

☐ *Before the Session*

Facilitator: In advance of the session

- Review today's scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the Bible Background Video ready to view.
- Have any selected video or music clips ready to show
- Encourage your group to listen to the podcast for this session (Share the link via email or social media)

☐ *A Perfect World*

Before showing the video clip, introduce it by saying something like this: "People have long dreamed of a utopia. The movie "The Truman Show" tells the story of Truman, who was raised from infancy in a completely controlled environment where all the people were actors, and his life was shown as a popular TV show. As the story unfolds, Truman begins to realize that the world he knows is a created setting. Even though it is in many ways idyllic — it is safe, pleasant, and Truman's needs are met — Truman begins to make efforts to escape. Some have seen the film as a version of the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived in a safe and idyllic environment, and yet they choose to move beyond it.

Show the Truman show clip

After viewing the clip, ask questions like these:

- Why do you think Truman wanted to leave the world they had created for him?
- Would you like to trade places with Truman and live in a pleasant yet controlled world? Why or why not?

☐ *The Garden of Eden*

Read Genesis 3:1-21.

View the Bible Background Video.

Ask questions like these:

- How is this passage similar or different from "The Truman Show" movie plot?
- What about the Garden of Eden sounds good? What about it sounds unappealing, if anything?
- Why do you think God placed the two trees in the garden, especially if Adam and Eve were to avoid one of them?
- In the podcast for this session, Bert Montgomery recalls the observations of a Rabbi. The Rabbi said that Adam and Eve were never meant to stay in the garden, and that to mature, they needed to leave its innocence (eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). How do you feel about this notion?

□ *The Freedom to Choose*

Before showing the movie clip, offer an introduction similar to this: “In the science fiction film, *The Matrix*, a young programmer named Neo discovers that the world he believes is real is merely an illusion created to keep humanity enslaved. Early in the movie, he is given the choice between two pills. One will allow him to forget his knowledge of the illusion, and the other pill will allow him to escape it, even though the real world is far less pleasant.”

Show the clip from the movie: *The Matrix*.

Then lead a brief discussion using questions like these:

- What choices did Neo have to make in this clip? Why do you think he chose the red pill?
- We have the ability to make choices about our lives. Is the freedom to choose a gift or a burden?
- Is the freedom to choose necessary for us to mature? How do we help children learn how to make good choices?
- How does the amount of knowledge we have affect our ability to make choices?
- What are the dangers of our ability to make choices?
- What do we learn from this passage about how God makes choices? What other choices might God have made?
- Did God intend for us to have the freedom to choose? Why or why not?

□ *Choosing God's Way*

Say something like this: “Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus put humanity on a path of freedom, but also a journey that makes us subject to the consequences of our choices (and others' choices).”

Ask questions like these:

How does God expect us to use our freedom of choice?

Do we ever have enough knowledge or wisdom to make the best choices? How do we move forward knowing of these limits?

Close with a prayer thanking God for the freedom to choose, and asking for humility and wisdom as we seek to make wise choices that are pleasing to God.

□ *or, if you have the time, use this alternate closing activity*

Say something like this: “The tough decisions and the various temptations faced by people who have to make such decisions are extremely common elements in our culture. Just to prove the point, let's name some of our favorites (for example, Luke Skywalker's choice to either complete his training or fly to the Cloud City to rescue his friends in *The Empire Strikes Back*; or the choice of the Grail in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?> Give the group a little time to name a few movie scenes and continue by asking: - We tend to look at temptation as a bad thing, or an obstacle to be overcome, but in what ways might we also be tempted to do good things? - How can we best be agents for helping people choose well, while not going overboard and taking away their free will? - Where are some places in our lives that we might want to be supplying some “nudges” to help people be their best? - How we might we, as people of faith, better do this for our society? Close with a prayer for help in better discernment and resistance to temptation in life's hard choices, and for the ability to be a light, rather than a stumbling block, for others who struggle.