

The Story behind *Conversations from the Garden*

At the time this family discussion tool was written, I had been studying and contemplating Genesis 1-3 for seven years. Yet it was poor organization skills that prompted this work. The writing began shortly after my scheduled speaking engagement on "Using Classical Literature to Teach Worldview to Children" at the Modesto Homeschool Conference. In the effort to pack my car for the event, the box that contained my handouts, notes and the books for discussion never made it to the car. These tragic circumstances became evident less than an hour before my scheduled speaking time. Humbly I stood before a packed room and confessed my oversight. My replacement talk would be "Why the First Story of Genesis Is the Critical Piece of Literature for Building a Christian Worldview." I quickly added, "If there was another talk you wanted to go to, feel free to leave." About half of them did.

Putting on a brave face, I plunged into my extemporaneous talk, showing my audience how the Genesis story not only lays the foundation for thinking like a Christian but also ushers in the whole grand narrative of the Bible. The big story starts in the first three chapters of Genesis and culminates in the last chapters of Revelation, building on all the themes established by the Author from the beginning.

The response afterwards was amazing. One woman said that what she had heard in my talk was the reason why the Lord had her at the conference. Then a man stopped me on my way back to my booth and asked if he could give me some honest feedback. Without waiting for a reply he then listed all the things he disliked about the talk, especially the questions I asked repeatedly to engage discussion from the audience. "Adults don't like to be asked questions. They simply want to be told what you know and where they can get follow-up information if they want to know more. You provided us with nothing to enable us to look into this for ourselves." With a curt end to our conversation, he walked away, and I have never seen him since.

For days after the conference, I stewed over his uncharitable comments. Nevertheless, he was right. My audience needed a guide to help them delve into the ideas I had so passionately delivered, and they needed something they could use with their children. After convincing my husband that I could develop a simple resource in a week or two, I set to work. A month and a half later, I had packaged several years worth of reflection and meditation on Genesis 1-3 in the form of questions. Designed for family use, these question prod thinking and conversation about the most foundational text in all of scripture. They cover roughly forty different topics from this text. I am an ardent believer in the power of questions and their necessity for learning. Unlike most people, I am rather comfortable with even befuddling questions. Some of the sweetness revelations from this text have been born out of years of unanswered questions. The Holy Spirit is such a patient teacher. Here's an example:

Perhaps three years ago, I remember asking aloud while walking our dog,, "Why is the tree that bore the fruit that caused the fall called the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'?" Later I would ask, "Why wasn't it just called 'the tree of death'? This would have made for a cleaner parallel with the tree of life?" This name, "good and evil", is especially odd given the fact that God expressly said, "...in the day you eat of it you will die." Eating the fruit of this tree meant the fall, the curse, expulsion from the

Garden and death. What could be good about that? There had to be a deeper meaning in that name, but what? Certainly man would learn the knowledge of good and evil through this tree. But there was more. Then one day, I was overwhelmed by the awareness that the tree that brought evil and death to man would also bring death to God.

Through the death of Christ on a tree, man would see the most astounding act of goodness the world has ever known -- the Creator sacrificing himself to save his creation. From the earliest days of the church, that time-splitting event has been called *Good Friday*. On that day, Christ bore the fruit of his broken body and shed blood upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, transforming a tree of death into the tree of life.

No single event in human history revealed at once the extent of both the evil of man and the goodness of God. The name given in the Garden was planned from eternity. God told man that he would die if he ate of its fruit, but he withheld from man the deeper truth that God would also die in order that man might live.

Asking questions of this text and questing for answers by meditating on the unfolding biblical narrative has been one of the richest endeavors of my life. The questions created in *Conversations from the Garden* are an invitation to join the journey.

Because it is designed to be a family discussion tool with lots of questions, the man from Modesto would probably still not like this study guide. However, he might be pleased to know that I am currently working on an adult book, which asks fewer questions but, like *Conversations in the Garden*, lays out more of the immense truth from this first text of scripture. My working title is *Secrets in the Garden: Discovering God's Big Story for Our Children and for Us*. I would be grateful for your prayers. We'll keep you posted as this work develops.

Anyway, that's the story behind *Conversation from the Garden*. I shall always be grateful for the irksome man from Modesto. May God bless him.