

## “Healing Our Brokenness”

February 22, 2026

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11

It is hard to identify a more archetypal story than this one in Genesis. It lays the foundation for virtually every story ever told or written in Western Civilization. We are bound to this story in ways that are nearly instinctive, but are certainly unconscious. It may seem a little extreme to burden this one little story with all that, but think about it. Human arrogance, human willfulness, human pride, the status of women in our society, our suspicion of “the other,” and our belief that forces outside ourselves somehow drive us to acts of destruction, all of that is encapsulated in this story.

Not only that, but our deep longing for utopia, the sense within us that something crucial has been lost to us, and the anxiety that loss causes is also expressed through this story. Have you ever lain awake at night wishing the world was different than it is? What kind of world do you want it to be? For most of us, I suspect, it’s a world less violent, less unjust, less painful. And while this story may offer an explanation for our brokenness, it does not offer us a solution.

In her excellent commentary on Genesis, Kathleen O’Conner places this story, along with others in the book, in the category of “refractions of trauma.” Genesis, as we have it today, was compiled during exile in Babylon. The trauma of exile is very close to the surface in these stories. This one offers an explanation, not just of the human condition generally, but of the exiles in particular. They brought it on themselves through their own arrogance and disobedience. That sounds pretty harsh to modern ears, but trauma studies show that finding an explanation for senseless trauma is often the only way for survivors to move forward. This story of the loss of paradise through the actions of the first humans parallels the experience of the loss of Jerusalem.

There are many other ways to interpret this story. I’ve chosen not to think of it literally. We know too much about evolutionary biology, geology and archeology to accept it as literal. But I do believe it’s true. I like the saying of the Indigenous storyteller Black Elk, who would often start his stories with, “I don’t know if these things happened in the way they’re told, but I do know this story is true.” When it comes to the story of the loss of paradise, the truth of it is, we are fallen.

We are fallen. There’s no denying that. And there’s no denying we have the capacity for redemption. When Jesus enters the wilderness and starves himself for so long, to the point he’s too weak even to stand, he’s confronted with the temptation to call it all off. Whether it’s through self-reliance or spectacle or power, he’s tempted to remove himself from our condition. Instead he chooses to stay hungry, to remain obscure, to live with weakness; in a word, to be like us. He embraces our brokenness.

That may be the central message of Jesus’ life in relation to us. He’s not out to conquer or coerce the world. The Church has used the imagery of Jesus as the victorious conqueror to justify its own coercion of people, but Jesus never presents himself that way. He refuses to be a warrior

king who defeats our enemies through violence. Instead, he enters our fallenness, our brokenness, and invites us to embrace our condition and stop denying it. Healing our brokenness begins with our admission that we are fallen.

In his book *Falling Upward*, Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and spiritual writer, describes what he calls the “two halves” of life. In the first half of life we spend our time establishing a foundation. We learn all the rules; we do what’s needed to build careers and families; we essentially construct our own little paradise, our little garden, in the world. And we need to do that. We need to feel settled and planted. But into every paradise comes trouble. We lose someone we love; our job stops being fulfilling; we receive a diagnosis that crushes our future. In short, we fall.

It’s not a moral failing, not always. It’s just the realities of life. Life can break us. Things don’t go our way not because we’re bad but because we’re human. When we hit that wall, when the foundations we’ve built start to crumble, we can begin entering the second half of life. The second half of life is the movement out of the depths of our fallenness toward healing. We begin defining our lives in a new way. We realize that relationships are more important than career, for instance.

We start to value the time we have with the people we love because we discover that life is fleeting. We examine our accomplishments and realize the hollowness of only living for advancement up some corporate ladder. Think of the Dickens story *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge is taken to his past, present and future and is healed of his selfishness and greed.

Entering that second half of life is essential for spiritual growth. But we can only get there by falling. When the couple in the garden eat the forbidden fruit and their eyes are opened, it’s not a tragedy, it’s liberation. To be fully human we have to leave the garden. They are driven out and it’s painful but it’s the only way they can truly live. And by entering the second half of life, their brokenness can be healed. That doesn’t mean they’ll be the way they were, they can’t go back, none of us can. But we can have a new life, a deeper, more meaningful life; one that values compassion because we’ve experienced grace.

When Jesus chooses to take on our brokenness rather than give in to the Devil’s offers, he doesn’t take it on so we don’t have to. He enters our brokenness to show us how. He walks with us through our brokenness so we can be healed. We can live with joy in spite of loss and sadness; we can live with compassion and not be resentful or bitter. Even though we’re fallen, we aren’t lost; we’re loved and we can be redeemed. Jesus chooses us over himself, to walk with us on the path of healing.

In these days of Lent, you are invited to join him on this path. Where are you broken? What needs healing in your life? Let him find you in your despair or anger, sadness or shame and lead you out to find hope and healing for your souls.

Amen