

*New York Times Bestselling Author of
Walking the Bible and Abraham*

Bruce Feiler

**The First
Love Story**

**Adam, Eve,
and Us**



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An Interview with Bruce Feiler

New York Times Bestselling Author of *The First Love Story: Adam, Eve, and Us*



What inspired you to write this book?

The conversation around my dinner table! I live surrounded by women. I have adolescent daughters. I have a working wife. And like everyone else, I'm just terribly confused about what are the rules for how men and women relate to each other these days. I've spent the last decade trying to figure this out – in my *New York Times* column, in my last two books, etc. I've basically been asking the questions: How do modern families work best, and what are the guidelines for successful relationships?

Then, about four years ago, we were on a trip to Rome and I had the brilliant idea to take my sleep-deprived daughters to the Vatican. See some art! It didn't go well. "My feet hurt! This is booooring!" Finally we made it to the Sistine Chapel. "Look up!" I said. One of my girls glanced at the image of Adam and God and said, "Why is there only a man?" Then her sister pointed out something I'd never seen before. "Is that Eve under God's arm?"

And that's when it hit me. Since antiquity, one story has stood at the center of every conversation about men and women. One couple has been the battleground for human relationships and sexual identity. That couple is Adam and Eve. If I wanted to understand how we got here and where we're going, I had to understand then. Specifically I wanted to know: What can history's first couple teach us about relationships today? Can they be the role models we're looking for?

But no one thinks of them as a love story. Were you worried about that?

No one thinks of them at all! Adam and Eve are the basically forgotten patriarch and matriarch of the Bible. People either dismiss them as fairy tales – they're made up; we've moved on. Or people dump on them for ruining life for the rest of us. Adam and Eve (but mostly Eve) have been almost universally blamed for being selfish, lustful, disgraceful, and for single-handedly bringing shame, sin, even death into the world. It's the biggest character assassination in the history of the world. And it's a complete shame. If you go back and look at the story—and look at how everyone from Michelangelo to John Milton to Mary Shelly in *Frankenstein* to Mark Twain to Mae West looked at the story – what you discover is that the story is sending an entirely different message. It's about connection, commitment, resilience, together. It's about love.



Wait, Frankenstein is about Adam and Eve?

Yes, who knew? I certainly didn't. In the story, Dr. Frankenstein is God; he creates the monster, that's Adam. And the monster is terribly lonely. He embodies that amazing line in Genesis that's the theme of the entire story: "It's not right for humans to be alone." The monster even learns to speak by reading *Paradise Lost*, which is the first major work to depict Adam and Eve in love. So the monster goes to Frankenstein and says, "I'm Adam! Make me an Eve."

You visit some pretty amazing places in this book: The Garden of Eden in Iraq, Jerusalem, the Galapagos. How did you decide where to travel and what were the most startling things you learned in those places?

Unlike *Walking the Bible*, where I climbed Mount Ararat looking for Noah's Ark, crossed the Red Sea, and climbed Mount Sinai, there aren't that many places where Adam and Eve actually walked. So with

this book I made a different decision: I would visit places where writers, artists, political leaders, and pioneering women grappled with the story. My favorites were 1) Michelangelo, of course. Being in the Sistine Chapel alone was one of the great experiences of my life. 2) John Milton's home, where he wrote *Paradise Lost* totally blind and made Adam and Eve into a love story. 3) Seneca Falls, NY. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who started the women's movement with Susan B. Anthony, was almost lost to history because she defended Eve and was ousted from community. This is an amazing story, almost entirely unknown, and will make anyone furious with the way Eve (and her defenders) have been treated over the years.

That brings up an interesting question: You mention your daughters and your wife. Do you think history's misrepresentations of Eve have affected the way the women in your life see themselves?

Absolutely. The whole idea that women are secondary was first justified by claiming (falsely) that Eve is created from Adam's rib. The whole idea that sexuality is dirty was first justified by claiming (falsely) that having sex got Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden. The whole idea that women should serve men was first justified by claiming (falsely) that that was Eve's punishment from God. We all live under the shadow of those readings even if we don't realize it.

But here's what's interesting—and to me, inspiring—about what I learned. Nothing has been more aggressively, even violently, discriminatory against women than organized religion. Now that religion has become voluntary in Western society, who could blame women for running the other way. Instead, women are consistently more religious than men, are more involved in spiritual activities, and take greater responsibility for passing on values to their children. And they've done this just in the last 30 years or so – starting with something that seemed unimaginable: reclaiming Eve as a hero, an icon for women everywhere. This is my favorite part of *The First Love Story* and what I most want to tell my daughters: You get to write your own story, just as the first woman did.

My last question is, How did working on this book affect your own faith?

It made me realize there's promised love in the Bible as well as promised land. We think of the Bible as being about commandments, about ways of living your life, about land. But we don't think of it as being about interpersonal love – and we certainly don't think of Adam and Eve in this way. For me, recognizing that the Bible opens the story of humankind with a story of togetherness, connection, and sticking with each other through difficult times, like getting kicked out of Eden and losing your child, was really eye-opening and comforting. The story's message is: The only thing strong enough to counter the pain of life is the reward of living life with another person. To me that makes the story more relevant to what I'm struggling with on a daily basis.

So how did this affect my own life: It taught me that the one of the most valuable lessons that I struggle with all the time – how do I hold my own family together in the face of busyness, exhaustion, 24/7 social media, even my own bumbling – is to make it a priority. My phone didn't teach me that message. The oldest love story of all taught me that lesson. And for that, I'm very grateful to Adam and Eve, and willing to move them from the back of my mind where they were forgotten to the tip of my tongue where they can keep me grounded every day.

For more information, discussion guides, and to contact Bruce directly please visit brucefeiler.com



Discussion Questions



1. Which aspects of Adam and Eve's relationship would you want to emulate in your current relationships, both romantic and not? Which aspects do you not admire?
2. On page 110, Feiler writes, "...look closely at the original story, what you find is a couple whose age, maturity, and locale are left purposefully vague, perhaps to increase their universality, who are struggling to figure out what it means to be live alongside each other." How does this reworking of Adam and Eve effect the way you examine your own relationships?
3. Chapter Four ends with Feiler's illustration of Tevye and Golde from "Fiddler on the Roof," as a couple whose twenty-five years of "chore-sharing" and mutual care-taking adds up to the kind of romantic love demonstrated by the first couple. Can that kind of relationship truly be duplicated in today's non-traditional, egalitarian marriages where each individual has his/her own goals and ambitions?
4. The question of time is often problematic with Adam and Eve- How old were they? How long were they actually in the garden? Do you think having answers to these questions would drastically change your view of the story?
5. What did the chapter "Family Affair" on Cain and Abel teach you about both parenting and loss?
6. Which chapter spoke the most to you? Which chapter did you grapple the most with?
7. Do you view Eve and her actions as feminist? Why or why not?
8. Review the 6 "C's" in the "Afterlife" Conclusion—Covenant, Connectedness, Counterbalance, Constancy, Care, Co-narration. Which of these do you value the most in your romantic relationships?
9. How do you think the story and Adam and Eve should be approached when explained to children? Did this book make you rethink that?
10. Bruce Feiler opens his book with a quote from Thomas Merton: "Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone—we find it with another." Has this been true in your life? Who in your life has helped you to find meaning?
11. Do the centuries of interpretations of Eve and her actions impact how women are viewed now?
12. Historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich famously wrote that "Well-behaved women seldom make history." By writing this she was not only celebrating the contributions of rebellious women, but lamenting that the contributions of so many other women have been overlooked. Do you think Eve needed to eat the fruit in the Garden of Eden in order to make history? And what are some things that women have done in your life that have been overlooked?
13. In the Conclusion, Bruce Feiler describes the ways in which "lovers create a new story—a shared story—of their life together." How has a loved one changed the way you tell the story of your life? Do you ever find yourself sharing your own invented language with a significant other?
14. Are there ways in which Adam and Eve's story might provide guidance for not just our personal relationships but our society at large? What could our leaders learn from their story?
15. Did this book change or affect the way you approach your faith?



Further Reading



The Art of Loving

Erich Fromm's classic, first published in 1956, has sold over six million copies, and with good reason. A rich, textured look at how love can release our greatest potential.

Loneliness

The masterwork by University of Chicago neuroscientist John Cacioppo that unveils pioneering research on the startling effect of loneliness on modern life.

Adam, Eve, and the Serpent

Elaine Pagel's extraordinary study of the impact of the Adam and Eve story on early Christianity, from Jesus to Augustine.

Les Miserables

At more than 1200 pages, Victor Hugo's novel is even more extensive and romantic than the musical, but the revelation is how prevalent Adam and Eve references are throughout the story. Same with Jane Eyre.

Why We Love

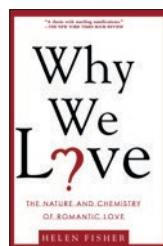
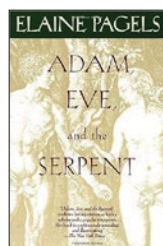
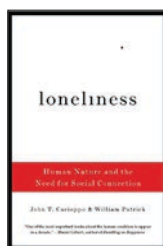
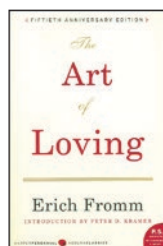
Anthropologist Helen Fisher's updated road map of the phenomenon of love from its origins in the brain to how our bodies react.

On Love

The novel that made pop philosopher Alain de Botton famous is still charming, electric, and unforgettable 25 years after it was first published.

About Love

My favorite one-volume exploration of the literature and philosophy of romantic love from Plato to Freud and beyond by polyglot thinker Robert Solomon.



FORBIDDEN FRUIT CRISP

With Apples, Figs, and Pomegranates

Recipe Created by Tybee and Eden Feiler • March 2017



INGREDIENTS

Filling:

5 Gala apples, peeled and sliced
1 container pomegranate seeds
1 bag/container dried mission figs, halved
1 tbs all-purpose flour
1/3 cup honey
1 tbs cinnamon

Topping:

Scant 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 cup turbinado sugar
1 tbs fresh lemon zest
1 1/2 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp salt
1 cup toasted pecans
10 tbs cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

Sauce:

1 tbs grated lemon zest
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice, plus more as needed
1/4 cup water
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)
3 cups confectioners' sugar, plus more as needed

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and grease a 9x12 baking dish.

Prepare topping:

In a food processor, pulse flour, turbinado sugar, lemon zest, nutmeg, and salt until well combined. Add pecans and pulse until pecans just start to break apart, 2 to 3 pulses. Some whole pecans should still be visible. Add butter and pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal with pea-sized chunks. Transfer to a bowl and chill until ready to use.

Make the filling:

Combine apples, pomegranates and figs in a large bowl. Stir in flour, honey and cinnamon and mix until well combined. Pour the filling into the baking dish and spread evenly. Coat completely with the topping. Sprinkle more cinnamon on top. Bake for 60 minutes.

For the sauce: Combine all ingredients in small bowl and beat until combined and smooth. It should be about the consistency of thick maple syrup- just

pourable. Adjust the consistency by adding a little more juice or powdered sugar. Store covered in fridge until ready to use.

Let cool in the pan and top with the sauce. Enjoy!

