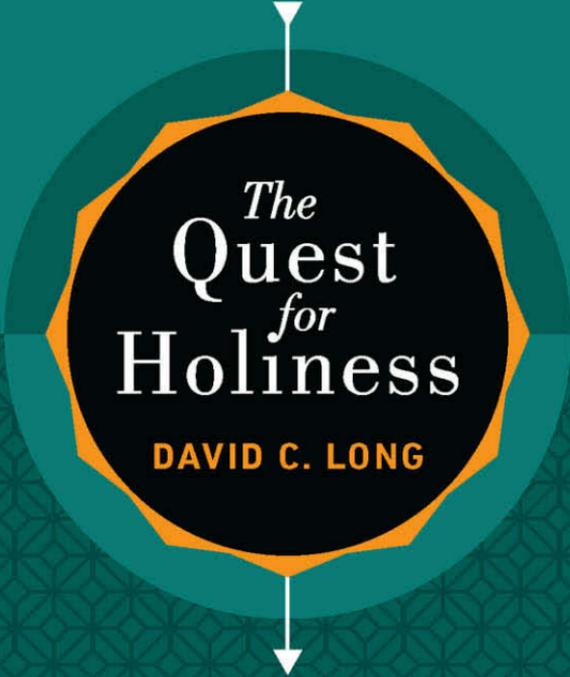


FROM  
SHALLOW  
BELIEF



*The*  
Quest  
*for*  
Holiness  
DAVID C. LONG

TO  
MATURE  
BELIEVER

*Foreword by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.*

FROM  
SHALLOW  
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TO  
MATURE  
BELIEVER

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# Foreword

It is not often that a professor mentors a doctoral student whose research, organization of findings, and presentation of material achieves a publishable level. David Long's doctor of ministry dissertation did just that.

Doctor Long's approach to the spiritual life has at least three major strengths. First, it makes it unmistakably clear that there is far more to the spiritual life than acknowledging one's fallen state, accepting Jesus as one's personal Savior, and going to heaven when one dies. Going to heaven after death is not the goal of the spiritual life. The goal is to be restored to wholeness in the likeness of Christ. This is a dynamic, transformational reality nurtured through an ever-deepening love relationship with God manifested in a love relationship with others.

Second, Long avoids the pitfall of "works righteousness" that is so often characteristic of many believers' understanding of the spiritual life. It is all too easy for the spiritual disciplines essential for growth toward wholeness in the likeness of Christ to be reduced to a list of dos and don'ts. Long carefully walks the knife edge between spiritual disciplines as works righteousness and spiritual disciplines as one's loving response of abandonment to God's transforming love working in and through us.

Third, Long grounds the spiritual life in the exigencies of daily human life rather than allowing it to become

something divorced from the everyday flow of life. Too often people separate their spiritual life from their secular life each having its own sphere of influence, its own definition of human identity, its own system of values, and pattern of behavior, and rarely do the two intermingle. Long breaks that structure.

I am confident anyone who undertakes a serious study (which these books deserve) will be challenged to a deeper spiritual journey, to becoming a transformed person and God's transforming presence in the world, and blessed in that journey.

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October 3, 2015

# Preface

A popular recruiting slogan from the army challenged men and women with the words “Be All You Can Be.” The idea was that the recruiter had something that would help the person succeed in life, at least for a period of time. This idea echoes a call spoken throughout the Bible into the lives of men and women of all cultures. It is the challenge that we who are followers of Jesus receive, but in a much more important context—the context of our eternal life.

One place we hear this call is in the letter of the apostle Paul written to the believers in Philippi, encouraging them to press on toward that for which Christ saved them (Philippians 3:12). In other words, we are to be all that Christ saved us to be. This call has in mind a two-part transformation. The first, a prerequisite to the second, is the change in our nature that we call justification, being declared right with God by grace through faith. Justification is a change in relationship that is made possible solely through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. It is a change from being an enemy of God to being a child of God, from being lost to being saved. The second transformation is called sanctification, something the Bible says specifically is the will of God for all who through faith have become followers of Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:3 NIV). The first transformation is about knowing Jesus as Savior. The second transformation is about knowing Jesus as Lord. It is

with regard to the second of these that this book considers what it means to be all Christ saved his followers to be.

It is an unfortunate reality that many who know Jesus as Savior have missed the command to know Jesus as Lord. Knowing Jesus as Savior implies that we are going to accept and seek to live by God's standard. To do so means to live lives that are radically reoriented from our old human nature and from the destructive tendencies of the world in which we live. Simply and succinctly, we are to respond to a Trinitarian call coming to us from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This puts us on a journey, a journey of our spiritual formation, a journey pursued in the grace of God. This is a high calling, the highest calling, on the life of a follower of Jesus. It is a calling to a life in which the disciple of Jesus is continually striving to be more like the Lord and it is anchored in God's creative design for humankind in which men and women are made in the image of God. The life of one in which the image of God has been restored will be characterized by a deep, abiding trust in God. There is no journey more demanding, but it is a journey that can be taken in joy and which leads to joy, because for the follower of Jesus it is taken within the assurance of the unbounded love of God.

As magnificent as God is in his transcendent glory, one of the most astounding revelations of the Bible is that it is his will to be in intimate communion with the pinnacle of his creation, human beings. That's you and me! The Bible is a story of this desire, beginning in a garden, passing through another garden, a cross, the resurrection, and ending with a new creation. It's easy to read the first three chapters of Genesis and pass over them quickly or think of

it as a quaint story for children. But it is much more than a children's story. It is nothing less than a picture of the struggle men and women have had throughout the ages obeying God and remaining in relationship with him as our Creator. If we look closely, every person can see himself or herself in the garden of Eden relationship between God and his creation. Throughout life every person continuously faces the same question, "Do I really and truly trust God to be a good and sovereign God?"

We begin with an exploration of the missed opportunity of Adam and Eve to place their unquestioning trust in God. The result was sin, a broken relationship with God, and the curse of a fallen self. As we come to a deeper understanding of Adam and Eve, we begin to realize that the choice they made is one we have made many times ourselves. But there is hope for change, a promise of transformation. Christian spiritual formation is imbedded in the promise that the fallen self can be transformed. Transformation in the Christian life comes by the grace of God and involves discipline on the part of a disciple of Jesus, discipline that involves understanding the call of God in one's life and Spirit-guided reflection on how the believer should respond to that call. We are led to questions of how God designed us and why we rebelled. We ask who we became as our first ancestors left that first garden, and wonder how we get back into the garden. As we understand our fallen nature or fallen self, we are enabled to surrender more and more to the transforming work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is a high calling and a demanding journey.

The second book in this series, *The Quest for Holiness—From Deadly Sin to Divine Virtue*, draws from the ancient understanding of the Desert Fathers in order to take a

deeper look into the tendencies of the fallen self. The seven deadly sins was the template used by the Desert Fathers to describe the pitfalls they faced on a daily basis. The seven virtues are attributes of life lived in the image of God. The premise throughout is that as we, Christ-followers, understand more about our fallen self, we will find there is more grace from God for change. The goal is transformation, and in all of this we are dependent upon the grace of God to become who he created us to be.

The third book in this series, *The Quest for Holiness—From Casual Conviction to Courageous Faith*, builds on the first two books by taking our spiritual formation out into daily life. We can understand the theology that underpins spiritual formation, and we can examine ourselves for evidence of the seven sins and seven virtues, but we must take this out into the world in which we live. We live out our Christlikeness, with all our successes and all our failures, in community and in the trials and tribulations of life.

As I have written this material I have often thought of the poem “The Fools Prayer” by Edward Rowland Sill, particularly the line that reads, “These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust among the heart-strings of a friend.”<sup>1</sup> Writing comes with responsibility. It is my heartfelt desire in writing this material that it do good and do no harm. Let the Holy Spirit be your guide, your teacher, as has been promised to you (John 16:13). That is a promise in which you can place your trust. My prayer is that regardless of the spiritual maturity you bring into the reading of this book, in every chapter you will find some challenge or some insight that will draw you into a deeper relationship of trust in God. If that happens, to God be the glory.



*The*  
Quest  
*for*  
Holiness

DAVID C. LONG

# 1

## The Image of God

*This is the heart of spiritual formation—the intentional, sustained re-patterning of a person’s life after the pattern set by God when he created human beings in his image, but made possible only by divine transforming power.*

—MEL LAWRENZ

**W**e human beings share a natural, God-given curiosity that leads us to seek an understanding of ourselves. *Why do I act the way I do? Why do I think the way I think?* Deeper moments of reflection have led many of us to gaze into the majestic vastness of the universe and wonder about our significance. This can leave us with feelings of insignificance, asking the age-old questions, *Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of this life?* Seeking to satisfy this desire for self-understanding exposes us to a barrage of information that purports to offer answers. Family, friends, teachers, and television tell us what we should look like, what we should think, what we should say, and what we should do.

If we turn to the Bible in this quest, we find that the biblical account of creation speaks carefully on this point. It

sets forth the order of creation, the manner of creation, and even the roles of multiplication and dominion. But it is the profound self-revelation of God that humankind is created in his image that unveils the essence of humanity. God says:

“Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.” So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26–27)

Being created in the image of God is a foundational truth for our self-understanding, a truth that plays a crucial role in the spiritual formation of a follower of Jesus. It is the source of Augustine’s observation that God made us for himself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in him.<sup>1</sup>

Accepting that there is a Creator and that the Creator designed people in his own image leads us to a lofty view of humanity. Most people would undoubtedly agree that the human race as a whole has strayed far from our original nature, but this truth of creative design remains. This revelation of something of a God-like pattern in creation stands as a beacon, a reminder of something beyond ourselves to which we are being called to return. Embedded in the creation story is the invitation to look closely at the image of God. The invitation entreats the disciple of Jesus to ask, *What is this image of God and what does it have to do with me?* The importance of the answer for spiritual formation is that it defines its ultimate goal, a goal to be pursued by every disciple of Jesus.

After the creation passages in Genesis, little is said in the Old Testament about *image* in relation to humankind being created in the image of God. There is a statement in Genesis 5 that says that Seth was born in the image of his father, Adam. One more Old Testament reference is found in Genesis 9 regarding the killing of a person made in the image of God. The remaining Old Testament references to image are admonitions not to represent God through an image and not to worship images or idols. The reappearance of the concept of image as a design for humanity comes in the New Testament with reference to Jesus. "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). Still, this idea of correspondence in some way between God and the life and character of his people is a basic principle of both the Old and the New Testament.

This revelation of a pattern in the image of God has intrigued and perplexed theologians for ages. The early church sought to understand what part of man and woman were created in the image of God, the body or the soul, and to what extent. The meaning of humankind being created in the image of God was being explored at fundamental levels. Origen, a highly controversial figure among the early Greek fathers, concluded that the soul of humankind, not the body, was created in God's image. This led him to the conclusion that "God's image is the perfected state to which the soul is striving."<sup>2</sup> To speak of the image of God in humankind is to speak of our very essence. Image is not a one-time design that lost meaning after the sin of Adam and Eve. Rather, it remains the ultimate goal of humankind and embraces the entire purpose of God for us.

Although the image of God terminology may not be found widely in the Old Testament, the teaching of human beings becoming like their Creator is frequently discussed. This is seen in references to the gift of a new heart (Ezekiel 18:31; 36:26). In the New Testament this spiritual transformation gains wonderful clarity in the person of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:49; Ephesians 4:15; 1 John 4:17). The *new heart* of Ezekiel is a life transformed into the likeness of Jesus. *Image* as the perfected state of the soul sheds its Old Testament ambiguity in the New Testament person of Jesus.

While time and study have resulted in a greater understanding of the Genesis passages, the reversal of the fall, the restoration of the image of God in his creation, and the pursuit of a deepening relationship with God remain as the central message of both the Old and New Testaments and, hence, of spiritual formation. Author Mel Lawrenz wrote, "This is the heart of spiritual formation—the intentional, sustained re-patterning of a person's life after the pattern set by God when he created human beings in his image, but made possible only by divine transforming power."<sup>3</sup> This transformation, which we also refer to as sanctification, is the heart of the search for what it means to be truly human, and more particularly, what it means to be a follower of Jesus. When we pursue true spirituality we are not running away from reality; we are pursuing reality.

It would be easy to lay the concept of image aside along with other biblical concepts that simply seem to be beyond our understanding. However, as we explore the implications of being made in the image of God, its importance as a basic truth of life becomes more astonishing. God really

does say he created us in his image, and this is not just a reference to kings and rulers, the rich and the powerful, “but also every peasant, pauper, and person possesses the gift of God’s image.”<sup>4</sup> This is indeed a powerful revelation.

John Calvin recognized the revelation’s implications. Creation in the image of God influenced his understanding of the nature of the Christian life. It was crucial for Calvin that Christians should recognize that God’s purpose for Adam and Eve is the same for all believers. God’s pattern in the garden of Eden remains the pattern for today. As was true of Adam and Eve, we are all linked to God’s patterning of humankind in his own image. While relevant in the lives of all people, disciples of Jesus especially should recognize that they now are being remade into God’s image. All people are called by this pattern of design to a relationship with their Creator, and those who respond and become followers of Jesus are to be formed into the likeness of Jesus, “the visible image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). As Calvin observed, “We now begin to bear the image of Christ, and we are daily being transformed into it more and more.”<sup>5</sup> This transformation that is so essential after the fall of Adam and Eve is both the challenge and the promise to all who come after them. This is a high calling and a defining purpose of life.

It should be evident at this point that this book is about Christian spiritual formation. Christian spiritual formation is Christocentric, meaning that Christ is at the center of it all. In a time in which there are many types of spiritual formation, it is important to remember that Christian spiritual formation is unique. It begins and ends with Christ. That is to say, it is through Jesus that one

enters into a redeemed relationship with his or her Creator and it is toward the likeness of Jesus that a believer's life progresses. In the Christian faith, the fulfillment of the gift of the image of God (*imago Dei*) is inseparable from the gracious work of Jesus, both as the fullness of the *imago Dei* himself and as the means through which the image of God may be restored in our soul.

The biblical story of creation tells us that all of humanity is remarkably designed by our Creator God, but in the Christian understanding of spiritual formation, this likeness has limits. Bearing God's image in the inner person does not mean that a person is or can become divine. God will always be *other* than his creation, including humankind. This is known as *transcendence*, meaning that God is beyond and superior to all that he created. This transcendent otherness will remain throughout eternity. Still, there is a proper sense of our participation in the divine nature. God, in his gracious design, has given human beings an invisible soul that is immortal and everlasting, attributes of his divine nature. But our participation in the divine nature must be understood in a way that avoids any notion of human beings becoming God.<sup>6</sup> This distinction separates Christian spiritual formation from a non-Christian New Age view. Christian spiritual formation allows for oneness with the will of God and a oneness of purpose, but never a oneness of substance. The biblical presentation of this relationship "emphasizes that human beings are distinct from the wholly other God, their Creator. And yet the priestly writer in Genesis would have us believe that something in us is an icon of God."<sup>7</sup>

Our understanding that the call to be like Jesus lies within God's original and eternal design for humankind opens for us a deeper appreciation of God's plan of creation. It allows us to understand that the New Testament message of who we are and whose we are is firmly rooted in the first chapter of the Old Testament book of Genesis. It also begs that we ask just how Jesus is the image of God. It is observed that the New Testament speaks of Jesus as the image of God because in the life and ministry of Jesus the presence, power, and rule of God is made known.<sup>8</sup> Jesus announced the arrival of God's rule (Mark 1:15), and he displayed kingdom power in many of its aspects (Matthew 12:28). He lived out the words he taught to his disciples in the Lord's Prayer: "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). He was the image of God in his perfect obedience to the Father's will (John 5:19, 36; 8:28; 10:37–38; 12:49; 14:10–11). Ultimately, Jesus obeyed to the point of death and was exalted by God (Philippians 2:5–11). In all things he brought glory to God.

This example of Jesus helps us learn what the human vocation is to be like. From the life of Jesus it is understood that the human vocation embraces surrender to God, which defines both our relationship to God and to others (Matthew 6:33). M. Robert Mulholland wrote, "Union with God results in our being a person through whom God's presence touches the world with forgiving, cleansing, healing, liberating and transforming grace."<sup>9</sup> As reflected in the life of Jesus, spiritual formation, or sanctification, is the growth we are to experience as people who believe in Jesus—growth that moves us toward the image of God. Are you seeing the big picture? From the

very beginning and throughout all of time, God has had in place a pattern and a process that flows from his sovereign decision to make us after his own image.

It was into this vocation—bringing glory to God—that the first Adam was created, but he and all his descendants have failed at the task. It was into this vocation that the second Adam, Jesus, was born. Through his perfect surrender and sinless life, Jesus fulfilled the human vocation. “In short, Christ imaged God by fulfilling the human vocation. Christians image God as they are progressively conformed to the image of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus lived out the image of God in his daily life and ministry (Colossians 1:15, 19).

We participate in the divine image only as we live lives as true disciples of Jesus. This conveys the vital understanding that the image of God, and therefore being in the image of God, is a *dynamic* reality. When our life is lived in the image of God, it is not a motionless picture. Rather, it is a vigorous, active, and forceful life—a life that reflects the glory of God. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the fall of humankind resulted in a realignment of life, the distorted focus on things other than God. Since Jesus is the *imago Dei*, a focus on Jesus is a restored and properly aligned life focus. In Jesus “the mirror of our humanity loses its distortions and regains its proper focus on God, so that in Christ the image is restored and through him can be restored in us as well.”<sup>11</sup>

Our creation in the image of God means much more than can be observed from a casual reading of the Genesis passage (Genesis 1:26–27). When we see its relation to our human vocation, it compels an order of life that surpasses the relatively mundane pursuits that we so often

mistakenly perceive as life's ultimate goals. That short passage in Genesis encapsulates what it means to be truly human. It also provides a hint as to God's design for our destiny. "If the first Adam shows us what we are, the last Adam promises what we shall be, and the one is the fulfillment of the other."<sup>12</sup>

With this understanding, the full extent of the dynamic revealed by creation in the image of God begins to become clearer. The image of God is the ultimate promise for and reality of humankind; it is true personhood. As the revelation of creation in the image of God begins in the Genesis story, its conclusion is found in the narrative of God's work presented in the book of Revelation. Through that revelation comes the vision of God's faithful people with the name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads:

Since a person's name is a manifestation of their nature, to have God's name upon one's forehead is to have one's nature conformed to the nature of God. . . . Being the people of God is a matter of having one's very being restored to the image of God. In Paul's terms, it is being conformed to the image of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

For a brief time the first ancestors experienced life in the image of God, but now those who follow await the day when they will be fully conformed to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29; cf. 1 John 3:2). That does not mean waiting passively through this life on earth. It is a life in which the follower of Jesus is called to actively participate each and every day:

But the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls, is the actual conversion of our whole nature into the image of Christ. The end is a person that esteems others as more important than self. It is a content and generous heart. It is a soul that has taken ownership of the spiritual climate in his or her church; that has learned to wait on God; to see with faith, to rejoice in suffering, and to suffer with the world.<sup>14</sup>

The marvelous grace of our Creator distinguishes us from the rest of creation. Only we are created in the image of God and invited into a personal relationship with God. It is God who defines that relationship and how we enter into it. This reality of creation justifies a very high view of humanity not only because the human race was originally created in the image of God, but also because we may be restored by God's grace to that image.

From the first chapter of Genesis, God told us who we are and who we are to become. By patterning human beings in his image, God began the revelation of the fullness of life he planned for the pinnacle of his creation. On this T. A. Smail wrote, "We are the human beings that we are through our bearing of the *imago Dei*, which is not a religious add-on to an already existent humanity but itself constitutive of that humanity."<sup>15</sup> In other words, who we are as human beings and who God intends us to be is expressed from the very beginning by God's creation in his image. Creation in the image of God means human beings have souls that can be transformed from a distorted image to the Creator's image. We have been made by God and for God, and our fulfillment in life comes with our alignment with this truth of creation.

## Reflection and Application



1. The following definitions are used throughout this book and should be clearly understood:
  - a. *Justification*: The change in status from enemies of God to friends, even children of God, that occurs solely by the grace of God when we first place our faith in Jesus (Romans 5:11; Ephesians 2:8–9).
  - b. *Sanctification*: Growth in the likeness of Christ, the re-patterning of life in the image of God. In the words of the apostle Paul, it is becoming all that Jesus saved a person to be (Philippians 3:12).
  - c. *Spiritual Formation*: As used herein, this is the same as sanctification. The following is a definition from M. Robert Mulholland Jr.:

Life is Spiritual Formation. Human life is, by its very nature, spiritual formation. The question is not whether to undertake spiritual formation. The question is what kind of spiritual formation are we already engaged in? Are we being increasingly conformed to the brokenness and disintegration of the world, or are we being increasingly conformed to the wholeness and integration of the image of Christ?<sup>16</sup>

2. Read Genesis 1:26–27 reflectively. Before the first act of creation, God could have created in any manner

consistent with his attributes, nature, and character. What does design in God's image say about God's view of humankind? What does it mean to you that God decided to make you in his image? What does it say about relationship with God?

3. Oswald Chambers, the author of the classic devotional, *My Utmost for His Highest*, wrote:

Salvation does not mean merely deliverance from sin or the experience of personal holiness. The salvation which comes from God means being completely delivered from myself, and being placed into perfect union with Him. When I think of my salvation experience, I think of being delivered from sin and gaining personal holiness. But salvation is so much more! It means that the Spirit of God has brought me into intimate contact with the true Person of God Himself. And as I am caught up into total surrender to God, I become thrilled with something infinitely greater than myself.<sup>17</sup>

How does this devotional about spiritual formation align with what has been said about creation in the image of God? What does it say about the transformation in life that is to come from spiritual formation? What is your commitment to this transformation and what would you like it to be?

4. What would you identify as most important in your life? How do you think most Christians would answer this? How would a life aligned with this priority be lived?

## 2

### The Fall

*The crux of humankind's alienation from God lies in "the difficulty that the human heart and mind can have in genuinely trusting God as a wise creator and living accordingly."*

—R. W. L. MOBERLY

Thomas Merton observed that the unique relation between God and Adam may be described as sonship because Adam shared God's own Spirit. "Adam, then, was meant from the very first to live and breathe in unison with God, for just as the soul was the life of Adam's body, so the Spirit of God swelling in Adam was to be the life of his *soul*."<sup>1</sup> Adam was not created as just one among the many and varied animals formed by God but rather as one that would choose to obey God's command.

It would be impossible to write a script that has a more glorious and promising beginning than the Genesis account of the creation of Adam and Eve in the image of God. As the pinnacle of creation, God placed Adam and Eve in a garden in which all of their needs were met, including intimacy with their Creator. It was a

garden filled with permission and only one prohibition. Astonishingly, as evidenced by the space occupied on the written pages of the Bible, this best of all beginnings is followed closely by the account of sin and the fall from grace. This beginning was marred by rebellion, disobedience, and separation from God. It seems that as soon as Adam and Eve were placed in the garden they turned away from God.

The seemingly simple command guiding this relationship is recorded in the second chapter of Genesis: “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die” (Gen. 2:16–17). Don’t eat from this tree, Adam! If you do, the result will be death! As long as you obey, the created relationship will continue. It sounds so simple, yet something went terribly wrong in this perfect relationship. By the end of the third chapter of Genesis, both Adam and Eve had disobeyed and had incurred the judgment of God. The simple answer to what went wrong is that sin produced a separation between the creatures and their God (Isaiah 59:2). The reality with which humanity has lived ever since is that sin has consequences. It was presented clearly in the Genesis account that to choose disobedience was to choose broken fellowship, yet that was exactly the tragic choice made by our first ancestors. They were tempted with something appealing and attractive, and they decided it was better for them than the command of God.

The power of sin is in its appeal. It presents itself to us as something desirable, something that in some way

will bring us satisfaction, most often an immediate satisfaction. In some way, the opportunity presented by sin is measured against a command of God and sin is deemed more desirable. For this reason, sin is always an affront to God. Adam and Eve were made for fellowship with God and with each other, but suddenly they felt shame, distrusted God and each other, resented each other, and were banished from Paradise.<sup>2</sup>

The series of events which we read in Genesis 3:1–6 constitutes what some have described as the greatest theological problem in the Word of God. Considering their intimacy with God, their place in the garden, and the clarity of the command, how could Adam and Eve have disobeyed? Why would God have created them in such a way that this disobedience was a possibility? We are permitted to probe the mind of God in search of answers, but we must be willing to find peace in the faith that disobedience does not thwart the goodness of God's sovereign plan.

The familiar scene portrayed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden standing in front of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent, or Satan, was engaged in conversation with Eve, but note that in this particular context the presence of God was not mentioned. It *seems* as if he was not present. Although Christian doctrine holds that God is omnipresent (present in all places) and omniscient (all knowing), this first encounter *seems* to be only between Satan and the humans. Indeed, verses 8–11 tell the story as if God discovered the event at a later time. God was walking in the garden when he asked Adam,

“Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?” (v.11).

This absence of an overwhelming presence of God is an important element in this well-crafted scenario. Our burning question is, *How could Adam and Eve live in the presence of God in the garden and still turn away in disobedience?* The answer may lie in the distinction between the omnipresence of God and the manifest presence of God. A. W. Tozer wrote, “The presence and the manifestation of the presence are not the same. There can be one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of His presence.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, we are reminded that, “we cannot attain the presence of God. We’re already totally in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness.”<sup>4</sup>

True to his general nature, God is everywhere. There is an impersonal presence of God that is in no way affected by prayer, belief, or obedience. The manifest presence of God, on the other hand, is the specific, selective presence of God with his people, normally as a result of prayer and obedience. We can see this in the story of Moses and Pharaoh. God was present everywhere Pharaoh was, even though his presence was unrecognized or rejected. He was also present with Moses and his people, but that presence took the form of a pillar of fire and a cloud. God was present among the Egyptians, but his presence was manifest among the Israelites. Adam and Eve had already taken a path of independence and disobedience that took them away from the manifest presence of God and brought them within reach of the tree with the forbidden fruit; it brought them within the sphere of temptation by

the evil one. In his omnipresence God was present during the temptation. If Adam and Eve had been following in obedience, God would have been with them in his manifest presence and their response to the temptation could have been very different. The lesson in this is that the scenario in the garden of Eden was not unique to Adam and Eve. Rather, it is one that is repeated in the lives of their descendants every day.

How unfortunate that Adam and Eve chose to face Satan on their own. Intriguingly, while Satan tempted Eve, he never told her to eat the forbidden fruit. Instead he undermined God's trustworthiness and truthfulness. Look at the deception. Satan misrepresented God by suggesting the command was unreasonable. "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). Eve caught the blatant error in Satan's statement, but she was hooked by the underlying deception. Eve's heart was opened to Satan's direct challenge of God's command. "You won't die, Eve. In fact, if you eat you will actually be better." The enticement of Eve did not come to her in the form of brute force but through the relative passivity of an idea. "It was with the idea that God could not be trusted and that she must act on her own to secure her own well-being."<sup>5</sup> Eve was never told to disobey God, but she was told that she would be better off if she followed her own choices and that no consequences would come from her disobedience. Dallas Willard pointed to the disastrous reality of the consequences when he wrote:

When Eve through mistrust of God (3:6) took the fatal step, she and Adam did not cease to be “living beings.” But they nevertheless died, as God said they would. They ceased to relate to and function in harmony with that spiritual reality that is at the foundation of all things and of whose glory the universe is an expression. They were dead to God.<sup>6</sup>

The story presented Eve drawing her own conclusion as to the correct action to take—obey God or seize what appeared to be a good and rational opportunity. Within this scenario we can see the essence of a love relationship in which love cannot be coerced; either party must be free to say no:

Inherent in God’s “decision” to create beings in his own image was that they could know their wholeness in a relationship of loving union with God. These beings were given the freedom to say “No” to that relationship because a love relationship always leaves the beloved free to say “No,” otherwise it is not a love relationship but coercion.<sup>7</sup>

The garden reveals the crux of our alienation from God, “the difficulty that the human heart and mind can have in genuinely trusting God as a wise creator and living accordingly.”<sup>8</sup> Embedded in the story of disobedience is the key challenge to relationship with God that has been faced ever since, the decision of the creature to trust or not to trust the Creator. Satan is aware of this challenge and makes the trustworthiness of God the object of his attacks.

While Eve was the principal actor in the Genesis account, the New Testament blames the fall on Adam (Romans 5:12). Adam's sin changed the relationship between creature and Creator. Adam had no reason to distrust God, but he chose to allow distrust, distance, suspicion, and disobedience to enter into his relationship with God. Dennis Kinlaw wrote, "And behind the shift from trust and communion to suspicion and separation was an overriding concern for themselves."<sup>9</sup> Like Adam and Eve, we all have a tendency to make ourselves the center of importance. Martin Luther used the phrase "*cor incurvatus ad se*" to depict this human condition, which means "a heart curved in on itself." Sin occurs when a person rebels against the created order and takes the place of God in his or her life. Alignment, or misalignment, of life around oneself means we determine the priorities of life and we live in a way that tries to satisfy those often distorted priorities.

Look at the deceptive nature sin can have. The distinction between blessing and curse can be subtle, confused all the more by Satan's implication, "You deserve this!" Further, Luther observed that God gave Adam no rationale as to why he was not to eat from this particular tree. In addition, from the perspective of Adam and Eve, neither of the two could look at the fruit and conclude rationally that God's command not to eat was good and reasonable. The tree was beautiful, its fruit would satisfy the natural need for food, and it would give them wisdom. To the rational mind, these all seemed to be good. But if the rational mind is corrupt, mistaken ideas and false beliefs will poison life. The command was not one to be

justified through reason. It was to be obeyed for the sole reason that it came from God.

It was precisely at this point that the serpent sought to drive the wedge between God and humans, this point of struggle between trust in rational human thought and trust in God. Satan tempted Adam and Eve to make what seemed to be a rational decision even though it was in clear opposition to God's command. This new scenario afforded to them the greatest opportunity to demonstrate trust in God, *obedience even when the rational mind does not understand the way of God* (Isaiah 55:8–9). Instead, Adam and Eve substituted their own human reasoning for the word of God and trust in their own rationalization for trust in God. "One of the major theological points of this story is that true wisdom comes only through intimacy with God and the attempts to secure wisdom outside fellowship are doomed to failure."<sup>10</sup> It also makes it clear that the deepening ability to trust God is a vital element of spiritual formation.

Some observe that the eating of the apple was, after all, not a very serious offense, making it easy for our human reasoning to tell us that the punishment did not fit the crime. Such a simple act, it may seem, should not have borne the consequence of the death of not only the perpetrators but all of their descendants. To the contrary, though, it is important that we understand that it is the seemingly inconsequential nature of the command and its breach that conveys the very point of the story. The arguable irrationality of the command combined with the threat of death upon disobeying has been understood to mean that even the slightest disobedience of

the command “was and must be a totally catastrophic sin which would estrange from God not only the immediate offender but also all future descendants and indeed all future humanity.”<sup>11</sup>

We come to the understanding that God set out a fundamental truth that defines our relationship with him. Any disobedience is sin and any sin has tragic consequences. We can understand this seemingly harsh outcome more clearly when looking at the contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus. Matthew 4 tells the story of another temptation—the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus had just been baptized, had heard the affirming words of the Father, and was beginning his public ministry. We are told that he was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan. The first two of the three temptations that followed were prefaced with the challenge, “If you are the Son of God” (Matt. 4:3, 6). It was God the Father who, at the baptism of Jesus, said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy” (Matt. 3:17). Once again, as in the temptation of Adam and Eve, Satan was saying, “Did God really say?” More specifically, the tempter was saying, “If you are the Son of God, you deserve more than God is giving you. You have a right to more!” The temptations came in three forms: to turn stone into bread for his own need, to prove his identity as the Son of God, and to claim dominion over all the nations. Succumbing to the first temptation would seem to have had the reasonable, sensible end of satisfying his hunger; the second of proving that he was indeed the Son of God. The third would have been

consistent with a dominion already promised in Scripture as Jesus is Lord of all.

Each of these temptations involved the sin of seeking fulfillment outside of the trusting relationship with the Father. Still, because of the promised results, we are so capable of rationalizing these as reasonable and acceptable ways for Jesus to have responded: being fed, being known, and being exalted. Although he was defeated by Jesus in the wilderness, we see Satan's tenacity when he came back with the same temptation at the cross. The same conditional statement, "if you are the Son of God," came once again through the mouths of Jesus' tormentors, challenging Jesus to come down from the cross (Matt. 27:40). It would be easy to rationalize that in feeding himself or escaping from the horror of the cross there was no harm and no fault in Jesus to be found. But this rationalization, so easily made from a self-referenced viewpoint, would obscure Matthew's depiction "of what it means for Jesus to be Son of God, in which his refusal to go along with the enticing suggestions is not marginal but fundamental to the whole meaning of his trusting and obedient sonship."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the obedience of Jesus that flowed from absolute trust of God was constitutive of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. It is a relationship conditioned upon absolute trust, which is the basis for absolute obedience.

The decision of Adam and Eve of whether to succumb to the enticing suggestion of Satan was neither marginal nor inconsequential, but rather points to the very essence and intensity of the trust relationship for which and into which they were created. They were created by God

and for God, which called for unswerving trust in God. Adam substituted his own rational understanding of what seemed good for what God said was good for him. John Wesley spoke of the consequence of Adam's action: "By these acts, the man and the woman flagrantly declared that they would no longer have God as their ruler. They would be governed by their own wills, not the will of God who created them. They would not seek happiness in God, but in the world and in the works of their own hands."<sup>13</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, sacrificed himself in obedient trust of the Father. A marked difference between the first Adam and the second Adam was their trust in God.

It becomes apparent that trust in God was the central issue in the temptation that led to the fall. As Oswald Chambers wrote, "Our problems arise when we refuse to place our trust in the reality of His presence,"<sup>14</sup> recognizing that an awareness of God's presence strengthens our ability to trust. Had Adam and Eve been attuned to God's presence, it surely would have influenced their actions. They had a choice, which gave them the full opportunity to trust in God. Trust in God allows for dependence upon God and, in their case, trust for food and wisdom. Distrust of God requires dependence upon oneself. This brings us to a deeper understanding of sin: Sin is our unwillingness to be radically dependent upon God "for life and breath and all things." It is, therefore, the idolatry of preferring to be "gods" rather than truly human (which was, of course, the primal temptation in Eden).<sup>15</sup>

Trust may at times in our lives be an easy response, but at some point a trust of radical dependence is likely to

be demanded of (or offered to) all of us who are disciples seeking to be like Jesus.

Again, in the contrast between Adam and Jesus, the meaning and purpose of life is brought into clear focus. Both faced a command that from a purely human viewpoint lacked strong rational clarity. For Adam, the command was not to eat within the context of every need being provided for him. For Jesus, the command was for total surrender even to death. Trust in the Father, that God is without qualification a good and sovereign God, is the defining essence of the relationship between the Father and the Son. This trust sustained Jesus through his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection:

It is often observed that Jesus did not answer Pilate when he asked his famous question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). We may think of the entire passion, however, as Jesus' answer. The right human relation to the one true God is that of trusting in the life-giving power of the Spirit of the Father, even in the face of hostile enemies.<sup>16</sup>

Adam and Eve missed a great opportunity to grow in trust and to love and glorify God by trusting. The whole work of God in redemption is to undo the tragic effects of their decision. Through his unequivocal trust in the Father, Jesus knew the truth, lived the truth, and is the Truth. This invites us to examine the strength of our own commitment to the commands of God and the alertness we have to the opposition that might come from our own rational mind. As modeled by Jesus, we are challenged to trust God as the greatest good even when our rational mind suggests otherwise.

## Reflection and Application



1. Familiarize yourself with Genesis 2:16–17. What was God telling Adam to “do”? What reason did God give for giving this command to Adam? What was the stated consequence of disobedience? When you are told to do something but are not given a reason for it, what influences whether or not you obey?
2. Read Genesis 3:1–11 reflectively. Draw yourself into the story as a close observer of the event. Where is the tree? Where is Eve? Where is Adam? Where is Satan? Where is God? Given the sovereignty of God, why do you believe he allowed this to happen?
3. The emphasis in this chapter has been on uncompromising trust in God and the difficulty human beings have trusting in this manner. What had God done that would allow Adam and Eve to trust him? What had God done that would cause Adam and Eve to distrust him? When they were making the decision of whether or not to obey God’s command, what did they need to trust God for in order to be obedient?
4. What makes it difficult for you to trust God?
5. The rational mind is a gift from God. As a gift from God, it should be exercised and developed to its full potential. What circumstances are you aware of in life in which one course of action seems reasonable but the Word of God forbids it or points in another direction?

6. Considering one of those circumstances in which the rational course of action is in conflict with the Word of God, in what specific ways do you need to trust God in order to be obedient to his commands?