

The Three Circles

May 24, 2026

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Genesis 2:15-3:24

Session Outline

1. God's Design (Genesis 2:15-25)
2. Sin Leads to Brokenness (Genesis 3:1-24)
3. The Gospel Leads to Restored Pursuit of God's Design (Genesis 3:15,21)

Theological Theme

God's promise to redeem the brokenness of humanity through His gospel of grace has been present from the beginning. The redemptive narrative is true and applies to everyone.

Call to Action

Sharing the redemptive narrative with others is powerful because all people are in need of the gospel.

The Three Circles

Introduction

One of the greatest sources of opposition to the gospel by skeptics is the dramatic dissonance that exists between the popular depictions of a loving God living in a perfect heaven and the heartbreak, injustice, and tragedy that so often flood headlines, life experiences, and relationships of all kinds. This often-rehearsed rejection typically takes the form of the familiar question, “If God is so loving and so powerful, how could He allow insert-the-name-of-atrocity-here to happen?” Believers who live in the same fallen world as those lodging the objection can find themselves speechless in the face of such a pain-ridden accusation.

However, realizing that the daily experience of life tainted by greed, licentiousness, grief, and frustrations of all kinds falls woefully short of God’s design reframes such an argument. Instead, the narrative of redemption is one in which God’s design offers purpose, wholeness, healing, and holiness. The challenge, then, becomes taking all of the grand ideas about God, how He relates with humanity, and what humanity is and becomes as a result and communicating such ideas in a conversational way.

In reality, God has been telling the story of His design and the redemption He offers since before time began. He revealed as much in His relationship with Adam and Eve. Even the couple who ushered sin and suffering into the world found the promise of God’s eternal hope in the midst of their great brokenness. Because God never changes, His promise of eternal hope is as true today as it was in the beginning.

- ❓ How do you respond when someone reacts harshly to the gospel due to their pain and disillusionment?
- ❓ What do you feel are the biggest challenges for believers when they share their faith?

Session Summary

In this week's session, the writer of Genesis recorded the events of creation. In doing so, he recorded not only God's design, but also how Adam and Eve rejected God's design due to their own sinfulness. As God levied the covenantal curses as a result of their sin, He also promised the hope of a coming Messiah. This same story would be rehearsed again and again throughout human history, pertaining to every living person. Understanding that essential outline of God's redemptive narrative helps today's believers share their faith in Christ through gospel conversations.

1. God's Design (Genesis 2:15-25)

In the first two chapters of Genesis, the writer painted a poetic masterpiece describing the splendor of God's creation. The language in those chapters exploded with the message of creative abundance, luscious surroundings, and worshipful existence. As Genesis 2 opened, the motif of rest emerged amidst the splendor of the garden of Eden, described with the images of precious gems. As the author turned his attention once again to the man in the creation narrative, man was depicted as being specifically placed in the garden by God to accomplish the role God ordained for him. Namely, the man was to "work it and watch over it." From the beginning, the purpose of man was to work in God's perfect creation.

Any purpose and responsibility involves boundaries. With Adam, God commanded that out of all creation, only one tree was off-limits to him. In fact, God's prohibition was stated within the context of abundant freedom. Adam could eat of any tree, save one. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil offered fruit whose consumption meant death. Kenneth Mathews clarifies, "The preemptive warning is necessary because, unlike the other members of the created order, mankind alone has the potential for crossing moral boundaries. Out of God's goodness and mercy he informs the man that the consequence of disobedience is death; what is at stake is whether he will choose to trust God's words."²

- ❓ What does the description of God's design including safety, rest, and worship indicate about God's character to you?
- ❓ Where in your experience do you come the closest to realizing those aspects of God's design?
- ❓ What does God's design indicate about relationships and how they are a part of God's purpose for humanity?

Placed




The word used for "placed" with regard to Adam's assignment in the garden had its root in the Hebrew word for "rest." The more literal idea behind Adam being placed in the garden was that God "caused him to rest" in His creation. The words for "work" and "watch over" are complimentary in meaning, as they pertain to serving others and even in the language of worship. Scholar Kenneth Mathews notes, "God prepares the garden for man's safety, where he can enjoy the divine presence."¹

In one of the more familiar passages in Scripture, the author of Genesis described the creation of Eve with the divine declaration that, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.” As God’s perfect creation continued, the Great Physician performed a holy surgery. Adam was put under, in a “deep sleep,” at which point God removed a rib and closed the man back up. The woman was presented to the man in a scene that provided the structure for modern wedding ceremonies. At their holy union, the solitary aspect of humanity was no more. Instead, the man and wife were alone together, naked and without shame. There was nothing to challenge their complete transparency and intimacy—physically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. This was God’s great design.

2. Sin Leads to Brokenness (Genesis 3:1-24)

Following on the heels of the glorious close of the creation narrative, the tone of the story changed drastically. Falling from immeasurable heights of intimacy and worship, Genesis 3 opened not with Adam, Eve, or even God Himself—but with a spotlight on a serpent. The catastrophic conversation that followed saw sin enter the world, bringing about the covenantal curses of God. As the serpent crept toward Eve, his sinister words subtly planted seeds of doubt as to the reliability of God’s truth: “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’”

Once the woman was in conversation with the liar, his appeal changed to fleshly desire and pride. Accusing God of withholding blessing from Adam and Eve placed Eve in a posture of covetous desire. Her heart condition was revealed by the author in his description of Eve’s estimation of the forbidden fruit. It was delightful to behold. It tasted good. It was “desirable for obtaining wisdom.” The description makes clear that Eve’s desire, having been convinced by the serpent that God was withholding blessing, was to do God’s job in her life for Him. She would control her own blessing. She would meet her own needs. She would bring about her own pleasure. That is what sin does in a person’s life after all—it convinces the person that he or she would make a better god than God Almighty Himself. With sin having entered the world, brokenness was not far away.

-  When you read the description of the conversation between Eve and the serpent, what lies do you see? How are those lies similar to the lies that the enemy gets you to believe in your own life?
-  How does Eve’s story help you be vigilant against the false allure of sin?
-  What was the extent of God’s curses after sin came into the world? Who was affected? How do you see those effects still occurring today?

On the other side of Adam and Eve's rebellion, God came looking for them. In reality, He knew exactly where they were. His searching was an opportunity to confess and repent of what they had done; it was an opportunity they did not take advantage of. Instead, seeking to avoid punishment and blame, they accused others, pointed fingers, and even blamed God! Reading through the curses in Genesis 3:14-24, the reader realizes that all of creation was cursed. There was nothing in God's perfect creation not tainted by the rebellion of Adam and Eve. But even in the midst of the divine curses, there was hope.

3. The Gospel Leads to Restored Pursuit of God's Design (Genesis 3:15, 21)

The first to be cursed as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion was the serpent. Whatever the serpent looked like in the garden, it was not the common depiction of a slithery reptile slinking along the tree limb. That image was what the serpent was cursed to become. On his belly he would go, eating dust all of his days. Whatever charismatic, seductive creature was persuasive enough to tempt Eve was reduced to a hideous, evil form. Even in this first curse, however, God gave a glimpse of the gospel promise. Promising the ultimate destruction of the serpent, God revealed that that ultimate destruction would come through the woman's offspring. Not only did God promise the end of the serpent, but He also revealed the manner in which it would occur.

The offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The serpent would strike the heel of the woman's offspring. Thus, God decreed that this incredible enmity between the serpent and humanity would rage violently on throughout the generations until that appointed offspring would rise up as the Victor over the enemy. The fact that the enmity would play out throughout generations was uniquely tied to the original job description God gave Adam and Eve in the perfection of creation. They were to be fruitful and multiply, that the earth might be filled with a people that God would call His own, and they were to tend God's creation, living in the land He specifically created for them. God would still build a people, but the struggle against the enemy would plague God's people as a result of sin, that is, until that particular offspring ultimately defeated the enemy with a mortal blow.

Woven into the curse of the serpent was the first prophetic promise of the coming Christ. The gospel was proclaimed, even in the wake of this very first sin. Throughout the generations, when God's people sought to fight against sin in their own power and determination, no matter how well-intentioned, defeat was coming. But there was one descendant of Adam, the Second Adam, who would bring victory to God's people eternally. As evidence of God's grace, the curses for the woman and man both bore the

wrath of God on their sin and the faithfulness of God in the continual honoring of the covenant. The woman would bring forth children in pain, but God would still continue to allow her to participate in His work in the world. The man would break his back in toilsome labor, but God still continued to allow him to participate in His work in the world.

As the curses were pronounced, God banished the man and woman from the garden. Before casting them out, however, God covered their shame with a representative, sacrificial act. He replaced the shabbily stitched together leaves covering their nakedness, once they realized they were naked, with more durable animal skins. Obviously, animals did not give those up willingly. To cover their shame, blood had to be shed; a sacrifice had to be made. Ultimately, this pointed to Christ, the final sacrifice.

- ❓ How does it make you feel to realize that God promised the gospel of Jesus Christ even as early as Genesis 3:15?
- ❓ Read 1 Peter 1:19-21. When did Peter say Jesus' atoning work was planned?
- ❓ When the sacrifice was made and the outward sign of their sin was covered, what evidence was given of their continued relationship with the Lord?

Conclusion

Considering the Three Circles (God's design, brokenness, the gospel) as an accessible, natural way to navigate conversations about knowing Christ, it is clear how similar the story of every single person is as it pertains to being in relationship with God.

First, where God's design included a perfect creation of order, harmony, and worship of its Creator in which His people find purpose and meaning in faithfulness to His will, humanity continuously seeks to replace God. Granted, most would likely not be able to verbalize that they are seeking to replace God. However, when humanity seeks to assert its own will, serve as its own authority, and worship its own glory, that is exactly what is taking place. What does it look like for humanity to do these things? It looks like relentlessly and ambitiously pursuing one's own pleasure with little regard for anyone else. It looks like a world in which others are viewed as rivals to be conquered or tools to be used to gain personal achievement. It looks like the world portrayed on talk shows, media coverage, political debates, and the periodicals that litter the check-out lines at the local stores.

Second, the evidence of sin's ravenous plague is the myriad of ways in which people seek to fill their longing for God. The pursuit of more money, bigger houses, fancier vacations, more perfect photos, greater

influence, and so on, ultimately lead to brokenness when, once those things are attained, there is no lasting satisfaction. Life does not feel the way one imagined it would when achieving those pursuits. That place of brokenness opens one up to the realization of his or her need for the gospel.

Third, in the midst of brokenness, when the schemes of man have amounted to little besides continued want, pain, apathy, addiction or the like, the gospel provides the recovery and restoration that only Jesus Christ can. Forgiveness is gained by those who repent and believe. Freedom is ushered in by the Holy Spirit, making it possible for the believer in Christ to pursue God's design once again. Now, however, the pursuit of God's design is not from personal strength or determination, but by the power of God in a believer that has been made a new creation with a new identity, as an adopted child of the living God.

- ❓ Where do you see your own life in the Three Circles? Who initiated gospel conversations with you?
- ❓ How confident are you in your ability to communicate the gospel and your own testimony?
- ❓ What are some of things that you see people trying to use to generate their own fulfillment and glory? What are some evidences that it isn't working?

Prayer of Response

Pray that God would help you share your faith with others through the Three Circles of God's design, brokenness, and the gospel. Pray that you would recognize this story in your own life and be able to share it with others.

Memory Verse

*I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.*
—Genesis 3:15

Additional Resources

- *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- *Evangelism* by J. Mack Stiles
- *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* by Jimmy Scroggins



Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's original purpose for humanity.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Kg 2:3; 8:9; 2Kg 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dn 9:11, 13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19, 26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17, 45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of "Dan" (14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gn 36:31).

Setting

The Torah (a Hebrew term for "law" or "instruction") was seen as one unit until at least the second century BC. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1–11) is a general history commonly called the "primeval history," showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12–50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the "patriarchal history," focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. Genesis unfolds God's plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham's descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb bere'shith, "In Beginning" [based on 1:1]; Gk Geneseos, "Of Birth" [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

Extended Commentary

Genesis 1–3

Primeval history describes the accounts of the creation, the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel, and the distribution of the human race. It embraces all those facets of human experience that led up to and necessitated the call of Abraham to covenant service to the Lord.

The two accounts of creation (1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25) are designed respectively to demonstrate the all-wise and all-powerful sovereignty of God (first account) and His special creation of humanity to rule for Him over all other created things (second account). Though the creation stories are fundamentally theological and not scientific, nothing in them is contradicted by modern scientific understanding. Genesis insists that all the forms of life were created “after their kind” (1:11–12, 21, 24–25); that is, they did not evolve across species lines. Most importantly, the man and the woman were created as “the image of God” (1:26). In other words, humanity was created to represent God on the earth and to rule over all things in His name (1:26–28). God’s desire was to bless humanity and to enjoy relationship with them.

The privilege of dominion also carried responsibility and limitation. Being placed in the garden to “work it and watch over it” represented human responsibility (2:15). The tree in the midst of the garden from which humans should not eat represented those areas of dominion reserved to Yahweh alone. The man and woman, however, disobeyed God and ate of the tree. They “died” with respect to their covenant privileges (2:17) and suffered the indictment and judgment of their Sovereign. This entailed suffering and sorrow and eventual physical death. God had created man and woman to enjoy fellowship with Himself and with each other. Their disobedience alienated them from God and each other.³

References

1. Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1-11:26*. NAC. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.
2. Ibid.
3. Dockery, David S., ed. *Concise Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998.