

Tim Madigan*

Book One

***The First Love Story: Why Adam and Eve Still Matter*
by Bruce Feiler**

Penguin Press, 2017

ISBN: 9781594206818

Best known for *Walking the Bible*, Bruce Feiler often combines travel and history with his writings surrounding religion. *The First Love Story* is no different. Inspired from a visit with his young daughters to the Sistine Chapel where one of his daughters does not see herself, only men, in the ceiling and the other spotted Eve under God's arm. Feiler decided to look at the story of Adam and Eve, and how our views of relationships, and femininity descended from Genesis.

The story is steeped in Western civilization, and Feiler reviews much of its art through a Genesis lens. Feiler states Michelangelo placed Eve front and center of the Catholic Church in his masterpiece. Well known

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26590/madang..33.202006.82>

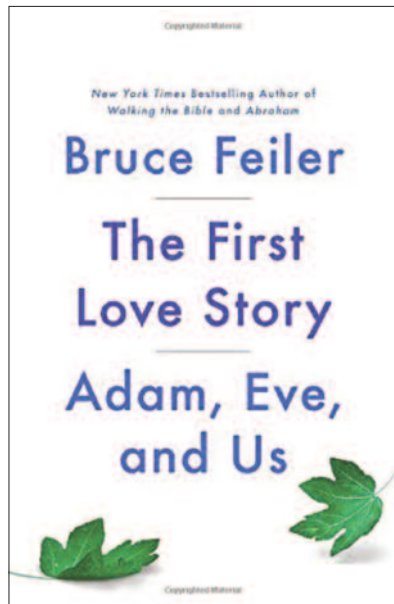
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works, from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* deal with the pain of being in love, inspired by Adam and Eve. Ernest Hemingway was very influenced by the story as well, writing of gender identity and commitment.

Feiler aims to bring about a change from "original sin" to simply a story of origins. Much has been written regarding this story being about the beginnings of civilization, of humankind moving from hunters and gatherers to

agriculture, and Feiler touches on this, too. But he sees this more of a story of two people becoming a couple, of learning to love each other. From the excitement Adam first feels when he first meets Eve, to a more mature love as they face their hardships together, from being cast out of Eden to losing both sons as Cain slews Abel. They manage to stick together through it all. Adam and Eve's sexual encounters bring them closer together, and not farther apart. Adam and Eve is a tale focusing on the horizontal relationship, of man to woman instead of the vertical relationship of man to God.

Feiler sees Adam and Eve seeking the balance between interdependence and autonomy. How to be one as spouses while each still maintains their unique identity. Feiler sees this Genesis story as the origins of romantic love. Adam and Eve is a story about humankind's rela-



tionship with God, but also our relationship with one another. Feiler compares the biblical story to other Mesopotamian stories that don't focus on the individual. Adam and Eve have names, personalities and issues where their contemporaries in other origin stories do not. Feiler asks us to focus on Genesis 1:26 where, ungendered humans are created simultaneously, and not the later story where Adam is created first.

Written pre-COVID-19, Feiler claims "Our biggest threat as individuals is feeling left out, isolated, fearful, alone; our biggest threat as a society is succumbing to similar forces of disunion, disharmony, fear, hate." Later, he cites current social science work including *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam and *Alone Together* by Sherry Turkle decrying the isolation of modern society before social distancing.

This need for love and connection—both from God, and from humankind—is what keeps this story powerful and relevant today.

Book Two

***Buddha's Office: The Ancient Art of Waking up While Working Well* by Dan Zigmond**

Running Press 2019

ISBN: 9780762494583

"Buddha never worked a day in his life." Zigmond begins, setting



him up as an unlikely mentor to the work-world, where high-stress jobs bleed into weekends and evenings, leaving even less time for family and other activities than ever before. But dealing with the adversity of work is vital to our well-being, and the teachings of Buddha give us a path to working well. Buddha even called an honest occupation the highest blessing and part of a fulfilling life.

The first part of the book provides a brief overview of Buddha's life and is a good introduction to his basic tenets. Going from extreme pleasure without taking responsibility, to a life of misery and self-martyrdom before finding the middle path and the Four Noble Truths. Life is stressful, but suffering is optional.

The remaining parts of the book are dedicated to creating a healthy, mindful career. For instance, seeing the world with a beginner's mind. Institutional knowledge and expertise are important, but freeing up the mind, coming in with a blank slate allows for a new perspective which can benefit both the organization and the employee. Zigmond finds the opposite of wisdom is arrogance, and not ignorance. The chapter "Buddha on the Bus" discusses the importance of physical activity, and how one survey found workers sitting 62% of the day, leading to health problems. Physical exercise improves mental health as

well as physical, and don't forget breaks! Resting the brain allows for more creativity.

Typical office dilemmas are addressed. Learning the right way to tell the truth, for example. Instead of avoiding conflict, often a little truth in the office allows people to talk about the issue. Buddha recommends asking yourself the following questions first: Is it helpful? Is now the right time? And is it kind? Another nugget that stood out on fulfilling work comes from a study done by the Mayo Clinic. Doctors who spend at least 20% of their worktime on the aspects of the job they love have a much lower level of burnout. In practical terms, this means about 90 minutes out of an 8 hour work day.

Separating one's identity from the job, being mindfully ambitious, and learning when to look for another job are all other areas of career development covered in this concise introduction to Buddhism.