of triumph over Satan and his seed by the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, and all who through his atoning death and saving life are assured victory with him over the evil one. There will now be two divisions of humanity: those in Adam and those in Christ.

From the beginning the Lord God assured a nobility to womanhood, an intimate and sensitive role in his redemptive plan. All Scripture which is pertinent to the role of women will fit within this basic framework. The female mode is dedicated by God to a unique expression of redemptive life. There will be protective safeguards, as the Father-God guards the moral purity of woman, the symbolic bride of Christ.

With his questioning, God had led Adam and Eve to confess "and I ate."

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God then acted immediately to deal with their sin. The skins with which God clothed them necessitated the death of animals. This was God's preview of the way in which he would ultimately bear for us all the agony and cost of our rebellion,

".. the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Incidentally, Isaiah chapter 53, that exquisite passage predictive of our Lord's atoning death, contains a sensitive and highly suggestive imagery in verse 7:

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a ewe that before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

I am told that the female sheep, or ewe, when faced with danger, has the ability to run, while the male sheep's legs "freeze" in similar circumstances. Thus, a ewe unresistant before her shearers would picture a willing submission, confirming what we have already seen in Philippians chapter two.

Adam and Eve were limited, finite creatures before their defiance of God, but they were perfectly contented and totally fulfilled, with no sense of inadequacy, frustration or failure. Their humanity was totally possessed by the life-giving love of their Father-God, and this state of perfect fulfillment is symbolized in their unashamed nakedness. Severed from their source of life and love and faced with their resultant inadequacy and guilt, they misappropriated one of God's own gifts to them to contrive a cover-up for their shame. Fig leaves, magnanimous and beautiful but lifeless apart from the tree, portray so well our efforts to live fruitful and fulfilled lives apart from God. Our best efforts are like roman candles on the fourth of July, a loud noise, a brief moment of glory and the inevitable fizzle.

God offers to replace our shabby human efforts with the impeccable righteousness of his Son, so that thus clothed we may be acceptable before God, free to enjoy the love relationship with him which assures our identity and sense of worth.

But the Pandora's box has been opened by their disobedience. God knows the self-imposed curse of self-centeredness with which they have been infected. Only God can judge good and evil by himself, for he is Good. When we make our self-interest the criterion for good, we have a formula for disaster. We have polluted our humanity and our whole environment with our self-centered focus. It would be unthinkable that we should live endlessly in this state! Anticipating this, God sent the man out of the garden of Eden and guarded that access to the tree of life. Significantly, he directs both the charge and the dismissal from the garden to the man, again acknowledging his governmental headship. In leaving with Adam, Eve acknowledged both God's authority and Adam's headship.

It is generally agreed that the cytoplasm of the ovum is not mortalized; that it is mortalized only in union with the sperm. At any rate, the Scriptures teach that humanity was infected by sin through Adam (Romans 5: 12), but a new birth is possible by faith "not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (2 Peter 1:23). Jesus Christ, born of woman, conceived by the Holy Spirit, is the Living Head

of the new humanity. In him we possess life, abundant and eternal.

Submissive to our Living Head, we may experience the deep healing of our humanity. God will deal with the root-issues, our attitudes toward him, ourselves and others. Every encounter with another person is an encounter with Christ: the cup of cold water given in His name, or the bitter thrust of criticism or hostility. A simplistic fashioning of fig leaves stamped "I'm okay, you're okay," will be only a temporary expedient, a brief lull in the storm, if it does not issue from a heart conquered by God's love, forgiveness and acceptance.

The built-in tensions of life can be creative or destructive. The pain, the thorns and thistles, are the ever-present reminders of humanity's limitations, that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way." "Weeds are nature's way of filling a vacuum," a gardener told me. The remedy, he suggests, is a closely woven pattern of "good" plants.

Temperamental, cultural, racial, sexual differences between people are the stuff of which our daily lives consist. There is also the necessary authority structure: teacher-student, government-citizen, parent-child, husband-wife, etc. In it all there is what the Apostle Paul calls "the law of sin and death," and what science refers to as the law of entropy (i.e. inexorably increasing randomness or disorder). It is sheer realism to state that life is not fundamentally romantic, but basically tragic, and in constant need of redemption. Pessimism and despair say there are no answers, no solutions. Romantic idealism seeks the pot of gold at rainbow's end. Christian idealism is grounded in the integrity and character of God, a quality of life which he offers to us in a growing, maturing relationship of love and trust.

The quality of that life, described as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23) will invade the vacuum in our individual lives and in society, resolve tensions creatively, and reverse life's entropy by the redemptive power of the resurrection. The method to appropriating that kind of life is in knowing the One in whom it resides, the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing him as First Cause and First Love!

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