

“Adam and Eve: Lose Self-Reliance”

Dr. Jeff Meyers, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Conyers

August 7, 2011

I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to the first book of Bible, the Book of Genesis, chapter 3. If you are a first time guest or visitor or maybe you are somewhat new to First Baptist Church of Conyers, what Harold and Iva Danforth were alluding to in the video you just saw is that about a year ago this season we began an endeavor as a church entitled “Project Freedom.” We came together as an entire church on Sunday evenings, Monday nights, Tuesday mornings and Wednesday nights, all at different times but doing the same curriculum, learning the same Biblical principles and applying the same concepts to every one of our lives, our families and our church, and ultimately, hopefully to our community to literally change the world, starting here.

But you could almost entitle “Be A Loser” as “Project Freedom 2.0.” And the illustration of Harold and Iva’s lives is absolutely perfect because you will notice they talked about learning certain principles and getting certain things in order. But then there was an event that occurred, an experience that occurred about a couple of weeks ago when a mission trip was involved and he decided that he was ready to go to the next stage. He decided that one of the things he had possessed for so long, even though he had learned Biblical principles, even though he had Biblical guidelines for his life, there was no longer that “killer instinct,” that “I’ve got to have the next job.” And what he recognized in his life and in their lives is what every one of us needs to recognize this fall: that as we get on page with God, as we begin to live the life that God would have for us, every one of us has something that’s weighing us down. Everybody has an aspect of their life that if we were to allow God to pull it out of our pocket, so to speak, we could run the race more efficiently, more effectively and faster with the gospel.

Throughout this fall, we’re going to address a multitude of issues about losing excuses, losing our past, losing fear, losing gluttony, losing materialism. Maybe what you need to lose isn’t on that list and that’s okay, we’ll cover a broad enough spectrum. Maybe what you need to lose isn’t what Harold and Iva needed to lose. But today when we come to Genesis 3, a very familiar story in scripture of what we know as Adam and Eve, what we find out is that at the core, at the beginning, every one of us needs to lose this one thing. No matter what your particular thing is, every one of us needs to lose self-reliance.

What does that really mean? What we need to do at the very beginning in order to be a loser for the sake of the gospel is come to an understanding that God knows better how to live this life than we do. Oftentimes we lean on experience, we lean on education, and we lean on other’s opinions. And it’s real easy to get into a trap of thinking, “I’ve got this thing called life down and I know how best to make the decisions for my life.” And that’s what we find with Adam and Eve; they found themselves in a position where they thought they knew best and that they knew more than God did. So how do you get into that position? Begin reading with me in Genesis 3:1.

“<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden? <sup>2</sup>And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: <sup>3</sup>But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. <sup>4</sup>And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die: <sup>5</sup>For God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. <sup>6</sup>And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. <sup>7</sup>And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. <sup>8</sup>And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? <sup>10</sup>And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. <sup>11</sup>And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou should not eat? <sup>12</sup>And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. <sup>13</sup>And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. <sup>14</sup>And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shall thou go, and dust shall thou eat all the days of thy life: <sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel.”

We’re talking today about self-reliance, getting into a position that I don’t think any of us means to get into, particularly those of you who know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. But it’s easy to gravitate into a position of thinking somehow we know better how to live this thing called life and that God’s opinion is secondary to our own “self-reliance” or self-knowledge. So

what I want to address today are three simple concepts from a very familiar story in the scripture. And the first one is this: how is it that we get to a point that we rationalize self-realization? How is it that we talk ourselves into thinking we know more than God does?

It actually happens a lot easier than you think. The first thing that happens is self-realization begins to creep up in our lives when we begin to think, or believe or doubt the Word of God. When we think that our education, our experience, a pundit's opinion or something else somehow supersedes the Word of God. In verse 1 of chapter 3, this is the question that starts it all: "Yea, hath God said." Let me interpret that for you. Did God really mean what God said or does God really know what He's talking about? This affects us in our marriage, raising children, our finances, our health, all areas, even dealing with our past or anxiety about our future. We come to a situation and ask, "Does God really know how to handle this best or can I find a better way?" "Yea, hath God said." It kind of starts with that attitude.

Then it manifests itself in these two areas. I want you to notice at the end of verse 1 what the serpent says. "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" In English there, there are nine simple words. If you go back to chapter 2 when God came to Adam and gave him the "rules and regulations" for the Garden of Eden He said, "You may eat of every tree *freely* except for the one that's in the middle, the tree of life." There were originally ten words in the commandment by God and yet the serpent, the devil, comes here and only gives nine. Do you notice the one word he left out? Freedom.

The one thing that every one of us thinks we're going to get by doing it our own way is the freedom to live, the freedom for adventure. What does freedom ultimately get us? According to this story, it gets us bondage every time. And when we start thinking we know more than God does one of the first things that we can creep into doing is taking away from the Word of God, taking away the word freedom, taking away the things contained there and thinking somehow they're antiquated, they don't apply to our lives any more or maybe because I've experienced this or done that I just know better. We begin to take away; we begin to doubt; we begin to question the Word of God.

There's another way this manifests itself and the woman does this in verse 3 when she says, "God has said you shall not eat it; neither shall you touch it." Let me give you a hint: if you go back into chapter 2 that is not what God said. She made up rules for God that were more stringent than the rules God had made. When we begin to think that we know better how to live life than God does, the first thing we do is we either take away from the Bible and say it doesn't address this significantly, or the other thing is that we start making God and the Bible say things that God never said. "See how bad He is; see how evil He is; see how stringent He is. I want freedom." So whether it's the taking away from or the adding to, it gets us into that same problem where we doubt the Word of God.

And I want to be very clear from the very beginning of "Be A Loser," it doesn't matter what subject matter we're dealing with if there is something in your life, whether it's something like losing your past and forgiving yourself or just dealing with a situation like materialism or debt, please hear me clearly: God knows how to handle it better than you do. And until you get to that point you're going to keep doing like the Israelites in the wilderness: you're just going to keep taking laps.

We doubt the Word of God and then we do a second thing: we begin to debate the mind of God. We begin to somehow talk ourselves into this idea that we have: to do something different from what God would have us to do; somehow that's a good idea. You know the old adage that if you tell a lie long enough then you will start to believe it. Look what Eve says in verse 6. "And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof."

There are three things she says about this fruit. We're not here to debate about what it is, what kind it was; that's another message for another day. I just want to look at the principles behind this famous story of Adam and Eve. Do you notice how pragmatism creeps in quickly? Do you know what pragmatism is? You find yourself in a situation where unless "this" occurs, things are going to get really ugly. We begin to talk to ourselves, "I need for this to happen because if it doesn't happen, it's going to end up worse." Eve said, "It's good for food," as if there were nothing else to eat, as if all the other trees in the garden could not provide food. In other words, if I don't have this food or this experience then somehow it won't work.

But it's also a very positive debate. If you haven't figured out by knowing me, I am a very positive person. I am the glass half-full kind of guy. My wife will tell you I can find the good in anything and the positive in everybody. But do you know that a positive attitude can get you in trouble? Notice what Eve said, "It's good, it's pleasant, it's going to help me." Every time we trust ourselves over God, we always talk ourselves into it on the positive – how good it's going to be or how great it's going to be. I have an acquaintance who is a pastor who makes this statement, "The power is in the negative thinking." I didn't like that at first, but he's got a point because every time we step outside of God's will for our lives it always ends up negative, every time.

The other thing we notice when Eve begins to debate within herself and with God, it is very progressive. “This will make me wise.” In other words, “God, You don’t understand that if I had this in life or if I experienced this in life or if I possess this in life then I could actually live life better than You think I could.” If this sounds ethereal and surreal, this happens every day of our lives when we make a decision contrary to what is in the Word of God. This is what we do: we doubt it and then we debate it.

What happens when we do that? I really don’t have to tell you what happens because you’ve actually experienced what happens. But let me show you what happens in verse 7. “And the eyes of them both were opened.” What are the ramifications, what are the results, what occurs when we get a mentality and we actually fought with actions that somehow we think we know how to live life better than God does? There is an instant realization. What I mean by that is we spend a lot of time, a lot of energy and sometimes a lot of resources thinking that if we experience something, possess something, or we can somehow be a part of something then whatever that something is will give us what we desire; it will give us what we feel like we need and what we feel like we want. “If I just possess that, then life will be great. If I just could experience that I would have a realized life.”

Let me share with you what I’ve learned, not only from my own life but in dealing with hundreds of others. Do you know what the loneliest and most devastating time in life is? It’s the fifteen minutes after what you thought would give you satisfaction doesn’t. And you experience it or you are now in possession of it and you realize that wasn’t really the problem; it wasn’t about having to have that or needing to experience that. What has happened is we realize that we fell for the lie; we fell for the farce that it is.

Notice it says their eyes were opened and they knew – instantly. After this experience in the Garden of Eden they realized that what they thought was good wasn’t good. What they thought would be pleasant wasn’t pleasant. What they thought would make them wise didn’t make them wise. The ramifications, the results of living a life on our own means, by our own rules rather than God’s are instant.

But here’s the problem because so many times it doesn’t feel instant. We make so many daily, weekly and monthly decisions against the things of God and have you noticed how much easier it gets when you do it on a consistent basis and in a consistent pattern? But there is an instant realization that that didn’t satisfy, I’ve got to go to the next; that didn’t work, I’ve got to go to the next; that didn’t fly, I’ve got to go to the next concept. So there is an instant realization that whatever we thought would give us what God promised us that we thought we were smart enough to do, experience or have didn’t work.

But in addition to that, I want you to see something very clearly. When we rely on ourselves rather than on God, it never happens in isolation. How many times have I heard somebody say, “It’s my life; I can do with it what I want”? “It’s my body; I can do with it what I want.” Now I will be honest with you, I come from a family in which the overwhelming majority have addictive personalities. And unfortunately, they become addicted to things that are not healthy for their bodies and every time it becomes destructive in the family here is the excuse: “It’s my body; I can do with it what it want.” Let me tell you what happens: it affects your spouse, your children, your neighbors, your family, your coworkers, and your community. Every time we go outside of the bounds that God has designed for life to be lived, it does affects somebody else.

She (Eve) gave to her husband; It didn’t happen in isolation. When King David was on the roof with Bathsheba, it didn’t just affect King David and Bathsheba, did it? It affected Uriah and the whole army of Israel, the whole nation of Israel and the descendants of Israel. How about Abraham when he and Sarah had this debate that somehow they knew better how to have a child than God did? Go open the newspaper today and they’re still fighting because of the decision that was made thousands of years ago. Sin never happens in isolation; it always affects people around you – and sometimes even people you don’t know are being affecting. Do you realize that when Adam and Eve sinned it did not just affect their marriage? It affected their children and it affected you. We live in a sinful, broken down world as a result of their thinking they knew how to live this thing called life better than God does.

So you see the ramifications here when we have the audacity to say, “God, I know how to handle money better than the Bible does. I know how to handle my body better than the Bible does. I know how to handle marriage better than the Bible does. I know how to deal with the past better than the Bible does.” It gets us exactly what they got – a problem that is spiraling out of control.

I mentioned to you that I am a very positive person; a glass half-full kind of guy. If the story ended in verse 7 this would be an incredibly depressing story – everything was good, it went bad and that’s the end. But what I want to talk to you about today is this: as we begin “Be A Loser” we need to realize that we have a natural tendency to gravitate away from the things of God;

yes, we need to understand that the ramifications are horrific. In fact, what are the ramifications? Death. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." What do Adam and Eve experience here? They experience death: a spiritual death now and a physical death later. Death entered the world because we thought we knew better than God.

But a theme I want you to hear throughout this fall as we go through Adam and Eve, Job, Moses and all these famed characters of the Old Testament is that in all of these situations, no matter what occurred, what decision had been made, what experience had been involved, in every situation the Lord offered restoration. I want you to hear me clearly: yes, we have a problem of thinking we know more than God does; yes, the ramifications are destructive in every fashion but I want you to know that God desires to restore your life. He desires to restore; He desires to heal whatever it is that is weighing you down.

And we see that take place here in verse 15. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel." Let me tell you something about restoration. I'm all for programs, I'm all for help and I'm all for counseling, but if you really want a heart-felt, life-changing restoration, understand that real restoration is initiated by God. You see, we get ourselves into messes and then we turn to other humans and expect them to get us out, too. But notice what happens here in verse 15: the Lord Himself says I will do this. True restoration, healing and forgiveness are initiated by God.

Do you realize that if God had not initiated what we know as the virgin birth then we would have missed the whole Messiah. If God had not initiated the cross then we would have missed it all. Why? Because we continually and perpetually say somehow I can find a solution, somehow I can find a means, somehow I can find a way, but God so loved the world that He gave. He initiated; He said you cannot save yourselves, you can't fix this problem. If you're going to be restored and forgiven then I've got to take the initiative. He initiated Jesus; He initiated the cross; He initiated the resurrection and He initiated the call on your life to be saved and forgiven. Restoration is initiated by God. Whatever you're struggling with, whatever is weighing you down, whatever you need to lose, even more than you want to lose it God wants you to lose it. Even more than you wish it wasn't a part of your life, God doesn't want it to be a part of your life. One of the things you need to realize from the very beginning is God desires that healing; God desires that restoration, and God is initiating in your life. Throughout this fall we will look at how that happens in different situations and scenarios.

But there is one last thing I want you to notice about restoration. It is inclusive; it contains multiple facets. What does that mean? It says in the Bible that God desires that none perish but all come to repentance. I think it's a series like this in the fall as we go through some of these subject matters and some of these characters in the Old Testament, there is one fault we have. (By the way, for those of you ladies who are going to be part of Traci's Bible study, this is one of those gavels she hammers all the time as we look at these Old Testament characters.) We put them on such a pedestal. And when we really examine their lives we realize they made the same mistakes we make and we make the same mistakes they did.

So as God intervened and restored in their lives, He wants to intervene and restore our lives. But we fall into the lie of thinking, "I'm too far gone. God doesn't understand I'm too far gone in this situation. You don't understand, Jeff, what I've really done. You don't understand what I've really thought. You really don't get how long I've battled with this or struggled with this." Do you not realize that God knew where Adam and Eve were when they were hiding behind the tree? When God comes to them and says, "Where are you," He was not asking that because He needed a GPS system. God was asking them because He wanted them to admit that they had messed up, admit that they had become self-reliant, admit that they couldn't solve it themselves, admit they couldn't cure their own problem.

When He asked where are you, guess what happened? They started making excuses; they started blaming everybody else. So finally in verse 15, He said I need to take care of this, I need to initiate some restoration. By the way, verse 15 is what we call the protoevangelum: the first hint at the gospel message in the scripture. That's ultimately where this ends. You can eliminate your fears of the past, eliminate your anxiety of the future, get rid of excuses, materialism, gluttony and all these other issues, but I'm going to be very honest with you on week one: this fall in studying these characters if you get all that stuff out of your life but you never have Jesus in your life then you still lose and never win. So maybe today as we look forward to some of the subjects we're going to deal with and some of the Bible studies we're going to do, maybe today is the day that you say more than anything else what I really need to do is trust Jesus for my salvation. Maybe you've done that in the past and you say I've got the salvation taken care of, it's the living it, it's the sanctification, that's the part I struggle with. I don't know what it is, but this is week one, day one of a study through the Old Testament seeing how God wants to move radically in our lives. And here's the great news: wherever you are, whatever you've done, whatever is between your ears and in your heart, God desires more than anything to release you of that junk so that you can lose it – not in your own strength and power, but in His. Let's pray.