

Find Your Fit: The Fig Leaves of Genesis
(#1 in the *Paradise to Paradise* series)

*They sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves . . .
And the LORD God made garments of skins
for the man and for his wife, and he clothed them.*
(Genesis 3:7, 21)

A sermon by Siegfried S. Johnson on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, **January 14, 2018**
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We created this image to advertise my Epiphany series which we launch this morning, *Paradise to Paradise: The Human Quest for the Perfect Fit*. The fig leaf image is intended to take us from Eden to Heaven, from the green of the Fig Leaves of Adam and Eve in the garden to the glistening white of the wedding garments of the bride in heaven. These next five Sundays will take us through the green of Epiphany to the white of Transfiguration Sunday, and we'll pave the path with articles of clothing in the bible which we will "*Try on for Size*."

Being in a couple of airports yesterday I walked through several body scanners, a reality in our post 9-11 world. The term body scanner leads us to think of long TSA lines at airport security checkpoints, advanced imaging technology which, at least at first, caused a bit of a stir by those who felt their modesty unacceptably comprised by the scanner's invasion of privacy.

I became interested in body scanner technology long prior to 9/11, in 1993 while writing a series for the quarterly journal *Dynamic Preaching*. While it had nothing to do with long lines at airports, I did wonder about a potentially uncomfortable invasion of privacy. I was writing about retail giants L. L. Bean, Lands' End, and J. C. Penney, which that year combined to test market *Body Scanner* technology, an in-store scanning of one's body for such precise measurements that might eliminate poor fits the purchase of clothing. The technology didn't catch on in malls

anything like that article predicted twenty-five years ago, but I've checked recently and with further technological development it seems poised to make a comeback.

A leading company involved with this technology is *Bodymetrics*, touting their 3D body mapping technology as the path to the Perfect Fit. Calling it a study in *Me-ality*, their website predicts it will revolutionize online sales. In fact, *Bodymetrics* claims to be responsible for driving up the sale of denim jeans by 20% at Selfridges of London, a luxury chain in Great Britain. To learn more, check out this video from the *Bodymetrics* website from Bloomingdale's at Palo Alto.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI_G6APh8OQ

From the *Bodymetrics* website: “(Our) body scanner uses eight PrimeSense™ 3D sensors to map the body’s measurements and shape. *Bodymetrics* revolutionizes the way consumers buy clothes through the virtual ‘try on’ of outfits . . . The scanner quickly and accurately calculates 100 measurements. Body-shape analytics are then used to find garments that best suit the customer’s unique shape and size . . . We believe soon most retailers will install body scanners and allow customers to access their *Bodymetrics* account online and through their phones. You will soon be able to shop for garments that fit your size, shape and style, and also share these experiences with your friends on Facebook.”

When twenty-five years ago I began to write about the human quest for the perfect fit, body scanner technology was much more primitive, invasive in ways even TSA agents might find embarrassing. In that now-antiquated technology the customer would actually slip into a body-suit which would conform to your shape, wrapping and gripping you like an electronic girdle, a stretchable, spandex-like fig leaf wrap laden with sensors to measure you precisely, three-dimensionally, head-to-toe. Presto! In a few moments your image pops up on a computer screen, transforming you into a virtual reality paper doll.

How uncomfortable! You know those vacuum-packed items in the grocery stores? I could just imagine myself shrink-wrapped into a bumpy, wrinkled, airtight package. Still, there's no denying the idea has promise. Why? Because of its potential to eliminate the risk of buying poorly fitted clothing. To be sure, all the R & D for this idea was been accomplished in the name of the very quest -- an intensely philosophical and ultimately spiritual quest -- we are considering, *Our Human Quest for the Perfect Fit*.

Before we dive into philosophy and theology let's take a quick trip back to the mall. Now that I've got you shrink-wrapped, reducing you to a computerized mannequin with flawless measurements, it's time to browse. See a pair of jeans that interests you? All you need do is move the mouse and click for the article of clothing to be instantly superimposed on your mannequin-ized image. Quick. Precise. Your measurements are matched exactly to your body metrics because the scanner “*wrapped around*” you in a state-of-the-art fig leaf fit.

Ladies, imagine how this might transform your shopping experience. Consider, for example, its potential to reduce domestic discomfort. I don't know about your husbands, so I'll speak in the first person about an affliction I suffer in the mall, a male shopping disorder which may be called, rapid-onset fatigue. A man's pleasant demeanor can suddenly and without warning or

explanation evaporate on trips to the mall. He may be able to mow and trim six acres before rushing off to play 18 holes. Yet, standing for 18 minutes among six aisles of fresh smelling clothing can prove too exhausting. The symptoms of rapid-onset Fatigue are easily recognized, an almost instantaneous elongation of the face and eyes, as if drained of energy. I might have been relaxed, smiling, and jovial only minutes prior to entering the mall, absolutely symptom free during my meal at the food court. Yet suddenly, as if some spell of black magic had been cast, all that vanishes. Sherry may happily emerge from a rack of clothing with what she imagines the perfect fit to see a pitiful human form staggering out to the concourse to seek a bench, slumping into a lifeless protoplasmic blob devoid of energy.



Well, no more! *Body scanner* technology has the potential to eliminate such sad shopping scenes. Shopping is done at the computer terminal as you amuse yourself by superimposing as many seasonal ensembles as you wish, trying on dozens of items in the time it once took for a single trip to the dressing room. Simply add to your virtual cart the item you've selected, push the enter key and "Visa or Mastercard?" is the only choice left to make.

Sound appealing? Ready to go to the mall to try it out? No? Me, either. Call me old-fashioned, but I don't think I'm ready to shop by computerized imaging. Easy? Yes. Quick? To be sure. Perfect fit? Won't debate it. Still, as fun as Jane and George Jetson were on Saturday mornings, I don't think we want this, and it's not just the fear of how we might look in shrink-wrap. It's more than that. Shopping like this, something vital for human experience is missing. Why does perfect fit technology have such slight appeal? Because we reserve the right, we cherish the right, to choose wrongly. We insist on the privilege to create our own regrets. We accept that life is not always a perfect fit, and it is precisely the elusiveness of our *Quest for the Perfect Fit* which fashions the very stories of our Becoming.

I love how Erma Bombeck, long before the *Me-ality* of *Body Scanners*, playfully described the elusive search for the Perfect Fit.

I blame blue jean commercials for the discontent of the world today. You get up in the morning and you don't feel too bad about yourself. Then you see a model on television, flat on her back, wriggling into a pair of jeans inch by inch. Don't ask how she stands up. We see her looking in a mirror at her reflection. The jeans fit her like a fungus and she says immodestly, 'Yes!' I know people who have dedicated their entire lives to finding a pair of jeans that fit their bodies. If the garment fits the hips, there's a gap in the waistband. If the waistband fits, you

can't get it zipped. If the waist and the hips fit, you can't get your legs in them. You say to yourself, 'What's wrong with me when I live in a country paved with jeans, and there isn't one single pair that fits my body?'”

The reason we enjoy this kind of writing is that we relate well to poor fits, both in trying on jeans and, more importantly, trying on life. A cartoon poked a bit of fun at internet compatibility sites. The stunned man, staring at a newly received letter, turns to inform his wife, *“It turns out there was a computer error dear. We weren't made for each other after all!”*

Suppose a digitally-certified answer were possible for every important decision we are called to make. Guaranteed. No regrets. Laser accuracy in choosing everything from your next pair of jeans to the perfect spouse. Sorry, not interested. Because, in truth, the Perfect Fit, however precisely engineered, is not what we are all about. It's the pursuit of the Perfect Fit we crave so much. God created us for the quest and that's what thrills us. We accept risk in our decisions, cherishing the liberty to make choices, even if those choices could result in regrets. As Sinatra sang, *“Regrets, I've had a few. But then again, too few to mention.”* Why too few to mention? Because our regrets are evidence of our cherished freedom to choose, even to choose wrongly. *“Let the record show, I took the blows, and did it my way.”*

Lucy once asked, *“Charlie Brown, do you have any regrets?”* Snoopy overheard the question and thought, *“I regret the bites I should have bitten.”* That line, I think, captures the very essence of the human spirit.

The story of the Garden of Eden supplies us with a foundational text for our Judeo-Christian understanding of ourselves in relation to God, the ultimate *Me-ality*. There we discover that “wrap around” technology had its genesis in Genesis! Those hastily improvised, crudely stitched loincloths of fig leaves represented the earliest stage of *wrap around* technology. I mean that literally. “Loincloths” is the translation of the Hebrew *hagorot*, meaning “to gird,” “to surround.” In modern Hebrew *hagorot* means *belts*. There's a belt shop on King George Street in the Old City of Jerusalem that will custom fit your belt on the spot. A sign at the entrance advertises their belt-making with Genesis 3:7, *“they sewed fig leaves together and made hagorot (belts).”*



(This third century fresco of Adam and Eve clothed with fig leaves is located in the Catacomb of St. Peter and St. Marcellinus in Rome.)

To Adam and Eve the bible credits the birth of the clothing industry, earth-tone garments fulfilling dual function of both under- and outer- wear. Granted, the industry was primitive, with not much in the way of savoir faire. Our first parents' chief concern, after all, was function, not style. It didn't take long, though, for humans to look beyond mere function to the finer distinctions. At some point Eve and her children determined, needle and thread in hand, to weave their way beyond modesty, all the way to elegance. They looked at their wrap of leaves and realized they were shopping at a discount store. They wanted more, which is why from the first stitch in that fig leaf wrap the exquisite tastes of Sax Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus was an inevitable evolution of the textile industry.

This passage, by the way, is the bible's first record of humans using implements to better their lives. *Sewing* implies the use of some sort of instrument, needle and thread. Some have suggested that the Hebrew word *taphar*, "to sew," is not to be taken at face value. The word, they suggest, should be understood as "to tie," something accomplished by hand, without the aid of a technological device. In my opinion this is an unwarranted elevation of assumption over text, violating the plain meaning of the verb which, in its three other biblical uses, unambiguously means "to sew" (as, e.g., Ecclesiastes 3:7, "a time to tear, and a time to sew").

Archaeology has amply demonstrated that the needle was one of the earliest and most useful inventions of humankind. Long before the use of metals, needles crafted from thorns, flint, bone, and ivory were in common use, and have been discovered at numerous sites dating many thousands of years before the birth of Christ. It should not, then, come as a surprise that clothing is the first industry we learn about in the bible requiring the use of rudimentary technology, the tools of which are still in common in our homes today. Fact is, the little emergency sewing kit you take with you on trips is not fundamentally different than that described in the Genesis text. This incredible longevity is due to the fact that the needle is an invention so simple in design, so supremely capable of fulfilling its function, that it has survived the passing of millennia. (Here is a set of bone needles from the Cave of Courbet near Toulouse, France, over 13,000 years old.)



Engineers use the term "elegance" to describe blueprint simplicity. These first fig leaf wraps were "Simply Elegant." And yet, while sewing is featured in the Genesis story, the philosophical and spiritual underpinning of the first paradise is that as human persons we recognize a lack, a need for covering. Described here as our nakedness before God, this lack moves human persons to seek acceptable "stand-before-God" attire. It's a universal question asked throughout the ages, "When I stand before God, what shall I wear?"

Just as certainly as the tools of the ancient art of sewing are yet common in our homes today, the story of Eden's paradise, a paradise now lost, reminds us that humanity shares a common spiritual desire to be adequately clothed in God's sight. This shopping spree of the spirit is both a very ancient and very modern enterprise.

This universal craving of humanity emerges from the shared recognition that we are called to be More than we find ourselves to be. Our knowing of this lack seems universal for homo-sapiens. If the *Me-ality* of *Bodymetrics* in the mall seeks to gain the Perfect Fit in clothing, the *Me-ality* of *Spiritmetrics* through the history of religion and philosophy has sought the dream of perfection in our standing before God. Theologians and philosophers and wave after wave of poets and artists and mystics, along with droves of many more everyday folk than we can possibly imagine, have all sought this Something More, knowing that our dress is not yet suitable to our status as beloved children of God, knowing ourselves created for More.

This More that is part of our universal intuition exists not only as a misty utopia at the end of our quest, but we feel ourselves at moments to have glimpsed it, to have experienced it, to have felt its presence. This series will end on Transfiguration Sunday as Peter, James, and John join Jesus on the mountain and see him transfigured, briefly glimpsing the shining brilliance of the garments of Christ. So also, I think, we have moments of shining when we glimpse the Something More for which we were created, Paradise Lost.

This series will end in Revelation 19 with the genuinely Perfect Fit – the Wedding Gown of the church as the bride of Christ at what John calls, the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

“Blessed are those who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.” I hope you will hear this series as your invitation to attend. There, we will be clothed with finer garments.

Even in Eden God seems not to have been impressed with our first parents’ efforts, fashioning instead a new and improved line. *“And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and he clothed them.”* The Creator engineered a better covering than the flimsy wrap around garment. Isn’t that the heart of the Good News? He. Clothed. Them. That’s *“Simply Elegant.”*

“He has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me with a robe of righteousness.” (Isaiah 61:10).



*When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne!*