

June 7, 10th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Genesis 3:8-15

by [Ron Adams](#) in the [May 27, 2015](#) issue

As an adolescent, I had a recurring anxiety. It often hit me at night, as I lay in bed thinking about who I was and what God thought about me.

Depending how the day had gone, my self-assessment could be quite negative. My list of inadvertent sins was longer than it ought to have been. Worse, the list of sins I was *tempted* to commit was even longer. It contained all of those things I'd been told were sins yet seemed awfully attractive to me. Perusing those two lists could make for a fitful night.

The second list was especially troublesome. I'd been taught that Jesus was always watching me, that God was everywhere, that the Holy Spirit knew my innermost thoughts. I was surrounded. This meant a high degree of likelihood that, were I tempted into some forbidden territory, God would catch me in the act.

Going to the movies, for example, was considered sinful and so to be avoided. But I really wanted to go to the movies. Not the dirty ones, but a sin was a sin. If I went to the movies, Jesus would see me. I would be exposed as a willful sinner, caught red-handed. My sin would find me out.

As if that weren't anxiety-producing enough, I had also been taught to expect the rapture at any moment. If that happened while I was frequenting some PG den of iniquity, I'd go straight to hell and deservedly so.

Looking back on it, it all seems a bit silly—much ado about a theology I've long since left behind. But at the time it was a source of nightmares. The fear of being caught in sin, of being exposed, was a daily companion—so much so that I sometimes wished God would leave me alone for a while and just give me some peace.

So I can commiserate with Adam and Eve as they run and hide from their creator. I know I should take God's side in this, and I do. Is there anything sadder than this image of God walking through the garden seeking companionship, only to discover betrayal instead? Imagine the heartbreak of watching your dream of perfection ruined by the momentary lapse of your own children. Hadn't they been warned?

Couldn't they have left that one forbidden thing alone? I do take God's part in this story.

But I know what it feels like to be exposed, to be naked before God and ashamed. And so I can see myself all too clearly in Adam and Eve. They really are my ancestors.

I also understand their immediate pointing of the finger and casting of blame. I know how strong is the defense mechanism that acts to preserve whatever dignity we have left in the moment of exposure. It's a fig leaf with which we feebly try to cover whatever makes us feel most ashamed. I understand the temptation to make God look elsewhere for the true culprit. I have been where I shouldn't, eaten the forbidden fruit, and run for cover. And I have done my best to get myself off the hook by blaming someone else.

The astonishing thing about all of this is how God responds to that broken perfection. The immediate response is punitive, and this too I understand. I have experienced it more than often enough. There is nothing surprising about God's initial response.

What is astonishing is God's long, slow, graceful, eternal response to human sin. In response to the heartbreak of that walk in the garden, God imagines into being a way for us to become what we were always intended to be. In response to our shame, God makes a way for us to stand freely in God's own presence, naked and unafraid. And in order to ensure that things will go according to plan, God again risks walking among us. God's astonishing response to human sin is to forgive, redeem, and save us.

I still have the occasional fitful night, but it is not so loaded up with theological content—more the stuff of pizza eaten too late in the evening or a bad decision about that second cup of coffee. I still struggle to be faithful, and I still look to my Christian community for help in discerning what that faithfulness looks like. My guess is that I am not alone here. We have all sinned and fallen short, and will likely do so until Christ comes, bringing healing in his wings. We are all and will remain the children of Adam and Eve.

But someday we will again find ourselves wandering through the garden, and God will come walking to meet us. And here's where the story changes, thanks be to God: God will call our names. We will look up from whatever it is we are doing. And

instead of feeling a need to run and hide, we will lift up our heads. We will not need to cover ourselves, because we will be just as God created us to be. We will turn toward the sound of God's voice. Then off we will run, fearlessly, shamelessly, to meet the God who made us. And all because God met us at our worst and made a way for us to become our best.