

## THREADS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, LESSON 16: GOD'S LOVING PLAN

*"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things?"... [Then] he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:26-27, NIV)*

FOR A COMPETITIVE GOLFER, the hardest way to play the game is from a position of catch-up. Start with a bad hole or two, and suddenly you're thinking, *I've got to make birdies, and I've got to start now*. Such self-imposed pressure is rarely a recipe for success.

When we read Scripture as it unfolds from the beginning, we get this same sense of difficulty. Right from the start, humanity set itself up for trouble.

The garden story of Genesis 3 is no myth fabricated to present an explanation what happened long ago. Rather, it is contained in the same Word of God that informs us about all matters relevant to life in Christ. Thus, Eden as we find it in Scripture offers an inspired and factual explanation of how men and women chose another path than obedience to God. By doing so—though they were fully unaware of what they were doing—they placed themselves in the position of greatest need for the work of God. Their death-marked lives now necessitated his rescue.

Many have asked why God would have allowed Adam and Eve the opportunity to sin if he knew what this would produce in their lives and in the world to follow. Wouldn't a loving God simply have let them continue in this blissful state? It's an important question, but it is often asked by the same people who don't want a God who dictates their lives. They want free will. And this is exactly what God gave to Adam and Eve—the wherewithal to choose: *will you adhere to my design or will you follow your own course?* They chose what we so often choose; they went their own way.

But let's take one more remarkable step. By allowing for Adam and Eve to choose sin, God also allowed himself to "demonstrate the full extent of his love." This is a line we pluck from the Gospel of John, immediately before Jesus began the steps of complete servanthood. First, he washed the disciples' feet. But as the hours progressed, Jesus did so much more. He showed "no greater love"—the laying down of his life for his friends (see John 15:13).

We looked last week at how Christ died for us even while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:6). It was a love that made no sense, except in this: God will do whatever it takes to show us his love. He will even do the hardest thing imaginable.

**Opening questions** What goes through your mind when you start a round poorly? How do you attempt to "get it back" as you play along? How also do you try to recover from great errors in life?

**READING** Genesis 3:1-19; Isaiah 53:1-12

### Sin, separation, salvation

How did Adam and Eve disobey God's command? What words did the serpent use to turn their attentions (v. 1)?

What were the judgments for their sin, to be passed on through them to all people (vv. 16-19)? (Note also Romans 5:12)

What provision did God promise in cursing the serpent (v. 15)?

### God's salvation through the death of Christ

Isaiah 53 focuses on the sacrifice of Jesus and God's purpose in his death. How did Christ suffer? What was the reason for his death? How will he be exalted because of his obedient love? In what way do we see the "striking of the heel" and the "crushing of the head" from Genesis 3 played out in Isaiah 53?