



Discovering Eve



**Group Participant's Guide
A Four-Week Study for Women**



**Major April McNeilly
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Welcome...

Perhaps the most damaging attack on God's great kingdom of love is the gender debate. Both male and female are created in God's image. Both women and men are tasked with being His stewards on planet earth. Together, men and women are partners with God in the story of redemption, equally reflecting His glory. Oh, what great work is ours – together! Yet, the enemy of our souls continues to undermine and devalue the intended reflection of God through male-female relationships.

Satan's plan continues to this day. He knows that humankind would benefit powerfully from the unleashing of God's creative energy through women! In many places throughout the world women continue to be second class to men. Women still earn less. Most CEO's are still male. Even though we have made great strides here in the West, much of the world continues to value boys and men over girls and women. Shockingly, Switzerland did not permit their women to vote until 1971! And this divide is sadly the same in our churches, the very place where women's rights and freedoms should be championed. Though most mainline churches now ordain women ministers, many evangelical churches still insist on male-only pastors. Some churches still will not permit women to preach and teach.

Male dominance has been the norm throughout humanity. Indeed, as we will consider in this study, the male-female divide takes us back to the Creation Story. From Genesis we can trace the origin of this tragedy. The very first woman, Eve, has much to say about the predicament of all women, even today. Perhaps we should say, not Eve but rather the men (and women) who interpreted Eve!

Over the next four weeks you are invited to join a group of women as we take a look at the Garden of Eden, and the first humans placed there. We'll be paying special attention to the first woman. In a close reading of Genesis 1 to 3, we aim to notice any details which may help us better understand the mystery of Eve.

Of particular interest to us is how the person of Eve is developed in this biblical narrative of Genesis 1 to 3. As the weeks go by, we will ask: Who really is Eve? Have I been unwittingly influenced by erroneous interpretations of her? How did that happen? What are the implications for us today?

It is my hope that this four-week study will help with three things:

- 1) Invite you to simply "read" the story of humankind's origin, allowing God's word to move you.
- 2) Challenge your understanding of Eve as you read Genesis 1-3.
- 3) Cause you to consider the impact Eve continues to have on women today.






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Introduction: Biblical Interpretation is Serious Business

The Bible is an incredible book! Not only is it ancient, having stood the test of time, it continues to be a bestseller all over the world in numerous languages and in vastly different cultural contexts. Those of us who are followers of Jesus are especially keen to understand what it is we are to receive from this precious book. How we read the Bible matters.

Like all great stories, the story of mankind's creation, and subsequent fall from grace, is well ordered and clearly narrated. There is purpose and flow, with the reader being invited to join in the journey. As we read of God's creative marvels, His intimate fellowship with the first humans, and of the appearance of an evil character threatening to undo all this – we are meant to feel the full weight of this story. Adam and Eve's tragedy moves us. How God deals with these first humans, and how He deals with the reality of evil, moves us. Rather than using various tools of exegesis,¹ we are going to use a more “sweeping” reading of the text, allowing the story to form. We will note details of the plot, of character development, of conflict and of dialogue.² We will note what is said, and what is clearly not said.

By allowing Biblical stories a prominent place in our hearts and imagination, God's voice has yet another way of drawing us into the Great Salvation Story. In a close reading of Bible stories, nothing is overlooked, ignored, or said to be an accident or mistake. Details matter. When seeing scripture through this lens, we elevate the words of scripture, resisting the temptation to cut the texts into chunks, interrupting the flow from book (and story) to book. We begin to see stunning harmony from Genesis to Revelation as we consider the story of God with us.

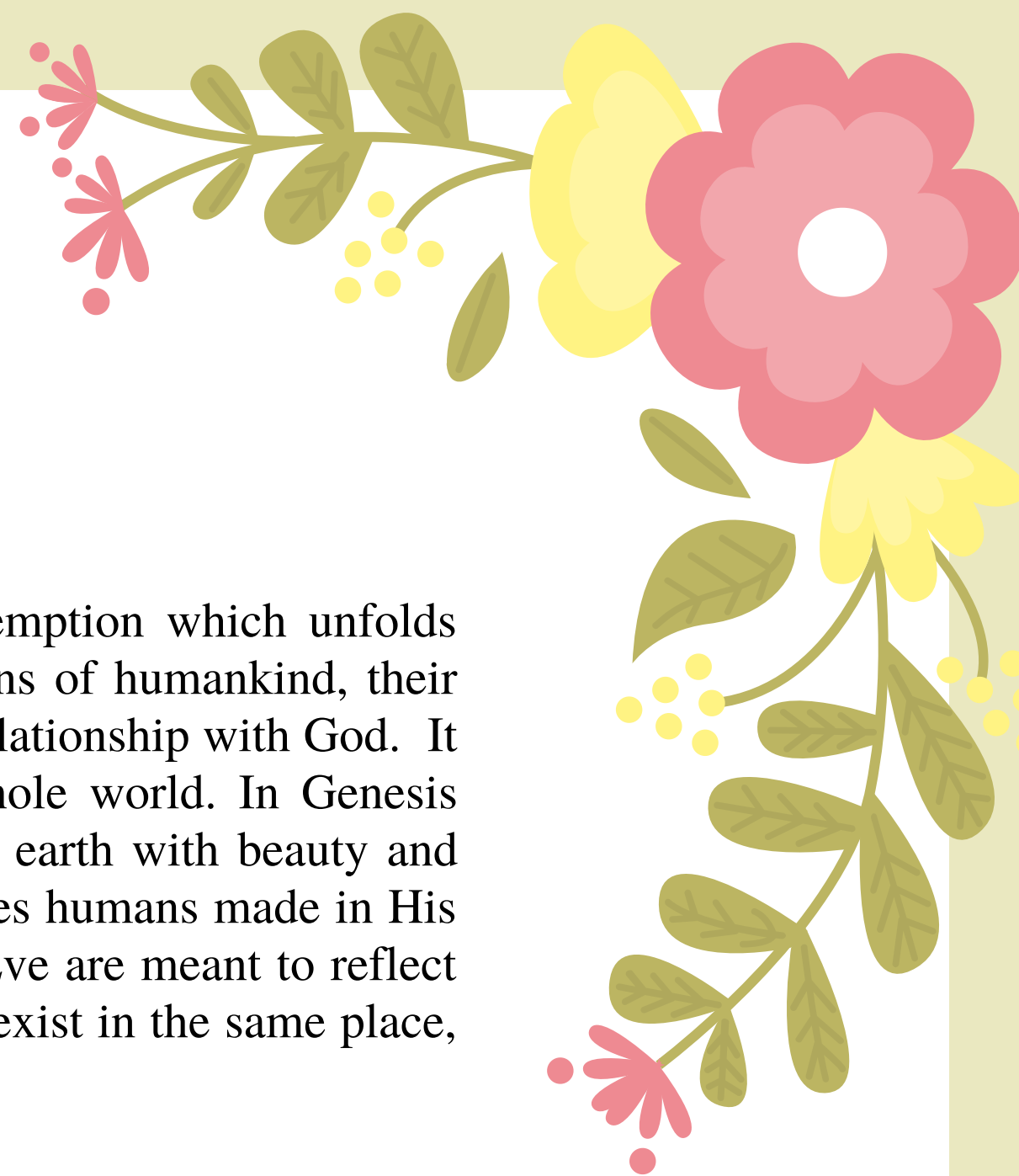
We are so pleased to journey with you as together we investigate God's word, allowing His voice to move us in today's complicated world. The Bible has much to say to us as descendants of Eve as we reflect His glory!



¹ Exegesis is an in-depth analysis of scripture, including the text's historical context, sources, authorship, how it fits in the Biblical canon, and so on.

² This way of reading a Biblical narrative using insights from modern literary criticism is known as Narrative Criticism. Unlike other critical ways of studying the bible, Narrative Criticism is not as concerned with original setting, date, authorship and so on.

WEEK ONE
Allowing the Story to Move Us



Overview of Genesis 1 through 3:

The over-all storyline of Genesis sets the stage for God’s great story of redemption which unfolds throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The book explains the origins of humankind, their intended connection to the Creator, and the tragic reality of humanity’s broken relationship with God. It is written mainly for the Israelites, but is also a message of hope for the whole world. In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we see the brilliance of God as He creates life, filling planet earth with beauty and order. Where there is chaos, God brings order. Into this orderly world God places humans made in His own image. They become His governors (stewards) of this world. Adam and Eve are meant to reflect God’s character. There is profound peace and harmony here. God and humans exist in the same place, same time.

In 1:28, God blesses “adam” – both male and female. He gives them authority to govern the amazing world filled with wonders. In chapter 2 of Genesis, more detail is given regarding God’s purpose for humans. Adam and Eve can choose to trust God for His continued wisdom and blessing, or they can choose self-rule. God has blessed them even with this gift of choice.

In Genesis 3, a new character is introduced: The Serpent. This brings great conflict into our story, with shocking results.

DID YOU KNOW:

“The Torah is Israel’s origin story: It’s the history of how the nation of Israel got its population, its land, and its religion. Genesis is the first of these five books in the Old Testament.” (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Next to the book of Jeremiah, Genesis is the longest in the Bible.

Quoted from The Bible Project.
<https://overviewbible.com/genesis/>

Which Creation Account?



Why does Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 seem like different accounts of the Creation Story?

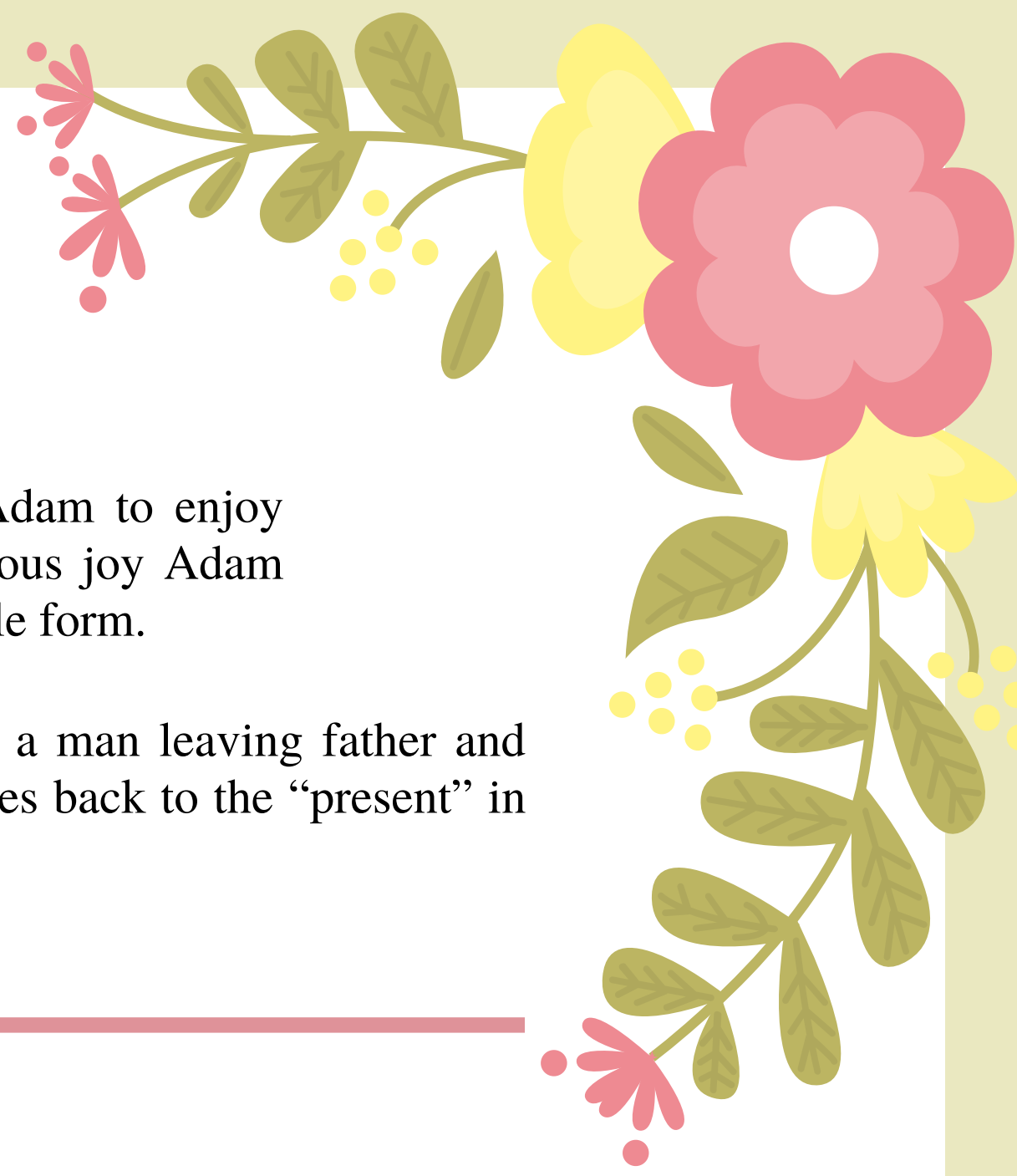
Taking a Closer Look at Genesis 1:

In this first reference to humans there are no personal names attributed. In 1:26 and 27 the Hebrew word used for “man” (NIV and NRSV use “human”) is actually “adam.” In this sense, Adam can be both a generic word for all of humankind, as well as a specific name for the first male.

Also note what’s not here: Any kind of hierarchical order to male and female. The text says simply that “adam” (humans/mankind) was made in God’s image. God’s image is both male and female. This is so important as we continue to grapple with God’s great story of salvation and redemption. The text says that both male and female, in God’s image, will reign over the earth (1:26-28). The Hebrew word for rule is to have dominion; to dominate.

Group Discussion: If we read Genesis 2 and 3, without considering Genesis 1, how will this reading impact how we see God’s will for women?





Taking a Closer Look at Genesis 2-3:

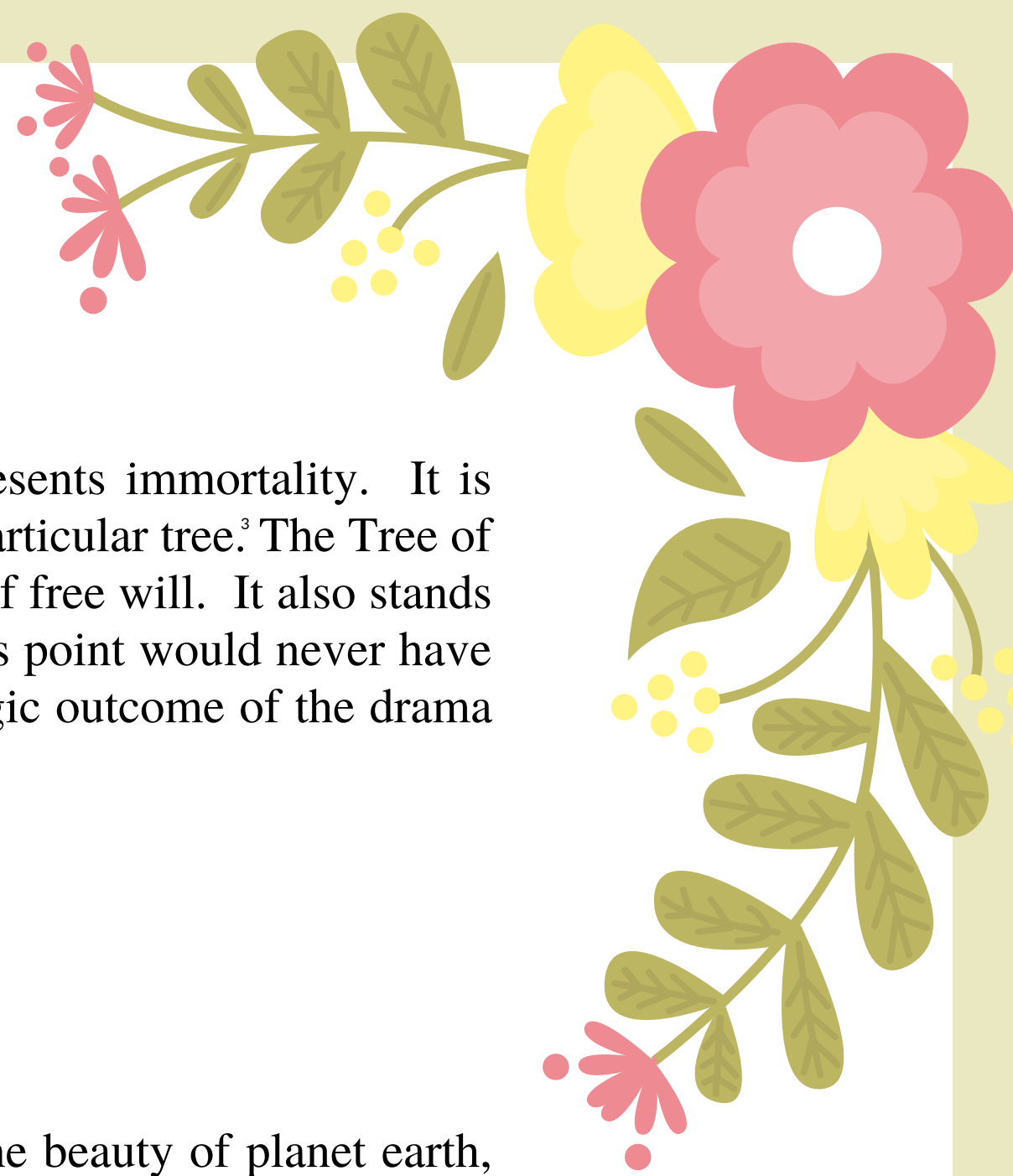
Verses 18 to 25 of chapter 2 allow us, the reader, to see God’s desire for Adam to enjoy community with another human. There is beauty here as we see the tremendous joy Adam experiences as he begins his relationship with this newly created “adam” in female form.

In 2:24-25, the author of the text speaks in a “future tense” when referring to a man leaving father and mother and becoming a unified whole as husband and wife. The author then goes back to the “present” in saying that man and wife felt “no shame.”

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever thought of the fact that Eve was not yet created when God gave the stern warning to man regarding the tree in the middle of the garden (Genesis 2:16-17)? The text doesn’t tell us when or how Eve actually heard of the warning. Explore the possible significance of this.
- Isn’t it interesting that, while there is clearly one man and one woman with no parents, the author allows us, the reader, to “see” into the future? The idea of “marriage” certainly hasn’t come up! Yet, God’s ideal of one man and one woman in a covenant of marriage seems implicit here. Discuss this in light of the many examples of polygamy among the ancients, including the Israelites.
- When Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, their eyes were opened. What does this mean? How might “shame” be a tool in the hands of the enemy today regarding intimacy?





Taking a Closer Look: Genesis 2:9

What's with the two trees in the middle of the garden? The Tree of Life represents immortality. It is interesting that at this point Adam and Eve seem uninterested in the fruit of that particular tree.³ The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil stands as the tangible representative of the gift of free will. It also stands as a great warning to the humans of a presence of evil – a presence who up to this point would never have occurred to them. In next week's study we'll take a much closer look at the tragic outcome of the drama between Adam and Eve and the Serpent.

RECAP OF WEEK ONE:



Genesis 1 and 2 show us God enjoying harmonious, unbroken fellowship with the beauty of planet earth, including an especially intimate relationship with the two humans placed there as stewards. As a new character is introduced, the Serpent, we see the course of history tragically altered forever. The presence of evil in the garden meant that Adam and Eve could join a rebellion against God, or choose to continue in obedience. Prior to the tragic eating of the fruit from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve seem to have a unified, fulfilling relationship with each other, and with God. In the next weeks we will especially consider the significance of sin as it impacts the male-female relationship.

For Personal Reflection: What are the casualties of this encounter with evil?

1. Humans are in conflict with each other (shame; clothes to cover up; blame), and with God.
2. How has the enemy of our souls impacted God's good gift of sexual intimacy? "At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness..." (Gen. 3:7; NLT). How can we inspire today's young adults to guard against the enemy's schemes when it comes to this sacred act of marriage?
3. Spend a few minutes each day with your journal, noting ideas that come to mind as you pray about The Curse and the idea of Original Sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in your life where a rebellious heart may be at work.
4. How does planet earth suffer from the weight of Eve and Adam's rebellion?
5. Spend time this week in nature. Allow God's presence to touch your spirit as you open your eyes to the beauty all around you.

³ Gen. 3:22



WEEK TWO

What's the Big Deal about "The Curse"?

Let's Read Genesis 3 Using the Tools of Narrative Criticism:

- Discuss the story – how it's written.
- How is the new character of the Serpent introduced?
- What is the movement toward conflict?
- What is the outcome of the conflict?
- How are the humans changed as a result of this conflict?
- How is God impacted by this conflict? *What might the narrator want us to feel?*

How Did We Get Here?

Last week we barely mentioned the arrival of a new character introduced in chapter 3 of Genesis: The Serpent. By reading the story of God and the first humans, allowing the text to speak for itself, we can note certain things about this character as soon as he enters the drama. In ancient biblical literature, words and sentence structure are significant. The narrator would never simply add or throw away a word without there being purpose. When the serpent is introduced as being "more crafty (shrewd; cunning) than any other wild animal" we are meant to stop and consider the implications of this description. Until now in our story there is only the hint of conflict. With this new character we are taken into a whole new world of intrigue and disaster. Who is this Serpent? Who is cursed?

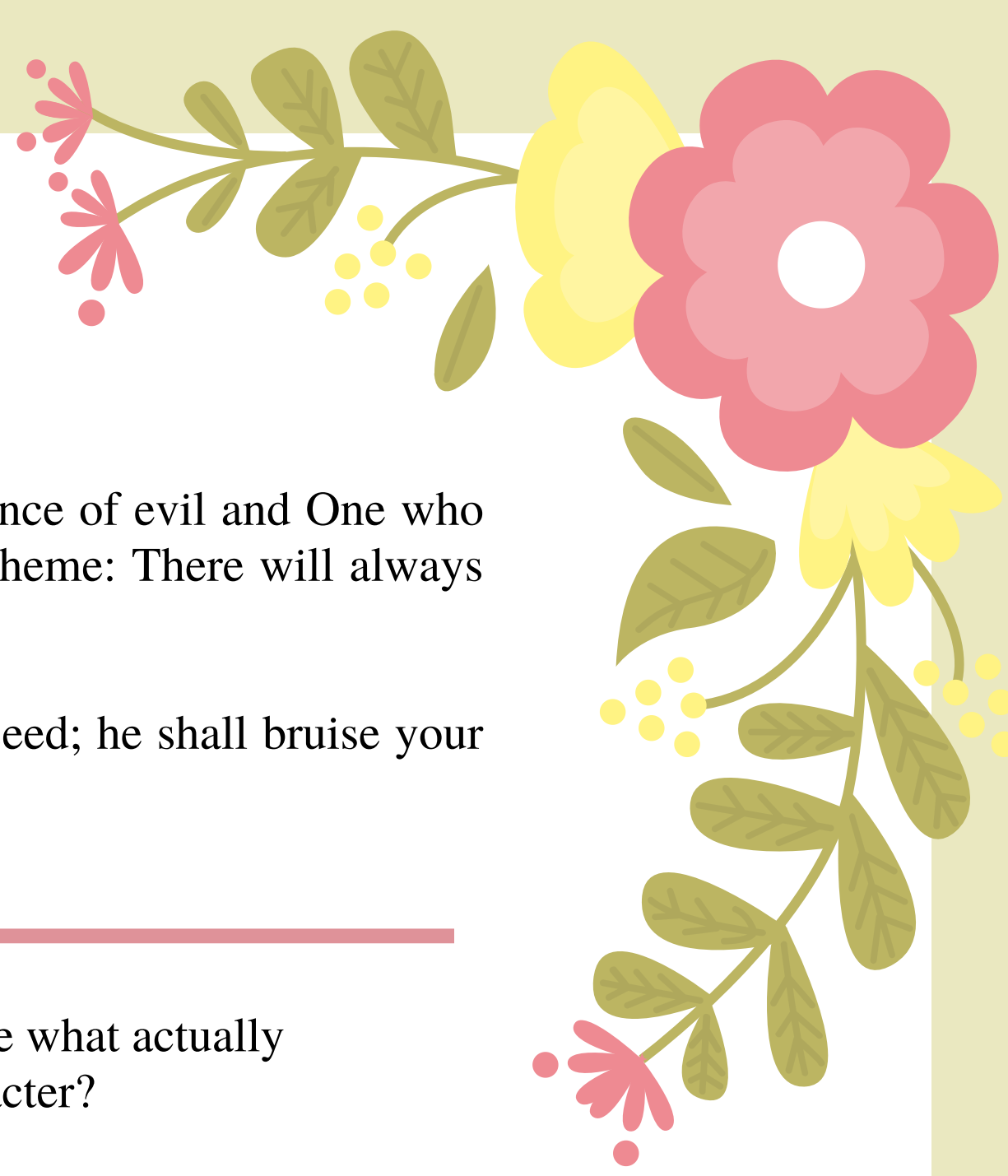
Group Discussion: Who is this Serpent and what does he have to do with the harmony in the garden? Is this a literal serpent? How does he impact the first two humans? Is Eve singled out, or are both man and woman at risk in the face of this new character?

The serpent says: "You'll become like God." (3:5). The tragedy of this statement is the fact that these first two humans are already like God! The presence of evil in the snake is a symbol of rebellion toward God. And he, the evil spirit in the snake, wants to bring humans into this rebellion. Satan "attacks God directly" by contradicting His words to Eve.⁴

The first humans choose to follow their own path, rather than stay with God's protection and unbroken fellowship. The result is a world increasingly out of control, one which sadly descends back into chaos. This evil is now part of the human's world. Sadly, we see a great increase in wickedness throughout the human race following the first humans' disobedience. The inclination of their heart is now toward evil. (Genesis 6:5 and 8:21).

Group Discussion: Satan will use any means to deceive us. He will also try to manipulate our thinking in such a way that, if we're not aware of his schemes, he may tempt us to doubt God's voice, or misunderstand God's purposes. He even tried to tempt Jesus through Peter! Remember His words to Peter in Matthew 16:23 "Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me." Discuss the words from 1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

⁴Van Groningen, G. (1996). "The Fall." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed., p. 240). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.



Taking a Closer Look: Genesis 3:14-15 **How is the Serpent cursed?**

There is a second aspect to this curse: The ultimate encounter between this presence of evil and One who would come from the woman. The narrator here wants us to reflect on a major theme: There will always be hostility between the “enemy realm” and the realm of humans.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Gen. 3:15, RSV

Group Discussion: Discuss the curse God placed on the Serpent. Describe what actually happens at this point in our story. What do you notice in this character?

Key Words in the Text:

Enmity: Hostility; animosity; antagonism; hatred; conflict
“The hostility (enmity) between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s seed, typifies the unending conflict between all that represents the forces of evil on the one hand, and all that represents the true and high destiny of mankind on the other...There must be war between every form of evil and the children of man. This verse has been called the Protevangelium”.⁵

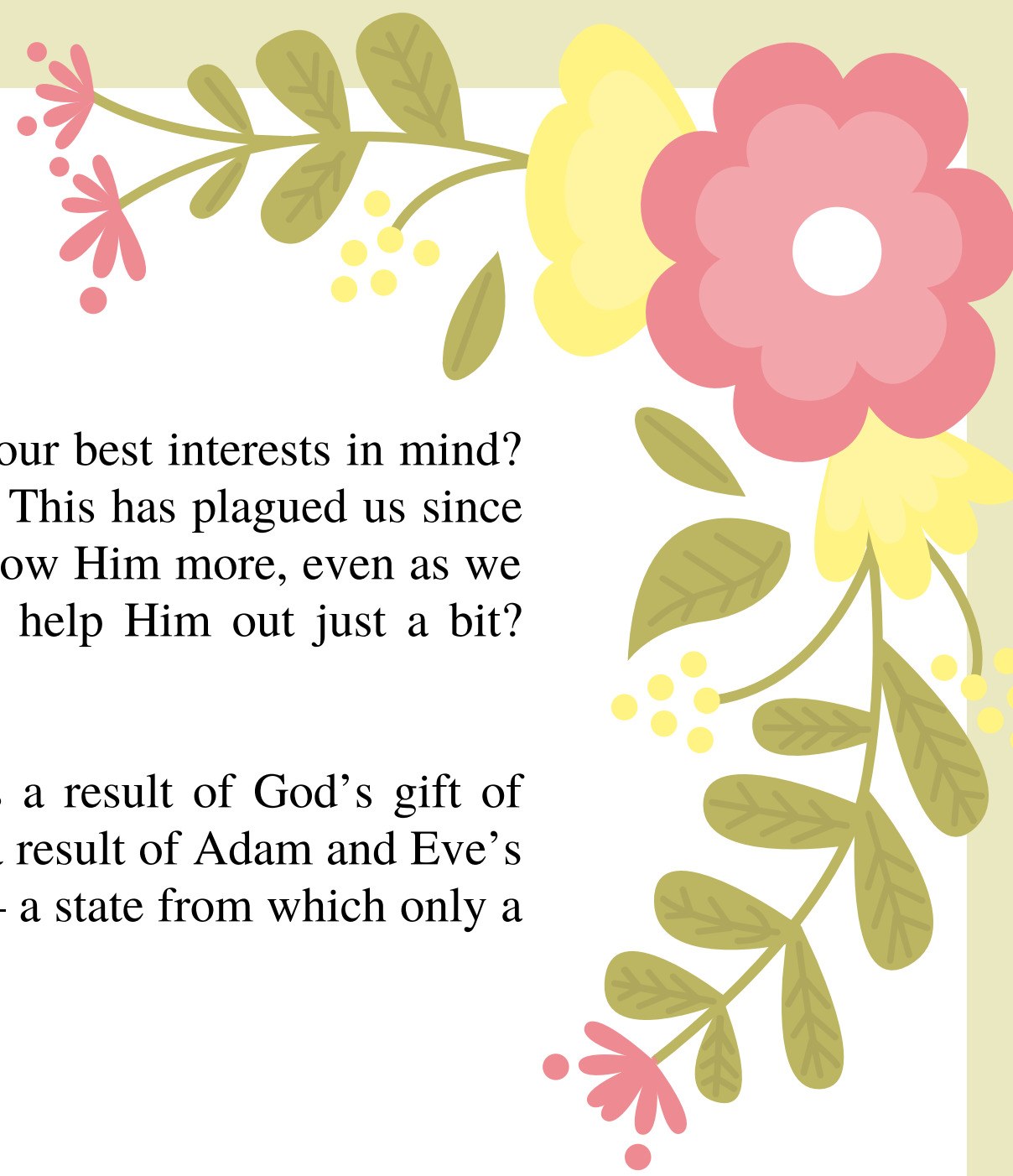
Bruise: Fatal in the case of the serpent. Brutal and harmful, but not fatal in the case of the serpent to the woman’s seed.

PROTOEVANGELIUM:
GREEK: “FIRST “AND “GOOD NEWS.”

Group Discussion: Look again at 3:14-19. Who is cursed?
Describe the curses.

⁵Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Online version. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/>

RECAP OF WEEK TWO:



The serpent plants an idea in Eve's mind: "Is God really for you? Does He have your best interests in mind? Or is He perhaps withholding something from you that you should really know?" This has plagued us since that fateful day in the garden. Can we really trust God? Even while we long to know Him more, even as we imagine one day seeing Him face to face, our hearts fear... Should we perhaps help Him out just a bit? Perhaps take things into our own hands?

As we consider humanity, we can sadly see the results of this sin-infection. As a result of God's gift of choice, rebellion has settled firmly in the hearts of women, men, and children. As a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience, all would now suffer this same fate. This is known as "original sin" – a state from which only a truly great Savior can provide the rescue plan.

For Personal Reflection

► Spend time this week meditating on the following verses:

- "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9 NIV
- "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5 NIV
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..." Gal. 3:13
- "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Colossians 1:13-14

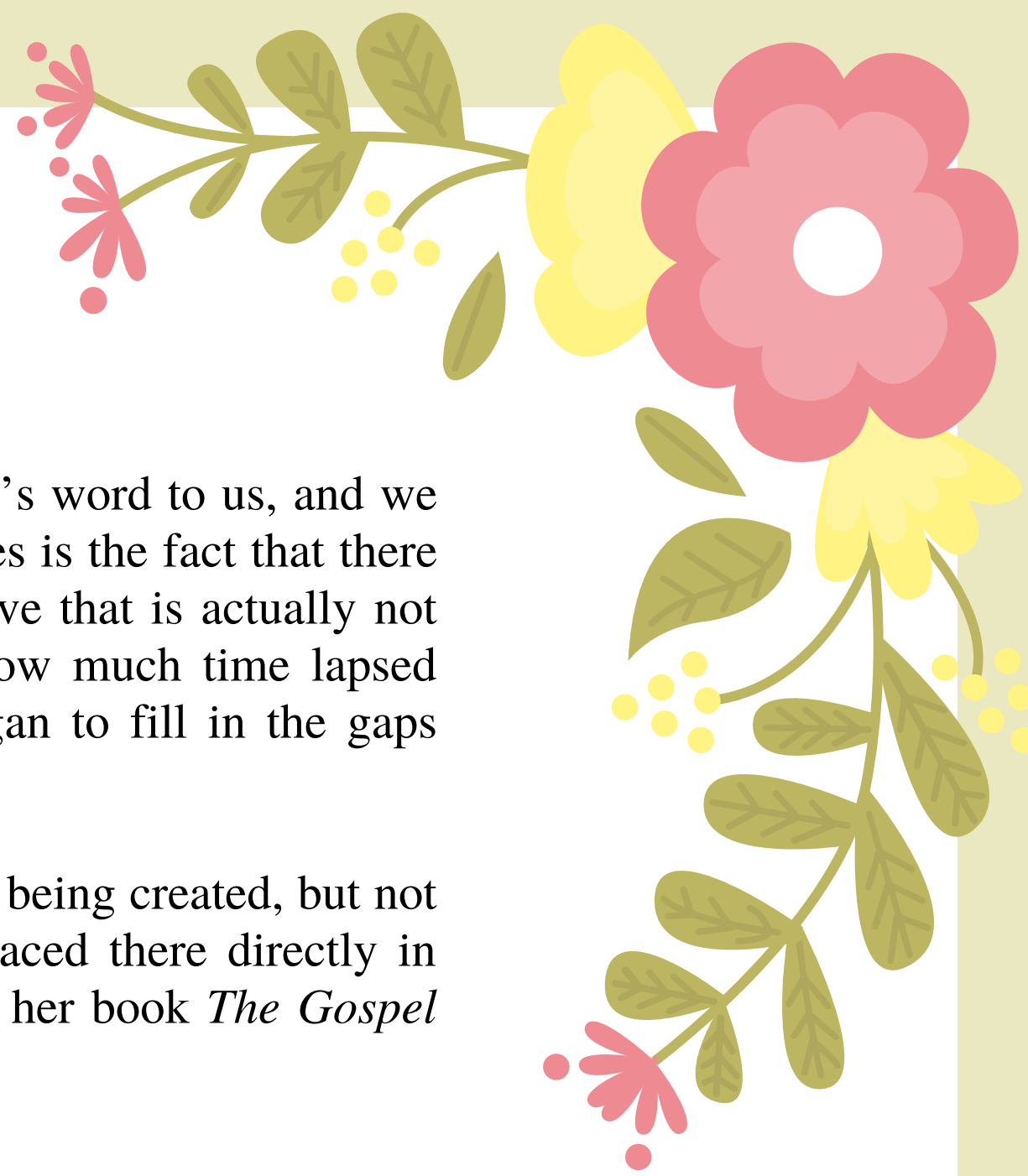
► How easy is it for you to trust God? Think about your hopes and plans, about your future. Do you have confidence in Him? How easy is it for the enemy of our souls to whisper words of doubt? Take some time alone to pray and journal your thoughts. Ask God to show you areas where you're afraid to trust Him.

► Does it strike you as incredibly deceitful of Satan to say "you will be like God" (3:5), when in fact Adam and Eve were already like God! The enemy of our souls will always try to undermine our identity. Journal about your identity in Christ. Remind yourself of who you are because of Him!

► Spend time reflecting on the idea of a "Wounded Victor." Jesus suffered the full weight of humanity's rebellion. Allow God's presence to inspire you to worship Him, entering into thankfulness for all that Jesus accomplished on the cross.

WEEK THREE

The Reader as Interpreter



It is important to remember that the Bible does not tell us everything. It is God's word to us, and we can certainly trust it – and Him! However, along with what we read on the pages is the fact that there is much *not* said. It is for this reason that so much has been believed about Eve that is actually not stated in Genesis. With such ambiguity and silence (consider for example how much time lapsed before Eve faces the serpent on that fateful day), it is no wonder readers began to fill in the gaps themselves.

Genesis 2 is curious in that we, the reader, are invited in to the “how” of woman being created, but not really the “why.” It is true that she is called a help-mate to the man, and placed there directly in relation to him. However, we are actually left to interpret this relationship. In her book *The Gospel According to Eve*, Amanda Benckhuysen says this:

"Does Eve's secondary creation, for instance, denote inferiority? Or, does being created last make her the crowning glory of God's creation? Does being formed from man's rib mean the woman is derivative and thus subordinate to him? Or does it indicate a relationship of intimacy and mutuality between the man and the woman?"

Group Discussion: Spend a few minutes discussing the “why” of Eve's creation. Read again Gen. 2:18-25 (use many different translations). Consider why God created the woman at this time. How was her creation different from all the other animals? From Adam? What does the text actually say? (We'll spend time this week looking closely at this!)

In this week's study we will consider some of the most well-known traditional beliefs regarding women in relation to men. In order to put some shape to this discussion, let's consider a heated debate which has been raging for the past few decades, especially among Evangelicals: Complementarian and Egalitarian views of women.⁶

Group Discussion: What is the difference between a Complementarian and Egalitarian view of women? Which is most prominent in today's evangelical world?

The following is a brief summary of some of the traditional complimentary ways men (and women) have read Genesis 2-3 as a way of justifying women's roles in relation to men's roles, especially in church leadership. For each argument, we also will note the problems with that line of reasoning. Remember – this is a brief look! If this subject interests you, please go deeper yourself. You'll be amazed at what you find!

⁶ *The Gospel According to Eve*, by Amanda Benckhuysen. InterVarsity Press. 2019. Page 12

1) Eve as HELPER:

Our first stop is Genesis 2:18 – zeroing in on the word “helper.” The Hebrew word here is **ezer**. Still today, especially among evangelicals and fundamentalists, many will site this word as a reference to woman’s status in comparison to man. Even among those complimentarians who place a high value on the dignity of women as being created in God’s image, they still insist that, as his helper, the woman is subordinate to man.

As bible scholars now readily point out, there are some problems with reading the text in such a narrow way. First of all, when we see the usage of this word elsewhere in the Old Testament, it is not an example of an inferior helping a superior.⁷ The word is used in various contexts in scripture, including a description of God as helper of Israel.

“He (Moses) said, ‘The God of my father was my help (ezer), and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh’” (Exodus 18:4)

“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the Lord has helped (ezer) us.” (1 Samuel 7:12)

“Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help (ezer) and our shield.” (Psalm 33:20)

“You are my help (ezer) and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!” (Psalm 70:5)

When considering that the same word used for Eve was used for God, we can see that this word seems to point to an action of “sustaining, upholding, and blessing the life of another...”⁸ It is indeed hard to imagine ancient Old Testament audiences interpreting this word as an inferior coming to the aid of a superior!^{9 10}

2) Creation Order of Events:

This argument says that since man was created first, he is superior to the woman. (Some scholars will point to 1 Timothy 2:13 suggesting that Paul read Genesis 2 this way¹¹). This seems the least persuasive argument to me. Since Eve was also created after the animals, are we suggesting she is inferior to them? Obviously not. In the Genesis 2 account, man is created before the animals – again, the order clearly does not make Adam inferior! Most would agree that it’s more likely that the order of events creates a kind of tension, “theologically emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationship; it does not establish a hierarchical order of those relationships.”¹² This makes great sense when we read the Genesis 2 account, seeing Adam “naming” all the created animals, but still aware of his own loneliness. (2:18-20).

⁷ Andrew Sloan, *At Home in a Strange Land: using the Old Testament in Christian ethics*. Baker Pub, 2009. Page 161

⁸ Benckhuysen, *The Gospel According to Eve*, page 12.

⁹ Sloan, page 161

¹⁰ Some bible scholars actually see this description of Eve as one with greater strength coming to help a weaker one. However, the bible text describes not a superior female, rather one who is man’s counterpart, or equal. Together they are strongest. (Sloan, 162)

¹¹ This chapter of 1 Timothy is very difficult to understand. Some scholars understand that false teaching had entered the church through women, and Paul had harsh words for those particular women.

¹² Sloan, page 163

3) The woman was taken from the man, and is therefore dependent on him (weaker).

As previously noted, many will look to Paul to justify their reading of this Genesis passage, especially 1 Corinthians 11:3-16. Yet even here, Paul is speaking about how women are to dress when they speak in worship, not about whether a husband has authority over his wife. Some scholars point out that here Paul is referring to the difference in how men and women pray, as independent of each other – not to any hierarchy between the genders.¹³ Paul is concerned about cultural realities in a specific setting.

Another interesting point to note is the fact that man's substance is taken from the ground (woman's from man), yet he is obviously not inferior to it. Why would we automatically assume inferiority of the woman since she is taken from man? Consider this:

“The animals are fellow creatures; they are of like substance to the man (from the earth), but they are not the right kind of fellow creature. The woman is not of like substance to the man (her substance is not taken from the ground); rather, she is the self-same substance (her substance is taken from the man himself). Furthermore, this is not the man's work, but God's: The man is asleep through the whole process and is no more than the delighted beneficiary of God's gracious work... The fact that the woman's “raw material” was taken from the man does not indicate her relational subordination to him.”¹⁴

4) Adam “names” Eve, placing her in an inferior position.

This argument says simply, since the man named the woman, he must therefore have authority over her. It is true that in the ancient Hebrew world authority was given to the one doing the naming: Parents name their children, kings name their subjects (see 2 Kings 24:17), and so on. However, scholars point out that naming is associated with authority only in contexts where that authority is clear. The process of naming in and of itself need not demonstrate the authority of the namer. Consider for example Genesis 16:13. Clearly Hagar is not in authority over God, yet she “names” Him.¹⁵

Amanda Benckhuysen points out an interesting aspect of the grammar in the naming exercise. When Adam named the animals brought to him, the Hebrew language recognizes a specific “naming formula”, whereas when he says “and this one shall be called” the difference in grammar is striking. In both cases the verb “to call” is used. With the animals the active voice of the verb plus the noun is used, but with Eve the passive voice without the noun is used. “The lack of the naming formula and the use of the passive voice in the second instance suggest that instead of acting upon the woman with authority and dominion, Adam is receiving and rejoicing in this creature God now brings to him to alleviate his aloneness.” So, like in the case of ezer, the fact that Adam “names” Eve does not necessarily point to a higher status for the man.^{16 17}

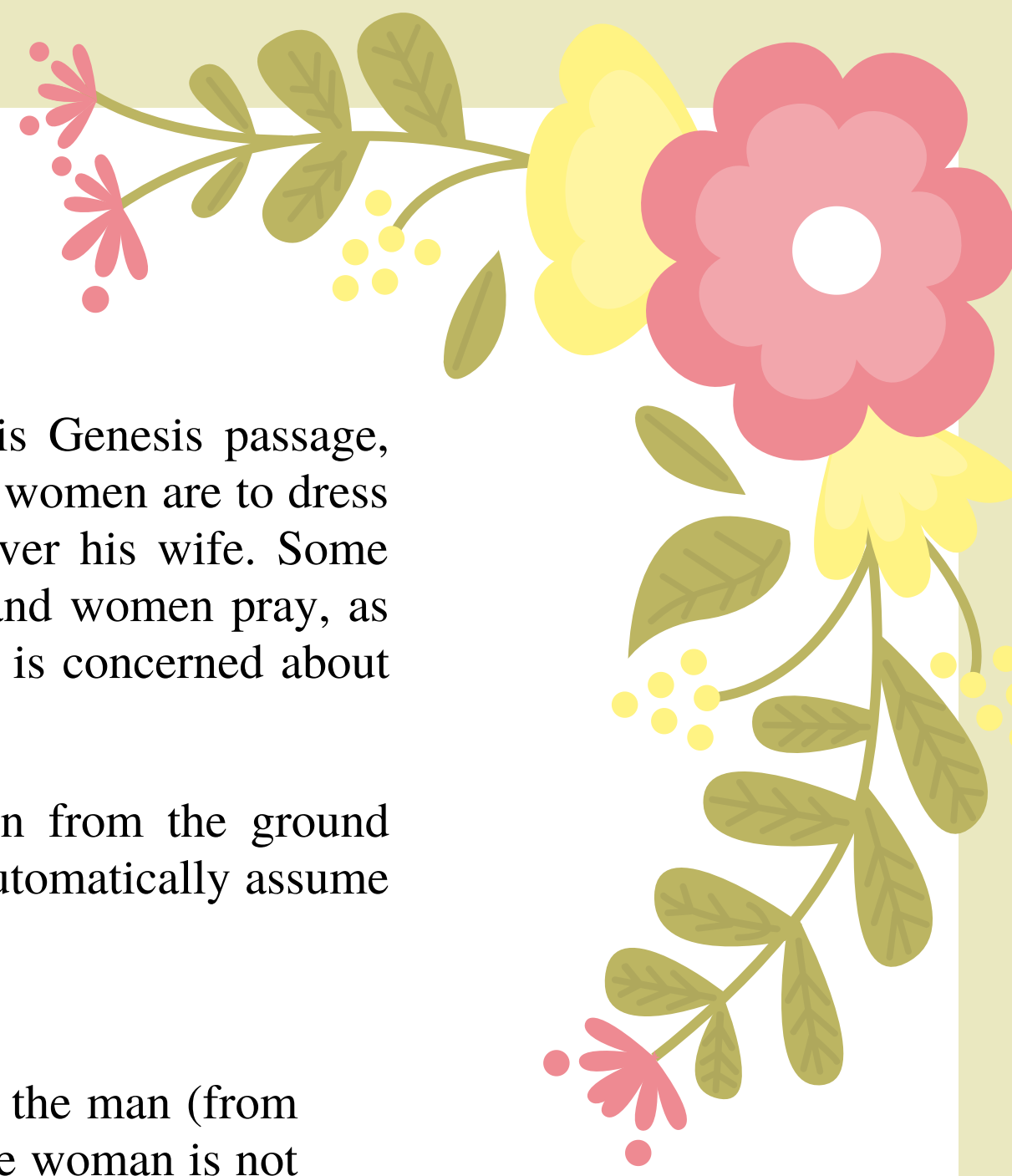
¹³ Sloan, 163.

¹⁴ Sloan, 163 If you're curious for more along these lines, James McKeown's book *Genesis* (chapter called “Gender Issues in the Garden of Eden”) takes a look at Phyllis Tribble's views on Adam as “the earth creature.” Her arguments are often compelling, though at times a stretch too! (McKeown, J. (2008). *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).

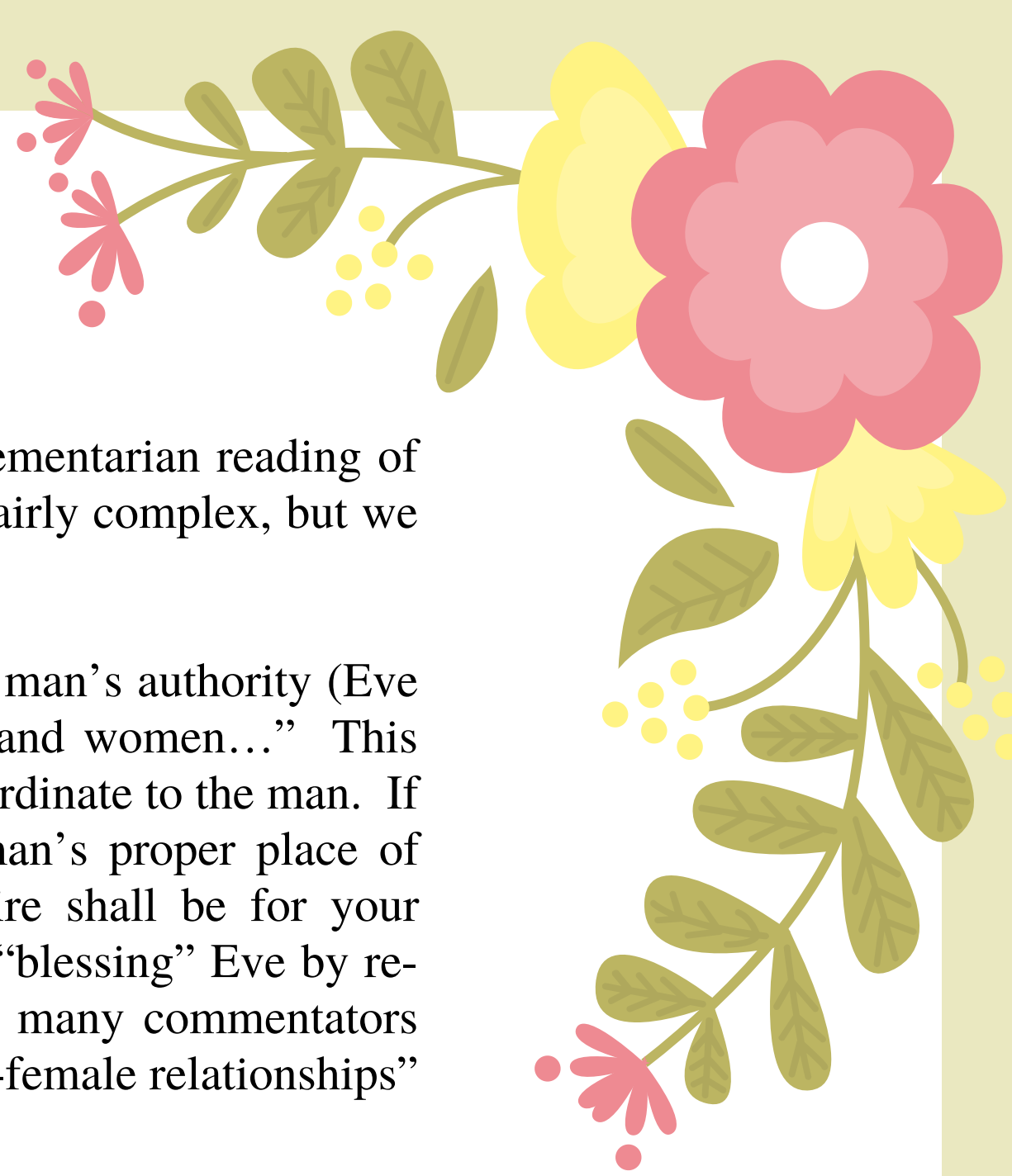
¹⁵ Sloan, 164-165.

¹⁶ Benckhuysen, 14.

¹⁷ When Adam does actually give a name to the woman, she is called Eve: Mother of all living. Notice that this is after the curse, when the devastating consequences of sin have entered the relationship. When Adam announces “Eve”, the noun is now present, along with the active form of the verb “to call”. Authority is here exercised. Phyllis Tribble says this: “When the transformed earth creature called the woman ׀iřřâ (and himself ׀îř), he did not name her but rather rejoiced in the creation of sexuality (Gen 2:23). But when the disobedient man called his woman's name (řēm) Eve, he ruled over her to destroy their one flesh of equality.” Gen 3:20-22. (Source: McKeown, J. (2008). *Genesis* (pp. 339–340). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).



5) Had Adam exercised his “God-given authority better” Eve would not have led him into sin.



This is the most fascinating (and troubling) of all the arguments for a complementarian reading of Genesis 2 and 3. Still today we can hear this being taught. The argument is fairly complex, but we will summarize it here.

The argument says that since God had ordained that woman be submissive to man’s authority (Eve to Adam), Eve’s sin was the “subversion of the proper order between men and women...” This whole belief rests on the assumption that woman was in fact created to be subordinate to the man. If this is true, after the fall God then makes things right by re-establishing man’s proper place of authority over woman. So the argument goes, since 3:16 says: “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you...” (RSV) God in His mercy and love is “blessing” Eve by re-positioning her to her proper place under her husband’s protection. Yet, as many commentators point out, Genesis 3:16 no more demonstrates God’s “good reordering of male-female relationships” than it does celebrating pain in childbirth!¹⁸

The judgement here has to do with the tragic distortion of human relationships. The word “desire” is the same Hebrew word as used in Genesis 4:7, surely not having to do with sexual desire, rather a desire for control. It seems that after the fall, both men and women had serious control issues! Relationships between men and women were tragically impacted. The gender debate continues to this day. God’s judgement to both Adam and Eve “expresses God’s punishment on sin in the form of sin’s distortion of that original creation order, an order of mutuality, equality, and delight.”¹⁹

Group Discussion: Spend some time unpacking all that we’ve just looked at. It’s a lot to take in! Consider your own understanding of male/female roles, especially in the church. Has your thinking been challenged here?

¹⁸ Sloan, page 166

¹⁹ Ibid, 167

RECAP OF WEEK THREE:



Details are left out of the Bible. There is a strong sense that God the Holy Spirit invites us into the role of interpreter. This week we've looked at some of the traditional interpretive readings of Eve which have contributed to a well-developed Complementarian view of women in the church, a view which continues today. This week is perhaps a beginning to your own study of what God really says about Eve – and about all women – in His Word.

For Personal Reflection

- ▶ This week do a little digging into gender biased translations. In particular, look at Romans 16:7. Did you know that the Greek name Junia is feminine, while the Greek name Junias is male? Older NIV translations have Junias, while the more recent version has Junia. Most current scholars now see this Greek name – the person Paul is referring to – as female. Consider the implications of there being a female apostle. Some translations have Junia (female) but then qualify it with “my kinsmen.” We can imagine the confusion among bible interpreters over the centuries when coming to terms with a possible female leader of this import.
- ▶ Spend some time this week reflecting on women leaders in the Bible. Here are some to get you started:
 - Deborah, Judges 4 and 5.
 - Huldah the prophet, 2 Kings 22
 - Mary, Luke 10:38-42
 - Priscilla, Acts 18:26 and Romans 16:3-4 (Some note Luke's listing of the woman before her husband as evidence of her teaching/leadership role).
- ▶ Spend some time with your journal, noting any feelings you may have about women in the church today. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a sensitive yet courageous spirit. Prayerfully mediate on Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:17-18).



WEEK FOUR Who is Eve?



Now that we acknowledge the absence of detail in many Bible stories, and accept our role as interpreter of these narratives, we may begin to see these Genesis passages in a certain light. A brief over-view of what we have noticed in our reading of Genesis 1-3 over the last three weeks can look like this:

- God is a creative genius. He placed humans in a garden of shocking beauty and life.
- The first two humans, Adam and Eve, are there as His stewards, taking care of the garden.
- They are both bearers of His image.
- They both share in a rich relationship with each other, and with their creator.
- There was always the possibility of evil in the garden, made clear with the entrance of a new character: The Serpent.
- The serpent, we may refer to him as Satan, deliberately attacked God's honor by undermining His authority in the eyes of the two innocent humans.
- Both humans disobeyed. Eve first, then Adam.
- Both humans suffered devastating consequences.

But have we come to a satisfactory understanding of who Eve is, and of what her role was in the tragedy in the garden? As looked at in last week's study, interpreters of Genesis 1-3 have seen Eve as being inferior to Adam. This week we will look more closely at traditional interpretations of Eve, and by extension all women.

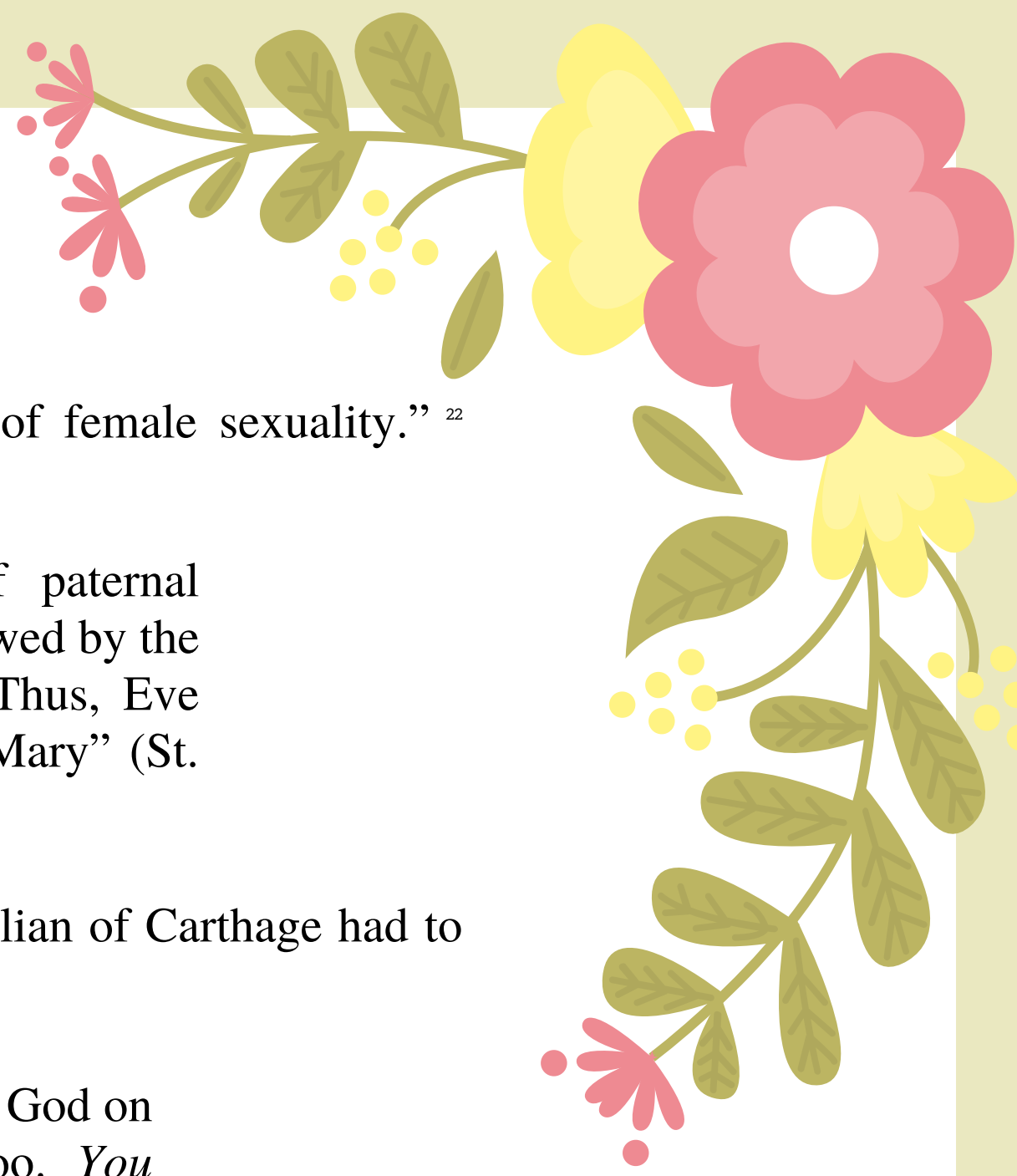
Before turning once again to Genesis, let us consider briefly the reality of patriarchy²⁰ and of interpreting scripture through a male lens. In terms of the Biblical understanding of Eve, listen to what Amanda Benckhuysen has to say:

“...a dominant interpretive tradition soon emerged in which the broad contours of Eve's constitution and character were construed quite negatively. Influenced by Greek philosophy and Aristotelian thought, the majority of early interpreters concluded that Eve was an inferior and secondary creation who bore primary responsibility for plunging the world into sin and strife. As all women were Eve, this interpretive tradition provided divine sanction for a system of patriarchy and male headship that made women subordinate to their fathers, husbands, and brothers...”²¹

Group Discussion: Since we have established that details are often left out of Bible stories, and that we as interpreters have a big role to play, can we see how a firmly entrenched male lens would have “read Eve” a certain way? Discuss some of the more obvious interpretations of Eve which scripture does not actually address.

²⁰A simple dictionary definition says this: Patriarchy is “a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line.” Another definition: “A social system in which power is held by men, through cultural norms and customs that favor men and withhold opportunity from women: The corporate glass ceiling is one consequence of patriarchy in education and business.” From <https://www.dictionary.com/>

²¹Amanda W. Benckhuysen. *The Gospel According to Eve*. InterVarsity Press. 2019. Page 9



One of the most intriguing themes regarding Eve has been Eve as “inventor of female sexuality.”²² Consider the following quote by Professor Tumanov:

“Mary is an eternal virgin, symbolically allaying all fear of paternal uncertainty...Eve, the inventor of female sexuality, is repeatedly viewed by the church fathers, e.g., Augustine and Origen, as Mary’s opposite. Thus, Eve becomes the embodiment of the whore... “Death by Eve, life by Mary” (St. Jerome)...”²³

As painful as this is to read, listen to what another of our Church Fathers, Tertullian of Carthage had to say about Eve:

“And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil’s gateway: *you* are the unsealer of the (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert – that is, death – even the Son of God had to die.”²⁴

Saint Augustine contributes in much the same, sad way. Amanda Benckhuysen describes some of Augustine’s thoughts toward women:

“...woman is man’s ‘helpmeet’ (Gen. 2:18 KJV) in procreation but not in companionship. If God had intended to provide man a companion, Augustine contended, he would have created another man... because woman was created second, she is...subject to and to be ruled by her husband... Man’s headship (after the fall)... (is to) keep women in check and thwart her moral degeneracy. For Augustine, women’s subjugation to man is a justifiable punishment because of woman’s appetite for and inclination to sin, typified in Eve’s succumbing to the serpent.”²⁵

Thomas Aquinas said: “Woman is defective and misbegotten.”²⁶ No need to continue, it is simply too painful! But the point is made: Male interpretations of Eve have taken on a life of their own. When such revered voices as those here quoted speak this way of Eve (and us!), it isn’t really surprising that we’re still having this conversation.



²² Vladimir Tumanov. “*Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women.*” Published online: 25 March 2011. Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011. Accessed through University of Toronto Electronic library. This is another huge subject, well beyond the scope of this Bible study!

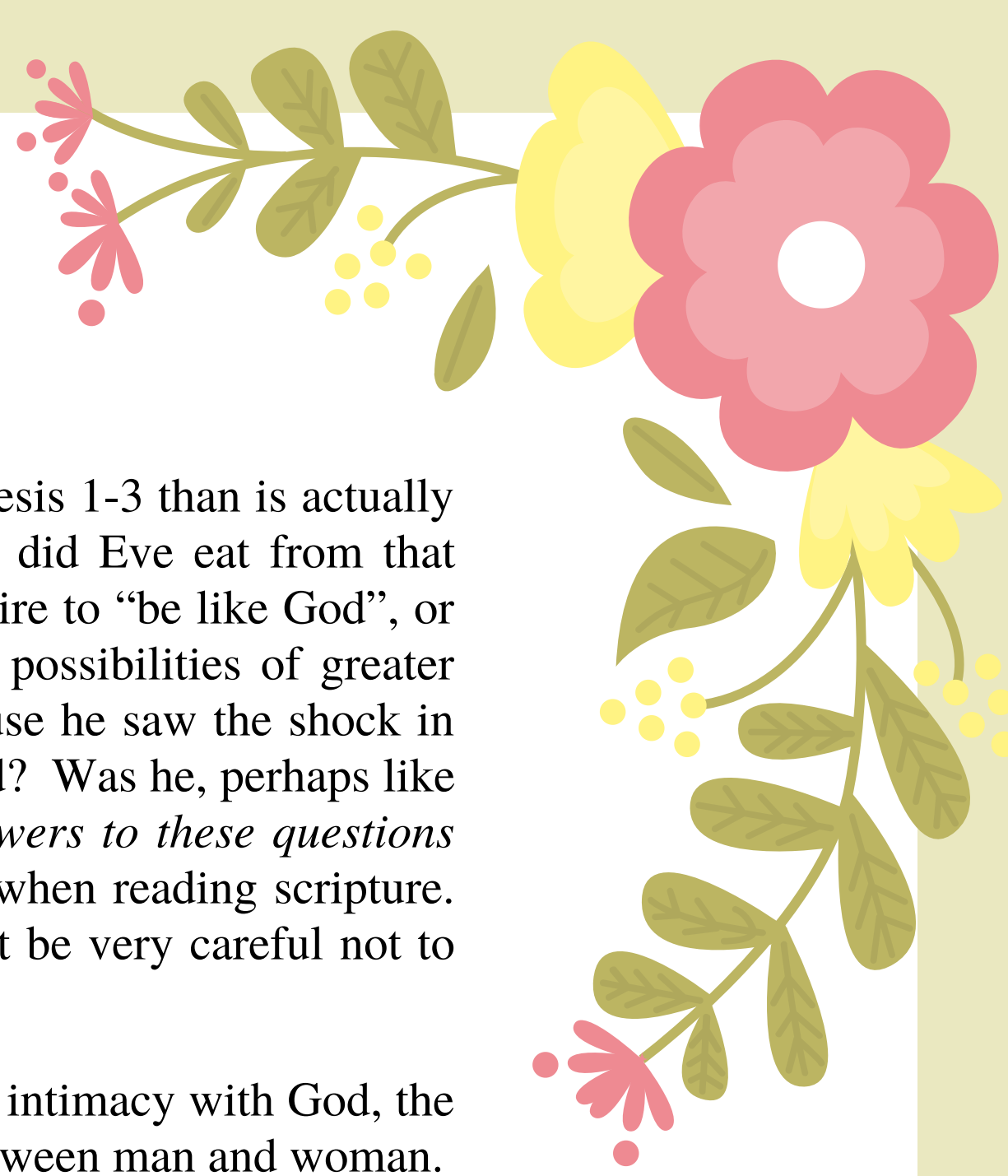
²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Quoted in Benckhuysen’s book, *The Gospel According to Eve*. Page 15. Italics not mine.

²⁵ Benckhuysen, 16-17.

²⁶ Ibid, 17

A FINAL LOOK AT GENESIS



When all is said and done, we the reader must admit that more is not said in Genesis 1-3 than is actually said. When and how did Eve hear that one tree was forbidden? Why in fact did Eve eat from that forbidden tree? What was her motive? Was she really filled with pride and a desire to “be like God”, or was she in that moment being curious and filled with child-like wonder at the possibilities of greater knowledge? As for Adam, where was he when Eve first ate? Did he eat because he saw the shock in Eve’s eyes at the first bite and knew he needed to eat in solidarity with his beloved? Was he, perhaps like Eve, driven by pride and a taste for power?²⁷ *Ultimately, we don’t know the answers to these questions since the text doesn’t actually tell us.* We the interpreters must be very careful when reading scripture. Let the stories of the Bible speak! Let God’s Spirit inspire us as we listen. But be very careful not to read into them our own agenda.

One thing becomes clear: Since Eve and Adam fell from their place of honour an intimacy with God, the consequence of the curse continues to show itself in a shocking power struggle between man and woman.

Let’s have some fun and use our “sanctified imagination” for a few minutes!

Reflections on Adam and Eve in the Garden:

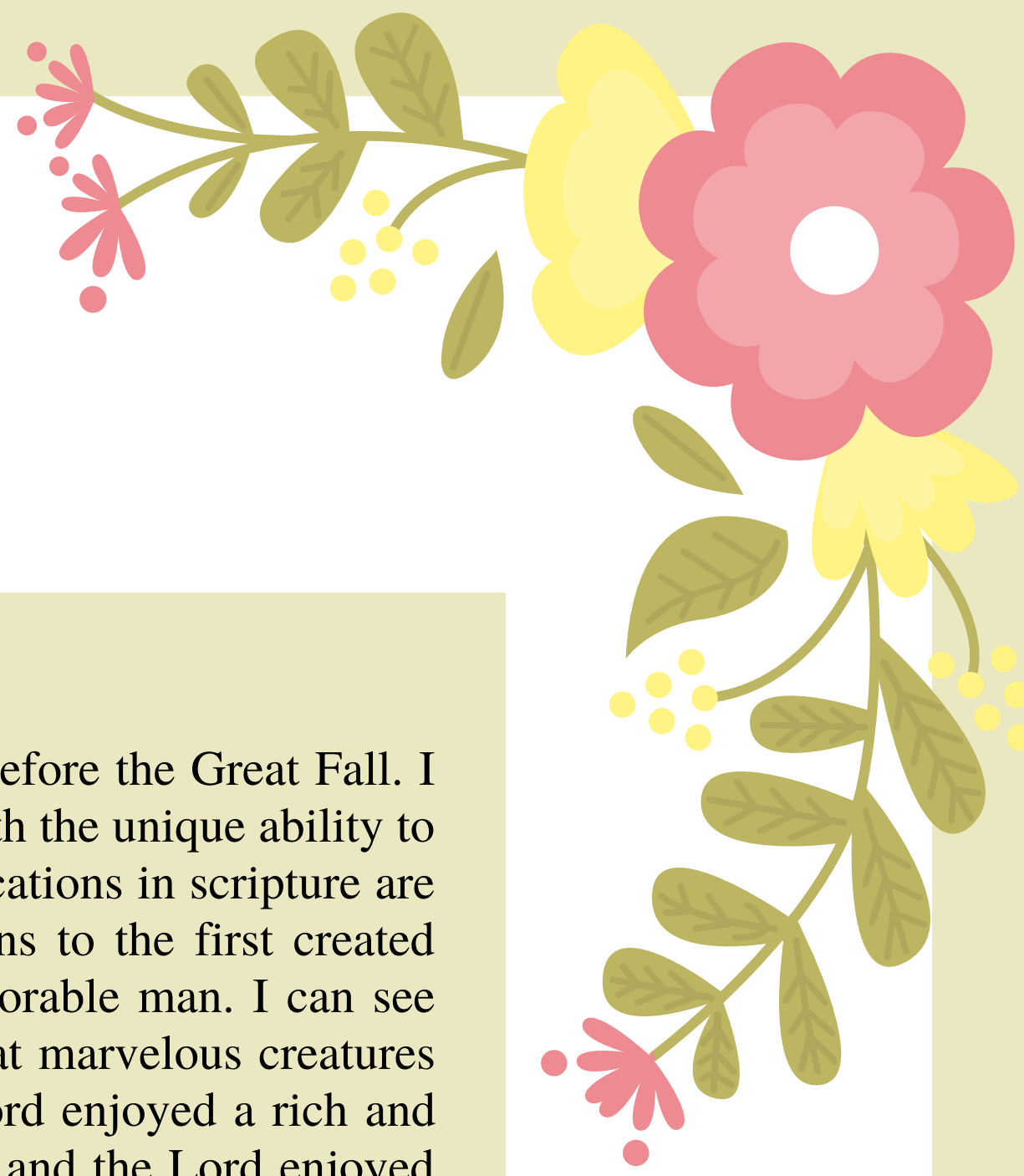
I have written two pieces, using lots of imagination, filling in gaps left out of the biblical text. The first is written from the perspective of a Christian man at the turn of the 20th century. (Remember, women at this time were, among other things, battling for the right to vote!) This man is educated and intelligent, willing to consider imaginative ways of seeing God. Let’s call him Charles. Charles has fully developed feelings and attitudes toward Adam and Eve.

The second is from the perspective of Adam, in the garden before the fall. Like Charles, this version of Adam also has fully developed feelings toward Eve. (He refers to her as Eve, even though she technically hasn’t received that name yet). The Bible does not tell us how these two humans felt toward each other, other than the man’s joyous exclamation when he first sees the woman. The bible also does not tell us any “back-story” regarding the serpent’s interaction with the humans.

You may find the second reading a little unnerving. Please don’t be troubled! I’m having fun with the story, including the way I describe the serpent. In Genesis 3:1 the Hebrew word used to describe the serpent has been translated in various ways, including: crafty; cunning; shrewd; subtle; seductive; clever. It is with this picture in mind that I write of the introduction of the serpent to the innocent humans.



²⁷Ibid, 14



Perspective of Charles, America 1915

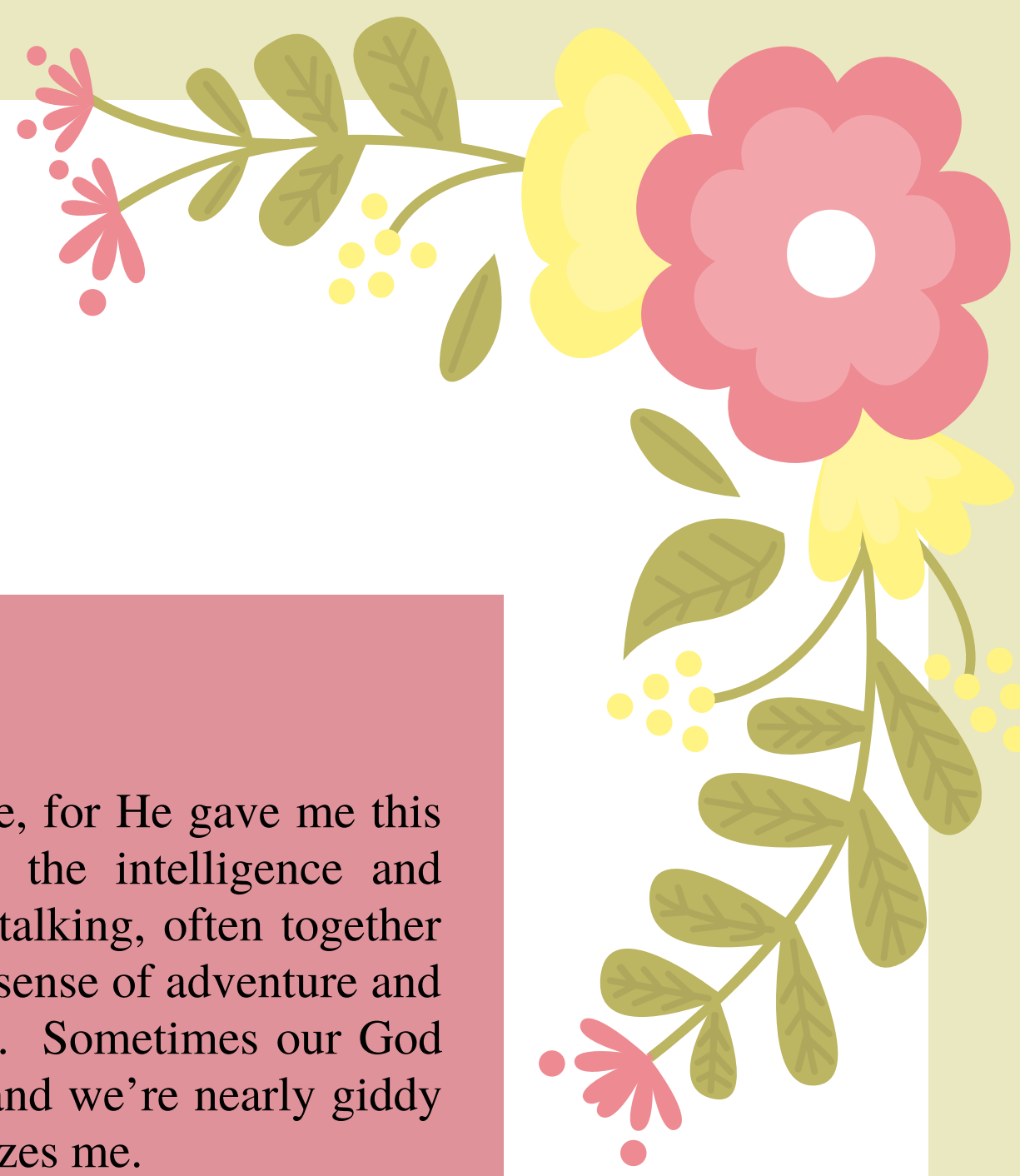
You may wonder what life was like for the two innocents in the Garden before the Great Fall. I sometimes place myself there as a silent observer. God has blessed man with the unique ability to imagine. Mind you, I hardly need exercise my imagination since the implications in scripture are quite clear as to the difference between the genders, at least as it pertains to the first created humans. Take Adam: Surely he is a strapping, highly intelligent and honorable man. I can see him throw his head back in laughter as he enjoys the Naming Game. What marvelous creatures God has placed in this garden for Adam to enjoy. That Adam and our Lord enjoyed a rich and endearing friendship, there can be no doubt. Who knows how long Adam and the Lord enjoyed this comradery before the woman arrived. I have often wondered about the necessity of her arrival. I suspect it must have had something to do with Adam's own vulnerability, even as one made in God's image. He is, after all, made of dust and dirt; of matter. In any case, God in His infinite tenderness toward his first human, provided a lovely help-mate.

Let us now picture Eve: Compared to the strapping, highly intelligent and honorable Adam, this female human looks to me to be an after-thought. To be sure, I see her as slender and graceful, tender-hearted and gentle. God would of course pour His brilliance into her as well as to Adam. I imagine God created her with the eye of an artist, gracing her with extraordinary beauty. Adam must surely be intoxicated with her loveliness! As for her intellectual capacities, she was of course far superior to the animals. She would have provided excellent company for Adam, although I imagine he would often get away from her sweet chatter to find much needed time alone with his greatest Friend. I suspect it was during one of those absences that Eve was easy prey for the Serpent. Without her husband there to protect her, it isn't surprising that Eve fell so powerfully into the obvious trap set by the enemy of our souls.

And so, it has been thus since the beginning of time: the naivety of woman, her likeliness to wander, has been a snare for both male and female. Oh that her reasoning and self-discipline were more fully formed like that of man! This of course in no way maligns God's greatness in her design. Rather, it is a reminder of her vulnerability. She is a secondary human, needing the male half to complete her.

Husbands I exhort you: Take care of your wife. Protect her from herself. She may be typically female and vulnerable to hysterical thoughts and actions, getting all kinds of fanciful notions in her head, just as her Mother Eve. In fact, I worry about my own daughters as I see increasingly belligerent women in our society today. So I say again – Husbands take care of your wife, lest she become your undoing.





Perspective of Adam, in the Garden of Eden:

I stand in awe of this exquisite creature! How well my Creator knows me, for He gave me this perfect partner. She is in every way my equal! Together we reflect the intelligence and imagination of our genius God. We spend countless hours walking and talking, often together with our Lord, sometimes on our own. Eve and I embrace life here with a sense of adventure and optimism. We dream together of what can be and all that is yet to come. Sometimes our God whispers possibilities into our minds about what the future can look like and we're nearly giddy with anticipation. Eve always has many questions for Him. Her mind amazes me.

Together, we are in awe of the marvels all around us. Sometimes Eve will playfully challenge me to a race or other physically demanding pursuit. Sometimes I am overcome with a sense of tenderness toward her as I see her soft form and feel her gentle touch. Sometimes we sit in silence, together with Him, and simply inhale the flow of life all around us. Oh the wonders of sharing this life with her!

It was with Eve that I spent hour upon hour discussing what God meant by not eating from the tree in the middle of the garden. Together we considered what the fruit of that tree might taste like. Together we determined to trust our Father's stern warning to stay away from it. As Eve often pointed out, our garden was full of adventure, without any need of whatever fruit that one tree offered. The tree obviously meant something else to God, and we were content to leave it alone.

A few weeks ago, as Eve and I plunged into a deep cascading water fall, emerging breathless and exhilarated, we caught a glimpse of a strange and wonderful animal. I don't even remember naming this one. His skin was many shades of green and blue, with fine, shimmering specs of amber, flecked at times with copper and gold. This stunning creature, the Serpent, stands just beneath Eve's shoulder. He is slender, even slight of form. If I want (and I have!), I can scoop him up in my arms where he contentedly drapes himself around my neck, chattering happily about the delights of our shared home. He seems to be especially drawn to Eve's company. I'm not surprised. Beautiful Eve is curious and imaginative and eloquent. I sometimes simply sit and enjoy the sound of their voices as they talk late into the night, pondering the mysteries of this exquisite life we share.

Group Discussion: Do you feel uncomfortable imagining Bible stories like this? Why or why not? What feelings are evoked as you read both perspectives? Which of the two descriptions sound more "typical" of an interpretation of Eve?

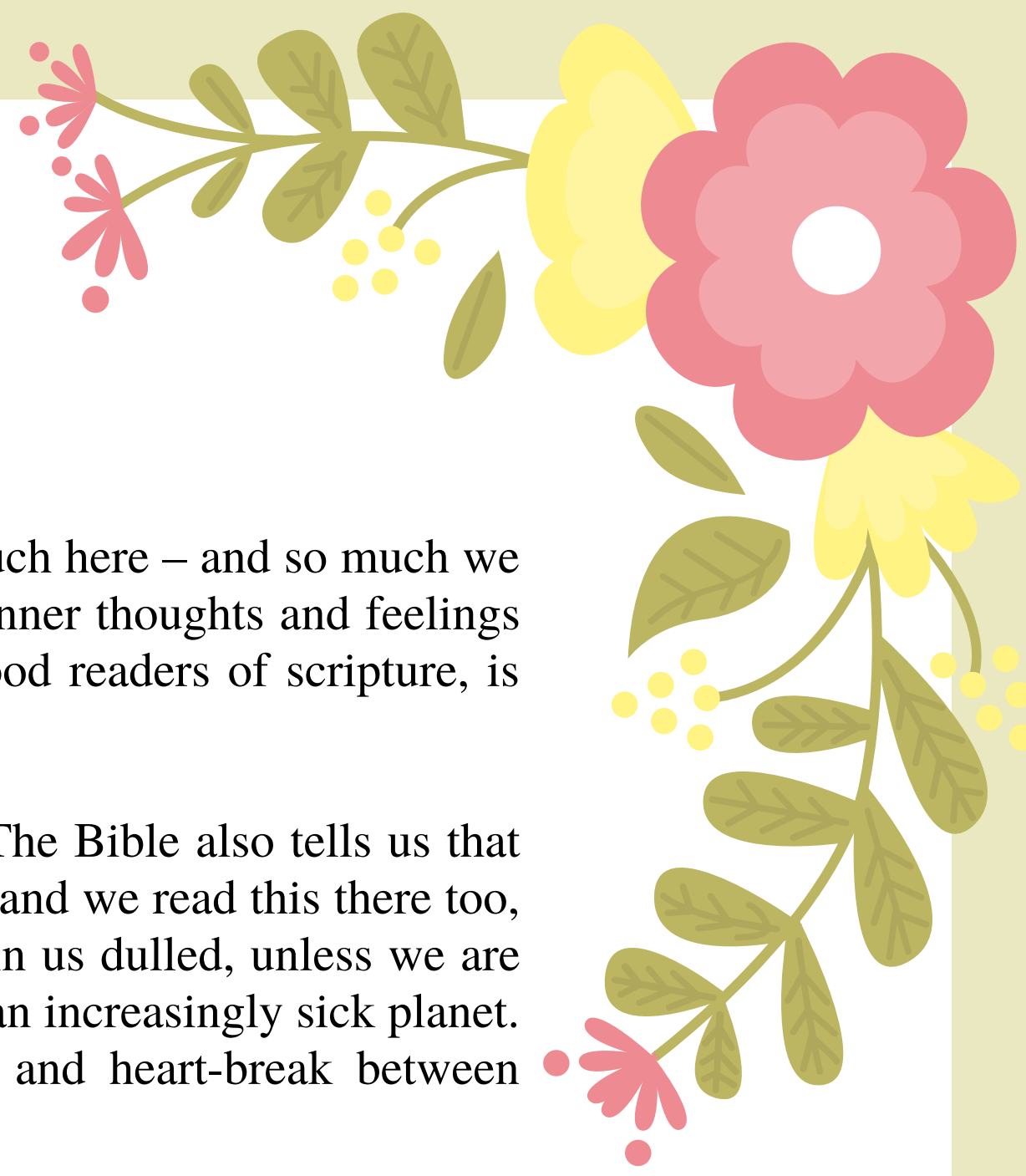


RECAP OF WEEK FOUR:



What fun we've had looking at these first three chapters of Genesis! There's so much here – and so much we take for granted that actually isn't here. Genesis 1-3 tells us very little about the inner thoughts and feelings of Adam and Eve. As a result, we cannot judge motive. What we can do, as good readers of scripture, is allow this powerful story of creation speak to us.

The Bible clearly demonstrates God's love for humans – both male and female. The Bible also tells us that both men and women are partakers of His divinity, being made in His image. Yet, and we read this there too, both men and women are cut off from intimate relationship with God, His image in us dulled, unless we are rescued from the curse of the fall. Death is now a reality. So too is hard work and an increasingly sick planet. Perhaps most devastating of all is the continued confusion, strife, competition and heart-break between genders. *Surely we can see the reality of Satan (the serpent) all over this!*



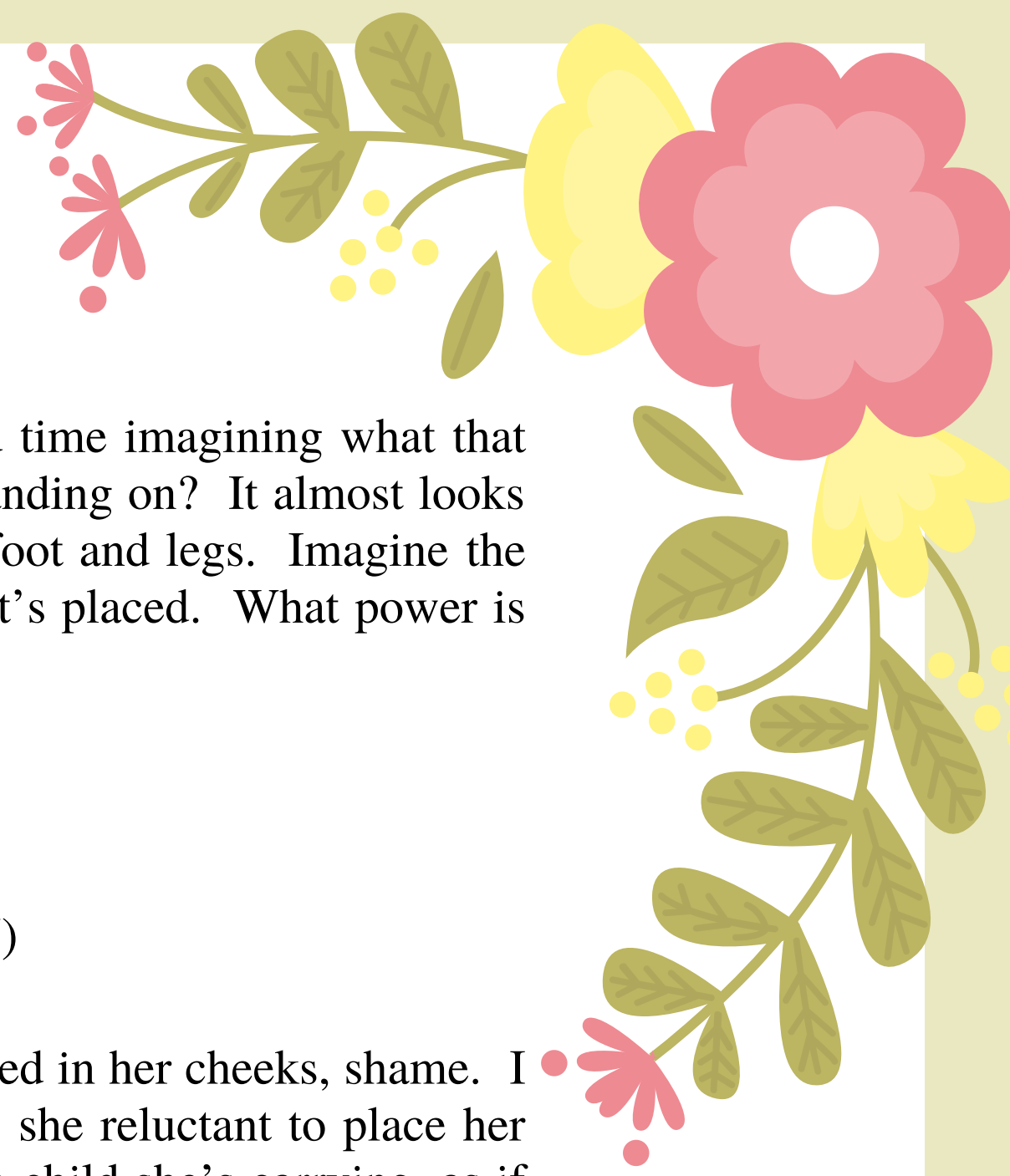
CONCLUSION

I hope you have found these last weeks to be thought-provoking and inspiring. There is so much good work our God is doing in and through His people today! As we get closer to the return of Jesus we will see increased Holy Spirit work among His people. His glory will be increasingly revealed through us as we bring lost people to Him. What a magnificent Kingdom plan we are part of.

As a way of concluding our time together, let's spend a few minutes enjoying a piece of artwork.²⁸ I love this piece! I see so much in Mary's face, in Eve's face - and all around the picture. Enjoy this process. We can call this Art Appreciation, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us through this work. He loves meeting with us. He has so much to say. Look at the art before reading my insights/questions. In fact, stop right now and just look at this beautiful painting. What do you see?



²⁸“Virgin Mary Consoles Eve” by Sister Grace Remington. Used with permission. I enjoyed a wonderful phone conversation with Sister Grace, discussing her work and her love for Jesus and the church. You may purchase her work easily by searching Mississippi Abbey+Mary Comforts Eve.Enjoy!



What catches your attention regarding the fruit and the lush vine? We can spend time imagining what that fruit must have looked like, smelled like, its texture. What are the two women standing on? It almost looks like a precarious stance for Eve. Notice the serpent wound tightly around Eve's foot and legs. Imagine the feeling of panic... And what of Mary's foot. Delicate, feminine, yet look where it's placed. What power is within her to be such a force against this evil? Remember Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (NIV)

And now look at the women themselves. What do you see in Eve's face? I see red in her cheeks, shame. I see her clutching that piece of fruit. Does it still have a hold on her? And was she reluctant to place her hand on Mary's stomach? Mary seems to be holding Eve's hand firmly over the child she's carrying, as if Eve wants to pull her hand back. In fact, Mary seems to be pulling Eve's gaze down there too. What descriptive words capture the look on Mary's face? Kindness? Sadness? Understanding? Empathy? Strength? Determination? So much!

Bless you sisters as you continue to rejoice in God's amazing creation of male and female in His image.
May we together with the precious men in our lives reveal His glory!

