

To facilitate group discussion, Public Affairs Television, Inc. has created the 175 page *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide*. You can purchase a copy of the Resource Guide for \$5.95 wherever books are sold or by calling Doubleday at 1-800-323-9872. In Illinois, call 847-768-7000.

Below is an excerpt from the chapter on Temptation. In addition to the essay and activities found below, the full guide contains a discussion of the role of translation in understanding ancient texts, and an examination of the origins of human violence among other topics.

TEMPTATION

THE STORY OF ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN: GENESIS 2-3

The woman replied to the serpent . . . "It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: `You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.' " And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." . . . Eve took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened . . . So the LORD God banished them from the garden of Eden . . . (Genesis 3:2-7, 23, The Jewish Publication Society Torah)

Read the full story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in your Bible. As you do, consider the following questions:

- What do you think Adam and Eve's real sin was? Was it sexual indulgence? Disobedience? Misuse of God's gift of moral freedom? Pride? Denial of responsibility? All of these?
- Are we all condemned to sin as a consequence of Adam and Eve's "original sin"? Or are we the masters of our own fates, free to choose between good and evil?
- What's the relationship between knowledge and sin?
- What are the greatest seductions and temptations of the modern world? How do they relate to the seductions and temptations that Adam and Eve faced?
- How do Adam and Eve's roles in the story differ? In what ways do those differences influence how we understand male-female relations and marriage today?

ON TEMPTATION

by Robert Coles

At the very beginning of human history, the serpent told us that knowledge was good, knowledge was power, and, even though we quickly learned how high a price we might have to pay for it, knowledge we have desired and knowledge we have pursued ever since. "There is only one good, knowledge," Socrates said more than four hundred years before the birth of Christ. "Knowledge enormous makes a God of me," John Keats concurred more than two thousand years later. But child psychiatrist Robert Coles suggests that knowledge alone is not enough to make us fully human, never mind godlike. The serpent that tempted Adam and Eve, that tempted our forbears after them, still attends us, prompts and prods us, invites us, entrances us: Come, be more than you already are, and do so quite naturally--by affirming and pursuing capabilities already yours. Like Adam and Eve, we are special among the earth's creatures--the one whom the Lord addressed, the

one graced with language, with understanding, the visionary one, endowed with ambition and curiosity, whose abilities, ironically, have from the very start been the source of thorough jeopardy.

What the serpent told Eve, promised her, that she and Adam shall be as gods (and with no consequent or subsequent danger of punishment from the Lord), is what we human beings have been telling ourselves ever since--knowledge and more knowledge ought to be our desire, and its acquisition will bring us a kind of divinity: the power, the control, the authority that goes with such understanding. Our history has amounted to a pursuit of that understanding and the result has, indeed, been the unparalleled command over nature made possible by our scientific achievements, with more of them, we are sure, around every generational corner.

Yet our history has also given us no reprieve from our mean and murderous side, no matter all we have learned about atoms and molecules, about chemical reactions, about the unconscious and its workings. A century that has given us a hugely knowing science has also given us nuclear bombs, the technology that enabled mass slaughter in concentration camps, and, yes, the gossip and malice, the slanders and spite that one not rarely finds in university campuses or among psychiatrists and psychoanalysts trained to fathom the mind. Such ironies won't let go of us. Ezra Pound's enormous erudition, his great talent as a poet, did not give him any immunity from cheap, crude hate. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger's brilliant, learned philosophical discoveries gave him no immunity from a self-serving complicity with the Nazi murderers to whom he truckled. Doctors and engineers and ministers and priests and lawyers and professors signed up with Hitler and Stalin, did their dirty work. Honorable altruists, who have proven to be beyond the temptation of accommodation to brute political power, like our Dietrich Bonhoeffers, our Raoul Wallenbergs, have, alas, been the exception, not the rule. To this day, we celebrate not moral intelligence, but cognitive intelligence and now "maturity" (whatever that is): the very bright, the solid and sound, the "well-adjusted" (to what, though?).

In Genesis 3, we are told that an intellect unheeding of the oughts and naughts set down by the Creator, a prideful intellect that casts aside moral authority, will come to ruin again and again. That story has to this day been our story. When Emerson warned us that "character is higher than intellect," he was addressing Genesis 3--the narrative and moral essence of which is the high cost of egoism, of a striving disobedience that goes ethically unscrutinized. Nothing in today's world suggests that the moral tragedy that Genesis describes, that Emerson found so worrying, is in any way less a presence among us now, for all our achievements. That biblical curse continues to be our daily challenge--how to tame our restless intelligence with humility.

Robert Coles is a child psychiatrist, and the author, most recently, of *The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism*.

ACTIVITIES FOR GROUPS AND FAMILIES

IMAGINING: LEAVING THE GARDEN

You are in the Garden of Eden, and God has just handed down his punishments to the serpent, Eve, and Adam. Break your group into pairs and have each pair act out the conversation that might have taken place at that moment between Adam and Eve. Talk about who you think received the harshest punishment. Talk about where you think you are heading and what that place and your new lives will be like. Are you excited? Regretful? Scared? Do you continue to blame the other, or yourself, for what happened? Are you angry at God? Do you think God is still angry with you?

This excerpt is from the 175 page *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide*. You can purchase a copy of the Resource Guide for \$5.95 wherever books are sold or by calling Doubleday at 1-800-323-9872. In Illinois, call 847-768-7000.