



Genesis 3:1-13  
The New Normal  
Our Own Undoing

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This morning we are beginning a new series of messages titled, “The New Normal,” and I want to say a few things by way of introduction to this series before we dive into today’s passage. **First, I know sometimes we’re hesitant to use that phrase (“new normal”) about a season of life – such as during a pandemic – because “normal” in this context implies not only that this is the new standard, but that it’s going to remain the standard for quite some time.** And that can be a little unnerving, scary, sad, or upsetting. Three or four paragraphs into writing this sermon, I read a brief post from a friend on social media that asked the question, “Do you think there will ever be an after Covid?” In other words, is this the “new normal?” People are wondering: will we always be in this current state? *Is this the new normal?*

Maybe we’re all wrong, but almost certainly, eventually, we *will* be able to congregate in our churches, sports stadiums, concert halls, and schools as we used to. I look forward to when social distancing isn’t necessary. Have you been in a family of 6 in a medium-sized home in a pandemic? It’s really hard for us all to keep 6 feet apart in our household and I’m *really* tired of sleeping on the couch while Gwen gets the bed. 😊 (That IS a joke, btw.)

**But we’re also not going back to exactly the way things were a year ago before we’d ever heard of “Covid-19.” There is an element of a “new normal” that’s not going away.** And some things may be for the better. Maybe people will be more likely to wear masks in public when they’re sick; Maybe hand sanitizer will be more publicly available; maybe plexiglass shields at check out counters will stick around; maybe a Costco employee will keep wiping down gas pumps after each use. I don’t know...but things will go back toward what we’re used to, even if some pandemic things carry over. So let’s not be afraid to speak of a “new normal.”

**Second, while the current situation certainly is a big influencer for the title of this sermon series, the fact remains that we experience “new normals” all the time.** The death of a parent or spouse or child; the loss of a

job; the diagnosis of an incurable disease or the permanent effects of an injury; raging wildfires that nearly every year set a new record for acres burned, towns burned, and life lost. And then there are smaller, oftentimes more personal “new normals” that people experience regularly: reading glasses; needing pants with a bigger waist; no more hair to comb or style.

**Third, there are “new normals” that are positive, too – even if we don’t usually call it our “new normal.”** Getting married, having kids/grandkids, starting a new job, moving to a new city or a new home... These are new normals that are fun and exciting. Mostly in this series, we’ll be focusing on changes in life that aren’t what we’d be wishing or praying for, but let’s at least acknowledge that “new normal” doesn’t *have* to be something we dread.

**Fourth, in the midst of all of these – especially the new normals that we *don’t* want in our lives – we often wonder: where is God?** Along with the question of “why” (looked at that some last week) this is the question we probably ask the most. Where is God when life is challenging? Where is God when trauma strikes? Where is God in a pandemic?

**Lastly, we need to acknowledge that there are different ways that a “new normal” comes to be.** Sometimes it’s because God is doing something in our life that, although challenging, helps to shape us and form our character to be more Christ-like (or God brings us one of those good “new normals”). Or, sometimes a new normal sets in because of something that another person does. And then there are times when we bring the “new normal” upon ourselves – and sometimes it impacts others, too. Maybe you’ve done that before – perhaps you said something or did something that had a lasting impact and created a new normal for you, and maybe even others. And that’s what we see in today’s passage

So I want to invite you to turn to Genesis 3, beginning in verse 1. The setting for this, as many of you know, is that God created the man and then the woman. They’re named “Adam” and “Eve” a bit later. God had told the man earlier, in chapter 2, that he was to care for the land, and that he could eat the fruit of any tree except for “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:17). So then Eve is formed a bit later, and that brings us to today’s

passage... (**Genesis 3:1-13**).

Now, there's a lot here that we could unpack, and we've looked at these verses at least a couple times before where we've explored some of the themes here. **Today, however, I want to zero in on the “new normal” that Adam and Eve brought upon themselves when they went against God's directive about the fruit of this one particular tree.**

This week I ordered a book that magically arrived a couple days later (thank you, Amazon!), called “God and the Pandemic” by N.T. Wright. And a few minutes after it arrived my son, Elliott, noticed our Amazon Alexa glowing, indicating that there was a message for us. So he said, “Alexa, Messages.” (I think that's what you say to hear messages – my kids pretty much handle that for me.) And Alexa responded, and I kid you not this is verbatim what she said in her computerized Alexa voice, “*God and the Pandemic* has arrived.” And I'm like, “You think? The pandemic arrived several months ago, and God has been around a lot longer!”

**So without an accompanying pandemic, we might say that God “arrives” there in the garden to check on the ones created in his image, and starts asking questions about what's going on.** Their own response is familiar territory for a lot of people. You've probably done these things yourself. First, they hide. They don't want to acknowledge or admit that they ate the forbidden fruit. They hope to have it just swept under the rug. Second, Adam finally admits culpability...but not his – Eve's! “You're right God,” he says. “I ate that fruit – because of her!” What the heck? *And* he implicates God when he does so: “The woman *that you put here with me*—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3:12). And thus begins the blame game as he blames her, then Eve blames the serpent.

Hiding, and blaming others are both responses we can have when we are facing the prospects of a new normal, or are in the new normal, that we have brought into existence by our own doing. **Both hiding and blaming have pride at the root of them.** Normally, when we think of pride, we think of boasting and propping ourselves up to get more credit than we deserve. But another side of pride is the opposite: *not* wanting credit when we've messed

up. It's the other side of the coin of pride. We want to escape responsibility – either by hiding away, or by shifting responsibility to someone else, and it's our pride that leads us to that, just as it did for them there in the garden.

Hiding and blaming are not the only possible responses when we've brought a new normal upon ourselves. There may be several. **One of the most common responses to a “new normal” that we've brought upon ourselves is to be angry with ourselves for doing what we've done.** In the fall of 2011 I was the head coach of Blake's youth soccer team. At one of the practices I sprained my left knee when I was out playing with the kids. I went to a knee doctor to get it looked at and make sure I hadn't done something worse, and I was advised to take it easy, limit my physical activity for a couple weeks, and then slowly re-engage with exercise and sports.

About 4 or 5 weeks after the injury, having followed the doctor's orders and feeling pretty good, we friends of ours near where we lived in Chehalis at the time. I think I shared this story with you all my very first Sunday as your pastor nearly 8 years ago. They lived on a man-made water ski lake, and they had a really nice competition water ski boat. I decided not to go wakeboarding because I felt the jumping and landing would be too strenuous for my knee...but I felt waterskiing – especially behind a competition boat like theirs that puts out almost no wake at water ski speeds – would be easier on my knee; there's almost no impact.

As you may know, a lake like that pretty much always has slalom buoys set up to ski through. I've never been able to quite make it through all 6 buoys and have always wanted to. So I gave it a shot. I made 4 or 5 passes through the course before thinking I should probably stop. But I decided to go through them one more time after some tips from my friend. After going by the 3<sup>rd</sup> buoy and pulling hard to get to the other side of the boat and to the next buoy, I felt something in my left knee snap.

I let go of the handle and just dropped down in the water as easy as could be. I was pretty much right in front of the home of the family we were visiting and I can still remember Gwen standing on the shore watching the whole thing. **Of course I didn't know the specifics at the moment, but I**

**immediately knew I'd brought a "new normal" into my life...and I had no one to blame but myself.** And I was ticked. I was so angry at myself for taking one more pass through the course... for even going behind the boat at all. Why water ski? Why one more run through the slalom course? Why try that hard to get around all 6 buoys? It's not like I'm gonna turn professional or anything – I'm not that good.

And my knee felt fine all along and I had followed doctors' orders from the original injury...but now I'd pushed it too much. Knees aren't supposed to feel like they have rubber bands snapping inside of them, right? I was so mad at myself. A few days later I found out I tore my meniscus and would need surgery. And while my knee mostly is fine and has not limited me in physical activity ever since I was fully recovered, at that moment I didn't know what the future held. The new normal that I do live with is that one day my left knee will need more work – likely a knee replacement – long before my other knee ever will. That's my reality, unless I stop doing many of the things that I really love to do...and stopping that stuff is a new normal I don't want to live into just yet.

In the grand scheme of "new normals" that we can bring upon ourselves, a messed up knee is not that big. I get that. People are in the headlines of the papers and magazines all the time for doing things with much more dire consequences, such as an affair that leads to divorce, embezzlement that gets them fired from their job, sharing national secrets with the "bad guys" that leads to a prison sentence or living in exile, and so forth. Regardless, my immediate response, imagining the worst possible outcome of none of the athletic things I enjoy doing...my response was anger with myself, which really is like Adam and Eve's blame game, but simply blaming myself.

**Maybe Adam and Eve had some anger at themselves.** It's not that difficult to imagine. Maybe their blame game made things worse between them and caused anger from one to the other. It's easy to imagine her saying to him later: "How could you blame me when you were right there with me at the tree? You told God it was my fault but you were with me!" So it's not hard to imagine anger at themselves for what they did, and at each other for how they handled it.

**But, in our hiding, our blaming, and our angering: where is God?** Where is God when we bring condemnation upon ourselves, when we bring a new normal into our lives or even the lives of other people? Can we impact our future with a new normal so much that God would abandon us? Does God pull back at our anger? Can God handle the emotions of the blame game? If we're hiding, does God just holler out "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" and then leave it up to us to come to Him?

If the rest of Genesis 3 is any indication, the answer is, "No." There *are* consequences for each of them. And then there's a consequence for *both* of them, that they're expelled from the Garden of Eden. **But God does not leave them, forsake them, or put the burden on them to come to Him.** God sought them out when he initially came to them. Their disobedience didn't keep him away. He didn't make them come to Him. He wasn't scared off by their blaming – including the veiled blaming of God by Adam.

In fact, when you get to Genesis 3:21 we read this, **"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).** So God took care of them. And not just in a random kind of way; He came up with a solution to the very concern they had that resulted from their disobedience. He clothed them. They were embarrassed because they were naked, the knowledge of which came about because they ate the fruit they weren't supposed to, and God solved that problem for them.

**Whatever "new normal" you have brought upon yourself – whether that's recently or something you did decades ago – God still cares about you and is working to help get you through things.** He can help you come to terms with your emotions and your response – whether you've tried to hide from God or others, blame others, or gotten angry with yourself. My own story is a testament to that. After we drove home from our friends' house I could only sit around the next couple days until my initial doctor's appointment. I had a lot of time to think while icing my leg and keeping it elevated.

And in that time I did not hear God's voice audibly, but I had this deep sense

of peace with the situation and my future that seemed to come from somewhere beyond me. I don't know how to explain it, but I was completely at peace with the possibility that so many of the things I love to do might not happen again, and I would simply find new things to do that would bring me just as much joy in life. As it turned out, I haven't had those limitations. But I do have a "new normal" that will be mine some day, and I still have that same sense of peace knowing that there will be a day when I won't be able to do those things. It will be another "new normal" to live into. And I'm ok with that, because God is with me every step of the way. He's got me covered.

God can and will do the same thing in your life when you've brought a "new normal" upon yourself. He will be with you; His Word and his promises will give you peace. **Jesus invites us to cast all of our burdens upon him, to take his yoke upon ourselves because his burden is easy and his yoke is light.** When we turn to Jesus with the things that burden us and weigh us down – like when we've brought some calamity upon ourselves and we're facing a new normal– he gives us peace. I hope and pray you know that peace in your life. Whatever you may have done, know that peace, joy, hope, and so much more can still be yours because Jesus is seeking you out and is with you, offering to cover and take care of you in the midst of the new normal. Let's pray...Amen.