

For all of its negatives, you have to admit that sometimes the internet can give rise to some pretty amusing things. From viral videos to nostalgic reminders, there is no end to the hilarity that can ensue from a few people being really bored and wasting their time online. There is no greater example of this than the origin of memes. Those picture perfect photos that can be changed and altered to fit almost any situation.

The distracted boyfriend meme, where his girlfriend is staring at him in horror as he checks out another girl. It could be made to be my diet looking aghast as I look at a cookie. The stack of books already on my bookshelf as I look at a new stack of books. The first world problems meme. A woman with her head in her hands, anguish on her face, tears streaming down. “Someone didn’t refill the Brita pitcher, now I have to wait 30 seconds for water.” “I just failed a Captcha test three times in a row so now I am a robot.” The cartoon dog sitting amongst flames saying, “This is fine.” There is no end to what have become quintessential memes, and one of my faves is the triple Spider-man meme.

It’s origins actually trace back to 1967 and the issue of Spider-Man entitled, “Double Identity.” Spider-Man is facing off against a villain who has disguised himself as *Spider-Man* and so they have a face off, pointing at each other to figure out who is the real one. There are versions of this with

three, four different Spider-Man's. Every iteration of this meme is used to have the same things point at each other and accuse the other of being the real thing, 2+2 points at 2x2 points at 2 squared. The internet is weird, and because I am a Millennial, I tend to see the world through the eyes of the internet and so as we were going through the lessons in Bible study and we read the first lesson and I said, it's like the biblical Spider-Man meme, I'm not sure anyone had any clue what I was talking about, but it is kind of the perfect description of a group of people standing around desperately trying to point the blame in someone else's direction, even though they're all woefully at fault. The only thing that's missing from this particular meme is God standing on the outskirts of the circle, shaking God's head like, "Kids, these days...they just don't know when to quit."

So, we all know this story right? God has played in the dirt and the mud and created Adam. It becomes clear that Adam needs a partner and so from one lone rib comes Eve, and all seems to be honky dory in this little corner of Eden. God gives them their marching orders for paradise living. The whole world is yours! Just don't eat from that tree! Along comes the serpent, hey, I bet God told you not to eat from that tree right? Maybe you should. Maybe you should try it out and see what happens. Maybe God was lying and just knows that it would make you like God. Go ahead eat the

proverbial apple, that would be more likely to be a pomegranate. They, and I do mean *they*, Eve *and* Adam, eat and chaos reigns. They realize they're naked, shame makes its earthly debut, and there is nothing left to do but hide so that God doesn't realize what they've done. Let's be real, a pretty gross miscalculation on their part as regards God's capabilities.

God comes into the garden and there is no one to be found. So God asks, "Where are you?" And for all the issues here, at least in this instance, Adam is honest. We heard you and were afraid because we're naked so we hid. Now, God already knows what's up, because again, it's God, but Adam and Eve are given a chance here, umm who told you that you were naked, did you perchance eat from the tree I told you not to? And just like that a meme emerges right there in the middle of paradise!

Adam emerges, fingers pointing in both directions. That woman that *you* gave me is who gave me the fruit and I ate it. Apparently, Adam doesn't quite grasp the concept of *agency*. Did you ask where the fruit came from? You were, ya know, *right there*, when the serpent offered it so you could have, I don't know, said, maybe we shouldn't do this. But sure, all God and Eve's fault. Cool cool. Well then Eve comes out, her own fingers ready and raring to point the blame. The serpent tricked me! Again, agency is not real great here. A snake gives you a piece of fruit and says it'll be

fine, clearly that's the path to take. There are fingers just flying. It's God's fault! It's Eve's fault! It's the serpent's fault! No one in that garden dares to just raise their hand and Taylor Swift this thing, "It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me." They'd much rather place the blame anywhere else, and then they're real mad when God informs them that there will be consequences to such behavior, like ya know, God told them from the beginning of all of this, but sure this is a total shock.

We don't get the whole text here, only the serpent's consequences, but we know the score, right? The serpent is told from this time on, humans and snakes aren't going to have a great relationship and snakes shall live on their bellies, eating dust. For women, congratulations, child birth is gonna hurt really bad! For men, congratulations, sweat and manual labor shall be yours! It's a hard conversation, realizing that God is uninterested in our excuses, our finger pointing, our blaming, but is in fact interested in making us confront our own hearts, minds, and souls to get to the core of who we are, what we do, and why. But here's the thing, it is kind of hard to find the grace, the hope in all of this, but it is there, it's there, because God is *interested*, and that is no small thing.

This is God we're dealing with here, so let's not pretend that God didn't know exactly what had happened in this garden from the moment

Adam and Eve heard the footsteps. God knew. God was well aware that fruit had been eaten, and this is what makes the question asked of Adam initially, all the more poignant, “Where are you?” This isn’t just a GPS question, this is a whole person question. Where are you? Where is your heart? Where is your mind right now? Where is your soul? Where is our relationship now that this thing has happened? Why do you feel the need to hide from me? What is it about the shame and the worry you are feeling that is driving you away? God wants a conversation, a holy connection. Sure, God already knows all the answers, but God wants Adam and Eve to see that God is invested, still, in what is happening to their minds and hearts, because it’s going to have an impact on their relationship.

The same goes for the second question God asks about why they’re naked. God sees that they are ashamed, vulnerable, scared, and God says, we don’t have to run away from those feelings. We can face them and own them; it doesn’t mean there aren’t going to be consequences, but none of those consequences are going to be an end of relationship or me validating and confirming your shame. At no point does God tell them, “I am so disappointed” or “You should be ashamed.” God opens up the door to conversation and says, talk to me about what you’re feeling, where you are, let’s walk through this. And to all of those questions, Adam and Eve just

stand there, in full meme regalia, because when confronted with that depth of connection and love, they kind of want to run in their other direction.

And for as much as we really want to critique and judge these two in all of their first humanness, we can't, because we do the same thing. When confronted with our own sinfulness, the things we struggle with, the things we hold onto so tightly in the vain assumption that God won't know, we are more than ready to point fingers, rather than open our hearts to direct conversation with God, because what if this is the time when God finally has had it and end the conversation? How many times when we confess our sins or face something we have done do we put caveats and reasoning behind, justifications that will make it "not so bad?" How many times do we try to hide from God which is really just hiding from ourselves and confronting the fact that we're human and we're going to make mistakes? How many times do we own up to something by simply saying, they made me do it or *you* made me this way!

And this is where it could be really easy to fall into a feeling of despair when it comes to this passage, but that's not the heart of it. The heart of it is those questions which God asks...where are you? Who told you that? The hope, scary though it may be, is that God wants to know us. Sure, God knows us, but God wants us involved in the conversation,

growing, learning, developing, thinking, drawing closer to God in the process. God wants us to see our hearts for the gifts they are, even if to get there we have to face down the not so great stuff we do sometimes. God is always seeking deeper dialogue, more intense, holy connection with us, to walk with us through the hills and valleys, guiding us and helping us when the going gets tough. It doesn't mean there won't be consequences, won't be hard times, won't be pain, but it does mean we will be seen, as sometimes scary as that is. But what a gift, to trust that we have a God who wants to know us, all of our weird, quirky foibles and our complicated messiness.

Today, God brings us the same question brought to Adam and Eve. Where are you? Where is your heart today? Your soul? Your mind? What are you struggling with? What are you grappling to understand? What are you striving to grow towards? Where have you slipped up and how can we work on it together? As you kneel before the cross this morning, receiving the free gift of grace, feel God asking, where are you? Dare to ask it, dare to answer it, not with pointed fingers, well I'm good but this person next to me is annoying the tar out of me. Dare to be honest, God I am frustrated, I'm scared, I'm hopeful, I'm worried, I'm at peace. And trust that whatever the answer is, it can be given in truth, in love, and in hope that you are seen, known, and more than anything, you are beloved. **AMEN!!!**