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THERE'S GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS...

“Tell me some good news!” These words were a favorite conversation starter my dad would loudly offer as he scrubbed thick black grime off his hands from a long day of work. It stuck in my mind like the aftertaste of a good dessert, both a savoring reflection and a desire for more. “Tell me some good news.” I loved this prompt. It implied there was always some good news. It was a directive to focus on the positive. It was a commentary on our universal human appetite for hope. Often in my self-centered, brooding teenage years it would catch me off guard. Where *was* the good news? And why did it feel so uncomfortably unnatural to find?

Hope has become a bad word. It is because, like its kin faith and love, hope is a risk. Doing it means dropping our defenses. If we get our hopes up, they could be fulfilled, or we could be disappointed. Suppose I was able to look you deeply in the eyes and tell you that God took the risk out of

hope. What if I told you that you could hope—you could be joyful!—without waiting constantly for the other shoe to drop? You may or may not believe me, and that's fair. I'm human, and maybe (probably) even a human you don't even know. But if *God* told you, surely you'd believe Him, right? I'm here to show you that He did.

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, bad news wasn't really a thing. I need you to really hear that. You were not made for anything but good news. That's why despair feels so oppressive. That's why trouble feels so overwhelming. You were just not made to carry it. There was no apprehension of "maybe something bad might happen" in the garden of Eden. In today's culture, the common proposition sounds something like this: "I have good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?" This kind of two-faced thinking of the good news and the bad news didn't start with God. It's not even from Adam and Eve.

We hear the tone of foreboding for the first time when we hear the serpent. Before the fruit was ever eaten, the serpent (Satan) introduced the first notion of bad news.

¹The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

²"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. ³"It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

⁴"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵"God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

⁶The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. ⁷At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

⁸When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man¹ and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees.

Genesis 3:1-8 NLT

With his very first question, the serpent began his setup. He first questioned if God had forbidden *all* fruit from them. Sounds simple enough, but let's break that down. Things grown from the earth were decreed to be their food.

What God *actually* said in Genesis 1:29 NIV is *“I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.”*

In this light, the serpent's suggestion that God has forbidden them from all fruit makes the question read more like a subtle invitation to a pity party. “Did God give you any food? Is He taking care of you?” He knew very well God had only forbidden them from one tree. It's interesting that instead of directly attacking what God had said and giving Eve all kinds of reasons why God shouldn't have forbidden that tree, he instead asks her to verify or set straight an incorrect statement.

Have you ever had to sit and watch someone do something the wrong way? There is a powerful compulsion to jump in and do it ourselves to show how it's done. We were made for truth. On some level, because we were made in God's image, watching what we know to be wrong feels physically difficult. We are drawn like moths to a flame to championing that which is right and good. If Satan can use a question, and mix it with a half-truth, he can begin a conversation we likely otherwise wouldn't have had to reconsider a Word of God that had never previously been unsettled within us.

We often think condescendingly of Adam and Eve. Truthfully, I can't say I wouldn't have jumped in to retort what God had really said just to set the record straight with

the serpent. But compromising didn't come with the first bite. Compromise begins the second we choose to continue the conversation.

Next, Satan plants the first seed of bad news...and ironically, it actually sounds like good news. In Genesis 3:4-5 he tells her she won't die if she eats it (sounds great!) but that she will be like God, knowing good and evil (sounds even better!). But wait. There is a sting to that sweet news. It's a “there's-good-news-and-there's-bad-news” scenario for the first time ever in history, but the “bad news” is much more subtle. Let's look deeper at what Satan said.

You won't die. It sounds like good news, but the bad news implied with that is that God lied to you. Not only does He want to keep things from you, but the whole trustworthy nature of His character is in question. This poison pill is candy-coated in the sweet-sounding good news of “you won't die!”

The second thing the enemy says—that they will become like God, knowing good and evil—also sounds like good news, but a painful thorn of bad news is planted. The lie is something to the tune of “God is holding out on you.” The enemy takes a truth—that we are not God nor do we have His capabilities—and twists it. He makes it seem like God is keeping us in ignorance so that He can control everything in a way that we may not agree is for our best interest if we really knew all that He knew. Basically, He's hiding good things.

The reality is that we're not God. No fruit can change that. The fruit merely opened our eyes to see both good and evil., to see both good news and lies. "Knowing good and evil," while it's sold to be a powerful benefit by the serpent, is actually not a good thing. The word used here for "know" is "yada" which, according to *Strong's Concordance*, has in this context the implication of learning of or becoming aware. To become aware of evil is a far cry from being able to discern it or have wisdom about it. If you've ever "known evil" in your life (and if you live in this world, my guess is that you've had a run in or two with evil), it's not a gift.

When God created man in the garden, he was—and we still are—invited into childlike dependence on God, dependence in a way that *we are utterly unconcerned about bad news*. We don't have to scrutinize or search out every possibility (also known as *worrying*) because, like a loving parent, He takes care of us. With the first "bite" of bad news in the garden, we went from naturally dependent children to having to relearn how to submit ourselves and trust God. We began to become aware of good news *and* bad news.

OUR PRESENT-DAY BATTLE

Because in the garden that first bite was taken, we all have had our eyes opened to knowing good and evil. Throughout this book, I'm going to refer to them as the good news and the bad news. The good news is the Word of God...all that is held in our biblical text, the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus (who was called the Word), as well as the living and active Word of God that continues to speak to our hearts and write our stories. It is the fullness of truth, and it is very, very good.

The bad news is the lies, distortions, and temptations of the enemy. You recognize it because it takes the tone of the evening news and puts a pit in your stomach about what could be on the horizon. It's the "what ifs" and "if onlys" and "why bothers". It's everything from worrying about how you're going to survive to wondering if you've missed the boat on your life callings. It is driven by fear, urgency, and hopelessness with the goal to put us into self-defense mode. The tragedy is not the existence of the bad news but that it has become so pervasive in our culture that it begins to feel realistic, rational, logical, or even well-rounded.

In the daily war of good news versus bad news in our minds, the same allegations that were thrown in the garden still assault us. *God isn't taking care of you. He may not be trustworthy. Given all the information, you could make better decisions*. It all culminates into the ultimate lie... the one the enemy spends our entire lives trying in many, many different forms to convince us of. *The lie that you can—and need to—save yourself*. This one lie is behind legalism, materialism, perfectionism, intellectualism, and countless other false gods of our time. From this one lie, we begin to question if good really *is* ahead or if the good will really outweigh the bad.

The truth—the good news—from way back before the fall is also the same as the good news available for the taking today. *The truth is that the serpent was always just a liar, and we never needed to save ourselves.* God was already taking care of us. God *is* already taking care of us. His plans for us *are* good, and, in fact, if we knew it all we still couldn't have picked a better plan than Him. He is hiding nothing bad. But now that our eyes and ears have been opened to entertain bad news as well, we have a choice other than joy and hope. Our choice is not much different than the original one in the garden. Do you trust? Or do you want to evaluate God's decisions and give your second opinion? There's good news and bad news...which do you want to hear first? What voice are you going to let lead the way in your thoughts, in your choices, and *in your life?*

ENCOUNTER:

At the conclusion of each chapter, there will be an “encounter” space. This is where the good stuff really happens. Knowledge doesn't change you. Experiences of encountering the Lord's goodness do. Find a few minutes in a quiet space to engage in these prompts and questions. Don't look for answers to these questions from within yourself and your awareness. Ask them of God, and let His still, small voice of hope and truth speak the answers you forgot you knew.

1. God, what are some bad news lies that I have let become part of my truth? (i.e., “Businesses I start will always fail,” “I will never get over my depression,” “My best days are behind me,” etc.)
2. Lord, are there areas where I have subtly believed that I have to take care of myself or questioned Your goodness? Holy Spirit, shine a light on those places, and show me the truth about Your presence in those areas.
