

HIS STORY

God created everything.

The original audience of the Book of Genesis was the ancient Israelites on their way to the promised land. They would not have asked some of the questions that pique our interest, such as the age of the earth or the science behind the creation. So what, then, was the original purpose for the creation account in Genesis?

The Israelites would have wrestled with questions such as: *Is our God the real God? Is He the best God? Is He the most powerful God?* Having lived so long among the gods of the Egyptians and those of other foreign nations, the Israelites struggled to believe that their God was the God.

To remedy such wandering hearts, God wrote Genesis 1:1 to help His people understand that the God of their bedtime stories—the God of their fathers—was the very same God who created the world. The God of Israel, not the gods of the Canaanites or the Philistines, was the Creator of everything. “For the Lord is great and is highly praised; He is feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:4-5).

God created everything good

The next critical point from the creation account is that God created everything good. Starting in verse 3 and going all the way through verse 25, God declares that each part of His creation is good.

Good. What does that mean? Why does God call each step of His creation good?

► **Is it morally good?**

► **Is it beautiful and pleasant to the eyes?**

► **Is it usable?**

The purpose and design of creation is to declare God’s glory and proclaim the work of His hands (Ps. 19:1) and to reveal things about God that are invisible to us, such as His eternal power and divine nature (Rom. 1:20). Because of creation, we can clearly see and understand these things.

It is quite stunning that we get to see the God of this universe begin the good work of revealing Himself. He reveals Himself in His creation, allowing humanity to know things about the Creator just by looking at creation—much like an artist leaves fingerprints on a work of art.

Essential Doctrines

Creation Out of Nothing: *The Bible requires us to believe that God created the universe—everything both visible and invisible—out of nothing (sometimes said, “creation ex nihilo”). This means that before God created anything, nothing else existed except God Himself. Nothing in creation is eternal; every created thing has a beginning.*

The Goodness of Creation: *In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **When have you experienced the goodness of God's creation? What was your response in that moment?**
- ▶ **Why do you think people are astounded when they see places like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon? What do these experiences tell you about God?**
- ▶ **How are these created things good (moral, beautiful, usable)?**
- ▶ **Why is belief in creation important? What are the implications if God didn't create?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

From the very beginning, we see that God created everything. This means, among other things, that the entire cosmos is in His hands. It's all in His hands. Even in its broken state, He is in control of everything.

- ▶ **How does knowledge of God's sovereignty over all creation influence the way you think about your circumstances?**
- ▶ **Why should belief in the sovereignty of God change the way we handle stress and anxiety?**

Heart

Creation, though corrupted because of sin, was created good. This means that sunsets, waterfalls, stars, mountains, oceans, plants, animals, food, relationships, and a billion other things were all created good for both God's glory and our enjoyment.

- ▶ **In light of this truth, how should we feel toward creation in general? What are some parts of creation you particularly enjoy?**
- ▶ **Is it possible for our hearts to idolize parts of creation? If so, how? In what ways can we avoid this happening to us?**

Hands

Making much of Jesus means that we not merely shine God's glory to those around us with our actions, but with our words as well. No matter how many "good" actions people witness from us, actions alone will never lead someone to a saving knowledge of God. Think of it this way: trees are good, but no matter how long you stare at a tree and observe its beauty, the tree will never be able to tell you the gospel. For that, you need words.

- ▶ **Read Matthew 28:18-20. How will fulfilling the Great Commission require both action and speech?**
- ▶ **How will this truth challenge you in your conversations with others?**

HIS STORY

To reflect God means to rule wisely.

What does it mean to be created in God's image? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "created in God's image"? Do you think we still bear God's image today, even in our sinful state?

As the story of the creation of man and woman unfolds, we begin to see what being created in God's image entails. For starters, God calls Adam and Eve to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth. His command for humans to fill and to subdue the earth is an invitation to bear His image—to reflect Him by doing what He has just done in creating the heavens and the earth.

To reflect God means to relate.

To bear God's image means to have a relationship with Him. Our image-bearing started when God created us. The account in Genesis shows how powerful a scene this was—when God's face was toward us, when He breathed into the first man the breath of life. Just as a mirror best reflects an image when the mirror is directly in front of the object, we reflect God's image best when we are in close relationship with Him.

After multiple statements of God seeing that His work was "good" and then "very good" comes the first moment when something is described as "not good." We were not created to bear God's image on our own or to have an isolated relationship with God. We reflect God best when we are in community with one another—relating to others in love and grace. Thus, reflecting God's image means we are to relate rightly to Him and to others.

To reflect God means to work and rest.

A lot of people have wrongly assumed that the command to work was a result of man's sinning and rebelling against God.

Work isn't something that God gave man as a curse after the fall into sin; the toil of work is what came with sin, but work itself is designed to give us fulfillment and provide us an environment to reflect God.

God did not rest because He needed it, as if He were tired or worn out. He gave us an example of rest to show that even though we are unlike any other creature in that we are the most "like" God, we are not God.

Essential Doctrine

Image of God in Humanity: *Some theologians believe "the image of God" refers to our mirroring of God's attributes: our nature models God's nature. Others believe we see the "image of God" in what human beings do. Still others believe the "image of God" concerns our relationships with God and with others. In Jesus we see the true image of God. He perfectly mirrors God's attributes, fulfills God's will, and enjoys a perfect relationship with the Father.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What comes to mind when you think of humanity being made “in the image of God”?**
- ▶ **When was the last time you thought of fish, birds, or even worms as living creatures that God has entrusted to you to care for?**
- ▶ **In what ways can your life demonstrate the priority of your relationship with God? What are some signs that your relationship with God is not your priority?**
- ▶ **In what ways does our culture diminish the value of work? How have you diminished the idea of work in your own life? How can you correct this?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The fact that God created humanity in His image means that each individual person on planet earth, no matter how big, how small, or the color of their skin, possesses inherent worth, value, and dignity.

- ▶ **How should the doctrine of humans being created in God’s image influence the way we think about others?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to note that humanity has a special place among creation because we were created in God’s image? What are the dangers of not affirming this?**

Heart

The reality of God creating humanity in His image not only means that we see other people in a different light, but it also influences the way we feel toward others who bear the same image, both Christians and non-Christians.

- ▶ **How should the doctrine of humans being created in God’s image influence the way we feel about others, both Christians and non-Christians?**
- ▶ **Why should we be grieved when we see image bearers of God living in a way that is contrary to the way God intended?**

Hands

As we learned throughout this session, bearing God’s image is a tangible reality that shows up in our day-to-day lives. Not only does it show up in our relationships, but it also shows up in the way we steward the earth God has given us, as well as in the way we work and rest. No matter how old you are, everyone works (home, school, sports, etc.), everyone rests, and everyone contributes, for good or bad, to the little corner of this planet where God has placed them.

- ▶ **How will you begin to treat friends, family members, and even strangers differently based upon the truth that they are created in God’s image?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can begin to reflect God by being a better steward of the world He has given us?**

HIS STORY

Sin leads to a distrust of God's Word.

As we begin to read the opening verses in chapter 3, we see that a drastic change is about to take place between humanity's relationship with their Creator. And at the heart of this change lies an issue of trust—trusting the goodness of God and His Word.

Human rebellion leads us to distrust the goodness of God's Word. This is at the heart of human sinfulness, so it's no surprise that Satan (disguised as a serpent) chose this line of temptation in the garden of Eden.

The serpent didn't first attack with a statement, but with a question. His goal was to lead Adam and Eve to doubt God's goodness. He followed the question with an outright lie: "You will not die." Sin begins with doubting God's goodness and ends with denying God's Word.

► When have you ever questioned the truthfulness of God's Word?

Sin leads to broken relationships with God and others.

The fallout from Adam and Eve's sin began immediately. Their eyes were opened. Their rebellion caused them to have a new consciousness of their nakedness. Shame entered God's good world. The first couple realized that they were naked, and so they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Before their sin, Adam and Eve felt no shame, there was nothing to hide, and they could be completely vulnerable before God and with each other in complete safety. There were fully known and fully loved.

And even now, we long to be known and loved. But shame has infected all of our relationships. This is why you wonder: *What if someone I deeply care for learned how I really am on the inside? What if they knew the secret thoughts running through my mind every day? Would they still love me? Would they abandon me?*

God created us to be fully known and fully loved. But in our fallen state, we've convinced ourselves that the only way we can be loved is if we're not fully known. We believe it would be impossible for anyone to know the depths of who we are and still love us. That's why we hide.

Essential Doctrine

Sin as Rebellion: *Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, expected to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Are you more likely to see your sin as a “mistake” or “failure” or as an act of rebellion? What is the difference and how does it impact our perspective?**
- ▶ **What are the signs that our relationship with God has been broken? What are some ways we hide from God?**
- ▶ **Take a moment to list different ways we can see the brokenness of human relationships in our world. How does the gospel provide an answer for these realities?**
- ▶ **How has sin affected the different spheres of society: family, government, church, the environment? How can we as Christians battle the effects of sin in these areas?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The historical reality of the fall of humanity is essential to understanding ourselves and the world in which we live. It gets to the root of why things are the way they are—why brokenness and suffering plague both the human race and the world that we inhabit. Every worldview tries to explain why things have gone wrong, but only the Christian worldview gives the correct answer: we rebelled against our Creator long ago.

- ▶ **Why is it important to be able to make sense of the brokenness of our world?**
- ▶ **How does the fall of Adam and Eve shed light on your own personal sins and temptations?**

Heart

The fall of humanity into sin teaches that all things have been affected by the fall, including our very own hearts. And because our hearts have been affected, we are in need of new ones. In fact, this takes place in the new covenant that God established. Because of our condition, God knew that new hearts would be necessary, and that is why He promised that through Christ, He would take out our hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh.

- ▶ **What is the connection between your heart and behavior?**
- ▶ **When it comes to resolving conflict in relationships, why is it important that both parties look inwardly, to their own hearts, to see how he or she might be sinning against the other person?**

Hands

The fall of humanity forever altered the course of human history, disrupting our relationship with God, with others, and with the good world He created. Nevertheless, God is still at work to remake that which has been broken. As we've seen throughout this session, God is on a mission to restore what has been lost through His Son.

- ▶ **How might God use His people in the mission to restore all things to Himself?**
- ▶ **How can you trust in God's Word this week? How might that affect different areas of your life?**

HIS STORY

Sin begins with the heart.

In this passage, we see that sin is not something that can be contained. It's not a disease that stayed only in the heart of Adam and Eve; it was passed on. The lie that slithered into the hearts of Adam and Eve slithered into the hearts of their children.

We see the spread of sin in the story of Cain's jealousy. Both sons offered sacrifices to God from their respective areas of work—Cain gave produce and Abel gave some of his flock—but God only accepted the sacrifice of Abel. Why? We find the answer in Hebrews 11:4: "By faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts..."

- **List a number of sinful actions, and then identify the sinful desires that precede them. Why is it important to consider sinful desires of the heart, not just sinful actions, in our battle against sin?**

It is important to note that before Cain ever acted on the evil desires brewing in his heart, God showed up and spoke truth into his life. God's grace preceded Cain's sin, offering a way out of the temptation.

A sinful heart leads to sinful actions.

Cain heard God's counsel to flee sin's temptation, but he didn't heed it. His rage gave birth to sin, and when sin was accomplished in his heart, it brought forth death.

Cain committed the act he had contemplated, and he shed the blood of his innocent brother. Just as Satan waited to pounce on Cain like a roaring lion, Cain did so to Abel. Sin is when we do to others what the enemy does to us. It begins with evil desires and then ends with evil actions toward others, actions that deserve God's condemnation.

But notice what happens next. Just as God came to counsel Cain before the sin, He comes to talk with him after the sin. God is offering Cain the opportunity to repent, "Cain, where is your brother Abel ... What have you done?"

Do these words sound familiar? After Adam and Eve sinned, God came with the question, "Where are you, Adam?" God knew exactly where Adam was, just as He knew exactly where Abel was. His questions were not offered in order to discover information, but as an invitation for Cain to respond with repentance.

Essential Doctrine

Sin's Effects in the World: *Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Sin has infected the social structures of society, leading to injustice and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the gospel is that the battle against these powers (Eph. 6:12) will be won through the work of Christ.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Have you ever sensed God offering you a way out of temptation? What truths did God bring to your mind? What was the result?**
- ▶ **Make a list of harmful things humans do to each other. Why does God care so much about how we treat other people?**
- ▶ **How do you respond when you recognize the sin in your own life?**
- ▶ **How does understanding God's forgiving heart help us live as a reflection of His love for others?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

This session helps us sense the weight of sin—its heinous nature, far-reaching extent, and the consequences it brings into our lives. Far from thinking that sin is a small thing or that it can be easily overcome through self-help strategies, we quickly learn that sin is not only toxic to the human soul, but it has infected all of us.

- ▶ **How has this session altered your perception of sin?**
- ▶ **How might a right perspective on sin help us have a right understanding of God's grace?**

Heart

One of the most telling truths this session teaches is the fact that sin isn't merely a behavioral problem or environmental problem. Rather, sin is a heart problem. Because sin begins with polluted desires of the heart, Christians should look inward to the root of their behavior when addressing sin within their lives.

- ▶ **What happens when you only focus only on the behavioral aspect of sin and not on what is taking place within the heart?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can begin to practice looking at your own heart when it comes to understanding patterns of sin in your life?**

Hands

Our world is still infected with sin and Christians still wrestle with the old sinful nature, but God call us to be salt and light in the world around us. We are to proclaim Him who can reverse the effects of the fall and sin, and live like His people by loving others as ourselves.

- ▶ **How has this session challenged you to live differently, especially in your relationships with others?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can be salt and light to others this week with your actions?**

HIS STORY

God Judges Wickedness

Sin spread wide and sin spread deep. By the time we get to Genesis 6, we may be wondering what God thinks about this situation and what He will do about it.

Every thought was nothing but evil, we read. Imagine that kind of a world—a place where in every thought and deed people were in essence shouting at God: “I don’t trust You! I don’t believe You! I defy You!” Such is the essence of sin—a faithless defiance of God the Creator.

God’s reaction was one of sorrow and grief. Consider the weight of the statement in verse 6. The Lord was grieved. He felt anguish in His heart. That word “grieved” in Hebrew means “toil, languish, agony, to be injured in feeling.”

God could have destroyed the world and all its inhabitants, but instead He chose to purge creation of its great wickedness. Yet, He would save one family. He chose not to give up on all humanity, not to turn His back and start over completely. Even though He knew Noah and his descendants would again disappoint Him, defy Him, and walk in faithlessness, God decided to preserve this remnant. Why? Because like a father who will not stop loving his children no matter how often they disobey, God bound His heart to His people.

God Provides a Way of Escape

We’ve seen that God was grieved by the sin of the world, and in His holy judgment, He decided to wipe everything off the face of the earth and start again. But here is where the story takes a turn. God demonstrated His commitment to humanity by choosing to preserve a righteous man’s family.

Take a look at verse 8 and then verse 18. Noah alone found favor in God’s eyes, right? But then notice how it says that God would establish His covenant not with Noah alone but also with those who belong to him. Watch the progression: Noah received God’s favor, was declared righteous, and then his family benefited from his righteousness. The same truth is reiterated in Genesis 7:1: “Noah found favor. Noah was the only righteous one, yet Noah’s family was saved.

- **Where are some other instances recorded in Scripture where God was grieved. How did He respond? What are some things that might grieve God today? In what ways does He still show patience to His people today?**

Essential Doctrines

God’s Glory: *The glory of God is His manifest work, the way He represents His perfect character through His activity. It also refers to His excellent reputation and is given as one of the reasons we are to praise His name.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **The Bible tells us that God grieved before His judgment took place. What does this tell us about His character and how He views sin in our lives?**
- ▶ **Why is it important for us to recognize that God's grace must precede our obedience?**
- ▶ **What lessons can we learn from Noah's example of faithfulness?**
- ▶ **Noah is described in the New Testament as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). In what ways does our mission to call people to repentance and faith resemble Noah's example?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

This session helps us to begin to see how and why it is important for God's grace and love to coexist with His judgment and righteous anger. Both of these characteristics are necessary, and together they reveal something deep to us about God's character.

- ▶ **Why is it important to stress both the grace and judgment of God when dealing with sin?**
- ▶ **What would happen if you had one without the other?**

Heart

Not only should our hearts be grieved over the fact that sin almost led, justifiably, to the entire destruction of the human race, but they should also be grieved over the fact that the God who judges sin also grieves because of sin's presence in our hearts. This was true not only back then, but even now. God is still grieved at the sight of the rebelliousness within us.

- ▶ **When was the last time you felt heartbroken over the sin in a friend's life? In your own life?**
- ▶ **How does the truth that God is grieved by our sin influence the way you deal with personal sin and temptation?**

Hands

In a similar way that Noah was obedient to God, we too should follow in his footsteps. And as God commissioned Noah and his family, we too are commissioned with the task of preaching the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus. The flood didn't stop the sin-infected hearts of men from spreading—it was never meant to. Only the cross is capable of that type of healing, and that is the message we have been called to share.

- ▶ **What are some positive characteristics of Noah that we can emulate as we seek to live on mission for God?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you to be more faithful in sharing the gospel with others?**

HIS STORY

God Sees the People's Proud Plans

The descendants of Noah settled in the land of Shinar, and there they decided to build for themselves a city, and within that city, a tower that would reach the sky.

At first glance, we might think, What's wrong with that? The world is filled with cities and skyscrapers. Why is there anything wrong with deciding to build this particular city and its tower? But look carefully at how the author of Genesis tells the story.

- ▶ **What are some instances in today's culture where people might try to make a name for themselves? (athletes, musicians, TV personalities, reporters, etc.)**
- ▶ **Is there anything wrong with wanting to take credit for our personal successes? Why or why not?**

God Judges Their Proud Plans

So God decided to judge the people in Shinar, not because He was threatened by their actions, but because He cared deeply about their hearts. He wanted to slow the spread of sin.

The text informs us that God put an end to the building of this tower by confusing the people's language. He could have destroyed the tower, struck the builders with lightning, or caused a massive earthquake. Instead, He confused their languages so that their progress in this evil was stunted.

Yet there's an element of mercy in this act of judgment, and that's a theme we've seen again and again in Genesis.

- ▶ Turn to the following sections in your Bibles and discuss the recurring themes of mercy through judgment that appear:
 - Genesis 3
 - Genesis 4
 - Genesis 6-9

God continues to show mercy to His children even today. Hebrews 12:5-11 tells us that God disciplines us when we sin, but the discipline is good because it is what proves we are His. The discipline is merciful because even if it isn't enjoyable at the time, it later yields the fruit of peace and righteousness.

God mercifully causes their proud plans to fail

We must not pass over this story as if it were an obscure historical event with little relevance to our lives. The events of Genesis 11 provide a window into human thought and behavior. We too are a people who travel farther and farther "east of Eden," turning our backs to God's goodness. We are a people who often live with absolutely no thought of God in our minds. In making decisions big and small, "we say to each other," but we don't say to God. We're content to live, act, speak, and make life's decisions without ever consulting God.

Essential Doctrines

God is Transcendent: *God's transcendence refers to the fact that He is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His greatness and power as well as His goodness and purity. The implication of this doctrine is that God is inherently superior to humanity; His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isa. 55:8-9).*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What are some ways people today, even Christians, seek to “make a name for ourselves”?**
- ▶ **Why might it be better for our plans to fail rather than have them succeed without God?**
- ▶ **What are some personal successes you’ve experience in life? Did you take all the credit for you success or did you glorify God? Explain.**
- ▶ **How has today’s study helped you recognize the importance of consulting God in the things you do and the decisions you make?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

God’s actions towards the people of Babel helps us to think once again about mercy and judgment going hand-in-hand. While confusing the languages and bringing disunity to the people was an act of judgment, it was simultaneously an act of mercy as well.

- ▶ **What surprises you about the action God took to stop the people’s building plans?**
- ▶ **Do you see an element of mercy in God’s judgment? Explain.**

Heart

The story of the Tower of Babel reveals something about the human heart that is both not surprising and shocking at the same time. It is not surprising given that we have already seen some pretty evil things that have resulted because of the contamination of the human heart; yet in a sense it is quite shocking because hearing this story is like looking into a mirror—the pride one sees is all too familiar.

- ▶ **What are some questions we could ask ourselves that might help us identify whether we are seeking to make a name for ourselves or please God?**
- ▶ **How can we tell if we are pursuing success apart from a relationship with God?**

Hand

The Tower of Babel warns us against the pride that all of humanity encounters in some form or fashion, seeking to place the self before others and even God Himself. However, God is the center of this universe—not us—and there is joy in living out life day by day with that truth in mind.

- ▶ **What are some practical ways we can make sure we are working to advance God’s kingdom instead of our own?**
- ▶ **What are some ways we can pursue humility and fight pride in our personal lives?**

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **In what areas of your life do you often struggle with trusting the promises of God (at home, at school, with your future, in relationships, etc.)?**
- ▶ **When have you taken matters into your own hands to ensure the outcome you want? How did that turn out?**
- ▶ **What sometimes causes us to assume our relationship with God is dependent on how well we keep His rules?**
- ▶ **What kind of person will a rules-focused life cause us to become? Do you think that's what God wants? Why or why not?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The calling of Abraham teaches us a great deal about stepping out in faith while not knowing the exact details and plans that lie ahead. The situation with Abraham was no different—he too experienced the same comforts, friendships, and familiarity that we would face upon leaving the places we call home.

- ▶ **God's initiation of relationship with Abraham called for Abraham's obedience. Why do you think Abraham obeyed God by leaving his land?**
- ▶ **What would it take for you to obey God if He called you to do something that makes no sense from the world's perspective?**

Heart

Abraham's calling causes us to think about the reality that God is the one who pursues us, not the other way around, and it is because of His righteousness, and not our own, that we are able to stand rightly before Him.

- ▶ **How does knowing that God seeks after us encourage you to trust in Him?**
- ▶ **How should knowing that God is the one that makes us righteous before Him motivate us to pursue lives of holiness?**

Hands

The calling of Abraham is primarily about God continuing His rescue plan of humanity. It isn't primarily about Abraham, or even his future descendants—it is about God, and the fact that He will be rescuing peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a result of His actions in the life of Abraham. If God has a global perspective, shouldn't we as well?

- ▶ **What are some ways your student group can be involved right now in being a light to the nations?**
- ▶ **How does the way we live affect our mission as God's people? How does it bring glory to Him?**

HIS STORY

God Asked for a Sacrifice

Remember that God had made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised Abraham land as well as offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that through Abraham’s descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God promised to redeem the peoples of the planet through Abraham’s family.

The problem, of course, was that Abraham and Sarah didn’t have any children, and Sarah was well past the age of being able to conceive. But God repeatedly stated that Abraham and Sarah would have a child of their own, and Abraham believed God’s promise.

In the chapters between what we studied in the previous session and this one, several situations arose, including a threat to the fulfillment of God’s promise when a king named Abimelech attempted to take Sarah as his wife. But God remained faithful and miraculously provided a son named Isaac (Gen. 21). Isaac was not only the child God promised Abraham and Sarah; he was the heir through whom God’s promises would be carried forward.

More than a decade later, however, Abraham’s faith was put to the test big time. God told Abraham to do something that would horrify any father, but especially a man through whom the salvation of the world was to come.

God Provides the Sacrifice and Calls Abraham to Trust in Him

So how does this climatic moment in history end? What happens to the promise? Let’s continue to read to find out.

When they reached the place, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. He bound his son, laid him on the altar, and raised his knife to sacrifice the boy. We shudder to think of what that moment was like. What was going through his mind at that second?

Suddenly, the Angel of the Lord called from heaven and told Abraham not to touch the boy, “for now I know that you fear God,” Abraham’s faith was tested, and he passed with flying colors because he was willing to obey God, even if it cost him everything. True faith leads to obedience (see Jas. 2).

After the Angel stopped him, Abraham saw a ram caught in some thorns. God had provided this animal for the sacrifice as a substitute for Isaac. Abraham offered the ram instead and named the place “The Lord Will Provide.”

► **What situation are you facing right now that requires you to trust and obey God?**

► **What do you already know about God? How can that knowledge help you to trust Him?**

Essential Doctrines

Christ the Substitute: *At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity’s need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Like Abraham, we may not know when we are being tested. In what ways should Abraham's story impact our obedience?**
- ▶ **When was a time you sensed God testing you? What did you learn about Him from that experience? What did you learn about yourself?**
- ▶ **How does faith fuel obedience?**
- ▶ **Why is it important for us to trust in the provision of God and not in our own work?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

The story of Abraham and Isaac is mind-boggling to the reader at first. Isaac is the promised son to Abraham and Sarah, and God has specifically stated that it will be through Isaac that Abraham's descendants will be named—meaning the covenant will continue through him. Yet while it is mind-boggling at first, we quickly come to realize what God is doing through this event.

- ▶ **What are some things God asks us to do in His Word that may seem counter intuitive? Why does He ask us to do these things?**
- ▶ **Why is it important that God provide a substitute for us?**

Heart

The Abraham we see in this event is somewhat different from the Abraham we have seen in former chapters. That is because Abraham has learned over time and through some poor past decisions that God can be trusted and will fulfill what He has promised. While Isaac was asked to be the sacrifice, one could also say that in another sense, Abraham's will was also a sacrifice.

- ▶ **How does Abraham's obedience challenge you to be more obedient to God?**
- ▶ **How does Abraham's faith in God challenge your own faith in God?**

Hands

Abraham's faith and belief in God influenced his decisions and the way he lived. The same is true for us as well—true faith will also result in a transformed life.

- ▶ **How has this session challenged you to live differently?**
- ▶ **How might you be able to use this story in the Bible to point others toward Christ? Explain.**

The Point: God promises to be faithful to His people even when they show themselves to be unworthy of His love.

HIS STORY

God Keeps His Promises

We're still working through Genesis, the first book of the Bible, and we see how this book is divided into units by the key phrase "... " (see 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). The use of this phrase in Genesis 25:19 indicates that a new section is starting, one that deals with Isaac and his children.

We've seen that Isaac is the child of promise who carries forward the promises of land, offspring, and blessing that God gave to Abraham. But before the promises are carried forward, a crisis must be addressed. Like Abraham's wife, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, could not have children.

But Isaac prayed for his wife, and God miraculously opened her womb. Are you noticing the pattern here? God is using unlikely pregnancies and births to keep His promises and deliver His people, and He is asking His people to trust Him in the process.

God Keeps His Promises Even When People Are Unworthy

We've seen how God keeps His promises in unusual ways. As the story progresses, we watch how God's people prove to be unworthy of those promises by their behavior. They play favorites, lie, and manipulate. Yet God remains gracious to them.

Here we read about another famine in the land, just like there was in the days of Abraham. The famine in Abraham's day foreshadowed the exodus. Famine drove Abraham and his family to Egypt, where plagues were unleashed on Pharaoh's house, and Abraham's family left Egypt richer than they came. The same thing will happen generations later on a larger scale, when God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt. God continues to rescue His people and keep His promise of land, offspring, and blessing despite horrible circumstances, such as famine and being away from their homeland.

We see here in Genesis 26 a similar unworthiness in Isaac, and we also see God's graciousness to keep the promises. Like his father, Isaac passed off his wife, Rebekah, as his sister because he feared the men of the area would kill him to take her as a wife since she was so beautiful. Yet despite Isaac's cowardly treatment of his wife, he was blessed in this foreign land and became rich, to the point the Philistines wanted him to leave. Eventually Isaac made it back to the land of promise in Beer-sheba, where God restated the promises to him yet again.

► **In what ways does remembering God's faithfulness in your past affect how you face difficult situations today?**

Essential Doctrines

God is Truthful: *The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Heb. 6:18, Titus 1:2). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is the Way, "the Truth," and the Life (John 14:6)*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

The Point: God is sovereign over all of life and will work out His plan of redemption despite and sometimes through our dysfunction.

HIS STORY

God's Plan Goes Forward Through a Dysfunctional Family

Let's review. When Isaac and Rebekah's children—Esau and Jacob—were in their mother's womb, the Lord told Rebekah that the older would serve the younger. In ancient cultures, the younger son would serve the older son, and the older son would receive the family inheritance. But as this story unfolds, we see the older son, Esau, selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, Esau was defined by food, by his appetite.

Not only did Esau sell his birthright, but he also took Hittite wives. He intermarried with a pagan people who didn't follow the one true God, and his actions made things miserable for his parents (Gen. 26:34-35). But God had declared that His promise to Eve (her offspring would crush the serpent's head, Gen. 3) and to Abraham (his offspring would bring salvation to all the peoples of the earth, Gen. 12) would be carried forward through Jacob, not Esau.

We see in Genesis 27 a final showdown between these brothers. Even though Isaac and his family were sinful, dysfunctional, and manipulative, God graciously keeps His promises.

God's Plan Goes Forward Through a Deceitful Son

Jacob schemed and lied to get what he wanted. In fact, he had numerous opportunities to come clean with his father and tell the truth. But he was so blinded with greed for the blessing that he continued to deceive.

We are often no different than Jacob. In situations where we find ourselves lying, it is usually because of something we want. We want others to have a certain opinion of us, so we bend the truth.

Jacob would eventually become the representative head of the nation of Israel, and Israel was called to be a light to the nations. God's redeeming plan would go through Jacob to all the nations of the earth. The saving line would come through the deceitful younger son, Jacob, not Esau.

► **When have you been guilty of altering the truth, even just a little, to get something you wanted? How did that work out?**

Essential Doctrines

God's Plan and Human Action: *God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the Lord's plan will prevail." In ways we are unable to fully comprehend, the Lord's plan goes forward in a way that extends to the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23)*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What are some common dysfunctions in families? How can God's grace in the gospel overcome these?**
- ▶ **In what kinds of situations do we find it easiest to lie? What do those situations tell us about what our hearts are craving?**
- ▶ **How can we change the desires of the heart?**
- ▶ **What hope does it give you to know that God works even through our deceit and sinfulness to accomplish His plan?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

This story of Jacob and Esau contains family favoritism, deceit, and manipulation. Once again we see the human heart and the depths of its sinfulness on full display. Yet, at the same time, we also see God's plan of rescue continuing to be carried out, displaying His grace and goodness despite man's sinfulness.

- ▶ **How does the truth that God's plan is always working out help you face the surprises, disappointments, and hardships of your daily life?**
- ▶ **What are some things we can determine about God's character based on this story?**

Heart

In this story we learn that Jacob experiences the presence of God, and as a result, is forever changed by that experience. We see this same formula repeated through the Bible—people encounter God and are transformed as a result (see Isaiah 7; Acts 9).

- ▶ **In what ways are we changed by experiencing the presence of God?**
- ▶ **Is it possible to experience God's presence and not be changed? Why or why not?**

Hands

The story of Jacob and Esau not only teaches us a lot about God and ourselves, but also the importance of developing healthy relationships around us so that God's message of redemption may spread throughout our communities.

- ▶ **How does the story of God's continual grace through messed-up people free you to be part of His plan?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you, as a group or as an individual, can engage in God's mission to bless all peoples of the earth?**

HIS STORY

Jacob's Old Name Reflected His Flawed Character

In the east, Jacob met his future wife Rachel at a well. He loved Rachel and wanted to marry her, so he served her father, Laban, for seven years to win her hand in marriage. But Laban deceived Jacob. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter, Leah, and Jacob had to work another seven years for Rachel.

The Lord told Jacob to return home to the land promised to his fathers, so he journeyed toward Canaan as a rich man with a large family. In order for Jacob to receive the promises of God, however, a transformation needed to take place. Jacob was fearful that his brother, Esau, would seek revenge, so he sent gifts with an envoy ahead of him to soften the blow. As Jacob remained behind, he encountered an unusual man who would change his life forever.

► **What are some areas in your life where brokenness needs to occur?**

Jacob's New Name Reflected the Grace God Showed Him

It is one thing for a person to show grace to someone else. But the effects are multiplied when the God of the universe shows grace to a wretched person. Grace ensures we will never be the same. We see this truth in the life of the cunning deceiver Jacob. Despite Jacob's repeated lying and scheming, God poured out grace upon him, and we see its effect here in Genesis 32.

Even though Jacob was injured in the wrestling match with the man, he grabbed him and would not let him go. Jacob had already told the man his name, which revealed the deceptive nature of his character. But here, in an act of amazing grace, the man who happened to be God Himself allowed Jacob to prevail, and then He renamed him.

Jacob's New Name Reflected the Task God Gave Him

We see in Jacob's life that God blessed and changed him so that Jacob—Israel—would be the means by which God brought change and blessing to the whole world. Watch how God reappeared to Jacob and again gave him his new name, which implied the continuing nature of God's promised blessing to Abraham:

Notice the progression for Jacob: Blessing (v. 9), New Identity (v. 10), Responsibility (v. 11). In the same way, God blesses us with salvation and transformation so that we can then fulfill His calling on our lives.

Essential Doctrines

New Identity of the Believer: *When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **In what ways do our past mistakes haunt and define us?**
- ▶ **Why is it difficult for us and for others to forget past mistakes?**
- ▶ **In what ways has your life or someone you know been changed by an act of grace from another?**
- ▶ **Have you ever wanted to be someone else or to have a fresh start or to receive a new reputation? What ways did you go about accomplishing that?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

What we think about ourselves and how we understand our identities, plays a significant role into other parts of our lives. How we view ourselves significantly influences the type of person we think we are becoming.

- ▶ **How is God's "renaming" us similar to or different than trying to change our reputation?**
- ▶ **In one sense, Jacob's story teaches us that an encounter with God results in brokenness. How has this been true in your own life?**

Heart

Jacob's story encourages us that difficulty in life can have positive benefits at a later time. In fact, they may be exactly what God uses to stir our hearts toward Him, leaving behind a life of sin.

- ▶ **What difficult circumstances in your life has God used to lead you to repentance?**
- ▶ **Why were those struggles necessary to get you to the point of repentance?**

Hands

Like Jacob, if we have received a new identity from God and have been led to repentance through difficult circumstances, we are called to display the same love and grace to others that we have received. We are no longer living for ourselves, but for the God who saved us and is calling us to be a blessing to others.

- ▶ **Describe a time you made a difference in someone else's life by an act of grace.**
- ▶ **What are some areas in which we ask for the blessing of God without giving thought to how God might want us to bless others?**

The Point: God is sovereign over our lives and can use suffering to accomplish His plans in and through us.

HIS STORY

God Has a Future Plan

We've seen how God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But God also warned Abraham about a future slavery in a foreign land before they would receive the promised land (Gen. 15:13). So, yes, God's plan was to bless the entire world through Abraham's offspring, but that future plan included pain and suffering.

Jacob's favorite son was Joseph because he was born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, in Jacob's old age (Gen. 30:22-24). That's why Jacob made Joseph a robe of many colors, a sign of favoritism toward Joseph and something that caused Joseph's brothers to despise him.

Making matters worse, the story goes on to say (vv. 5-11) that Joseph had dreams about his brothers bowing down to him—not something you want to hear from your younger brother. The text never indicates whether or not Joseph was right or wrong in recounting these dreams to his family, but it's clear that the dreams were a picture of God's future plan.

► **What are some dreams you have for your future? How might God's plans be better?**

God Prepares Joseph for that Plan

Joseph's brothers were shepherding their dad's flock near Shechem, and Israel sent Joseph to check on them. When the brothers saw him coming in the distance, they devised a plan to harm him. At first, they intended to kill him and throw him into one of the pits (37:20), but Reuben tried to convince the brothers not to kill Joseph. Hoping to come back later to rescue Joseph, Reuben told his brothers to throw him in the pit alive (37:21-22).

This horrific act of betrayal and injustice was part of the process God would use to accomplish His plan. God's plan was not merely to rescue Israel; rather, He intended to rescue the world, and Joseph's rejection and suffering were the means by which God would accomplish the plan.

Joseph Trusts God Even When God Seems Absent

Joseph did the right thing in rejecting the advances of his master's wife. Even so, he was falsely accused, and despite his innocence, he was thrown into prison. Yet even there, the Lord was with him (v. 21). God had not abandoned him. God gave Joseph great grace so that even the prison warden put Joseph in charge of all the other prisoners. And once again, the Lord prospered everything that Joseph did.

Too many Christians have the false idea that if God is with us, then nothing bad will happen. We think of verses like Romans 8:31—"If God is for us, who against us?"—as if they promise life without adversity. But we leave out the verses that say we may experience suffering, famine, nakedness, peril, and many other obstacles (8:35-39). Rightly understood, nothing can separate you from God and His love in Christ, not because He shields you from bad things but rather because in the midst of those circumstances, He walks with you. He brings you safely through to the other side.

Essential Doctrines

God is Omniscient: *Scripture teaches that God is all knowing. He is the One who is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why do we sometimes envy God's plan for someone else's life rather than accept the one He has laid out for us?**
- ▶ **When we try to live out God's plan for someone else, how does that usually turn out?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you intentionally put a strain on your body in order to be better prepared for the future? How can the same truth apply to our character?**
- ▶ **What are some challenges you have faced that prepared you to handle future challenges and blessings?**

YOUR MISSION

Head

Joseph's story challenges our thinking about our integrity and our actions. Joseph did what was right and fled from the sexual temptation of Potiphar's wife, yet was still sent to prison. Even though he suffered for doing the right thing, he maintained his integrity and would be used by God in the long run to save many nations.

- ▶ **What lessons can we learn from Joseph's victory over temptation?**
- ▶ **Why is it important to do the right thing, regardless of the outcome?**

Heart

Joseph's story encourages our hearts and reassures us that God is not only good and sovereign, but is working all things for the good of those who love Him.

- ▶ **Why do we assume God is there in the good times and gone in the bad?**
- ▶ **How does the knowledge that God is with you in hardship help you battle things like discouragement, depression, and isolation?**

Hands

Joseph's story not only challenges our thinking and encourages our hearts, but it also informs us on how we should live and treat others around us.

- ▶ **What can your church do in showing people around you that God has not abandoned them?**
- ▶ **How can you personally encourage someone you know who feels alone this week?**

HIS STORY

Good Comes From Joseph's Suffering

Let's briefly summarize Joseph's journey. He was falsely accused of attempted rape, and he spent years in jail. While in prison, Joseph—the dreamer—rightly interpreted a dream for Pharaoh's chief cupbearer. He asked the cupbearer to remember him and mention him to Pharaoh once Pharaoh showed him favor. But the cupbearer forgot Joseph when he was restored to his position. Once again, Joseph had been treated unfairly.

After two years, Pharaoh had a dream that alarmed him, and this caused the chief cupbearer to remember Joseph. Consequently, Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dream. Relying on God's power, Joseph explained the dream's meaning: there would be seven years of agricultural abundance followed by seven years of famine. Joseph wisely mapped out a plan for Pharaoh that would prepare a reserve for the seven years of famine. As a result, Joseph was now promoted to rule over Egypt as a vice-regent to the Pharaoh.

Forgiveness Comes Through Joseph's Suffering

We've seen that one way God was faithful to His covenant was by bringing fruit out of Joseph's affliction. It's here that the story takes a turn, and now we see in the life of Joseph an incredible picture of forgiveness, one that models the faithfulness of God to His people.

When Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt for food, they bowed down to him, which fulfilled his earlier dreams. Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. Through a series of circumstances, Joseph hatched a plan to keep his brother Benjamin behind, but the brothers worried such an event would hasten their father Jacob's death. At this pivotal moment, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers.

The reason Joseph could forgive his brothers is because he saw that it was really God who had sent him to Egypt, for this very purpose: to save them from famine. God was keeping His covenant promises to Abraham. He rescued and sustained Jacob's family through the suffering, humiliation, and exaltation of Joseph to power in Egypt.

Joseph Affirms That God Turns All Things For Good

As we pick back up with the story of Joseph, we see that Israel took his family down to Egypt to live there during the famine. At the time, they numbered around 70 people (see Gen. 46:27,34). But God blessed them in Egypt and made them rich, and they multiplied (see Gen. 47:27).

Remember, God had promised to bless the whole world through Abraham's offspring. So before he died, Jacob restated these promises from God to his sons and foretold that the Messiah would come from Judah (see Gen. 49:8-10). When Jacob died, Joseph took his father's body to the promised land for burial. When he returned to Egypt, his brothers were concerned that Joseph would get his revenge now that their father was dead.

But Joseph exhorted them not to be afraid, and he indicated that he trusted in God's justice. He said he was not in God's place—what they intended for evil, God used for good to save many lives. So Joseph forgave them, comforted them, and took care of them and their families. He showed amazing grace to his brothers.

Essential Doctrines

God is Faithful: *Description* God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). *God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.*

Leader Note: Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.

