

CONTENTS

UNIT 1: GOD THE CREATOR

Memory Verse.....	08
Session 1: In the Beginning, God.....	09
Session 2: In God’s Image.....	15
Session 3: Human Rebellion.....	21
Session 4: The Spread of Sin.....	27
Session 5: The Creator Destroys and Redeems.....	33
Session 6: The Creator Slows the Spread of Evil.....	39

UNIT 2: GOD THE COVENANT-MAKER

Memory Verse.....	46
Session 7: God’s Covenant with Abraham.....	47
Session 8: The Testing of Abraham.....	53
Session 9: God Reaffirms the Covenant.....	59
Session 10: God’s Dysfunctional Covenant Family.....	65
Session 11: The God Who Gives New Names.....	71
Session 12: The God Who Uses Suffering.....	77
Session 13: God Is Faithful to His Covenant.....	83

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HOW TO USE

01 SESSION ONE

In the Beginning, God...

SCRIPTURE
Genesis 1:1-25; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6

THE POINT
In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good.

CHARACTERS

- The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

PLOT
The grand story of the Bible, the story that we are all a part of, begins with creation. It begins as every beginning should—it sets the stage for everything that follows. The theme of Genesis opens simply yet dramatically as we're introduced not only to God, but to the world He has created. In Genesis 1, we meet a God who is simply there, long before the beginning of time, and He simply assumes His existence because He wrote it. We find out from very early on that God is not dependent on His creation. Instead, Genesis 1 describes God as Creator of His existence to God alone. Have you ever wondered where God has always existed.

INTRO

The first page of each session contains a brief overview of what to expect in the His Story section. This will include the Scripture passage(s), the main point, key figures, as well as a basic plot that sets the scene for the Bible study.

HIS STORY

GOD CREATED EVERYTHING

The original audience of the Book of Genesis—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 when, 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.*

Genesis 1:1-2
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

99 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.

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).

10 Session 1

CREATION
All things from the cosmic to the molecular level have been created by Him, through Him, and for Him.

HEARING GOD'S IMAGE
God created man in His image to reflect His likeness.

FALL
Set in the story and abhors God's good creation.

CAIN AND ABEL
The death of humanity's fall is revealed in the murder mystery between two brothers.

78 The Gospel Project for Students 11

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.

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

- It is morally good:
- It is beautiful and pleasant to the eye?
- It is 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.

Romans 1:18-20
For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what has been made. As a result, people are without excuse.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES
The Goodness of Creation
In Genesis, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even "very good" (2:3). 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.

HIS STORY

Intended for group and personal use, the His Story section follows the storyline of the Bible, focusing on what God has done in redemptive history throughout the pages of Scripture. These pages also feature questions to engage with, Essential Doctrines to learn, and a visually helpful timeline to follow throughout the study. In addition, there is a Christ Connection section at the end, helping you connect the dots between Jesus and the biblical storyline for each session.

THIS STUDY

CHRIST CONNECTION
John 1:1-3,14 says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. . . . The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there. God created everything through His Son, and all things exist and hold together because of His Son.

THERE IS NOT A SQUARE INCH IN THE WHOLE DOMAIN OF OUR HUMAN EXISTENCE OVER WHICH CHRIST, WHO IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL, DOES NOT CRY: 'MINE!'
ABRAHAM KUYPER

1 Corinthians 8:6
For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth—as there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from Him, and we exist through Him, and we exist through Him.

Why is it so important that God created everything through the Son? Because through the Son, God gives us special revelation. Creation gives us general knowledge about God's power and nature, but it fails to reveal God's specific plan of redemption and create things about Him, in order to know those things, God would have to reveal Himself personally. According to the Bible, this is exactly what God did through the sending of His Son.

NOAH
Both judgment and grace occur any power in the flood.

TOWER OF BABEL
Humanity's pride in seeking glory for itself but God's glory will never be forgotten.

12 Session 1

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with you own.

► **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?**

HIS STORY
God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

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?

14 Session 1

YOUR STORY

Intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Story section is designed to connect what God has done in the past to the present. As you discuss and answer these questions, you'll begin to realize that what God was doing in the lives of these biblical characters easily connects with life today.

YOUR MISSION

Also intended for group and/or personal use, the Your Mission section is designed to show how God's Story is capable of creating lasting transformation into how we think, feel, and live from this day forward. It is intended to show that every session goes beyond mere Bible study to a calling to be on mission with God in this world.

FROM THE EDITORS



Ed Stetzer

General Editor
The Gospel Project
President, LifeWay
Research

“The Story Begins”—sounds epic, doesn’t it? As if you are about to embark on a great journey; as if from this moment forward, things will never be the same. I, for one, hope that is true, because we are not about to dive into a study of some ancient work that is dead, but into the living Word of God. This isn’t just any story; this is the story that God Himself has been telling since the beginning of time.

The Gospel Project Chronological is going to take us through the storyline of Scripture in three years. From the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation, we will see that God’s Word is not a series of disconnected writings and stories but one grand narrative with a beginning, an eternal end, and a purpose—to reveal Jesus Christ as God’s Son, our Savior and Lord.

In the Old Testament, Jesus is the promised One; in the New Testament, He has come and will come again. All of life and all of history revolve around this One to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). And to those who are called by His name, this is our mission—our part of the story—to proclaim to the whole world Jesus as Lord, the Savior of all who believe in Him, that they would hear and give glory to the Creator of all.



Trevin Wax

Managing Editor
The Gospel Project

Author of multiple books, including *Gospel-Centered Teaching*, *Counterfeit Gospels*, and *Clear Winter Nights: A Young Man’s Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After*

For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image-bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.

UNIT 1

God the Creator

GENESIS 1–11

MEMORY VERSE

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

GENESIS 1:26-27

01

SESSION ONE

In the Beginning, God...

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1-25; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6

THE POINT

In the beginning, God created everything, and He created everything good.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

PLOT

The grand story of the Bible, the story that we are all a part of, begins with creation. It begins as every beginning should—it sets the stage for everything that follows. The first chapter of Genesis opens simply yet dramatically as we're introduced to the greatest reality ever to exist—God. In Genesis 1:1, we meet a God who is simply there. It doesn't open up with a long list of arguments for God's existence because the Bible is His revelation of Himself. It simply assumes His existence because He wrote it.

We find out from very early on that God is not dependent on anything or anyone else for His existence. Instead, Genesis 1 describes God as Creator of everything—all that exists owes its existence to God alone. Have you ever wondered where God came from? The answer is that He has always existed.

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?

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Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

99 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.

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 great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens” (Ps. 96:4-5).



Genesis

CREATION

All things, from the cosmic to the molecular level, have been created by Him, through Him, and for Him.



BEARING GOD'S IMAGE

God creates man in His image, to reflect His likeness.

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.

Romans 1:18-20

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

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.



FALL

Sin enters the story and distorts God's good creation.



CAIN AND ABEL

The depth of humanity's fall is revealed in the heinous murder between two brothers.

CHRIST CONNECTION

John 1:1-3,14 says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Every time we see God speak things into existence, the Son is there. God created everything through His Son, and all things exist and hold together because of His Son.

“THERE IS NOT A SQUARE INCH IN THE WHOLE DOMAIN OF OUR HUMAN EXISTENCE OVER WHICH CHRIST, WHO IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL, DOES NOT CRY: ‘MINE!’”

ABRAHAM KUYPER

1 Corinthians 8:5-6

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Why is it so important that God created everything through the Son? Because through the Son, God gives us special revelation. Creation gives us general knowledge about God’s power and nature, but it fails to reveal God’s specific plan of redemption and certain things about Him. In order to know those things, God would have to reveal Himself personally. According to the Bible, this is exactly what God did through the sending of His Son.



NOAH

Both judgment and graciousness are found in the flood.



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity’s pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God’s glory will never be dethroned.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption through
His Son, Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?

02

SESSION TWO

In God's Image

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:26–2:25

THE POINT

God created humanity in His image.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Adam and Eve:** the first humans created

PLOT

In the previous session, we saw how God begins the story of the world by looking at the creation event. We saw that in the first three days of creation, God dealt with the formlessness by giving boundaries, separating, and organizing in order to make the heavens, the seas, and the earth. Then, in the second set of three days, God dealt with the emptiness of the world by filling the spheres that He created in the first three days. He filled the expanse with the sun, moon, and stars, He filled the earth with vegetation, and He filled the seas and the dry land with living creatures.

Our story picks up where we left off, moving toward the climactic scene where God creates something in a new and unique way—the creation of humanity. Mankind was created in God's image, a unique characteristic from all other parts of creation.

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?

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

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.

Genesis 1:26

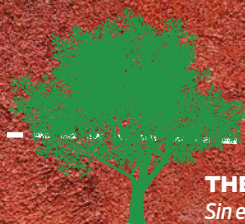
Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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.



BEARING GOD'S IMAGE

God creates humanity in His image, to reflect His likeness.



THE FALL

Sin enters the story and distorts God's good creation.

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.

Genesis 2:15

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.

“WORK, WHETHER IT INVOLVES PLUMBING A SINK OR PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF THE COSMOS, IN THE HANDS OF A CHRISTIAN IS MINISTRY.”

BEN WITHERINGTON

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.



CAIN AND ABEL

The depth of humanity's fall is revealed in the heinous murder between two brothers.



NOAH

Judgment and graciousness are found in the flood.

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Bearing God’s image—it is a daunting task. How are you doing at reflecting God’s image? At wisely ruling the world? At relating with Him and others? At reflecting Him properly through the rhythms of your everyday activities and rest? What would the world conclude about God by looking at His image that you’re reflecting?

Here’s the bad news: It’s no small sin for you to fail at properly reflecting God to the world. An assault on God’s image is an assault on God Himself. When you fail to properly reflect His image to the world, you are telling the world lies about God and what He’s like.

But here’s the glorious good news: Jesus came to be the perfect image of the invisible God. He is the only One who rules wisely over the world. He upholds all things by His power, and all of creation awaits in eager anticipation for His return. He is the only One who perfectly relates to God and others and can restore our broken relationships with God and others. He not only has a face-to-face relationship with God, but His face is the very face of God. And because of Jesus’ good work on our behalf—His perfect life, death in our place, and glorious resurrection—we are invited into His rest. No longer striving for salvation but resting in His finished work.



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity's pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God's glory will never be dethroned.



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God establishes a covenant with Abraham.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption through
His Son, Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?

03

SESSION THREE

Human Rebellion

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 3:1-24

THE POINT

Sin corrupts the goodness of God’s creation.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Adam and Eve:** the first humans created by God in His image
- **Satan:** disguised as the serpent in the garden

PLOT

In the previous sessions we learned that God created the world and human beings, male and female, in His image. As a Father providing good things for His children, God gave Adam and Eve a good world to take care of and enjoy. Everything He made—sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, birds, trees, and fruit—all of it was good and all of it was for them. More importantly, God gave Himself in relationship and fellowship to the first people.

All was good, and all was well! In fact, as we’ve seen, God overlooked all that He had made and declared it to be “very good.” It’s hard to gain an accurate picture of this time given that the world we now know is not the way it was intended to be. But in the first two chapters of the Bible, things were exactly as they were meant to be. That is, until sin enters the stage in human history.

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.

“A LOT OF PEOPLE THINK THAT ‘SIN’ IS JUST BREAKING A RULE. WHAT IS AT STAKE HERE IS SOMETHING DEEPER, BIGGER, SADDER, UGLIER, MORE HEINOUS. IT IS A REVOLUTION. IT MAKES ME GOD AND THUS DE-GODS GOD.”

D. A. CARSON

Genesis 3:1

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

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?



THE FALL

Sin enters the story and distorts God's good creation.



CAIN AND ABEL

The depth of humanity's fall is revealed in the heinous murder between two brothers.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

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: "Children have I reared and brought 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.

Genesis 3:9-10

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

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.



NOAH

Judgment and graciousness are found in the flood.



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity's pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God's glory will never be dethroned.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Even though this story is a sad scene of fallenness and judgment, there is a thread of mercy. Before casting Adam and Eve out of paradise, God clothed them with animal skins. God provided the covering for Adam and Eve's nakedness.

Not only that, but in verse 15 God tells the serpent that the day is coming when a Son will be born through Eve, and even though the serpent will strike His heel, this Son of Eve will crush the serpent's head. A Savior will come, and the serpent will be defeated. The evil unleashed in the garden will be eradicated when the Son of Eve arrives.

God's initiative here points forward to His Son's atoning work, when through His own sacrifice, He will take away the guilt of our sin and cover our shame with His righteousness.

Genesis 3:15

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Because of sin, Adam and Eve were banished from paradise. Their sin separated them from God's presence with no way back in except through the angel's sword. But the day would come when the sword would fall on the Son of Eve on the cross. The Son would be banished by the Father so that we might be reunited. He would face the sword so that we could return from our exile.

When God's own Son was born into this world, He undid everything that went wrong in Genesis 3. He answered the question that Satan put in our hearts: "Is God good? Does He intend good for us? Can we trust Him?" He answered that question with the nails in His hands and a spear through His side—with His becoming sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM
God establishes a covenant with Abraham.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC
Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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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?

04

SESSION FOUR

The Spread of Sin

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 4:1-16,25-26

THE POINT

Sin spreads throughout the hearts and actions of people.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Cain:** first son born to Adam and Eve
- **Abel:** second son born to Adam and Eve

PLOT

In the previous session we saw how everything good God created in Genesis 1-2 was affected by the sinful choice of Adam and Eve. Instead of believing God's Word and living under God's rule, they disobeyed and turned from God. Yet even in the midst of this loss and despair, hope would be given in the promise of God to the man and the woman—the promise of One to come who would restore that which was lost and crush the head of the serpent.

Though Genesis 3 ended with the banishment of Adam and Eve, Genesis 4 opens with hope: Eve gives birth to two children and gives credit to “the Lord's help.” God has started to fulfill His promise to give Eve a son who would defeat the serpent. And the hope that this promise would be fulfilled was all the more pressing as we see sin spread like cancer through the first family of the human race.

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 more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts."

Genesis 4:1-5

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

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.



CAIN AND ABEL

The depth of humanity's fall is revealed in the heinous murder between two brothers.



NOAH

Judgment and graciousness are found in the flood.

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.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

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.

Genesis 4:8-12

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

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, "Where is Abel your brother? ... 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.



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity's pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God's glory will never be dethroned.



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God establishes a covenant with Abraham.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Looking at Cain's story forces us to look at our own story. We may not have committed murder, but we have witnessed ourselves fail by sinning countless times. So what now? What do we do after we've traded God's counsel for the empty promises of sin? How do we prevent the guilt and shame of sin from paralyzing us from seeking God?

Hebrews 12:24 speaks to us of Jesus' blood in comparison to Abel's. Abel's blood, the blood shed by sin, was crying out—crying out in angst because justice needed to be done. But Jesus' blood, the blood shed for sin, calmly speaks—and it speaks a better word than the blood of Abel because justice has now been served.

Hebrews 12:24

To Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

“THE ULTIMATE ABEL, THE ULTIMATE MAN OF FAITH, THE ONLY TRUE AND LITERALLY INNOCENT MAN CAME INTO THE WORLD AND WE—CAINS ALL—KILLED HIM. BUT THIS WAS NOT A RANDOM ACCIDENT. THIS ONE CAME INTO THE WORLD TO BE OUR SUBSTITUTE, TO BEAR THE CURSE THAT WE CAINS DESERVED.”

TIM KELLER



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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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 calls 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?

05

SESSION FIVE

The Creator Destroys and Redeems

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 6:5-22; 9:1-11

THE POINT

God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust in Him.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Noah and his family:** descendent of Adam through the line of Seth; a good and righteous man; father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth
- **The peoples of the earth**

PLOT

After the spread of sin and seeing how it led to one brother murdering another, the story continues to unfold by introducing us to one of the most well-known characters in the Bible—Noah. Now, most people in our culture, even if they haven't set foot inside a church, are familiar with the basic story line of Noah. For them, that would include an ark, pairs of animals, a colossal flood, and so forth. While these are certainly elements that come up in the story, what if there is more to it than that? What else can we learn about this event? What is God communicating about Himself through this time in history? What do we learn about ourselves through this? What does Noah have to do with Jesus?

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.

Genesis 6:5-7

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

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?



NOAH

Both judgment and graciousness are found in the flood.



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity’s pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God’s glory will never be dethroned.

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: "Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.'" Noah found favor. Noah was the only righteous one, yet Noah's family was saved.

99 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.

Genesis 6:8,18

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ... But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

THE STORY OF NOAH AND THE ARK SHOUTS TO ALL THOSE WHO PERSIST IN LIVING APART FROM GOD ABOUT WHAT IS TO COME. IT INVITES ALL TO ACCEPT GOD'S OFFER OF PROTECTION AND SAFETY FOUND ONLY BY BEING UNITED TO CHRIST.

*Nancy Guthrie, **The Promised One***



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God establishes a covenant with Abraham.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.

There are two truths here we must not miss. First, grace precedes righteousness. It's no accident that the text specifies Noah receiving favor from the Lord before being declared righteous. Grace came first. It wasn't that Noah obeyed and that's why he was saved. It was that Noah received grace, and that's why he obeyed.

The second truth is that the covenant God made with Noah benefited the members of his family. The righteousness of Noah was the foundation of the preservation of the rest of his family.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In the story of Noah, we see a pattern for how God is going to offer ultimate salvation. Jesus is the One in whom God was truly pleased, the One God truly favored. Though all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, though none are righteous, not even one, God offers us salvation based on the sole person of Jesus and His righteousness.

Remember, Noah's family was saved not on the basis of their righteousness but on the basis of Noah's righteousness. They were saved because they belonged to Noah. Likewise, we're not saved by our own works but by the work of Jesus alone, and we're saved only if we belong to Him.

However, where Noah could only save seven members of his family, God has given to Jesus people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The family of Jesus will be so much larger than the family of Noah.

Just as Noah spent his life in faith building an ark while the world rejected his message (Heb. 11; 2 Pet. 2), we should spend our lives faithfully telling people about the coming judgment and the good news of salvation God has made possible for us through Jesus Christ. Just as Noah's story ends with a reaffirmation of God's covenant and a commissioning to follow God in obedience, so also our salvation is not an end in itself but what precedes our own obedience. God has commissioned us not only to be fruitful and multiply but also to take the good news of His merciful love to the rest of the world.



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.



JACOB AND ESAU

Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ..

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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?

06

SESSION SIX

The Creator Slows the Spread of Evil

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 11:1-9

THE POINT

God judges and disrupts human attempts to thwart His glory.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **The people of Babel:** generations following Noah

PLOT

As the Genesis account continues, we encounter an interesting narrative in what is commonly referred to as the Tower of Babel. By the time we reach this account in history, some time has passed since the judgment and mercy of the flood (discussed in the previous session), but like the time surrounding the flood, we continue to see that humanity is still broken from the inside-out. There is still a sin problem because there is still a heart problem. Sin still remained in the heart of man after the flood. God knew this was the case, which is why the flood was only meant to slow down the progression of sin in the world.

As we approach this event in history, it is important to ask ourselves what the author would have us understand about God, ourselves, and the way we should live as we look back to this time. Stories like these are recorded for a purpose, and God would have us immerse ourselves into this time in biblical history to teach us something new, and perhaps something we've never thought about before.

HIS STORY

GOD SEES THE PEOPLE'S PRIDEFUL 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.

Genesis 11:1-5

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.

- 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?



TOWER OF BABEL

Humanity's pride is relentless in seeking praise for itself; but God's glory will never be dethroned.



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God establishes a covenant with Abraham.

GOD JUDGES THEIR PRIDEFUL 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.

Genesis 11:6-7

And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech."

99 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).



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC
Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.

GOD MERCIFULLY CAUSES THEIR PRIDEFUL 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.

IT IS OUT OF KINDNESS THAT GOD CAUSES OUR IDOLS TO DISAPPOINT US. WHEN OUR CITIES AND TOWERS AND NAMES FALL, MAYBE THEN WE WILL FINALLY SEE THE GOD WHO HAS BEEN THERE WAITING TO SATISFY US ALL ALONG.

Genesis 11:8-9

So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In Genesis 11, God confused the language of those who sought to make known the greatness of their own name and of their own kingdom. Thousands of years later, at Pentecost, God tore down the language barrier so that His people would scatter across the world and make known the great name of His Son.

Not only that, but this theme of judgment combined with mercy found throughout Genesis and the rest of the Old Testament points to the cross of Jesus. The cross is the ultimate display of both God’s judgment and His mercy. At the cross, God fully poured out His wrath against our sin, but He also poured out the fullness of His mercy and grace when He let His own Son take the punishment for our sin.

As Christians, we have new and redeemed hearts. As a result, we are to accept the task the people of Babylon ignored and share the good news of God’s kingdom, accomplishing His mission and spreading His fame, not ours.



JACOB AND ESAU
Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD
Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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 your 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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption through
His Son, Jesus Christ.*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

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?



HANDS

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?

UNIT 2

God the Covenant-Maker

GENESIS 12–50

MEMORY VERSE

And he believed the LORD,
and he counted it to him
as righteousness.

GENESIS 15:6

07

SESSION SEVEN

God's Covenant with Abraham

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 12:1-4; 15:1-6; 17:1-14

THE POINT

God chooses a nation through which He will reverse the curse of sin and reclaim the world as His kingdom.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Abraham:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to be the father of many nations

PLOT

As we saw in the previous session, Genesis 11 tells the story of the generations who came out of the flood and built the Tower of Babel with its top in the sky. The Lord came down to judge their pride, and He did so by confusing their language and scattering them over the earth.

The problem of sin and separation from God that began in the garden in Genesis 3 had not gotten better; in fact, it had only gotten worse. People were not only separated from God, but they were now separated from one another.

What can be done to remove these barriers that come between our relationships with both God and one another? How will God fix this problem? Watch and see how God initiated a renewed relationship with His people and continues His rescue plan.

HIS STORY

GOD INITIATES A RENEWED RELATIONSHIP

As we start with this story, we see from the very beginning that God has not given up on humanity. He still has a rescue plan in place, and that plan involves entering into a unique relationship with Abraham (though he was called Abram before God changed his name).

Through Abram's descendants, God will reverse the misfortunes of Eden (separation from God) and Babel (separation from one another). The specific promises that God made to Abram make this connection with the events of Babel clear: The people of Babel wanted to "make a name" for themselves (Gen. 11:4), but God promised to make Abram's name great (12:2). The rebels at Babel were scattered over the earth under God's judgment, but God promised to and through Abram to bless "all the families of the earth" (12:3).

Genesis 12:1-4

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Circle the uses of the pronoun "I" as it appears in God's words to Abram. What do you think this tells us about God's commitment to His glory and His plan of redemption?



THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

God establishes a covenant with Abraham.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Election

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

Genesis 15:1-3

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

GOD COMMANDS ABRAM TO TRUST HIS PROMISES

Sometimes evidence seems to stack up against promises. God made wonderful promises to Abram, but Abram and Sarai still didn't have any children. Both of them were old, and Sarai was well past the years of being able to conceive. So Abram began to question God's promise, and even took matters into his own hands.

Abram experienced great doubt despite God's great promises. He looked at his situation, and he thought that he would try to help God along by pointing out his servant Eliezer. If we're honest, we'll admit this kind of doubt is understandable. There are times in our lives when the promises of God do not look so promising.

In the midst of Abram's doubt, God came to him and restated His promises, even adding to them. And Abram believed!

God reassured Abram that he would have children of his own. He would give him offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky. Not only did God restate this promise to Abram and his children repeatedly (see Gen. 22:17; 26:4; also 28:14), but He saw it through. In Deuteronomy 1:10, Moses said, "The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven," and again in Deuteronomy 10:22.



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.



JACOB AND ESAU

Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.

AS LONG AS A MAN IS THINKING OF GOD AS AN EXAMINER WHO HAS SET HIM A SORT OF PAPER TO DO, OR AS THE OPPOSITE PARTY IN SOME SORT OF BARGAIN—AS LONG AS HE IS THINKING OF CLAIMS AND COUNTER-CLAIMS BETWEEN HIMSELF AND GOD—HE IS NOT YET IN RIGHT RELATION TO HIM. HE IS MISUNDERSTANDING WHAT HE IS AND WHAT GOD IS. AND HE CANNOT GET INTO THE RIGHT RELATION UNTIL HE HAS DISCOVERED THE FACT OF OUR BANKRUPTCY.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

CHRIST CONNECTION

The story of the calling of Abraham points to Jesus in many ways. For instance, in Genesis 12:7 the Lord made a promise to Abraham's seed, or offspring. This can be understood as referring to all of his offspring collectively (see Gen. 13:16) or just one (see Gen. 3:15; 4:25 ["child"]). Indeed, it could be said that Abraham's collective offspring benefited through the singular promised offspring of Isaac.

In Galatians 3, Paul picked up on this peculiarity of the word "seed." Paul emphasized that God's promise was not to "seeds" but to one "seed," and ultimately the "seed" of Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). Yet those who belong to Jesus are then collectively considered "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (3:29).

Another connection is found in Genesis 15:6, where we saw Abraham believing the promise of God and God counting it to him as righteousness. In Galatians 3, the apostle Paul pointed to Abraham's faith as a model of saving faith. Paul argued that we are not justified (declared righteous before God) by trying to keep the rules (Gal. 3:11). Those who break God's law are cursed, and we're all law-breakers. But the good news is that Christ became that curse for us on the cross (3:13). Justification only comes through faith in Jesus, and just as with Abraham, God credits His righteousness to our account (3:6-7). Today, we too are called to trust the promises of God.



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through His encounter with God.



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
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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?

08

SESSION EIGHT

The Testing of Abraham

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 22:1-14; Hebrews 11:17-19

THE POINT

Faith is trusting in God to keep His promise to provide salvation.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Abraham:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to be the father of many nations
- **Isaac:** the promised son to Abraham and Sarah

PLOT

The last session marked a bright moment in history when we saw God's rescue plan take shape in the choosing and calling of Abraham. It showed us that while humanity is still broken and contaminated because of sin, God still hasn't abandoned us to ourselves. It showed us that God keeps His promises, and that He is at work to restore and make all things new once more.

In the midst of this good news, however, we come to a historical event that is difficult to fathom at first. It appears, on the surface, to make no sense and serve no good purpose whatsoever. In fact, it even makes us initially wonder how God is going to pull off this rescue plan if things go the way He has commanded them.

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.

Genesis 22:1-6

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.



ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

Abraham's faith is tested when commanded to sacrifice his son.



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.

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, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 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."

Genesis 22:10-14

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

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?



JACOB AND ESAU
Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The theme of substitution is at the heart of Christianity, and the theme of the substitute lamb runs throughout the Bible. Abraham said that God would provide a lamb. As we will see in future sessions, at the Passover a lamb's blood was shed as a substitute for the life of a firstborn son in Israel (firstborn sons just like Isaac). That sacrifice caused the death angel to pass over them. Also, on the Day of Atonement animals were given in place of the Israelites as substitute sacrifices. All of these stories point forward to the moment when the Lord Jesus Himself would die as the sacrifice for our sins (see 1 Cor. 5:7). God provided His only begotten Son as the substitute for the world.

Here in Genesis 22, God provides a ram to be the substitute for Isaac. Just as Isaac (the willing son to be sacrificed) hints at Jesus (God's Son who went up the mountain), so also the ram hints at Jesus as our substitute. The ram caught in the thorns points ahead to the coming descendant from Abraham, Jesus the King, who will be crowned with thorns and pierced for our transgressions.

When it comes down to it, we see several parallels between Abraham's story and the gospel of Jesus as told in Genesis 22. For instance:

- Isaac was Abraham's "only" son (of promise), and Jesus is God's "One and Only" Son (John 3:16).
- Both Isaac and Jesus were subject to be sacrificed.
- Just as Isaac willingly submitted to be sacrificed on a mountain, Jesus willingly submitted to crucifixion on Calvary.
- Both Isaac and Jesus carried the wood for the sacrifice.
- When asked where the sacrificial lamb was, Abraham responded that God would provide it. God ultimately provided the sacrificial lamb when He gave His "One and Only Son" as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus is our substitute.

99 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.



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.



THE SALVATION OF MANY

God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
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YOUR STORY

*Where your story
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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.

09

SESSION NINE

God Reaffirms the Covenant

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 25:19-26; 26:1-6

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Isaac:** son of Abraham through whom God would renew His covenant

PLOT

In the previous sessions, we've seen how God chose Abraham to be the one through whom salvation would come to the world. We saw how Isaac was the child of promise, and how Abraham's faith was tested. But what happens when Abraham's descendants are unfaithful to God? How will God's promise go forward?

In this session, we see that God renews His promise to be with Abraham's offspring and to bless the world through them despite their sinful and unworthy ways. Abraham's descendants fight, lie, and manipulate one another, but God remains faithful and renews His promises again and again. We can take heart in knowing we serve a God who keeps His promises in unusual ways to unworthy people, a God who is present with us as we fulfill His mission.

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 "These are the generations of..." (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.

Genesis 25:19-21

These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

99 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).



ABRAHAM'S HEIRS RECEIVE THE PROMISE

The promise of the covenant is passed to Abraham's descendants.



JACOB AND ESAU

Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.

Genesis 26:1-3

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

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?



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Consider this pattern throughout the Bible. God granted Isaac as a miracle child to Abraham and Sarah in order to keep His promise to them. Likewise, Esau and Jacob were an answer to Isaac's prayer. God granted a miraculous birth, the prophet Samuel, to Hannah who was barren. Manoah's wife faced infertility but gave birth to Samson, whom God used to judge Israel. Ultimately, the virgin Mary gave birth to the Savior of the world, an unlikely birth that was the culmination of all of God's promises.

There is no doubt that God graciously grants many things to us in the gospel. He gives us forgiveness of sin, adoption into His family, eternal life, an inheritance in His kingdom, and so much more. But the one thing the gospel of Jesus Christ secures for us that is far more glorious than any of these is God Himself.

The God-man, Jesus Christ—the One who shed His own blood for us and was raised from the dead to free us from the curse of sin—will live with His people forever. The promise of God to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is the promise God has fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. And if we learn anything about God's character from these biblical accounts and others, it is the fact that God is someone who keeps His promises, even at the cost of His own life!

THE SUPREME BLESSING IN ISAAC'S LIFE WAS NOT MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, BUT THE LORD HIMSELF. "I AM WITH YOU," GOD SAID TO ISAAC.

Willem VanGemeren, Gospel Transformation Bible



THE SALVATION OF MANY
God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.



MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD*
God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **What are some ways you have seen God keep His promises in your life or in the life of someone you know?**

▶ **What situations have caused you to doubt God's promises to you?**

▶ **How can you battle your doubts and trust God's promises in these difficult circumstances?**

▶ **How has this session challenged you on a personal level?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
Redemption through
His Son, Jesus Christ*

YOUR STORY

*Where your story
meets His.*

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

There's no question that God has made promises to us that are independent of our worthiness. Not only that, but God also keeps His promises even when we fail to live as we should. Yet, we often seem to believe that God is mad at us or that we forfeit His blessing if we fail Him. When we think this way, we reveal a works based mind-set at work within us.

- Why is it easy to think God is perpetually angry with us when we fail Him?
- Why is it important that we change that way of thinking?



HEART

It is important to remember that God's grace, love, and mercy are unmerited—meaning we didn't do anything to deserve them. In fact, the Bible affirms that we love only because God first loved us, and that it is His kindness that leads us to repentance.

- How can we stand on the promises of God we see in Genesis? How does this help us grow in love and obedience toward Him?
- How does God's faithfulness lead to a deeper trust in Him?



HANDS

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (see Pr. 3:34; Jas. 4:6). There is no place for pride or boasting in the Christian's mission, but only the desire to become more like Christ in the hope of expanding His kingdom in the hearts of people.

- What are some limitations that may make a person feel unqualified to share the love of Christ with others?
- How does knowing that God uses unlikely and unworthy people to accomplish His plan free us from the fear of not being qualified to share His message?

10

SESSION TEN

God's Dysfunctional Covenant Family

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 27:1-40; 28:10-22

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Esau and Jacob:** twin sons born to Isaac and Rebekah

PLOT

God's plan may not seem the least bumpy or even the most efficient at times, but through it all He is always committed to His promises. We saw this truth on display in the previous session, in which God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob even when they proved less than faithful in their actions.

As we continue along the biblical journey, we will see that despite the dysfunction of Isaac's family, the deception of Jacob, and the despondency of Esau, God is committed to His plan to redeem a people from all the nations on the planet through the offspring of this family—Jesus of Nazareth. And this story will show us, among many things, that because God specializes in showing mercy to unworthy people, we should look for ways God can make visible His grace through our own struggle with ongoing flaws and 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.

Genesis 27:5-8

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, 'Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the LORD before I die.' Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you.



JACOB AND ESAU
Family dysfunction erupts between parents and sons for the birthright blessing.



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.

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.

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

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.

99 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 decree 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)

Genesis 27:18-19

So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.



THE SALVATION OF MANY

God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.

CHRIST CONNECTION

In Genesis 28:10-22 we are reminded of God's faithfulness to keep His promises, even to those who are undeserving. After betraying his brother, Jacob fled for his safety. He found a place to stay the night, choosing a stone as his pillow.

As he slept, Jacob dreamed about a stairway on the ground with its top in the heavens. Angels were going up and down. It is here that Yahweh reminded Jacob that He is the God of Abraham and Isaac and He would be Jacob's God, too. God would give the land to Jacob and his offspring. He would give Jacob offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth. God promised that all the peoples of the world would be blessed by Jacob's offspring. Then God promised, "I am with you." Jacob took the stone he used for a pillow and set it up as a marker and named the place Bethel, or "House of God." Like in Eden, God promised to live among His people. Jacob then vowed to serve Yahweh as His God.

The stairway Jacob saw reminds us of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4). The people of Babel had attempted to come before God on their own terms. But this story shows us that if man is to reconnect with God, then it will require God coming down to us. Christianity is different from other religions because we believe God's presence is secured not through our climbing up toward Him but through His gracious descent toward us.

Jacob's stairway gives us a glimpse into the reversal of Babel. The people of Babel were trying to reach God by lifting up a tower, and it caused them to be separated all over the planet. But when the offspring of Jacob, God incarnate—Jesus of Nazareth—will come down from heaven, He will be lifted up to draw all people to Himself. He will bless all the peoples of the earth and reunite them in Himself. John 1:51 tells us that Jesus is the true stairway to heaven. He is the One who reconnects earth and heaven.



MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD*
God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.



GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED
God displays His glory among all the peoples.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

*God's Story of
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YOUR STORY

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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?

11

SESSION ELEVEN

The God Who Gives New Names

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 32:24-32; 35:9-15

THE POINT

Encountering God leads to a fundamental change of identity and purpose.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Jacob:** youngest son of Isaac and Rebekah; tricked his father into giving him Esau's birthright

PLOT

The good news from the Bible is that life-change is possible, and it is not dependent on you. We might be able to mask behavior for a while, but such acting never amounts to true transformation. Only God has the capability of changing hearts and lives. God is the life-changer, and we see this in His interactions with Jacob.

As we continue the story of Jacob we see that an encounter with God leads not only to brokenness, but to lasting change within someone's life. As a result of this encounter, Jacob is forever changed, and even receives a new name from God highlighting the transformation that God had done in his life. Where his old name meant "deceiver" and was an apt description of his former ways, Jacob receives a new name that will speak now to the grace of God in his life.

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.

Genesis 32:24-27

And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

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



JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Jacob, the deceiver, is forever changed after being broken through his encounter with God.



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

The sufferings of Joseph and the mercies of God.

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.

Genesis 32:28-30

Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."



THE SALVATION OF MANY

God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.



MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD*

God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.

99 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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Genesis 32 should encourage us because it reveals that no matter how messed up our lives may be, no matter how many bad decisions we have made, and no matter how much we have wrecked the relationships around us, if we encounter the living God, we can be given a new life. The New Testament teaches that we can encounter God through His Son, Jesus, and that in Christ we bear His name! Therefore, our identity will no longer be wrapped up in our sin, but rather, our identity will be that of beloved children of God.

Just as God had done with Jacob, his firstborn son would not carry the promises forward. The promises passed to Judah (see Gen. 49), and through Judah would come the Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus would fulfill God's calling on Israel to be a light to the nations, and through His death and resurrection, He would bring salvation to the world.

God chose this man with all of his wretched past to be the agent through whom He would bring His saving blessing to the whole world. Because Jacob would have a son, and his son would have a son, and his son would have a son, and his son would have a son, until eventually a virgin peasant girl would have a Son named Jesus—the Savior of the world! Through Jesus, God can change your life forever and use you to bring blessing to the world around you. He will give you a new identity and a new purpose that fuels your life like never before.

God's renaming of individuals in the Old Testament reflects both privilege and responsibility. As Christians, we bear the name of Christ. We receive both the privilege of salvation and the responsibility of mission.



GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED

God displays His glory among all the peoples.



JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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YOUR STORY

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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?

12

SESSION TWELVE

The God Who Uses Suffering

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 37:3-11,23-28; 39:6b-23

THE POINT

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

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joseph:** favorite son of Jacob and Rachel; sold into slavery by his jealous brothers
- **Joseph's brothers:** twelve brothers whose families would eventually become the twelve tribes of Israel.

PLOT

The unfolding drama of God's redemptive story continues as we take a peek into the life of a young man named Joseph. Throughout Joseph's life, we see how God uses suffering to accomplish His plan to save many lives. Not only that, but we also get a preview of how God will work through Jesus' suffering in our place to save the world. The good news for those in Christ is that we can trust God to take the hardships in our life and use them to fulfill His plan.

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?

Genesis 37:3-4

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.



JOSEPH'S HARDSHIPS

*The sufferings of Joseph
and the mercies of God.*



THE SALVATION OF MANY

*God brings good out of
the evil done to Joseph.*

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.

Genesis 37:23-24

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

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 can be 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.



MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD*

God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.



GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED

God displays His glory among all the peoples.

Genesis 39:21-23.

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Joseph's life points forward to Jesus. Jesus would be betrayed, handed over to captivity, stripped of His robe, and killed through an unjust sentence. But the rejection and humiliation of Jesus was God's plan to save Israel and the world! Jesus looked abandoned by God, as if His cries to the Father went unanswered, but when that grave opened on Sunday morning, it was clear He was not alone. God vindicated His Son.

We get a glimpse of this plan in Joseph's life. He suffered. It seemed as if he were abandoned, but God was with him and God was accomplishing His good plan. Joseph succeeded even in captivity, and his humiliation would eventually lead to God's exaltation to bless Israel and all nations (see Gen. 12; Phil. 2).

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

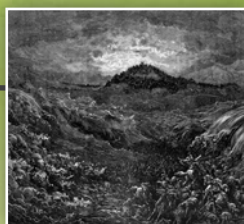
God Is Omniscient

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.



JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.



THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- ▶ **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?**

HIS STORY

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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?

13

SESSION THIRTEEN

God Is Faithful to His Covenant

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 41:46-57; 45:1-15; 50:15-21

THE POINT

God is sovereign and will bring good out of evil circumstances.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joseph:** son of Jacob whom God used in the midst of great suffering

PLOT

During our previous story we saw how Joseph suffered grave injustices. He was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, forced to work in Potiphar's house, then falsely accused of sexual advances against his master's wife and thrown in jail. Yet through every difficulty Joseph experienced, he remained a man of steadfast faith.

After hearing all of that, we might wonder if Joseph could ever bounce back from the horrible sufferings he has endured. Not only that, but we might also wonder what good could come of it? What was the purpose of it all, anyway? What is God telling us through the life of Joseph today, and what does the covenant have to do with any of this?

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 SALVATION OF MANY

God brings good out of the evil done to Joseph.



MOSES SPEAKS TO GOD*

God reveals Himself to Moses and promises redemption.

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.

Genesis 45:4-5

So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.

Genesis 50:19-20

But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.



GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED

God displays His glory among all the peoples.



JUDGE AND SAVIOR

Even in the midst of His judgment, God provides a means of salvation.

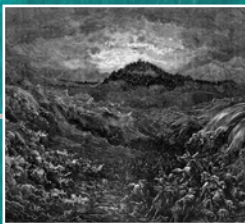
God Is Faithful

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.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Joseph went on to live a long life. When he died, he was put in a borrowed tomb in Egypt, awaiting the return of God's people to the promised land. Genesis began with life in paradise, but it ended in death in a borrowed tomb outside the promised land. God made a covenant with Abraham, and the promises seem to be unfulfilled. But, the story was not over yet ...

Joseph's life was a preview of the coming Messiah who would forgive those who wronged Him. Joseph knew that God used his brothers' sinful actions to save many people. Jesus would be mistreated, betrayed for silver, handed over to captivity, and ultimately executed at the hands of evil men. While He was being crucified, He looked down at the ones killing and forgave them. On the cross, He secured saving forgiveness for the world, and then God highly exalted Him, so that the nations of the world would stream to Him, bow their knee and confess Him as Lord (see Phil. 2:5-11). Evil men killed the Messiah, but God used even their evil deeds to accomplish His goal of salvation.



THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.



THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

YOUR STORY

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- ▶ **What are some challenges in your life that have made you a better follower of Christ, son or daughter, student, and friend?**

- ▶ **What are some challenges you've faced that you see others facing? In what ways can God bring fruit out of your past affliction by leading you to minister to others in similar circumstances?**

- ▶ **Why is it so difficult for us to forgive those who wrong us? What is it about forgiveness that is so painful?**

- ▶ **How has the story of Joseph connected with you on a personal level?**

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION



HEAD

The story of Joseph challenges the way we think about, and approach, various difficulties in life. As in the case of Joseph, belief in God's sovereignty and plan over his life led him to persevere through his difficulties, forgive his brothers, and recognize that God was doing something bigger than he could see from his limited view point.

- How does the gospel help you put the bad things that happen in your life in the right perspective?
- What are some verses we could cling to when struggling to believe that God is in control and is working all things for good?



HEART

Christ died on the cross in order to fully forgive all of our sins, and His forgiveness is the fuel to forgiving those who sin against us. Refusing to forgive is not just disobedience; it's unbelief. Holding a grudge against someone reveals that we believe the cross of Christ is enough to forgive the sins we commit against God, but it is not enough to forgive the sins committed against us.

- How does holding a grudge contradict the gospel?
- How can meditating on the gospel empower you to be patient with and forgive others?



HANDS

Longing for justice and for things to be set right are not wrong, but our bitterness, desire for revenge, and lack of forgiveness reveal that we want to execute a task that belongs to God alone. The power to forgive our enemies is found in trusting the justice and mercy of God.

- How can we show those with whom we disagree love and mercy as an expression of God's love for us?
- Since Jesus is the Savior who offers forgiveness to the world, how can we be part of the commission to take the message of forgiveness to all peoples?