

(in)courage
DEVOTIONAL BIBLE 





(in)courage

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE 

Denise J. Hughes, *General Editor*

Trevin Wax, PhD, *Publisher*

Melissa Fuller, *Managing Editor*



CHRISTIAN
STANDARD
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Letter from the Editor

"Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples."

PSALM 96:3

The heart of (in)courage has always been to provide a place where women can gather to share their story and declare His glory. Since its inception in 2009, our website at incourage.me has published over 4,000 stories from more than 3,000 women.

We gather together daily to bear witness to the beauty of God's grace in our everyday lives. We share our stories because we believe it's a ministry—the ministry of being willing to "go first." To share what's really going on. To whisper what perhaps we've all been thinking and feeling. To admit when we're not fine. As friends and sisters in the body of Christ, our prayer is to continue the gift of going first through the stories here on these pages.

The (in)courage Devotional Bible is an invitation for all women to find their stories within the tapestry of the greatest story ever told—God's Story of Redemption.

After walking through the Red Sea on dry land, Miriam led all the women of Israel in dancing and rejoicing because of what God had done. After leading an army into battle, Deborah gave praise to God for the victory. After learning her prayer had been answered and a child would soon be born, Hannah sang with words of thanksgiving. After hearing the angel's words that she would give birth to the Savior who would sit on David's throne, Mary responded with gratitude and praise.

We seek to follow in the footsteps of these women. With 312 devotions by 122 women, we are telling our stories of how God's story has changed our lives. Because of His grace, we have found beauty in the brokenness and hope in the hard. With each devotion, we sing the praise of the One who has authored our story for His glory.

We believe Scripture is complete. Nothing needs to be added to it or taken from it, and we can find ourselves within it. God's Word is truth. Our circumstances may be different and our culture might not look the same, but God "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). We can look to Him as our unchanging source of hope.

The (in)courage community has always believed that friendship matters and we are better together. We are many voices with one heart, and we want to lift our voices so more women can hear of His goodness—that no matter where we've been or what we've done, God loves us and has a purpose for us. We are never beyond His reach. In Christ, new life awaits. It's the most beautiful story ever told.



Denise J. Hughes, General Editor

How to Read the Bible

God has revealed Himself in His Word and in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. While written by human authors, every word on the page is breathed out by God, so we read the Bible to know God better and to learn from Him how to flourish in our everyday lives. Reading the Bible can be challenging, though, and sometimes overwhelming. But it can also be rewarding and awe-inspiring. More importantly, immersing ourselves in Scripture is the way we become more like Jesus as part of getting to know Him more.

How Do We Read the Bible?

Thankfully, some simple steps can help us access the language of the Bible, and because the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, we can trust the Holy Spirit will empower us to understand the beauty of Scripture.

Set Yourself Up for Success

- Make a commitment to read God’s Word daily.
- Prayerfully select a reading plan. (You can find several reading plans starting on p. 1826.)
- Set aside a consistent time each day to meet with God in His Word.
- Designate a place where you will read the Bible.
- Gather any materials you might use—like a journal and pen.
- Diminish any distractions—such as turning off a phone or reducing background noise.

Read

- Pray and ask God to reveal more of Himself to you through His Word.
- Approach the text with a joyful expectation that God will speak to you through His Word.
- Look over the introduction to the individual book.
- Read quietly. Read aloud. Take in a whole chapter. Savor an individual verse.
- Go your own pace and give yourself grace.

Reflect

- Identify the genre: historical narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, or letter (to name a few).
- Consider the context: Who wrote it? To whom was it written? When was it written?
- Discern the author’s objective: What was the author’s main purpose?
- Underline any passages that stand out to you.
- Write any questions you have in the margins of your Bible or in a journal.

Respond

- Notice how a specific principle in the passage is applied to the situation in the passage.
- Ponder possible parallels in your own life.
- Contemplate appropriate responses, perhaps a course of action or a change of belief.
- Write your thoughts about the passage in a journal.
- Invite the Lord to show you how He wants you to respond to His Word.

May we always remember—with deep, heartfelt gratitude—that because of Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross we can approach the throne of grace with boldness (Heb 4:16). And when we spend time in God’s Word, our time is never wasted (Is 55:11). He is faithful to draw near to us whenever we draw near to Him (Jms 4:8). It’s a promise.

For more devotions on how to read God’s Word, see pages 828, 1245, and 1307.

God's Story of Redemption

The English word for Bible comes from the Latin word *bibliotheca*, which means “library.” The Bible is a “library” of 66 books, but they’re unlike any other book in history. The authors who wrote them were inspired by the Holy Spirit. These 66 books of the Bible—written by dozens of authors over approximately fifteen-hundred years—tell one cohesive, overarching story. It’s God’s story of how He orchestrated time and events to redeem His people. So before we dive into a certain book or a particular passage, it helps to understand how every part of the Bible comes together to tell God’s Story of Redemption.

The main character in the Bible is God, who exists eternally in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Before God created the heavens and the earth, He already had a plan in place. In fact, He already had you and I in mind.

For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him (Eph 1:4).

Creation (Genesis 1–2)

God literally spoke the universe into existence. By His very words, He creates and gives life.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gn 1:1,3).

He created us so we could have fellowship together, and the very first man and woman—Adam and Eve—enjoyed His presence in the garden of Eden.

Separation (Genesis 3)

A relationship, though, isn’t a real relationship unless both parties willingly choose to be together, so God gave humanity a free will. He risked rejection by His own creation so that we might know Him. In the garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed, with one command—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:16-17). They could eat anything else in the garden, but not the fruit of this one tree. In this, God required obedience, but it was still humanity’s choice. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, sin entered the world, separating sinful people from a holy God.

So the LORD God sent [Adam] away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Gn 3:23-24).

Now, as a result of sin, all people are born into brokenness. We live our lives seeking to be whole again, but wholeness and restoration can only be found in our Creator.

Expectation (Genesis 4–Malachi)

Nothing, however, is a surprise to God. Before Adam and Eve drew their first breath, God knew that sin would separate humanity from His holy presence, so He set into motion a plan to reconcile His people back to Himself. This way of reconciliation would be secured through His Son, Jesus, and the people waited with expectant hope for a Savior to come. The rest of the Old Testament is filled with stories and prophecies and so much more, with all of it pointing to Jesus as the coming Redeemer (Jn 5:39).

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever (Is 9:6-7).

Salvation (Matthew–John)

The four Gospel accounts offer four testimonies of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. With His own body, Jesus paid the price for all sin.

For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

Through God's ministry of reconciliation, those who accept His gift of grace now have access, once again, to God's presence and will live for eternity with Him.

Transformation (Acts–Jude)

Christ will come again one day, but while we wait for His return we're to grow and become more like Him.

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit (2Co 3:18).

Through God's Word, we learn more about who God is, and His Spirit—indwelling all believers—empowers us to be transformed into His likeness (Php 3:21).


Consummation (Revelation)

While the book of Revelation is apocalyptic in nature, it describes the second coming of Christ. When Jesus returns, He'll come as the King of all kings, and a magnificent wedding banquet will take place. Throughout Scripture, Christ is depicted as the bridegroom and the church His bride. In this metaphor, we see the picture of marriage. We are His beloved—His betrothed.

Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself (Rv 19:6-7).

Friend, you are His beloved. He treasures you, so much so, that He gave His life for you. There is no sin—no secret, no past, no shame—that He cannot forgive and redeem. God's story of redemption isn't a fanciful tale; it's truth. It's also an invitation. The God of the universe fashioned you in His image, and He longs to transform your brokenness and create something whole and beautiful.


For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rm 10:13).



Meet *Eve*

A WOMAN OF
Second Chances
GENESIS 3

Eve desired wisdom, and she believed the serpent when he said that God was holding out on her. She broke God's law and did the one thing He asked her not to do. Eve learned the hard way that God wasn't the one who lied. It was the serpent who deceived her. But God didn't leave her in her brokenness. The first mistake in history also led to the greatest second chance. While there were consequences for her actions, God promised to redeem her and make her the mother of all the living. He also promised that her offspring would one day crush the serpent and destroy his hold over man. God was faithful to fulfill His promise, too, bringing about redemption through the Second Adam—Jesus Christ.



Women of Courage

Fifty women in the Bible are highlighted for different aspects of their character. Each woman's story reflects how God reached in and touched her life. These women's stories serve as an encouragement to us all, and they're connected with one of the ten themes.

Book Introductions

Each book of the Bible has an introduction which includes historical background, the message of the book, and why the book is important and applicable today.

THE BOOK OF
1 Thessalonians

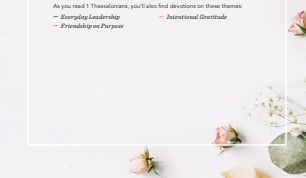

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART Paul's trip to Thessalonica was not short due to an opponent of prisoners who opposed Paul's teaching. After three Sabbath, Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silas, needed to leave town. But their brief time in Thessalonica yielded the fruit of a great faith. Timothy soon returned to check on the new converts and later reported to Paul how much the believers there were holding true to the faith, but they did have a question: What would happen to their loved ones who passed away before Christ's second coming? This letter is Paul's response to their question, plus several other issues.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY First Thessalonians deals explicitly with "the day of the Lord"—Christ's second return. In fact, Paul returns to this theme in every chapter, clarifying some important matters that are increasingly helpful for us today. In addition to his discussion on the end times, Paul emphasizes the importance of living in a manner that glorifies God, and his encouragement to those 1st-century believers is relevant for us today.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY While the Thessalonians believed in eternal persecution, Paul reassured them—and also us—of the genuine hope we find in Christ. We can look to Christ as the reason for the hope we have, regardless of our circumstances.

As you read 1 Thessalonians, you'll also find direction on these themes:

- *Emerging Leadership*
- *Intentional Obedience*
- *Friendship on Purpose*

HE HAS
SENT ME TO
heal THE
BROKENHEARTED...
TO GIVE THEM A
Crown of beauty
INSTEAD OF
ashes.

ISAIAH 61:1-3

Theme Verses

Each theme has one Old Testament and one New Testament verse which embody the heart of the theme. These verses have been artistically designed to present the beauty and truth of God's Word and aid in memorization.

Journaling Space

Each page of Scripture contains lined journaling space for personal reflection and notes.



Devotional Theme Guide



Beautiful Brokenness

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God. **PSALM 51:17**
Scripture is full of stories of broken people. But it is also full of stories of how God has redeemed them—their stories, their families, and their futures—by His grace. While the stories may seem wrought with brokenness and despair, God turns that brokenness into beauty, reflecting the power of the grace. God chooses to use broken people every day, and their brokenness leads them to fully depend on Him.



Better Together

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1827

For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. **1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13**

God designed men and women to live in community with one another and share their lives together. Throughout the Bible, there are stories of people living in community who are better because they live and work and serve the Lord together. The stories of these men and women in the Bible who were better together are wonderful examples for the church today of how we can love and support one another and always point each other toward Christ.



Daily Grace

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1828

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day." **EXODUS 16:4**

God provided manna for His people when they were living in the desert. Each day He provided enough for that day. In the same way. He provided enough manna each day for the Israelites, He also provided grace every day for His people throughout Scripture. He continues to provide the grace we need every single day and in exactly the right portion. Here you'll find encouragement that God is always working to meet your needs and draw you into His love with His ever-flowing grace.



Everyday Leadership

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1829

Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith. **HEBREWS 13:7**

God is always faithful to provide wisdom and guidance for His people through the men and women He appoints as leaders. But God also calls leaders who may not be exactly what the world would consider a leader. Everyday leadership showcases stories of men and women who step out of their comfort zones to lead others, pointing them to the truth. Their leadership impacted more lives than they would ever know, and their stories give us confidence that God can and will use our lives to lead others and point them to Christ.



Friendship on Purpose

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1830

No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. **JOHN 15:13**

The ultimate example of friendship is in Jesus Christ. He gave His life to save His friends. He cared for His friends, challenged His friends, encouraged His friends, and enjoyed His friends. While Christ is the ultimate example of friendship, Scripture is full of many other beautiful examples of purposeful friendship that encourages, builds, cares for, and gives life. May we see these examples and wholeheartedly follow in friendship on purpose.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. **ROMANS 5:5**

No matter the circumstance, God's Word is full of stories of hope. In the face of countless trials and tribulations, His people have hope that reflects their deep faith in the Father. Though circumstances are hard—sometimes even impossible—God's people choose to have hope and rely on Him for their every need. Their steadfastness is often the encouragement we need to face our own hard and find hope in our Savior.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832

Love your neighbor. **LEVITICUS 19:18**

Biblical hospitality is never meant to be perfect. It is meant to engage, encourage, and build up others while simultaneously inviting them to share their stories and their lives. The stories of hospitality found throughout Scripture remind us to focus on our guests and sharing God's incredible love and grace with them. Regardless of the condition of our space, if our hearts are focused on encouraging others, our hospitality will honor God.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833

Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **1 THESSALONIANS 5:18**

God loves our gratitude. He loves it when His people stop and thank Him for what He has done. There are many examples throughout the Bible where God's people stop and celebrate what God has done. These stories serve as reminders of the importance of stopping and intentionally showing gratitude to the Lord for His provision and victory.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9

While the entire story of Scripture is God's second chance for humanity, the Bible is full of individual examples of how He graciously poured out His love for His people and redeemed their lives. His heart for redemption is displayed through the way He continually reached into broken lives and gave His children another chance to follow Him. His patience and grace are unmerited and unmatched. He grants second chances to His people, not because they are deserving, but because He is merciful.

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. **2 TIMOTHY 1:7**

"Do not fear" is found 365 times in the Bible, once for each day of the year. God's desire for His people is not for them to live in fear, but to live in the confidence He is always with them and that with Him, they have nothing to fear. God is faithful to His children, and in their choice to be brave, His power is beautifully displayed. Scripture provides examples of men and women who faced impossible situations but chose to be brave and follow God's leading in their lives.

Introduction to the Christian Standard Bible[©]

The Bible is God's revelation to humanity. It is our only source for completely reliable information about God, what happens when we die, and where history is headed. The Bible reveals these things because it is God's inspired Word, inerrant in the original manuscripts. Bible translation brings God's Word from the ancient languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) into today's world. In dependence on God's Spirit to accomplish this sacred task, the CSB Translation Oversight Committee and Holman Bible Publishers present the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

Textual Base of the CSB

The textual base for the New Testament (NT) is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition, and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, 5th corrected edition. The text for the Old Testament (OT) is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th edition. Where there are significant differences among Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek manuscripts, the translators follow what they believe is the original reading and indicate the main alternative(s) in footnotes.

Goals of This Translation

- Provide English-speaking people worldwide with an accurate translation in contemporary English.
- Provide an accurate translation for personal study, sermon preparation, private devotions, and memorization.
- Provide a text that is clear and understandable, suitable for public reading, and shareable so that all may access its life-giving message.
- Affirm the authority of Scripture and champion its absolute truth against skeptical viewpoints.

Translation Philosophy of the CSB

Most discussions of Bible translations speak of two opposite approaches: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. However, Bible translations cannot be neatly sorted into these categories. Optimal equivalence capitalizes on the strengths of both approaches.

Optimal equivalence balances contemporary English readability with linguistic precision to the original languages. In the many places throughout the Bible where a word-for-word rendering is understandable, a literal translation is used. When a word-for-word rendering might obscure the meaning for a modern audience, a more dynamic translation is used. This process assures that both the words and the thoughts contained in the original text are conveyed accurately for today's readers. The Christian Standard Bible places equal value on fidelity to the original and readability for a modern audience, resulting in a translation that achieves both goals.

History of the CSB

Holman Bible Publishers assembled an interdenominational team of one hundred scholars, editors, stylists, and proofreaders, all of whom were committed to biblical inerrancy. Working from the original languages, the translation team edited and polished the manuscript, which was first published as the Holman Christian Standard Bible in 2004.

A standing committee maintained the translation, while also seeking ways to improve both readability and accuracy. As with the original translation, the committee that prepared this revision, renamed the Christian Standard Bible, is international and interdenominational, comprising evangelical scholars who honor the inspiration and authority of God's written Word.

Footnotes

Footnotes are used to show readers how the original biblical language has been understood in the CSB.

1. Old Testament (OT) Textual Footnotes

OT textual notes show important differences among Hebrew (Hb) manuscripts and ancient OT versions, such as the Septuagint and the Vulgate. See the list of abbreviations that follows for a list of other ancient versions used.

Some OT textual notes (like NT textual notes) give only an alternate textual reading. However, other OT textual notes also give the support for the reading chosen by the editors as well as for the alternate textual reading. For example, the CSB text of Psalm 12:7 reads,

⁷ You, LORD, will guard us;^a
you will protect us^b from this generation forever.

The textual footnotes for this verse read,

^a12:7 Some Hb mss, LXX, Jer; other Hb mss read *them* ^b12:7 Some Hb mss, LXX; other Hb mss read *him*

The textual note in this example means that there are two different readings found in the Hebrew manuscripts: some manuscripts read *us* and others read *him*. The CSB translators chose the reading *us*, which is also found in the Septuagint (LXX), and placed the other Hebrew reading *him* in the footnote.

Two other kinds of OT textual notes are

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Alt Hb tradition reads _____ | a variation given by scribes in the Hebrew manuscript tradition (known as <i>Kethiv/Qere</i> and <i>Tiqqune Sopherim</i> readings) |
| Hb uncertain | when it is unclear what the original Hebrew text was |

2. New Testament (NT) Textual Footnotes

NT textual notes indicate significant differences among Greek manuscripts (mss) and are normally indicated in one of three ways:

| |
|----------------------|
| Other mss read _____ |
| Other mss add _____ |
| Other mss omit _____ |

In the NT, some textual footnotes that use the word “add” or “omit” also have square brackets before and after the corresponding verses in the biblical text. Examples of this use of square brackets are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11.

3. Other Kinds of Footnotes

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Lit _____ | a more literal rendering in English of the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text |
| Or _____ | an alternate or less likely English translation of the same Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek text |
| = | an abbreviation for “it means” or “it is equivalent to” |
| Hb, Aramaic, Gk | the actual Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek word is given using equivalent English letters |
| Hb obscure | the existing Hebrew text is especially difficult to translate |

emend(ed) to _____ the original Hebrew text is so difficult to translate that competent scholars have conjectured or inferred a restoration of the original text based on the context, probable root meanings of the words, and uses in comparative languages

In some editions of the CSB, additional footnotes clarify the meaning of certain biblical texts or explain biblical history, persons, customs, places, activities, and measurements. Cross references are given for parallel passages or passages with similar wording, and in the NT, for passages quoted from the OT.

Abbreviations in CSB Bibles

| | |
|----------|---|
| AD | In the year of our Lord |
| BC | before Christ |
| c. | century |
| ca | circa |
| chap(s). | chapter(s) |
| cp. | compare |
| DSS | Dead Sea Scrolls |
| e.g. | for example |
| Eng | English |
| etc. | et cetera |
| Gk | Greek |
| Hb | Hebrew |
| i.e. | that is |
| Lat | Latin |
| lit | literal(ly) |
| LXX | Septuagint—an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| NT | New Testament |
| ms(s) | manuscript(s) |
| OT | Old Testament |
| pl. | plural |
| Pss(s) | Psalms(s) |
| Sam | Samaritan Pentateuch |
| sg. | singular |
| Sym | Symmachus |
| Syr | Syriac |
| Tg | Targum |
| Theod | Theodotian |
| v./vv. | verse, verses |
| Vg | Vulgate—an ancient translation of the Bible into Latin |
| vol(s). | volume(s) |

Introduction to Bible Serif

Bible Serif was elegantly crafted to reinforce the Christian Standard Bible's optimal blend of accuracy and readability. It is an ideal typeface for Bible reading or deep study.

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DEUTERONOMY 28

your enemies. You will march out against them from one direction but flee from them in seven directions. You will be an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.²⁶ Your corpses will be food for all the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the earth, with no one to scare them away.

²⁷ The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, tumors, a festering rash, and scabies, from which you cannot be cured.²⁸ The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness, and mental confusion,²⁹ so that at noon you will grope as a blind person gropes in the dark. You will not be successful in anything you do. You will only be oppressed and robbed continually, and no one will help you.³⁰ You will become engaged to a woman, but another man will rape her. You will build a house but not live in it. You will plant a vineyard but not enjoy its fruit.³¹ Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat any of it. Your donkey will be taken away from you and not returned to you. Your flock will be given to your enemies, and no one will help you.³² Your sons and daughters will be given to another people, while your eyes grow weary looking for them every day. But you will be powerless to do anything.³³ A people you don't know will eat your land's produce and everything you have labored for. You will only be oppressed and crushed continually.³⁴ You will be driven mad by what you see.³⁵ The LORD will afflict you with painful and incurable boils on your knees and thighs — from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

³⁶ The LORD will bring you and your king that you have appointed to a nation neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will worship other gods, of wood and stone.³⁷ You will become an object of horror, scorn, and ridicule among all the peoples where the LORD will drive you.

³⁸ "You will sow much seed in the field but harvest little, because locusts will devour it.

³⁹ You will plant and cultivate vineyards but not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them.⁴⁰ You will have olive trees throughout your territory but not moisten your skin with oil, because your olives will drop off.⁴¹ You will father sons and daughters, but they will not remain yours, because they will be taken prisoner.⁴² Buzzing insects will take possession of all your trees and your land's produce.⁴³ The resident alien among you will rise higher and higher above you, while you sink lower and lower.⁴⁴ He will lend to you, but you won't lend to him. He will be the head, and you will be the tail.

⁴⁵ "All these curses will come, pursue, and overtake you until you are destroyed, since you did not obey the LORD your God and keep the commands and statutes he gave you.

⁴⁶ These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever.

⁴⁷ Because you didn't serve the LORD your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though you had an abundance of everything,⁴⁸ you will serve your enemies the LORD will send against you, in famine, thirst, nakedness, and a lack of everything. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the ends of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you won't understand,⁵⁰ a ruthless nation,⁵¹ showing no respect for the old and not sparing the young.⁵¹ They will eat the offspring of your livestock and your land's produce until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine, fresh oil, young of your herds, or newborn of your flocks until they cause you to perish.⁵² They will besiege you within all your city gates until your high and fortified walls, that you trust in, come down throughout your land. They will besiege you

^{28:32} Lit day, and not for power your hand ^{28:50} Lit a nation strong of face

the
Old Testament





THE BOOK OF *Genesis*

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR'S HEART The book of Genesis was written by Moses, a key leader among the Hebrews. He likely penned Genesis during “the desert years,” between 1446 BC—1406 BC. Moses wanted us to know where we came from and why we’re here. So the first words of Genesis depict God creating the universe. With a word, God spoke the earth into being. He also created the first man and woman, but because of their eventual disobedience, humankind became separated from God. We’ve been living with the consequences ever since.

CONNECTING WITH GOD'S STORY The word *Genesis* means *beginning*, and that’s the story of this book. Genesis tells the beginning—of this world and humanity, of beauty and brokenness, of you and me. It also shows us where we can find hope and healing. In Genesis, we enter into God’s story. Humanity connects with a divine narrative that has a clear arc and plotline throughout the entire Bible. Genesis sets the scene, introduces the characters, and explodes with a love story between God and the human beings He creates. The evil that threatens them and God’s plan for salvation are all put into motion in the first few chapters.

CONNECTING WITH OUR STORY Through Genesis we understand the origin of our own brokenness. We also see the seed of hope as God promises to provide a way for restoration. Genesis is the starting point, not only for all of life, but also for our own journey. Through the stories that unfold, we trace the fingerprints of God, moving on behalf of His people.

As you read Genesis, you’ll also find devotions on these themes:

- *Beautiful Brokenness* — *Hope in the Hard* — *Second Chances*
- *Better Together* — *Imperfect Hospitality* — *The Scared Brave*
- *Everyday Leadership* — *Intentional Gratitude*

The Fall

GENESIS 3

The lady made it sound so simple. All I had to do was fill out a short application to be approved for a credit card with a reasonable limit for a beginner. It sounded so easy. Not only would I have a financial backup in the case of an emergency, I would also have the opportunity to build my personal credit history. As I signed my name across the dotted line, I remember feeling a bit of concern. My parents had warned me about the perils of consumer debt and had encouraged me to talk to them about major financial decisions. But I was an adult now. I figured that as a freshman in college, it was the right time for me to start making some decisions of my own.

A few weeks later the shiny new credit card arrived in the mail. My intentions were only to look at it. It was nice to know I owned a piece of plastic with my name on it that gave me more purchasing power than I had on my own. And for a while, that's exactly all I did—look.

However, the day inevitably arrived when some clothing I wanted cost more than the cash that I had to pay for it, and I remembered the shiny plastic card that I carried around in my purse. I convinced myself that this one purchase wouldn't harm anything, so I reached inside of my wallet to grab that card and put it to use. Initially, nothing terrible happened. But I'd crossed a boundary line that had been put in place for my protection and I knew it. And it wasn't long before the consequences of that one lone signature started to show up. The balance on the card increased over time, and the unintended consequences of burdensome debt resulted.

Like the warning my parents had given me, God gives us warnings and instructions for our own good. In the beginning, God created the world and everything in it and called it good. Yet only three chapters in, the first man and woman make a decision that forever changed things for every person that would come after them. Adam and Eve didn't take God at His Word. They engaged in conversations, thoughts, and, eventually, actions that moved them away from the original plan God had for them.

In Genesis 2:16-18, God gave clear instructions not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis 3, we see what happens when we don't take seriously the guidelines and boundaries that God gives us.

One day, Satan showed up in the form of a serpent and did to Eve what he has continued to do to all people throughout history. He deceived her. He started by questioning God's Word and omitting God's goodness (v. 1). God granted them freedom to eat from all trees in the garden with the exception of one. Satan focused Eve's attention on what she couldn't have instead of everything God had given her.

Not only did Satan recount God's Word incorrectly, Eve did too. She added to what God said (v. 3). Then after Eve's attempt to offer a rebuttal to Satan's false claim, Satan flat out called God a liar (v. 4) and told Eve that there would be no consequences, when God had clearly said otherwise.

Eve fell for it. She chose to go with what made sense to her in the moment and ignore the warning God had given her and her husband. She invited her husband to participate in disobeying God. As a result, their perfect life in the Garden of Eden came to an end as a consequence of their sin.

The good news is that God still pursued a relationship with them. First, He went looking for Adam and Eve. He sought them out even when they were hiding from Him in guilt and shame (vv. 8-9). God invited them to face their sin and be honest about what they had done (v. 11). He cursed Satan and provided a solution for victory over him through the birth of Christ Jesus (v. 15). While Adam and Eve still had to face the consequences of their choices, God covered them (v. 21). He showed them tough love by protecting them from doing more damage than they'd already done (vv. 22-24).

Most of us have experienced, either firsthand or by watching others, what can happen when we don't follow God's direction. We call the sin of Adam and Eve "The Fall" but the truth is we all fall. Like Eve, many of us focus more on what we can't have and show a lack of gratitude for what God has provided. When we don't embrace the truth of God's Word, there will be consequences. Some consequences are immediate and obvious. Others appear over time and subtly erode God's plan for our lives. In either case, one consequence is always the same—sin separates us from fellowship with God.

But even when we fall, and we all fall (Rm 3:23), there is good news. First, the same God that showed mercy, grace, and redemptive love in Genesis is the God who offers us the same gift today and every day. Like He covered Adam and Eve, He is willing to cover us with His saving, redemptive blood.

Second, we have the opportunity each and every day to choose to obey God's Word. Believing what God has said is our powerful defense against the deception of the enemy and the pitfalls and consequences that may follow.

Eventually, the consequence of my decision to buy things on credit became so overwhelming that, despite the shame and guilt I felt, I talked to my parents about it. They were disappointed in my choices but also expressed their commitment to guide me to a better financial place. The good news was they were willing to cover me with love and wisdom as I moved forward. They did, however, require me to cut up the card.

God always provides a way for us to regain fellowship with Him. God offers forgiveness and a solution to the consequences that we face because of the victory we have in Jesus Christ. God desires to cover us. It is not His desire that any of us should perish spiritually or experientially. While sometimes that involves showing us tough love, His love is always aimed at our ultimate good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- Have you faced consequences for your disobedience to God?
- How did God correct you?
- How did you experience God's protection and compassion through His correction?

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

Author Index, page 1844

you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life.

15 I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

16 He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.

17 And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it':

The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor^A all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 You will eat bread^B by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust."

20 The man named his wife Eve^C because she was the mother of all the living. 21 The LORD God made clothing from skins for the man and his wife, and he clothed them.

22 The LORD God said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree

of life, eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.

CAIN MURDERS ABEL

4 The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have had a male child with the LORD's help."^D 2 She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain presented some of the land's produce as an offering to the LORD. 4 And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent.^E

6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent?" 7 If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."^G And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's guardian?"

10 Then he said, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! 11 So now you are cursed, alienated from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood you have shed.^H 12 If you work the ground, it will never again

^A3:17 Lit it through pain ^B3:19 Or food ^C3:20 Lit Living, or Life ^D4:1 Lit the LORD ^E4:5 Lit and his face fell ^F4:6 Lit why has your face fallen ^G4:8 Sam, LXX, Syr, Vg; MT omits "Let's go out to the field." ^H4:11 Lit blood from your hand

give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

¹³But Cain answered the LORD, "My punishment^a is too great to bear! ¹⁴Since you are banishing me today from the face of the earth, and I must hide from your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, whoever finds me will kill me."

¹⁵Then the LORD replied to him, "In that case,^b whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over."^c And he placed a mark on Cain so that whoever found him would not kill him. ¹⁶Then Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

THE LINE OF CAIN

¹⁷Cain was intimate with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain became the builder of a city, and he named the city Enoch after his son. ¹⁸Irada fathered Mehujael, Mehujael fathered Methusael, and Methusael fathered Lamech. ¹⁹Lamech took two wives for himself, one named Adah and the other named Zillah. ²⁰Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of the nomadic herdsmen.^d ²¹His brother was named Jubal; he was the father of all who play the lyre and the flute. ²²Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. Tubal-cain's sister was Naamah.

²³Lamech said to his wives:
Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
wives of Lamech, pay attention
to my words.
For I killed a man
for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

²⁴If Cain is to be avenged
seven times over,
then for Lamech it will be
seventy-seven times!

²⁵Adam was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has given^e me another child^f in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."

²⁶A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.

THE LINE OF SETH

5 This is the document containing the family^g records of Adam.^h On the day that God created man, he made him in the likeness of God; ²he created them male and female. When they were created, he blessed them and called them mankind.ⁱ

³Adam was 130 years old when he fathered a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. ⁴Adam lived 800 years after he fathered Seth, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ⁵So Adam's life lasted 930 years; then he died.

⁶Seth was 105 years old when he fathered Enosh. ⁷Seth lived 807 years after he fathered Enosh, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ⁸So Seth's life lasted 912 years; then he died.

⁹Enosh was 90 years old when he fathered Kenan. ¹⁰Enosh lived 815 years after he fathered Kenan, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹¹So Enosh's life lasted 905 years; then he died.

¹²Kenan was 70 years old when he fathered Mahalalel. ¹³Kenan lived 840 years after he fathered Mahalalel, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁴So Kenan's life lasted 910 years; then he died.

¹⁵Mahalalel was 65 years old when he fathered Jared. ¹⁶Mahalalel lived 830 years after he fathered Jared, and he fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁷So Mahalalel's life lasted 895 years; then he died.

¹⁸Jared was 162 years old when he fathered Enoch. ¹⁹Jared lived 800 years after he

^a4:13 Or sin ^b4:15 LXX, Syr, Vg read "Not so!" ^c4:15 Or suffer severely ^d4:20 Lit the dweller of tent and livestock ^e4:25 The Hb word for given sounds like the name "Seth." ^f4:25 Lit seed ^g5:1 Lit written family ^h5:1 Or mankind ⁱ5:1 Or Adam, human beings ^j5:2 Hb 'adam

Sight Unseen

GENESIS 6-7

Exactly one year ago we purchased a fixer-upper with sixteen acres in Tennessee, sight unseen. It was the riskiest thing my husband and I have ever done. I'm sure our family and friends had to bite their tongues not to openly admonish us, but we felt led by God that we were to move and that the house and land was ours. We named the property Hesus Hill because the Hebrew word *hesed* is a description of God's tremendous, loyal, and steadfast love for us. It reminds us that through thick and thin He is always there. Oh how we needed that reminder as we struggled in so many areas to fix up the house.

God's instructions to Noah must have seemed insane. *It will rain and all the things with breath in their lungs will die, except for you and your family (Gn 6:13). Remember, the people had never seen rain before (Gn 1:6-7, 2:5-6). Oh, and build a boat, Noah, to these exact specifications (Gn 6:14).* That must have seemed crazy to all the people he knew, but Noah obeyed, and the Lord was faithful to give Him the details he needed and to provide every step of the way. The animals came to him, but Noah and his family still had to go out and collect the food (Gn 6:21, 7:8-9).

The ark instructions came in detail, but they had to work to build it (Gn 6:14-16). I'm sure at some point it crossed Noah's mind: *How am I going to shut this door?* But when the time came and they were all loaded up, "the LORD shut him in" (Gn 7:16). There was no navigation system or rudder for that giant boat, and yet God protected them. He steered them from harm and kept them from crashing into mountains.

Noah is such a beautiful example of walking by faith. Up to that point there had never been rain. There was no rudder, and yet, he believed and obeyed. He walked onto that finished ark knowing God would deliver them, and He did. About a year later, at the end of that incredible faith journey, when the land was finally dry, the first thing righteous Noah did was offer up a beautiful sacrifice honoring the Lord (Gn 8:20). God made a covenant with mankind that He would never flood the earth again, complete with a rainbow as a sign (Gn 9:9-17).

Ultimately, Noah's faith and obedience gave us all a second chance. I'm wondering when we will finally grasp that when God whispers in our spirit to go or to do, that His "rudder" will take into account every obstacle, that His perfect plan is in motion, that we need only be available, and most of all, that His *hesed* love will ever be present, carrying us to dry land.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

Author Index, page 1844

THE FLOOD RECEDES

8 God remembered Noah, as well as all the wildlife and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. God caused a wind^a to pass over the earth, and the water began to subside. ²The sources of the watery depths and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the rain from the sky stopped. ³The water steadily receded from the earth, and by the end of 150 days the water had decreased significantly. ⁴The ark came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.

⁵The water continued to recede until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were visible. ⁶After forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made, ⁷and he sent out a raven. It went back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent out a dove to see whether the water on the earth’s surface had gone down, ⁹but the dove found no resting place for its foot. It returned to him in the ark because water covered the surface of the whole earth. He reached out and brought it into the ark to himself. ¹⁰So Noah waited seven more days and sent out the dove from the ark again. ¹¹When the dove came to him at evening, there was a plucked olive leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the water on the earth’s surface had gone down. ¹²After he had waited another seven days, he sent out the dove, but it did not return to him again. ¹³In the six hundred and first year,^b in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water that had covered the earth was dried up. Then Noah removed the ark’s cover and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴By the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry.

^a8:1 Or *spirit*; Gn 1:2 ^b8:13 = of Noah’s life ^c8:17 Lit *creatures of all flesh* ^d9:2 Lit *are given in your hand*
^e9:5 Lit *And your blood belonging to your life I will seek*

THE LORD’S PROMISE

¹⁵Then God spoke to Noah, ¹⁶“Come out of the ark, you, your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out all the living creatures^c that are with you — birds, livestock, those that crawl on the earth — and they will spread over the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” ¹⁸So Noah, along with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, came out. ¹⁹All the animals, all the creatures that crawl, and all the flying creatures — everything that moves on the earth — came out of the ark by their families.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD. He took some of every kind of clean animal and every kind of clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹When the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, he said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of human beings, even though the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward. And I will never again strike down every living thing as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.”

GOD’S COVENANT WITH NOAH

9 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ²The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority.^d ³Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. ⁴However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. ⁵And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood;^e I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders

a fellow human, I will require that person's life.^a

⁶ Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.

⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it."

⁸ Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, ⁹ "Understand that I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you — birds, livestock, and all wildlife of the earth that are with you — all the animals of the earth that came out of the ark.

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you that never again will every creature be wiped out by floodwaters; there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all future generations: ¹³ I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I form clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all the living creatures:^b water will never again become a flood to destroy every creature. ¹⁶ The bow will be in the clouds, and I will look at it and remember the permanent covenant between God and all the living creatures^c on earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and every creature on earth."

PROPHECIES ABOUT NOAH'S FAMILY

¹⁸ Noah's sons who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were Noah's sons, and from them the whole earth was populated.

²⁰ Noah, as a man of the soil, began by planting^d a vineyard. ²¹ He drank some of the wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. ²³ Then Shem and Japheth took a cloak and placed it over both their shoulders, and walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father naked.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his drinking and learned what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said:

Canaan is cursed. He will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers.

²⁶ He also said: Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; Let Canaan be Shem's slave.

²⁷ Let God extend Japheth;^e let Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem; let Canaan be Shem's slave.

²⁸ Now Noah lived 350 years after the flood.

²⁹ So Noah's life lasted 950 years; then he died.

THE TABLE OF NATIONS

10 These are the family records of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They also had sons after the flood.

² Japheth's sons: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³ Gomer's sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴ And Javan's sons: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. ⁵ From these descendants, the peoples of the coasts and islands spread out into their lands according to their clans in their nations, each with its own language.

⁶ Ham's sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. ⁷ Cush's sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. And Raamah's sons: Sheba and Dedan.

^a9:5 Lit any human; from the hand of a man his brother I will seek the life of the human. ^b9:15 Lit and creatures of all flesh ^c9:16 Lit creatures of all flesh ^d9:20 Or Noah began to be a farmer and planted ^e9:26 As a wish or prayer; others interpret the verbs in vv. 26-27 as prophecy: Canaan will be . . . ^f9:27 In Hb, the name Japheth sounds like the word "extend." ^g10:4 Some Hb mss, Sam, LXX read Rodanim; 1Ch 1:7

⁸Cush fathered Nimrod, who began to be powerful in the land. ⁹He was a powerful hunter in the sight of the LORD. That is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a powerful hunter in the sight of the LORD."¹⁰ His kingdom started with Babylon, Erech,^A Accad,^B and Calneh,^C in the land of Shinar.^D ¹¹From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah,¹² and Resen, between Nineveh and the great city Calah.

¹³Mizraim^E fathered the people of Lud, Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh,¹⁴ Pathrus, Casluh (the Philistines came from them), and Caphthor.

¹⁵Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn and Heth,¹⁶ as well as the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites,¹⁷ the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites,¹⁸ the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the Canaanite clans scattered. ¹⁹The Canaanite border went from Sidon going toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and going toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim as far as Lasha.

²⁰These are Ham's sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

²¹And Shem, Japheth's older brother, also had sons. Shem was the father of all the sons of Eber. ²²Shem's sons were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram.

²³Aram's sons: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

²⁴Arpachshad fathered^F Shelah, and Shelah fathered Eber. ²⁵Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg,^G for during his days the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan. ²⁶And Joktan fathered Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,²⁷ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah,²⁸ Obal, Abimael, Sheba,²⁹ Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were Joktan's sons. ³⁰Their settlements extended from Mesha to Sephar, the eastern hill country.

³¹These are Shem's sons by their clans, according to their languages, in their lands and their nations.

³²These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their family records, in their nations. The nations on earth spread out from these after the flood.

THE TOWER OF BABYLON

11 The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary.^H ²As people^I migrated from the east,^J they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³They said to each other, "Come, let us make oven-fired bricks." (They used brick for stone and asphalt for mortar.) ⁴And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth."

⁵Then the LORD came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans^K were building. ⁶The LORD said, "If they have begun to do this as one people all having the same language, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let's go down there and confuse their language so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸So from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹Therefore it is called Babylon,^{L,M} for there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth, and from there the LORD scattered them throughout the earth.

FROM SHEM TO ABRAM

¹⁰These are the family records of Shem. Shem lived 100 years and fathered Arpachshad two years after the flood. ¹¹After he fathered Arpachshad, Shem lived 500 years and fathered other sons and daughters. ¹²Arpachshad lived 35 years^N and fathered Shelah. ¹³After he fathered Shelah, Arpachshad lived 403 years and fathered other sons and daughters. ¹⁴Shelah lived 30 years and fathered Eber. ¹⁵After he fathered Eber, Shelah lived 403

^A10:10 Or Uruk ^B10:10 Or Akkad ^C10:10 Or and all of them ^D10:10 Or in Babylonia ^E10:13 = Egypt

^F10:24 LXX reads fathered Cainan, and Cainan fathered; Gn 11:12-13; Lk 3:35-36 ^G10:25 = Division ^H11:1 Lit one lip and the same words ^I11:2 Lit they ^J11:2 Or migrated eastward ^K11:5 Or the descendants of Adam ^L11:9 Hb Babel

^M11:9 In Hb, the name for "Babylon," babel sounds like the word for "confuse," balal. ^N11:12-13 LXX reads years and fathered Cainan. ¹³After he fathered Cainan, Arpachshad lived 430 years and fathered other sons and daughters, and he died. Cainan lived 130 years and fathered Shelah. After he fathered Shelah, Cainan lived 330 years and fathered other sons and daughters, and he died; Gn 10:24; Lk 3:35-36

The Place Between Going and Showing

GENESIS 12

I like to make my own decisions about my life—where I live, how I spend my time, and how I make a living. I'm an independent, except for this one thing. I've chosen to submit my life to God as a follower of Jesus Christ and trust that He knows better than I do. I don't always know where I'm headed, kind of like Abraham. When God called Abraham, He didn't tell him where he was going, and in the same way, He doesn't always tell us either. God will show us as we go with Him.

God had given Abraham some big promises—to make Him a great nation and to bless the earth through his family. At age 75 Abraham left everything he knew and followed God into the unknown.

When we're willing to let God lead our lives, there's no telling where we'll ultimately end up. It can be a scary place, the place in-between, the space between going and showing. Yet it's in this place where we learn to trust, and I won't kid you, it's not an easy place, not at all.

When my husband and I got married, our plan was to have a big family, but God had an entirely different plan for us. We had one child, our daughter Francesca, and then for years we battled with miscarriage, infertility, and three failed adoption attempts. You see, God called us to be the parents of an only child, in spite of our desire for more, because God had something bigger in view than our happiness.

God gave us a daughter with a gift in music because part of His purpose was to touch a generation through her ministry. God enabled us to give our daughter our full attention, and to carefully guide her and prepare her for the future God had in mind for her. This isn't to imply He can't do the same if you have a house full of children. It's just how He did it with us.

I admit I wasn't happy about this for a long time. Eventually, though, I made peace with God and decided to let Him have His way in my life. He didn't tell me where He was taking me, but as I submitted He showed me. In my going was His showing. The fruit has been good. Many have come to know Christ through Francesca's ministry and thousands of hearts have been encouraged and blessed by her music. My husband and I have learned to trust even when it makes no sense. Let's follow wherever He leads us.

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835

Author Index, page 1846

mountains of Seir, as far as El-paran by the wilderness. ⁷Then they came back to invade En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they defeated the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and lined up for battle in the Siddim Valley ⁹against King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar — four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Siddim Valley contained many asphalt pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them,^a but the rest fled to the mountains. ¹¹The four kings took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food and went on. ¹²They also took Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, for he was living in Sodom, and they went on.

¹³One of the survivors came and told Abram the Hebrew, who lived near the oaks belonging to Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and the brother of Aner. They were bound by a treaty with^b Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his relative had been taken prisoner, he assembled^c his 318 trained men, born in his household, and they went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵And he and his servants deployed against them by night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah to the north of Damascus. ¹⁶He brought back all the goods and also his relative Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the other people.

MELCHIZEDEK'S BLESSING

¹⁷After Abram returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the Shaveh Valley (that is, the King's Valley).

¹⁸Melchizedek, king of Salem,^d brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High. ¹⁹He blessed him and said:

Abram is blessed by God Most High,
 Creator^e of heaven and earth,
²⁰and blessed be God Most High
 who has handed over your enemies
 to you.

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself."

²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand in an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take a thread or sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich.'^f ²⁴I will take nothing^g except what the servants have eaten. But as for the share of the men who came with me — Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre — they can take their share."

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

15 After these events, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

Do not be afraid, Abram.
 I am your shield;
 your reward will be very great.

²But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"^g ³Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a slave born in^h my house will be my heir."

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to him: "This one will not be your heir; instead, one who comes from your own body will be your heir."ⁱ ⁵He took him outside and said, "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "Your offspring will be that numerous."

^a14:10 Sam, LXX; MT reads *fell there* ^b14:13 Lit *were possessors of a covenant of* ^c14:14 Sam; MT reads *poured out* ^d14:18 = Jerusalem ^e14:19 Or *Possessor* ^f14:24 Lit *nothing to me* ^g15:2 Hb *obscure* ^h15:3 Lit *a son of* ⁱ15:4 Lit *loins*

God Gives the Victory and Gets All the Glory

GENESIS 14

When reading God's Word, I don't want to miss what He is teaching me about who He is and how that affects who I am. So I pray: *God, what do You want to show me about who You are in chapter 14 of Genesis?*

Sometimes things are so obvious they can be taken for granted. Abram defeats his foes and rescues his nephew Lot and his family. When he encounters Melchizedek, it's confirmed that this victory is due to the fact that God was with Abram. The king of Sodom was also there, but he was the complete opposite of Melchizedek.

"Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, 'Give me the people, but take the possessions for yourself.' But Abram said to the king of Sodom, 'I have raised my hand in an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that belongs to you, so you can never say, 'I made Abram rich'" (Gn 14:21-23).

After such a great victory it might have been tempting for Abram to put confidence in himself and justify receiving such great earthly wealth. But it was clear who the victory belonged to, and it was clear where Abram's strength really came from.

God was with Abram, so He gave him victory. Why? For His glory, so that Abram would know that God is able, and so that generations to come would know that God is able. Abram would soon face even greater obstacles, so God was showing Abram that he could trust the Lord's guiding hand.

Over what recent battles has God given you victory? Maybe an addiction or illness, lust or vanity, or perhaps the sheer willpower to eat one cookie and not the whole batch? Our God is with us; better yet, because of the work of Christ, our God is also in us. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us and empowers us to be victorious.

My sisters, let's give credit where credit is due. Let's give our victorious God thanks and praise, and let's be spurred on to trust Him even more to provide what He has promised, in a way that we will know and others will see, that true victory comes from Him alone.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833

Author Index, page 1849

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

⁷ He also said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

⁸ But he said, "Lord GOD, how can I know that I will possess it?"

⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

¹⁰ So he brought all these to him, cut them in half, and laid the pieces opposite each other, but he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. ¹² As the sun was setting, a deep sleep came over Abram, and suddenly great terror and darkness descended on him.

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know this for certain: Your offspring will be resident aliens for four hundred years in a land that does not belong to them and will be enslaved and oppressed.^a ¹⁴ However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions. ¹⁵ But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶ In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."^b

¹⁷ When the sun had set and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the divided animals. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "I give this land to your offspring, from the Brook of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River: ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hethites, Perizzites, Rephaim, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

16 Abram's wife Sarai had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. ² Sarai said

to Abram, "Since the LORD has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said.^c ³ So Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years. ⁴ He slept with^d Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering!^e I put my slave in your arms,^f and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the LORD judge between me and you."

⁶ Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your slave is in your hands; do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸ He said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

She replied, "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai."

⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority."¹⁰ The angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count."

¹¹ The angel of the LORD said to her, "You have conceived and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael,^g for the LORD has heard your cry of affliction. ¹² This man will be like a wild donkey. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will settle near all his relatives."

¹³ So she named the LORD who spoke to her: "You are El-roi,"^h for she said, "In this place, have I actually seen the one who sees me?"ⁱ

^a15:13 Lit will serve them and they will oppress them ^b15:16 Lit Amorites is not yet complete ^c16:2 Lit Abram listened to the voice of Sarai ^d16:4 Lit He came to ^e16:5 Or "May my suffering be on you!" ^f16:5 Lit bosom ^g16:11 = God Hears ^h16:13 = God Sees Me ⁱ16:13 Hb obscure

Trusting God in the Wilderness

GENESIS 16:13

Peace. It was the desperate cry of my heart. For months, anxiety had consumed my days and stole my nights. It left me fragile, uncertain, slipping further and further away from all that felt good and safe. I did what I knew to do. I immersed myself in God's Word, meditating and praying. Still, I couldn't feel God. I couldn't find God. Anxiety reigned and ruled my heart.

I desperately longed to be normal again, to go back to the way life used to be. But I couldn't, no matter how hard I tried.

I look back now and know God was with me. He had a plan—a good plan. I just couldn't see it. In His faithfulness, God unfolded it as I continued to meet Him in His Word. Even when I didn't want to, I showed up.

The place God took me was not a comfortable place. He slowed my pace. He refocused my heart. That work led to hard questions. Why do you have to be so strong? Why must you always be in control?

Friend, God took me into the wilderness to quiet my heart and capture my attention. In the wilderness, God shifted something in me. For many years, He had been working through me, but now He needed to work in me. It required surrender. It required weakness. It required trust. And, hardest of all, it required time.

God did the same for Sarai's servant girl, Hagar, in Genesis 16. When Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's child, Sarai mistreated Hagar terribly. To escape her cruelty, Hagar fled to the wilderness.

Scripture tells us the angel of the Lord found Hagar. God sent His messenger to minister to this desperate, rejected servant girl. In her deepest grief, God came to Hagar, called her by name, and breathed life and hope into her suffocating heart.

He not only called her by name, but He also defined her role, "slave of Sarai" (v. 8). He identified her this way to prepare her heart for His next words. God told her to "go back to your mistress and submit to her authority" (v. 9). What hard words for her to hear! Yet God didn't leave her without hope. He promised Hagar two things: God would increase her descendants so much that they would be too numerous to count, and He would give her a son, and she should name him Ishmael, which means "God hears."

Hagar expressed her gratitude by giving God a special name, El-roi, the "one who sees me." God heard the cry of Hagar's heart. He rescued her and gave her hope and direction.

Never forget, my friend: God knows your name. He hears the cry of your heart. He will find you in the wilderness. God will respond in love and give you hope. Will you trust Him with the cry of your heart today?

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

Author Index, page 1850

from any foreigner and not your offspring.¹³ Whether born in your household or purchased, he must be circumcised. My covenant will be marked in your flesh as a permanent covenant.¹⁴ If any male is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that man will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah^a will be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown. Then he laughed and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can Sarah, a ninety-year-old woman, give birth?" ¹⁸ So Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael were acceptable^b to you!"

¹⁹ But God said, "No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac.^c I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring."

²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will certainly bless him; I will make him fruitful and will multiply him greatly. He will father twelve tribal leaders, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will confirm my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year."²² When he finished talking with him, God withdrew^d from Abraham.

²³ So Abraham took his son Ishmael and those born in his household or purchased — every male among the members of Abraham's household — and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very day, just as God had said to him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised,²⁵ and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised. ²⁶ On that same

day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.²⁷ And all the men of his household — whether born in his household or purchased from a foreigner — were circumcised with him.

ABRAHAM'S THREE VISITORS

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. ² He looked up, and he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, bowed to the ground,³ and said, "My lord, if I have found favor with you, please do not go on past your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, that you may wash your feet and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ I will bring a bit of bread so that you may strengthen yourselves. ⁶ This is why you have passed your servant's way. Later, you can continue on."

"Yes," they replied, "do as you have said."

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, "Quick! Knead three measures^e of fine flour and make bread."⁷ Abraham ran to the herd and got a tender, choice calf. He gave it to a young man, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ Then Abraham took curds^h and milk, as well as the calf that he had prepared, and set them before the men. He served them as they ate under the tree.

SARAH LAUGHS

⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he answered.

¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will certainly come back to you in about a year's time, and your wife Sarah will have a son!" Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent behind him.

¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were old and getting on in years.ⁱ Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.^k ¹² So she laughed to herself:

^a17:15 = Princess ^b17:18 Lit *alive* ^c17:19 = He Laughs ^d17:22 Lit *went up, or ascended* ^e18:5 Lit *may sustain your heart* ^f18:6 Lit *three seahs*; about 21 quarts ^g18:6 *A round, thin, unleavened bread* ^h18:8 *Or butter* ⁱ18:8 Lit *was standing by* ^j18:11 Lit *days* ^k18:11 Lit *The way of women had ceased for Sarah*

Meet *Sarah*

**A WOMAN OF
Hope
GENESIS 17**

God promised Abraham that He would bless his wife, Sarah, and give her a son, and through her, many kings of peoples would come. When Sarah heard she was going to have a child, she laughed. Who could blame her? At nearly 90 years of age, she had given up all hope for a child of her own. But when the Lord visited Abraham and said that Sarah would have a child within the year, Sarah had permission to hope again. Even though her situation was hard and time had worn her thin, she clung to the hope and the promise God had made. As dangerous as it was to hope again, she soon learned it was all worth it.

“After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I have delight?”

¹³But the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Can I really have a baby when I’m old?’ ¹⁴Is anything impossible for the LORD? At the appointed time I will come back to you, and in about a year she will have a son.”

¹⁵Sarah denied it. “I did not laugh,” she said, because she was afraid.

But he replied, “No, you did laugh.”

ABRAHAM’S PLEA FOR SODOM

¹⁶The men got up from there and looked out over Sodom, and Abraham was walking with them to see them off. ¹⁷Then the LORD said, “Should I hide what I am about to do from Abraham? ¹⁸Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹For I have chosen^a him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what he promised him.” ²⁰Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is immense, and their sin is extremely serious. ²¹I will go down to see if what they have done justifies the cry that has come up to me. If not, I will find out.”

²²The men turned from there and went toward Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.^b ²³Abraham stepped forward and said, “Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away instead of sparing the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people who are in it? ²⁵You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won’t the Judge of the whole earth do what is just?”

^a18:19 Lit known ^b18:22 Alt Hb tradition reads while the LORD remained standing before Abraham

²⁶The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷Then Abraham answered, “Since I have ventured to speak to my lord — even though I am dust and ashes — ²⁸suppose the fifty righteous lack five. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?”

He replied, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

²⁹Then he spoke to him again, “Suppose forty are found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it on account of forty.”

³⁰Then he said, “Let my lord not be angry, and I will speak further. Suppose thirty are found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

³¹Then he said, “Since I have ventured to speak to my lord, suppose twenty are found there?”

He replied, “I will not destroy it on account of twenty.”

³²Then he said, “Let my lord not be angry, and I will speak one more time. Suppose ten are found there?”

He answered, “I will not destroy it on account of ten.” ³³When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he departed, and Abraham returned to his place.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

19 The two angels entered Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in Sodom’s gateway. When Lot saw them, he got up to meet them. He bowed with his face to the ground ² and said, “My lords, turn aside to your servant’s house, wash your feet, and spend the night. Then you can get up early and go on your way.”

“No,” they said. “We would rather spend the night in the square.” ³ But he urged them so strongly that they followed him and went into his house. He prepared a feast and baked unleavened bread for them, and they ate.

⁴ Before they went to bed, the men of the city of Sodom, both young and old, the whole population, surrounded the house. ⁵ They called out to Lot and said, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Send them out to us so we can have sex with them!”

⁶ Lot went out to them at the entrance and shut the door behind him. ⁷ He said, “Don’t do this evil, my brothers. ⁸ Look, I’ve got two daughters who haven’t been intimate with a man. I’ll bring them out to you, and you can do whatever you want^a to them. However, don’t do anything to these men, because they have come under the protection of my roof.”

⁹ “Get out of the way!” they said, adding, “This one came here as an alien, but he’s acting like a judge! Now we’ll do more harm to you than to them.” They put pressure on Lot and came up to break down the door. ¹⁰ But the angels^b reached out, brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹ They struck the men who were at the entrance of the house, both young and old, with blindness^c so that they were unable to find the entrance.

¹² Then the angels said to Lot, “Do you have anyone else here: a son-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of this place, ¹³ for we are about to destroy this place because the outcry against its people is so great before the LORD, that the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”

¹⁴ So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were going to marry^d his daughters. “Get up,” he said. “Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city!” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

^a19:8 Lit do what is good in your eyes ^b19:10 Lit men, also in v. 12 ^c19:11 Or a blinding light ^d19:14 Lit take

God Remembers Your Faith

GENESIS 18:1-15

Have you ever said you had faith, when in truth, you didn't? Have you ever had angst in your soul only to pretend things were okay? Have you ever secretly felt like a have-not when it comes to the blessings God gives to His children? I have.

For most of my adult life, I've struggled with chronic health issues having to do with Lyme disease. Due to a significant health flare, I need to see my doctor once a week. He's a brilliant doctor and a fellow believer. I walked into his office one day with a plastic smile on my face and told him I was doing all right. But under my skin, deep in my soul, where all our twisted emotions seem to gather, I felt only discouragement and despair.

This wise doctor took one look at me and knew that the pain in my eyes didn't match the forced smile on my face.

He said to me, "We'll get to your symptoms in a minute. Come over here and sit down."

I dutifully obeyed.

He then leaned in and made an observation that completely undid me. "I know this has been a long, tough battle for you. I can tell you're a responsible person. You felt like you let your kids down all those years ago when you were sick as a young mom. And now that you're once again not feeling well, you're afraid to let down those who count on you. But at some point you have to open your hands, surrender, and trust God with this part of your story. I want you to do something for me. Open your hands and say, 'Jesus, I accept me, and I trust You.' Do it. Say those words for me."

I looked up at him, opened my mouth to speak, and let out a guttural sob instead. I think I drained every last tear from my body. He continued, "You must understand that self-contempt will do more damage to your soul and to your cells than any disease ever could. This battle is not all up to you. More rests on God's shoulders than on yours. You can trust Him. He will bring you through this."

I realized in that moment that it's not our small faith that keeps us from inheriting the promises that God has for us. We need only a small seed. Rather, it's unbelief that blocks our view of Him. I had no idea that I'd held myself in contempt over something I couldn't control. I didn't realize that my limited perspective on my circumstances and my negative view of my weaknesses were the things that kept me from expectantly looking for God to break through.

I wonder if Abraham's wife, Sarah, felt the same way.

Sarah and Abraham's bodies were as good as dead. Almost, pretty close to, but not quite yet, dead. Imagine. Amidst such impossible circumstances, God spoke a promise to them: "You are going to bear a son. And he will be a seed of a nation. And you will have descendants that outnumber the grains of sand on the shore" (my paraphrase).

Mind-boggling, yes? How would you respond? Put yourself in Sarah's shoes. Her skin is paper-thin. Gravity has won the day. Her joints ache and creak. She shuffles through her daily routine much slower than she used to. And she does so with a broken heart. Her womb is not only withered and old; it's still barren. So how does Sarah respond to God's pronouncement?

She laughs! Abraham had laughed too, but he didn't deny it. Sarah pretends she believes. God confronts her and then He declares: "Is anything impossible for the LORD?" (Gn 18:14).

We all have painful facts that surround our circumstances, facts that seem to undermine God's promises to us. So what should we do? Shove down our disappointment and pretend we're okay? Berate ourselves for our weakness and cover up our self-loathing with a cute outfit?

Why pretend, when God's promises are for us?

When we think of Sarah, we remember her as someone who struggled with unbelief. When she couldn't get pregnant, she urged her husband to sleep with another woman. When God affirmed that the promise would come through her womb, she laughed!

But you know how the New Testament remembers her? She's in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11. She's remembered as a woman who had faith and believed the promise. Despite Sarah's battle with unbelief, faith found its way into her heart. And all of heaven noticed. Sarah's missteps drown in the sea of God's grace. Her faith echoes on into eternity. We might remember Sarah's unbelief, but God remembers her faith.

He's so moved by our desire to trust Him when our circumstances mock and threaten us that He moves when He finds faith in us. He shows Himself strong in our weaknesses. He breaks through the most impenetrable barriers. He makes a way where there is no way. He makes the impossible, possible. That's what He does because that's who He is.

No matter how tempting it is to be discouraged by your circumstances or how easy it is to berate yourself for your weakness, avoid such mindsets. Be kind to your soul and ruthless with your enemy. Refuse discouragement and despair. And remember: God is not disgusted by your need. He's tender toward you. Accept His grace and trust Him to keep His promises to you. You don't have to pretend when you have His promises.

What hurts and heartaches still affect you today? What does faith look like for you in this place? Spend some time with God today. He's got something to say to you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What impossible circumstance are you facing today?
- Where is God asking for your faith?
- In what ways has unbelief taken over and convinced you of something that is untrue?

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

Author Index, page 1850

Hospitality on the Go

GENESIS 18:2-5

I walked down the dark corridor, the floor smelling of urine and filth, and quietly knocked on the door at the end of the hallway. It creaked open several inches and a hand grabbed my shoulders, pulling me inside.

It was like a different world. Dirty, but distinctive. Spread before me was a little table picnic with cookies, lemonade, and paper towels folded into perfect squares. A soiled mattress sat in the corner of the room alongside a makeshift kitchen consisting of a small refrigerator and rickety camp stove. Clearly, my host didn't have much. But from what little she did have, she was generously giving to me, her honored guest.

In a somewhat similar scenario, we see Abraham, a man of great wealth, demonstrating this same style of hospitality—all in, holding nothing back.

At the time of this story, Abraham was in his golden years—not the age where hosts run or hurry about. Yet, that's exactly what Abraham did. He saw his guests, ran from his tent to meet them, and bowed to the ground. He begged them to pause their journey, then proceeded to prepare a tantalizing feast of tender choice beef, bread, curds, and milk.

Not only was Abraham kind and cordial, but somehow he had the inside scoop on who his guests really were, or at least that one was of a divine nature. Now we don't know whether or not he fully understood that he was entertaining the Lord of Hosts, but the way he handled the situation reveals a lot about his heart. Clearly, he had a charitable nature, visibly shown in how he lavished his very best on his visitors. He was courteous, bowing upon meeting them. He was also considerate, waiting on them like a servant, bringing their food right to them while they rested under a nearby tree, perhaps the only tree providing shade in that area.

In pondering this kind of generosity, I cannot recall a single time when I have hustled about before company was coming unless it was to hurry and clean the house. But I want to have a heart like that, and I'm guessing you do too.

What I'm learning is that this kind of warmth and welcome has very little to do with the setting and more to do with the state of our heart. Quite simply, the size and style of our home does not matter. A mere room will suffice. Like the woman with only a dingy apartment to serve from, we can use what we have, giving our all, no matter our income level or our address.

Let's greet our guests with humble hospitality—encouraging them, sustaining them, and turning them toward God—so that when they leave, their hearts overflow with His goodness.

Lord, may it be so. Give us hearts that love You and long to serve You. Hearts like our friend Abraham. Make us welcoming women. Hospitable women. Women after Your own heart. Because of Jesus. Amen.

Imperfect Hospitality

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1832

Author Index, page 1843

God's Intimate Care of the Overlooked

GENESIS 21

One of the most challenging parts of the motherhood journey for me has been feeling alone in it. I have great friends with whom to do park days and kid swaps, to share funny stories and vent about discipline frustrations. I also have a fantastic husband—a 100% invested kind of dad our boys respect and adore.

Yet there are still times of deep loneliness, times of feeling like the parenting burden lands mostly on me: nursing babies round the clock, soothing croupy coughs late into the night, fixing every meal, attending to owies, and refereeing brotherly wrestling. I'm the one home, the one who nurtures and sees and hears every need. It can feel overwhelming.

But then I read about Hagar. She was a weary mama who felt totally on her own, insufficient, and ill-equipped. She was having one of those crumble-on-the-floor-in-an-exhausted-heap kind of days—and for good reason. She was unable to meet her son's needs and change their circumstances. The pain was too much to bear, and she gave up in despair.

"God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven" (Gn 21:17). God's ears were tuned to the suffering of a child, and He reached out to the boy's mother. Then God opened Hagar's eyes, and she saw a well full of water (Gn 21:19). Not only did God hear their cries and respond with encouragement, He provided for their physical needs and made a way for this desperate mama.

Not only that, but God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness (Gn 21:20). God's intervention didn't end when the moment of crisis was over. The Lord stayed intimately involved in Ishmael's life, guiding and protecting him, blessing him with His presence. What more could a mom ask for?

When I read this passage of Scripture, I usually focus on how God kept His promise to Sarah and miraculously opened her womb to birth Isaac. Or I think about how the Lord was faithful to Abraham in leading him through negotiations with Abimelech and blessing him with wealth and possessions and land. Sarah and Abraham often bask in the spiritual spotlight as the prime examples of God's mighty work, the chosen ones through whom God exercised His power and accomplished His divine plan. Yet there in the middle of it all, God demonstrates His keen interest and intentional care of an overlooked mom and her child. God saw Hagar. Just like He sees you and me.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

Author Index, page 1844

will be traced through Isaac,¹³ and I will also make a nation of the slave's son because he is your offspring."

¹⁴Early in the morning Abraham got up, took bread and a waterskin, put them on Hagar's shoulders, and sent her and the boy away. She left and wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba. ¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she left the boy under one of the bushes ¹⁶and went and sat at a distance, about a bowshot away, for she said, "I can't bear to watch the boy die!" While she sat at a distance, she[^] wept loudly.

¹⁷God heard the boy crying, and the^o angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid, for God has heard the boy crying from the place where he is. ¹⁸Get up, help the boy up, and grasp his hand, for I will make him a great nation."¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰God was with the boy, and he grew; he settled in the wilderness and became an archer. ²¹He settled in the Wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

ABRAHAM'S COVENANT WITH ABIMELECH

²²At that time Abimelech, accompanied by Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. ²³Swear to me by God here and now, that you will not break an agreement with me or with my children and descendants. As I have been loyal to you, so you will be loyal to me and to the country where you are a resident alien."

²⁴And Abraham said, "I swear it." ²⁵But Abraham complained to Abimelech because of the well that Abimelech's servants had seized.

²⁶Abimelech replied, "I don't know who did this thing. You didn't report anything to me, so I hadn't heard about it until today."

²⁷Abraham took flocks and herds and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. ²⁸Abraham separated seven ewe lambs from the flock. ²⁹And Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why have you separated these seven ewe lambs?"

³⁰He replied, "You are to accept the seven ewe lambs from me so that this act^o will serve as my witness that I dug this well."³¹ Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba^o because it was there that the two of them swore an oath. ³²After they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines.

³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴And Abraham lived as an alien in the land of the Philistines for many days.

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he answered.

²"Take your son," he said, "your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

³So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we'll come back to you."⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together.

^a21:16 LXX reads the boy ^b21:17 Or an ^c21:30 Lit that it ^d21:31 = Well of the Oath, or Seven Wells

Not My Son

GENESIS 22

The clouds hung low, the fog settled, and the wind whispered of impending decisions. Onlookers saw an ordinary father-son outing. Meandering together and camping by the river; bonds forged, love demonstrated, wood gathered. A special time with an only son. But as they traveled, the reality of this ultimate sacrifice settled into the heart of Abraham: He had been asked to give up his one and only promised and beloved son, Isaac. The one for whom he had prayed.

As they neared the chosen spot, Isaac questioned, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gn 22:7).

Abraham responded, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Gn 22:8).

I can't begin to imagine how Abraham may have reacted in these final moments. Weeping, pleading in his heart, "Take me instead, Father, take me," followed by the final resignation—even if the Lord takes him, the Lord could still bring him back.

In my kitchen, laughter permeates the air. I look around with joy as siblings are reunited. Our eldest is home for a holiday and once again, our family is complete. When my first-born grabs his younger brother in a bear hug and slaps him on the back, my mind wraps around what's been required of Abraham. I couldn't do it. Would the Lord really ask for my child? The pain is too great, the asking too much. *I beg You, Lord, anything else.*

Silence. Deathly silence. Yet in those final moments, a ram is offered up in Isaac's stead. Abraham's only son, saved. This story foreshadows God's sacrifice of His only Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. Our Emmanuel, nailed to a tree. As He hung on the cross, with a crown of thorns on His brow, blood trickled down His face as He made a way for us. Mocked and scorned, His side pierced for our transgressions.

Born to a virgin, so the Word would become flesh, He came to die, so He could stand in our stead. His momma, Mary, watched as her son became the ultimate sacrificial Lamb. Her son would not be saved. Jesus would have no substitute. This was the purpose for which He was created. He must bleed. He must die. He must be crucified so that we may have life.

Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, was provided by God to be our offering. God's great love required of Himself what He did not require of Abraham.

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1Pt 2:24).

I am at a loss. My momma's heart breaks anew at this ultimate sacrifice. It should have been me. *Thank You, Jesus. Thank You.*

The Scared Brave

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1835

Author Index, page 1846

⁷ Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father."

And he replied, "Here I am, my son."

Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide^d the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Then the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac^e and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He replied, "Here I am."

¹² Then he said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me." ¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a ram^c caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham named that place The LORD Will Provide,^d so today it is said: "It will be provided^e on the LORD's mountain."

¹⁵ Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, "By myself I have sworn," this is the LORD's declaration: "Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your only son, ¹⁷ I will indeed bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your offspring will possess the city gates of their enemies. ¹⁸ And all the nations of the earth will be blessed^d by your offspring because you have obeyed my command."

¹⁹ Abraham went back to his young men, and they got up and went together to Beer-sheba. And Abraham settled in Beer-sheba.

REBEKAH'S FAMILY

²⁰ Now after these things Abraham was told, "Milcah also has borne sons to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Uz his firstborn, his brother Buz, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²² Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." ²³ And Bethuel fathered Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴ His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

SARAH'S BURIAL

23 Now Sarah lived 127 years; these were all the years of her life. ² Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

³ Then Abraham got up from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hethites: ⁴ "I am an alien residing among you. Give me burial property among you so that I can bury my dead."^c

⁵ The Hethites replied to Abraham,^h ⁶ "Listen to us, my lord. You are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in our finest burial place.^j None of us will withhold from you his burial place for burying your dead."

⁷ Then Abraham rose and bowed down to the Hethites, the people of the land. ⁸ He said to them, "If you are willing for me to bury my dead, listen to me and ask Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf ⁹ to give me the cave of Machpelah that belongs to him; it is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me in your presence, for the full price, as burial property."

¹⁰ Ephron was sitting among the Hethites. So in the hearing^k of all the Hethites who came to the gate of his city, Ephron the Hethite answered Abraham: ¹¹ "No, my lord. Listen to me. I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the sight^l of my people. Bury your dead."

^a22:8 Lit see ^b22:9 Or Isaac hand and foot ^c22:13 Some Hb mss, Sam, LXX, Syr, Tg; other Hb mss read saw behind him a ram ^d22:14 = Yahweh-yireh ^e22:14 Or "He will be seen" ^f22:18 Or will bless themselves, or will find blessing ^g23:4 Lit dead from before me ^h23:5 Lit Abraham, saying to him ⁱ23:6 Or a mighty prince ^j23:6 Or finest graves ^k23:10 Lit ears, also in vv. 13, 16 ^l23:11 Lit in the eyes of the sons

¹² Abraham bowed down to the people of the land ¹³ and said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, "Listen to me, if you please. Let me pay the price of the field. Accept it from me, and let me bury my dead there."

¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham and said to him, ¹⁵ "My lord, listen to me. Land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Bury your dead."

¹⁶ Abraham agreed with Ephron, and Abraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had agreed to in the hearing of the Hethites: four hundred standard shekels^a of silver. ¹⁷ So Ephron's field at Machpelah near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the boundaries of the field—became ¹⁸ Abraham's possession in the sight of all the Hethites who came to the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field at Machpelah near Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field with its cave passed from the Hethites to Abraham as burial property.

A WIFE FOR ISAAC

24 Abraham was now old, getting on in years,^b and the LORD had blessed him in everything. ² Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household who managed all he owned, "Place your hand under my thigh, ³ and I will have you swear by the LORD, God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live, ⁴ but will go to my land and my family to take a wife for my son Isaac."

⁵ The servant said to him, "Suppose the woman is unwilling to follow me to this land? Should I have your son go back to the land you came from?"

⁶ Abraham answered him, "Make sure that you don't take my son back there. ⁷ The LORD,



Meet *Rebekah*

A WOMAN OF
Hospitality
GENESIS 24

Rebekah was a simple woman living in Nahor. When she saw a traveler at the well, she didn't hesitate to offer him water and invite him to stay with her family. At the time, she had no idea that he was a servant of a relative, Abraham, who had moved away years earlier. Unbeknownst to her, Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for his son among his family's people. His servant had asked God for a sign of hospitality from a woman in order to know which woman to choose as Isaac's wife. Rebekah's kindness was a specific answer to the servant's prayer. Sometimes what seem like the smallest acts of hospitality are really beautiful gifts—and answered prayers—to those who receive them.



^a23:16 Lit 400 shekels passing to the merchant ^b24:1 Lit days

How to Be at Peace with Your Choices

GENESIS 25:8

Let's talk about Abraham. That chosen man God called to become the father of a nation, a man of blessing, a man of promise. That man, that righteous-by-faith man—he made some, uh, mistakes in his time.

Remember the time he told his wife to pretend she was his sister so the Egyptians wouldn't kill him? And Pharaoh went and made her his wife (Gn 12)? Then Abraham did the same thing with her again at a later date (Gn 20)! Incidentally, the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. Abraham's son Isaac did the exact same thing with his wife Rebekah (Gn 26).

Remember also when Abraham listened to his wife and took her maid, Hagar, into his bed so she would conceive a child for him and Sarah (Gn 16)? That didn't turn out so well.

Oh, but Abraham was faithful, even if he was human and prone to take matters into his own hands. He loved the Lord, and He eventually stopped questioning the promises of God and obeyed wholeheartedly, trusting Him completely. Scripture says that Abraham "took his last breath and died at a good old age, old and contented" (Gn 25:8).

Abraham messed up in some big ways—ways that have had lasting consequences to this day, but he died satisfied with his life. His sins didn't define him, his faithfulness did.

He was chosen, and you and I are chosen as well, for this time, in this culture. We are chosen. When we follow the God who has chosen us, and we, stumbling along, trust in the calling over our lives, we will live satisfied. What I've learned from Abraham is that being satisfied with our lives isn't so much about our sinful bents or the messes we've made, but the willingness to follow a faithful God with wholehearted devotion.

Living satisfied is about trusting the One who holds my days in His hand.

Living satisfied is about getting up when I fall down, changing direction if need be, and keeping on with my gaze set on Jesus.

Living satisfied is making wide-awake choices, knowing that God lets my decisions stand, even in redemption; my choosing matters.

Living satisfied is about believing that God has a purpose for my days, planned before the world began, for such a time as this. And my job is to trust Him by faith, to keep walking forward knowing the Holy Spirit is guiding me and molding me.

Yes, that's it, and that's how I'm going to live because I want to live a faithful, satisfied life. I want to look back over my life one day, and before I breathe my last breath, feel the peace of satisfaction over my life. I lived well. I followed God. I was faithful.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

Author Index, page 1849

Cautionary Tales

GENESIS 27

“Well at least I’m not like her!” I thought smugly on the first day of my visit. They were the most dysfunctional family you could imagine. The parents clearly played favorites with the kids. One son was the worst kind of mama’s boy and could lie without breaking a sweat. The other son was a total “man’s man”—until he didn’t get his way. Then he turned into a big crybaby.

And the woman of the house? Oh, was she ever a piece of work! I’d only planned to visit for a day, but I couldn’t seem to pull myself away. Before I knew it, a whole month flew by and I was still hanging out with them. As the days passed, the Holy Spirit chipped away at my smug attitude. And by the time I waved farewell to Rebekah and her family, I’d discovered how much she and I have in common. I was downright grateful to her for helping me recognize three big mistakes I don’t have to keep making.

She took matters into her own hands. God told her when she was pregnant that the younger would serve the older (Gn 25:23). But when the time came for Isaac to give his blessing, she didn’t trust God to work things out according to His promise. Instead, she concocted a plan of her own and roped Jacob into it.

Rebekah reminds me to take my concerns to God and to leave them with Him.

She promised to take the blame for anything that went wrong. Her words “Your curse be on me” (Gn 27:13) echo in my head and heart. My first thought: *How could she say such a thing?* My next thought: *How often do my actions say, “Your curse be on me”?*

Rebekah reminds me to allow others to experience the consequences of their own choices.

She used her intimate knowledge of those she loved against them. Rebekah knew her husband and sons well; she knew what made them tick and what ticked them off. She knew how to fix the delicious meal Isaac loved. She knew exactly where Esau’s best clothes were stored. She knew that Jacob’s hands and neck were smooth. And she turned her intimate knowledge of each man into a weapon that she wielded to get her way and betray their trust.

Rebekah reminds me to protect intimate knowledge to keep people and relationships safe.

Three powerful take-aways:

- (1) Take my concerns to God and leave them there.
- (2) Allow others to experience the consequences of their choices.
- (3) Protect intimate knowledge to keep people and relationships safe.

This is the great gift that cautionary tales such as Rebekah’s offer us: the opportunity for vicarious learning, the chance to witness from a distance the consequences of someone else’s poor choices so we can make better ones.

Second Chances

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1834

Author Index, page 1844

The Times We're Passed Over

GENESIS 29:16

Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, whose eyes were tender; and the name of the younger was Rachel, who was beautiful in form and appearance. What is meant by “tender” eyes is unclear. Perhaps it means delicate and soft. Or perhaps she had light blue or light colored eyes. Some believe it means her eyes were ordinary or perhaps even crossed. Either way, her tender eyes were how she was remembered while her younger sister was remembered for her stunning beauty.

Comparison can exist in any relationship, but it is almost a guarantee between sisters. It's not what God wants, but it's part of our sinful nature. These sisters were no exception. Jacob loved Rachel, and he told Laban that he would serve him for seven years for Rachel. Her father agreed, so Jacob served seven years for Rachel, “and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her” (Gn 29:20). On the night of their wedding, Laban deceptively took his daughter, Leah, and brought her to Jacob. In the morning he woke up to Leah by his side.

“When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Wasn't it for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?”

Laban answered, “It is not the custom in this place to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn. Complete this week of wedding celebration, and we will also give you this younger one in return for working yet another seven years for me.”

And Jacob did just that. He finished the week of celebration, and Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife” (Gn 29:25-28).

As if these sisters needed more things to compare with one another, now they were to share a husband?

I'm blessed to have a sister I adore and we're very close, but we've not always been as close as we are today. I grew up in her shadow of good grades and a blemish-free reputation. Comparison was always there.

I pray that we, as women, will feel steadfast in our relationship to our Father—that we know His love is true, feel it so deep, and live it so much—that we'll stop comparing ourselves to the friend who got engaged, the new mama whose baby is healthy, the woman in the magazine, the mom who is always on time, or the neighbor who doesn't have to work.

Leah was passed over for the beauty of another. There will be times when we are passed over too. May we rest in our identity that comes from Him and know we are His beloved and His chosen.

Beautiful Brokenness

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826

Author Index, page 1843

¹³The LORD was standing there beside him,^A saying, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” ¹⁷He was afraid and said, “What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.”

¹⁸Early in the morning Jacob took the stone that was near his head and set it up as a marker. He poured oil on top of it ¹⁹and named the place Bethel,^B though previously the city was named Luz. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow: “If God will be with me and watch over me during this journey I’m making, if he provides me with food to eat and clothing to wear,^C and if I return safely to my father’s family, then the LORD will be my God. ²²This stone that I have set up as a marker will be God’s house, and I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me.”

JACOB MEETS RACHEL

29 Jacob resumed his journey^C and went to the eastern country.^D ²He looked and saw a well in a field. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it because the sheep were watered from this well. But a large stone covered the opening of the well. ³The shepherds would roll the stone from the opening of the well and water the sheep when all the flocks^E were gathered there. Then they would

return the stone to its place over the well’s opening.

⁴Jacob asked the men at the well, “My brothers! Where are you from?”

“We’re from Haran,” they answered.

⁵“Do you know Laban grandson of Nahor?” Jacob asked them.

They answered, “We know him.”

⁶“Is he well?” Jacob asked.

“Yes,” they said, “and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with his sheep.”

⁷Then Jacob said, “Look, it is still broad daylight. It’s not time for the animals to be gathered. Water the flock, then go out and let them graze.”

⁸But they replied, “We can’t until all the flocks have been gathered and the stone is rolled from the well’s opening. Then we will water the sheep.”

⁹While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰As soon as Jacob saw his uncle Laban’s daughter Rachel with his sheep,^F he went up and rolled the stone from the opening and watered his uncle Laban’s sheep.

¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept loudly.^G

¹²He told Rachel that he was her father’s relative, Rebekah’s son. She ran and told her father.

JACOB DECEIVED

¹³When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then he took him to his house, and Jacob told him all that had happened.

¹⁴Laban said to him, “Yes, you are my own flesh and blood.”^H

After Jacob had stayed with him a month, ¹⁵Laban said to him, “Just because you’re my relative, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”

¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters: the older was named Leah, and the younger was

^A28:13 Or there above it ^B28:19 = House of God ^C29:1 Lit Jacob picked up his feet ^D29:1 Lit the land of the children of the east ^E29:3 Sam, some LXX mss read flocks and the shepherds ^F29:10 Lit with the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother ^G29:11 Lit and he lifted his voice and wept ^H29:14 Lit my bone and my flesh

named Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had tender eyes, but Rachel was shapely and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel, so he answered Laban, "I'll work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

¹⁹ Laban replied, "Better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay with me."

²⁰ So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Since my time is complete, give me my wife, so I can sleep with^A her."²² So Laban invited all the men of the place and sponsored a feast.

²³ That evening, Laban took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴ And Laban gave his slave Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her slave.

²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Wasn't it for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?"

²⁶ Laban answered, "It is not the custom in this place to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete this week of wedding celebration, and we will also give you this younger one in return for working yet another seven years for me."

²⁸ And Jacob did just that. He finished the week of celebration, and Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. ²⁹ And Laban gave his slave Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her slave. ³⁰ Jacob slept with Rachel also, and indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

JACOB'S SONS

³¹ When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was unable to conceive. ³² Leah conceived, gave birth to a son, and named him Reuben,^B for she said, "The LORD has seen my affliction; surely my husband will love me now."



Meet Leah

A WOMAN OF
Beautiful Brokenness
GENESIS 29-30

Leah had "tender eyes," which likely means her eyes were crossed or were weakened in some way. She was given away in marriage, only to have her husband reject her the next morning, demanding he be given Leah's younger, more beautiful sister. At first, Leah believed her children would make her husband love her. But he never did. Instead, Leah grew closer to God with each child she bore. She learned to praise God in her brokenness and loneliness, giving praise to the One who always met her needs. She named her fourth son Judah, which sounds like the word "praise" in Hebrew. Leah was unloved and broken, but God turned her brokenness into praise, and ultimately, He brought the Messiah into the world through her descendants.



^A29:21 Lit can go to ^B29:32 = See, a Son; in Hb, the name *Reuben* sounds like "has seen my affliction."

³³ She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "The LORD heard that I am unloved and has given me this son also." So she named him Simeon.^a

³⁴ She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "At last, my husband will become attached to me because I have borne three sons for him." Therefore he was named Levi.^b

³⁵ And she conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah.^c Then Leah stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she envied her sister. "Give me sons, or I will die!" she said to Jacob.

² Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in God's place, who has withheld offspring^d from you?"

³ Then she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Go sleep with her, and she'll bear children for me^e so that through her I too can build a family." ⁴ So Rachel gave her slave Bilhah to Jacob as a wife, and he slept with her. ⁵ Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; yes, he has heard me and given me a son," so she named him Dan.^f

⁷ Rachel's slave Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Rachel said, "In my wrestlings with God,^g I have wrestled with my sister and won," and she named him Naphtali.^h

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her slave Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Leah's slave Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, "What good fortune!"ⁱ and she named him Gad.^j

¹² When Leah's slave Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, ¹³ Leah said, "I am happy that the women call me happy," so she named him Asher.^k

¹⁴ Reuben went out during the wheat harvest and found some mandrakes in the field.

When he brought them to his mother Leah, Rachel asked, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

¹⁵ But Leah replied to her, "Isn't it enough that you have taken my husband? Now you also want to take my son's mandrakes?"

"Well then," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes."

¹⁶ When Jacob came in from the field that evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So Jacob slept with her that night.

¹⁷ God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my slave to my husband," and she named him Issachar.^l

¹⁹ Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ "God has given me a good gift," Leah said. "This time my husband will honor me because I have borne six sons for him," and she named him Zebulun.^m ²¹ Later, Leah bore a daughter and named her Dinah.

²² Then God remembered Rachel. He listened to her and opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore a son, and she said, "God has taken away my disgrace." ²⁴ She named him Josephⁿ and said, "May the LORD add another son to me."

JACOB'S FLOCKS MULTIPLY

²⁵ After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so that I can return to my homeland." ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children that I have worked for, and let me go. You know how hard I have worked for you."

²⁷ But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor with you, stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." ²⁸ Then Laban said, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

^a29:33 In Hb, the name *Simeon* sounds like "has heard." ^b29:34 In Hb, the name *Levi* sounds like "attached to." ^c29:35 In Hb, the name *Judah* sounds like "praise." ^d30:2 Lit *the fruit of the womb* ^e30:3 Lit *bear on my knees* ^f30:6 In Hb, the name *Dan* sounds like "has vindicated," or "has judged." ^g30:8 Or "With mighty wrestlings" ^h30:8 In Hb, the name *Naphtali* sounds like "my wrestling." ⁱ30:11 Alt Hb tradition, LXX, Vg read "Good fortune has come!" ^j30:11 = Good Fortune ^k30:13 = Happy ^l30:18 In Hb, the name *Issachar* sounds like "reward." ^m30:20 In Hb, the name *Zebulun* sounds like "honored." ⁿ30:24 = He Adds

Leah and Rachel

GENESIS 30:22-24

Genesis 30 paints a very real picture of what happens to people when life doesn't happen as they planned.

Jacob was first attracted to Rachel because of her beauty, but then she allowed her barrenness to cause a rift in their relationship, making her bitter toward him and her sister. She knew of the dream he had at Bethel, where the LORD said that all people on earth would be blessed through him and his offspring (Gn 28:14), and Rachel's inability to produce an heir caused her great anguish (can you blame the girl?). But then in Genesis 30:22 "God remembered Rachel" and she bore a son. His name, Joseph, or Yoseph, means "he adds," as in her prayer that the Lord would give her another son. But it also sounds like the word 'asaph, meaning "he took," as in "God has taken away my disgrace." Rachel was astonished that God had actually given her grace and joy.

Have you ever found yourself like Rachel, forcing an outcome only to watch God turn your greed into an opportunity for gratitude?

After Joseph's birth, Jacob went to her father, Laban, and told him he was ready to take his family back to Canaan. Laban did not want Jacob to leave, so he cut Joseph a deal, saying that he could be paid for every streaked, speckled, and spotted sheep in his flock. However, in his craftiness, Laban removed all the goats that he had promised to Jacob. But God allowed Jacob to circumvent Laban's craftiness (Gn 30:37-39).

I've found that when life doesn't go according to my plans, I often blame, belittle, or break down. When I put my trust in my own plans instead of God's plans, I become cunning like Laban and I don't recognize the girl staring back at me in the mirror. Yet, even in the grime, God shows me His grace.

God woos us with His prevenient grace from the beginning, going before us, covering our imperfect plans with His perfection. Despite our missteps, He will continue to declare us as people to receive His gift of grace. Most often, we are like the goats—streaked, speckled, and spotted—but we are always remembered, loved, and recipients of the LORD's promises.

As God provided a son for Rachel and a way for Jacob to return home to Canaan, He will lead you to a place of gratitude. Don't let bitterness keep you from believing in God's promises. He longs to lavish His grace on you.

Intentional Gratitude

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1833

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Grasping to Prevailing

GENESIS 32

I was staring at a blank email document. My cheeks were wet with tears. I was attempting to write the words that would tell my pastors I had to step down from small group ministry. It was one week shy of the small-group launch. All that remained were final details—a few phone calls, really. And I couldn't do it. I was overcome with paralyzing and debilitating anxiety.

It felt like dying, admitting that regardless of how long I'd been a Christian or in church leadership, I was a broken mess. Maybe I could tell you that Jesus was my Savior, but how it frustrated me that I couldn't save myself.

I wanted to do better, be better, fly right over the difficulty and land where I had a handle on life again. I hated feeling broken. I hated failing. I hated letting others down.

Then God led me right here to the story of Jacob. Jacob, whose name meant "one who fights for his own way" (he grasps the heel), found his life coming unraveled the night before he was to meet Esau, his estranged brother. Jacob was about to come face-to-face with everything he had ever done wrong, and he was terrified he was about to lose everything he had fought so hard to get. We see Jacob scrambling—praying, sending Esau presents, and separating his loved ones. That night, he wrestled with an angel of the Lord. Here's the thing I can't get over: God touched Jacob's hip and gave him a limp Jacob would have the rest of his life. And yet, with that limp, God changed Jacob—the one who fought for his own way—to Israel—"God prevails" (in Hebrew, Israel sounds like the phrase, "he struggled with God").

The only real way to live like God prevails isn't to try harder. It isn't to prevent it all from falling apart. It is to walk leaning on God. That place you are broken, that limp? That is the real place God's power prevails. It doesn't matter what the struggle is, how weak of a Christian you think you look like. Because when you can't, sister, He can. Maybe we fear everyone will see our limp, but here's the good news: if you are leaning on Jesus, people don't see the limp. What they see is Jesus walking with you.

Heavenly Father, I bring before You my fears and my weaknesses. I ask for Your forgiveness of my pride and all my striving to do it on my own. I look to Jesus Christ to be my strength. Instead of trying harder, I am slowing down and refusing to move without You with me. I need You. I thank You for Your grace that is always sufficient for me (2Co 12:9-10). Thank You that these places of weakness are exactly where You prevail. Let Your strength prevail in me. Amen.

Beautiful Brokenness

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1826

Author Index, page 1843

DINAH DEFILED

34 Leah's daughter Dinah, whom Leah bore to Jacob, went out to see some of the young women of the area.² When Shechem — son of Hamor the Hivite, who was the region's chieftain — saw her, he took her and raped her.³ He became infatuated with Jacob's daughter Dinah. He loved the young girl and spoke tenderly to her.⁴ "Get me this girl as a wife," he told his father.

⁵ Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah, but since his sons were with his livestock in the field, he remained silent until they returned.⁶ Meanwhile, Shechem's father Hamor came to speak with Jacob.⁷ Jacob's sons returned from the field when they heard about the incident and were deeply grieved and very angry. For Shechem had committed an outrage against Israel by raping Jacob's daughter, and such a thing should not be done.

⁸ Hamor said to Jacob's sons, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your^b daughter. Please give her to him as a wife.⁹ Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.¹⁰ Live with us. The land is before you. Settle here, move about, and acquire property in it."

¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Grant me this favor,^c and I'll give you whatever you say.¹² Demand of me a high compensation^d and gift; I'll give you whatever you ask me. Just give the girl to be my wife!"

¹³ But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully because he had defiled their sister Dinah.¹⁴ "We cannot do this thing," they said to them. "Giving our sister to an uncircumcised man is a disgrace to us.¹⁵ We will agree with you only on this condition: if all your males are circumcised as we are.¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters, take your daughters for ourselves, live with

you, and become one people.¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."

¹⁸ Their words seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem.¹⁹ The young man did not delay doing this, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most important in all his father's family.²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city.

²¹ "These men are peaceful toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and move about in it, for indeed, the region is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as our wives and give our daughters to them.²² But the men will agree to live with us and be one people only on this condition: if all our men are circumcised as they are.²³ Won't their livestock, their possessions, and all their animals become ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will live with us."

²⁴ All the men who had come to the city gates listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and all those men were circumcised.²⁵ On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords, went into the unsuspecting city, and killed every male.²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with their swords, took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went away.²⁷ Jacob's sons came to the slaughter and plundered the city because their sister had been defiled.²⁸ They took their flocks, herds, donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.²⁹ They captured all their possessions, dependents, and wives and plundered everything in the houses.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. We are few in

^a34:3 Lit spoke to her heart ^b34:8 The Hb word for your is pl, showing that Hamor is speaking to Jacob and his sons. ^c34:11 Lit "May I find favor in your eyes" ^d34:12 Or bride-price, or betrothal present

number; if they unite against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.”

³¹But they answered, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”

RETURN TO BETHEL

35 God said to Jacob, “Get up! Go to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.”

²So Jacob said to his family and all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your clothes. ³We must get up and go to Bethel. I will build an altar there to the God who answered me in my day of distress. He has been with me everywhere I have gone.”

⁴Then they gave Jacob all their foreign gods and their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak near Shechem. ⁵When they set out, a terror from God came over the cities around them, and they did not pursue Jacob’s sons. ⁶So Jacob and all who were with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷Jacob built an altar there and called the place El-bethel^A because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸Deborah, the one who had nursed and raised Rebekah,^B died and was buried under the oak south of Bethel. So Jacob named it Alon-bacuth.^C

⁹God appeared to Jacob again after he returned from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. ¹⁰God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; you will no longer be named Jacob, but your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.

¹¹God also said to him, “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will come from you, and kings will descend from you.^D ¹²I will give to you the land that I gave to Abraham

and Isaac. And I will give the land to your future descendants.” ¹³Then God withdrew^E from him at the place where he had spoken to him.

¹⁴Jacob set up a marker at the place where he had spoken to him — a stone marker. He poured a drink offering on it and anointed it with oil. ¹⁵Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

RACHEL’S DEATH

¹⁶They set out from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth, and her labor was difficult. ¹⁷During her difficult labor, the midwife said to her, “Don’t be afraid, for you have another son.” ¹⁸With her last breath — for she was dying — she named him Ben-oni,^F but his father called him Benjamin.^G ¹⁹So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰Jacob set up a marker on her grave; it is the marker at Rachel’s grave still today.

ISRAEL’S SONS

²¹Israel set out again and pitched his tent beyond the Tower of Eder.^H ²²While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard about it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

- ²³ Leah’s sons were Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.
- ²⁴ Rachel’s sons were Joseph and Benjamin.
- ²⁵ The sons of Rachel’s slave Bilhah were Dan and Naphtali.
- ²⁶ The sons of Leah’s slave Zilpah were Gad and Asher.

These are the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

^A35:7 = God of Bethel ^B35:8 Lit Deborah, Rebekah’s wet nurse; Gn 24:59 ^C35:8 = Oak of Weeping ^D35:11 Lit will come from your loins ^E35:13 Lit went up ^F35:18 = Son of My Sorrow ^G35:18 = Son of the Right Hand ^H35:21 Or beyond Migdal-eder

SEIR'S FAMILY

20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,
 21 Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These are the chiefs among the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom.
 22 The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman.
 Timna was Lotan's sister.
 23 These are Shobal's sons: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.
 24 These are Zibeon's sons: Aiah and Anah.
 This was the Anah who found the hot springs^a in the wilderness while he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon.
 25 These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.
 26 These are Dishon's sons: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran.
 27 These are Ezer's sons: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.
 28 These are Dishan's sons: Uz and Aran.
 29 These are the chiefs among the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah,
 30 chief Dishon, chief Ezer, and chief Dishan.
 These are the chiefs among the Horites, clan by clan,^b in the land of Seir.

RULERS OF EDMOM

31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites:
 32 Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom; the name of his city was Dinhabah.

33 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah reigned in his place.
 34 When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites reigned in his place.
 35 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad reigned in his place. He defeated Midian in the field of Moab; the name of his city was Avith.
 36 When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah reigned in his place.
 37 When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the Euphrates River reigned in his place.
 38 When Shaul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor reigned in his place.
 39 When Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, Hadar^c reigned in his place. His city was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.
 40 These are the names of Esau's chiefs, according to their families and their localities, by their names: chief Timna, chief Alvah, chief Jetheth, chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon,
 41 chief Kenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibzar, chief Magdiel, and chief Iram.
 42 These are Edom's chiefs, according to their settlements in the land they possessed.
 Esau^d was father of the Edomites.

JOSEPH'S DREAMS

37 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.
 2 These are the family records of Jacob. At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended sheep with his brothers. The young man was

^a36:24 Syr, Vg; Tg reads the mules; Hb obscure ^b36:30 Lit Horites, for their chiefs ^c36:39 Many Hb mss, Sam, Syr read Hadad ^d36:43 Lit He Esau

The Dream They Never Imagined

GENESIS 37

My heart broke as I heard her words: "I want to curl up in a ball and have someone hold me. I feel like a failure because neither of my children will grow up with both their parents."

She is a single mom, pregnant for the second time. Alone.

Shattered dreams. We all have them. Somehow our life doesn't turn out anything like we imagined. In Genesis 37, we enter into Joseph's story. Life is good. He's his father's favorite. Jacob publicly acknowledges this by giving Joseph an ornate robe. But this constant reminder to his brothers fuels their hatred and jealousy. Joseph doesn't seem to have the same responsibilities as his brothers. Some days, while his brothers are out tending their flocks, Joseph is comfortably back home with his father. Let's face it; Joseph is a brat, a tattletale, and no doubt flaunts his father's favoritism. The final straw comes when Joseph gloats to his brothers about his dreams that they would all bow down to him. It's the dream they could never imagine.

We see the brothers' hostility for Joseph intensify. One fateful day, Jacob sends Joseph to check on the brothers in the field. Off in the distance, they recognize his ornate robe, a flashing reminder of their father's favoritism. So they plot to harm him. They strip him of his robe and throw him into a pit.

Sometimes, when life is good, God takes us on a detour. And when God takes us on a detour, He can strip us of the one thing that is most valuable to us. We see the deep hatred Joseph's brothers have for him. They throw him into a pit and then callously sit down nearby to have a meal. Did their hatred for their brother deafen them to his cries for help?

In Genesis 15:13, God tells Abraham that his descendants will be strangers in a foreign land and they will be enslaved for four hundred years. This foreign land was Egypt, and this prophecy was fulfilled by the despicable betrayal of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery. God was setting the stage for His people to go to Egypt. His plan was to preserve His covenant people through a great famine.

Lying in the bottom of the pit, Joseph probably felt it was the end to his dreams. Being stripped of his precious robe and sold into slavery was not how he imagined his dreams would play out.

As Joseph's story unfolds, we learn that his brothers' intentional efforts to destroy Joseph's dreams were the very means God would use to fulfill them. What broken dreams are you holding on to? Is your life nothing like what you had imagined or dreamt of? God's invisible hand is always at work, moving people and situations to accomplish His plan for your life.

Hope in the Hard

Devotional Reading Plan, page 1831

Author Index, page 1848

his brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. ³⁰He went back to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone! What am I going to do?"^a ³¹So they took Joseph's robe, slaughtered a male goat, and dipped the robe in its blood. ³²They sent the robe of many colors to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it. Is it your son's robe or not?"

³³His father recognized it. "It is my son's robe," he said. "A vicious animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces!" ³⁴Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth around his waist, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵All his sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said. "I will go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." And his father wept for him.

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards.

JUDAH AND TAMAR

38 At that time Judah left his brothers and settled near an Adullamite named Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua; he took her as a wife and slept with her. ³She conceived and gave birth to a son, and he named him Er. ⁴She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and named him Onan. ⁵She gave birth to another son and named him Shelah. It was at Chezib that^{b,c} she gave birth to him.

⁶Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. ⁷Now Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the LORD's sight, and the LORD put him to death. ⁸Then Judah said to Onan, "Sleep with your brother's wife. Perform your duty as her brother-in-law and produce offspring for your brother." ⁹But

Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he released his semen on the ground so that he would not produce offspring for his brother. ¹⁰What he did was evil in the LORD's sight, so he put him to death also.

¹¹Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He might die too, like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

¹²After a long time^d Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had finished mourning, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went up to Timnah to his sheep-shearers. ¹³Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

¹⁴So she took off her widow's clothes, veiled her face, covered herself, and sat at the entrance to Enaim,^e which is on the way to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had grown up, she had not been given to him as a wife. ¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.

¹⁶He went over to her and said, "Come, let me sleep with you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law.

She said, "What will you give me for sleeping with me?"

¹⁷"I will send you a young goat from my flock," he replied.

But she said, "Only if you leave something with me until you send it."

¹⁸"What should I give you?" he asked.

She answered, "Your signet ring, your cord, and the staff in your hand." So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him. ¹⁹She got up and left, then removed her veil and put her widow's clothes back on.

²⁰When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get back the items he had left with the woman, he could

^a37:30 Lit And I, where am I going?

^b38:5 LXX reads She was at Chezib when

^c38:5 Or He was at Chezib when

^d38:12 Lit And there were many days, and

^e38:14 Or sat by the mouth of the springs

not find her.²¹ He asked the men of the place, "Where is the cult prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?"

"There has been no cult prostitute here," they answered.

²² So the Adullamite returned to Judah, saying, "I couldn't find her, and besides, the men of the place said, 'There has been no cult prostitute here.'"

²³ Judah replied, "Let her keep the items for herself; otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send this young goat, but you couldn't find her."

²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, has been acting like a prostitute, and now she is pregnant."

"Bring her out," Judah said, "and let her be burned to death!"

²⁵ As she was being brought out, she sent her father-in-law this message: "I am pregnant by the man to whom these items belong." And she added, "Examine them. Whose signet ring, cord, and staff are these?"

²⁶ Judah recognized them and said, "She is more in the right^a than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not know her intimately again.

²⁷ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb.²⁸ As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife took it and tied a scarlet thread around it, announcing, "This one came out first."²⁹ But then he pulled his hand back, out came his brother, and she said, "What a breakout you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez.³⁰ Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread tied to his hand, came out, and was named Zerah.^c

JOSEPH IN POTIPHAR'S HOUSE

39 Now Joseph had been taken to Egypt. An Egyptian named Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guards,

bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, serving^d in the household of his Egyptian master.³ When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made everything he did successful,⁴ Joseph found favor with his master and became his personal attendant. Potiphar also put him in charge of his household and placed all that he owned under his authority.^e ⁵ From the time that he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house because of Joseph. The LORD's blessing was on all that he owned, in his house and in his fields.⁶ He left all that he owned under Joseph's authority;^f he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome.⁷ After some time^g his master's wife looked longingly at Joseph and said, "Sleep with me."

⁸ But he refused. "Look," he said to his master's wife, "with me here my master does not concern himself with anything in his house, and he has put all that he owns under my authority.^h ⁹ No one in this house is greater than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do this immense evil, and how could I sin against God?"

¹⁰ Although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her.ⁱ ¹¹ Now one day he went into the house to do his work, and none of the household servants were there.^j ¹² She grabbed him by his garment and said, "Sleep with me!" But leaving his garment in her hand, he escaped and ran outside.¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment with her and had run outside,¹⁴ she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "my husband brought a Hebrew man to make fools of us. He came to me so he could sleep with me, and I screamed as loud

^a38:26 Or more righteous ^b38:29 = Breaking Out ^c38:30 = Brightness of Sunrise; perhaps related to the scarlet thread ^d39:2 Lit and he was ^e39:4 Lit owned in his hand ^f39:6 Lit owned in Joseph's hand ^g39:7 Lit And after these things ^h39:8 Lit owns in my hand ⁱ39:10 Lit he did not listen to her to lie beside her, to be with her ^j39:11 Lit there in the house

The Integrity of Joseph

GENESIS 39:9

Joseph is one of my favorite figures of the Bible. He provides an example of bestowing undeserved mercy after bitter betrayal, holding to an unshakeable faith during uncertain and difficult times, and exhibiting immovable integrity amidst intense temptation.

Integrity is often referred to as our character shown when no one is looking; who we are when we're not trying to impress anyone. Yet the reality is, we are always seen. Psalm 139 tells us that we cannot escape the presence and knowledge of God.

"LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I stand up;
you understand my thoughts from far away.
You observe my travels and my rest;
you are aware of all my ways"
(Ps 139:1-3).

Joseph understood this better than most. He held to the truth that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. Yet, this was not a fearsome truth. It was part of what carried Joseph through so many difficulties. Though his brothers may have forsaken and forgotten him, God had not and never would.

Alongside his belief that God was always with him, he understood that God is good and holy. He recognized that every transgression was ultimately an offense to his perfect Creator.

An abiding grasp of these truths led to an unwavering commitment to live a life of integrity. Joseph did not give in to lust, revenge, or hatred because he knew they would ultimately affect the intimacy he had with his holy God.

Our God sees all—and all our sin is against God. When I choose my way instead of His, I question His goodness. I say my plan is better than His. Yes, my failures affect flesh and blood, but my sin is always chiefly against God.

God, give us the same resolve to honor You with every choice. Not out of fear of getting caught, nor out of a desire to impress others, but out of worship and a desire to be close to Your presence.

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as I could.¹⁵ When he heard me screaming for help,^a he left his garment beside me and ran outside.”

¹⁶ She put Joseph’s garment beside her until his master came home. ¹⁷ Then she told him the same story: “The Hebrew slave you brought to us came to make a fool of me,¹⁸ but when I screamed for help,^b he left his garment beside me and ran outside.”

¹⁹ When his master heard the story his wife told him — “These are the things your slave did to me” — he was furious ²⁰ and had him thrown into prison, where the king’s prisoners were confined. So Joseph was there in prison.

JOSEPH IN PRISON

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him. He granted him favor with the prison warden. ²² The warden put all the prisoners who were in the prison under Joseph’s authority,^c and he was responsible for everything that was done there. ²³ The warden did not bother with anything under Joseph’s authority,^d because the LORD was with him, and the LORD made everything that he did successful.

JOSEPH INTERPRETS TWO PRISONERS’ DREAMS

40 After this, the king of Egypt’s cupbearer and baker offended their master, the king of Egypt. ² Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker,³ and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guards in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guards assigned Joseph to them as their personal attendant, and they were in custody for some time.^e

⁵ The king of Egypt’s cupbearer and baker, who were confined in the prison, each had a dream. Both had a dream on the same night,

and each dream had its own meaning. ⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked distraught. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”

⁸ “We had dreams,” they said to him, “but there is no one to interpret them.”

Then Joseph said to them, “Don’t interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.”

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph: “In my dream there was a vine in front of me. ¹⁰ On the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹ Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand.”

¹² “This is its interpretation,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. ¹³ In just three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position. You will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand the way you used to when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴ But when all goes well for you, remember that I was with you. Please show kindness to me by mentioning me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this prison. ¹⁵ For I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should put me in the dungeon.”^f

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was positive, he said to Joseph, “I also had a dream. Three baskets of white bread were on my head. ¹⁷ In the top basket were all sorts of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

¹⁸ “This is its interpretation,” Joseph replied. “The three baskets are three days. ¹⁹ In just three days Pharaoh will lift up your head — from off you — and hang you on a tree.^g

^a39:15 Lit *he heard that I raised my voice and I screamed* ^b39:18 Lit *I raised my voice and screamed* ^c39:22 Lit *prison in the hand of Joseph* ^d39:23 Lit *anything in his hand* ^e40:4 Lit *custody days* ^f40:15 Or *pit, or cistern* ^g40:19 Or *and impale you on a pole*

When Life Throws a Curveball

GENESIS 40

I heard what sounded like the ever-lovin' house falling down and flew to the foot of the stairs in time to see my son's head smack hard—very hard—into a table. He lay motionless on the floor, and I stood breathless in my spot. I dropped down, my hand gently touching the back of his head. Finding my voice, I squeaked, "Ethan! Wake up, baby! Wake up!"

After a few seconds, he stirred, and my husband and I helped him sit down on the stairs. Because miracles are real, Ethan suffered only a mild concussion and an injured arm that required physical therapy. He seems to grow an inch a day, so it's easy to see how his changing height tinkers with his equilibrium. Combine this with his size 12 feet and I wonder how this kind of fall hasn't happened sooner.

Sometimes life throws a curveball that can affect us just the same. We're moving full steam ahead when something knocks us off our equilibrium. Maybe that something is an unwanted change in the form of a dashed dream or a disappointment. Whatever it is, it causes you to twist and tumble downward, hitting and bumping every hard surface along the way. Next thing you know you're sprawled on the ground with your head aching or your heart broken.

For the longest time, a curveball didn't have to hit me too hard to knock me flat on my back. I would lay there panicked, with all kinds of worst-case scenarios flashing through my mind. It would take me a long time to get to my feet and walk steady again.

I've gotten better, but life's curveballs still trip me up and knock me over. However, I don't stay down as long as I used to, and there's one key reason why: I am more intentional about spending time with Jesus. Because the only rock-solid ground to stand on is Solid Rock truth. The more I do this, the less curveballs send me over the edge.

In Genesis we read how Pharaoh chose Joseph as his right-hand man. And because God gave Joseph the ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph knew Egypt and other countries would face seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. To ensure food would be available during the lean years, Joseph prepared the nation by saving grain during the years of plenty. So when times were tough, the people of Egypt and the surrounding lands gleaned from the storehouses and were saved from ruin.

My time with Jesus works much the same way. If I consistently keep company with Him through His Word and prayer during the good times, I build up a storehouse of faith. Then I'm able to feast on it during seasons of famine too—even when curveballs tinker with my equilibrium. Jesus doesn't demand our presence, He simply invites us into His. While time doesn't heal all wounds, time with the Healer does.

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are seven years, and the seven worthless, scorched heads of grain are seven years of famine.

²⁸“It is just as I told Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt. ³⁰After them, seven years of famine will take place, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. The famine will devastate the land. ³¹The abundance in the land will not be remembered because of the famine that follows it, for the famine will be very severe. ³²Since the dream was given twice to Pharaoh, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and he will carry it out soon.

³³“So now, let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh do this: Let him appoint overseers over the land and take a fifth of the harvest of the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵Let them gather all the excess food during these good years that are coming. Under Pharaoh’s authority, store the grain in the cities, so they may preserve it as food. ³⁶The food will be a reserve for the land during the seven years of famine that will take place in the land of Egypt. Then the country will not be wiped out by the famine.”

JOSEPH EXALTED

³⁷The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants, ³⁸and he said to them, “Can we find anyone like this, a man who has God’s spirit^A in him?” ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands.^B Only I, as king,^C will be greater than you.” ⁴¹Pharaoh also said to Joseph, “See, I am placing you over all the land of Egypt.” ⁴²Pharaoh removed his signet ring from his hand and put

it on Joseph’s hand, clothed him with fine linen garments, and placed a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He had Joseph ride in his second chariot, and servants called out before him, “Make way!”^D So he placed him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh and no one will be able to raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt without your permission.” ⁴⁵Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah and gave him a wife, Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest at On.^E And Joseph went throughout^F the land of Egypt.

JOSEPH’S ADMINISTRATION

⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Joseph left Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout the land of Egypt.

⁴⁷During the seven years of abundance the land produced outstanding harvests. ⁴⁸Joseph gathered all the excess food in the land of Egypt during the seven years and put it in the cities. He put the food in every city from the fields around it. ⁴⁹So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance — like the sand of the sea — that he stopped measuring it because it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰Two sons were born to Joseph before the years of famine arrived. Asenath daughter of Potiphara, priest at On, bore them to him.

⁵¹Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh^G and said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and my whole family.” ⁵²And the second son he named Ephraim^H and said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

⁵³Then the seven years of abundance in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every land, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. ⁵⁵When the whole land of Egypt was stricken with famine, the people cried out to Pharaoh

^A41:38 Or *the spirit of the gods, or a god’s spirit* ^B41:40 Lit *will kiss your mouth* ^C41:40 Lit *Only the throne I*
^D41:43 Or “Kneel!” ^E41:45 Or *Heliopolis, also in v. 50* ^F41:45 Or *Joseph gained authority over* ^G41:51 In Hb, the name *Manasseh* sounds like the verb “forget.” ^H41:52 In Hb, the name *Ephraim* sounds like the word for “fruitful.”

for food. Pharaoh told all Egypt, “Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you.”⁵⁶ Now the famine had spread across the whole region, so Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt.⁵⁷ Every land came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, for the famine was severe in every land.

JOSEPH’S BROTHERS IN EGYPT

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at each other? Listen,” he went on, “I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us so that we will live and not die.”³ So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt.⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought, “Something might happen to him.”

⁵The sons of Israel were among those who came to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.⁶ Joseph was in charge of the country; he sold grain to all its people. His brothers came and bowed down before him with their faces to the ground.⁷ When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them.

“Where do you come from?” he asked.

“From the land of Canaan to buy food,” they replied.

⁸Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.⁹ Joseph remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies. You have come to see the weakness^a of the land.”

¹⁰“No, my lord. Your servants have come to buy food,” they said.¹¹ “We are all sons of one man. We are honest; your servants are not spies.”

¹²“No,” he said to them. “You have come to see the weakness of the land.”

¹³But they replied, “We, your servants, were twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now^b with our father, and one is no longer living.”

¹⁴Then Joseph said to them, “I have spoken:^c ‘You are spies!’¹⁵ This is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.¹⁶ Send one from among you to get your brother. The rest of you will be imprisoned so that your words can be tested to see if they are true. If they are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!”¹⁷ So Joseph imprisoned them together for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them, “I fear God — do this and you will live.¹⁹ If you are honest, let one of you^d be confined to the guardhouse, while the rest of you go and take grain to relieve the hunger of your households.²⁰ Bring your youngest brother to me so that your words can be confirmed; then you won’t die.” And they consented to this.

²¹Then they said to each other, “Obviously, we are being punished for what we did to our brother. We saw his deep distress when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this trouble has come to us.”

²²But Reuben replied: “Didn’t I tell you not to harm the boy? But you wouldn’t listen. Now we must account for his blood!”^e

²³They did not realize that Joseph understood them, since there was an interpreter between them.²⁴ He turned away from them and wept. When he turned back and spoke to them, he took Simeon from them and had him bound before their eyes.²⁵ Joseph then gave orders to fill their containers with grain, return each man’s silver to his sack, and give them provisions for their journey. This order was carried out.²⁶ They loaded the grain on their donkeys and left there.

^a42:9 Lit nakedness, also in v. 12 ^b42:13 Or today, also in v. 32 ^c42:14 Lit “That which I spoke to you saying:

^d42:19 Lit your brothers ^e42:22 Lit Even his blood is being sought!”

when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good?' ⁵ Isn't this the cup that my master drinks from and uses for divination? What you have done is wrong!' "

⁶ When he overtook them, he said these words to them. ⁷ They said to him, "Why does my lord say these things? Your servants could not possibly do such a thing. ⁸ We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found at the top of our bags. How could we steal silver or gold from your master's house? ⁹ If it is found with one of us, your servants, he must die, and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

¹⁰ The steward replied, "What you have said is right, but only the one who is found to have it will be my slave, and the rest of you will be blameless."

¹¹ So each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. ¹² The steward searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and each one loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers reached Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell to the ground before him. ¹⁵ "What is this you have done?" Joseph said to them. "Didn't you know that a man like me could uncover the truth by divination?"

¹⁶ "What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "How can we plead? How can we justify ourselves? God has exposed your servants' iniquity. We are now my lord's slaves — both we and the one in whose possession the cup was found."

¹⁷ Then Joseph said, "I swear that I will not do this. The man in whose possession the cup was found will be my slave. The rest of you can go in peace to your father."

JUDAH'S PLEA FOR BENJAMIN

¹⁸ But Judah approached him and said, "My lord, please let your servant speak personally to my lord. ^a Do not be angry with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh. ¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' ²⁰ and we answered my lord, 'We have an elderly father and a younger brother, the child of his old age. The boy's brother is dead. He is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.' ²¹ Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him to me so that I can see him.' ²² But we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father. If he were to leave, his father would die.' ²³ Then you said to your servants, 'If your younger brother does not come down with you, you will not see me again.'

²⁴ "This is what happened when we went back to your servant my father: We reported to him the words of my lord. ²⁵ But our father said, 'Go again, and buy us a little food.' ²⁶ We told him, 'We cannot go down unless our younger brother goes with us. If our younger brother isn't with us, we cannot see the man.' ²⁷ Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. ²⁸ One is gone from me — I said he must have been torn to pieces — and I have never seen him again. ²⁹ If you also take this one from me and anything happens to him, you will bring my gray hairs down to Sheol in sorrow.'

³⁰ "So if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us — his life is wrapped up with the boy's life — ³¹ when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die. Then your servants will have brought the gray hairs of your servant our father down to Sheol in sorrow. ³² Your servant became accountable to my father for the boy, saying, 'If I do not return him to you, I will always bear the guilt for sinning against you, my father.' ³³ Now please let your servant remain here

^a44:18 Lit *speak a word in my lord's ears*

ruler over all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned,^a for he did not believe them.²⁷ But when they told Jacob all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

²⁸ Then Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go to see him before I die."

JACOB LEAVES FOR EGYPT

46 Israel set out with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, and he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.² That night God spoke to Israel in a vision: "Jacob, Jacob!" he said.

And Jacob replied, "Here I am."

³ God said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.

⁴ I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back. Joseph will close your eyes when you die."⁵

⁵ Jacob left Beer-sheba. The sons of Israel took their father Jacob in the wagons Pharaoh had sent to carry him, along with their dependents and their wives.⁶ They also took their cattle and possessions they had acquired in the land of Canaan. Then Jacob and all his offspring with him came to Egypt.⁷ His sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters, indeed all his offspring, he brought with him to Egypt.

JACOB'S FAMILY

⁸ These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt — Jacob and his sons:

Jacob's firstborn: Reuben.

⁹ Reuben's sons: Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

¹⁰ Simeon's sons: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman.

¹¹ Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹² Judah's sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.

The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.

¹³ Issachar's sons: Tola, Puvah,^c Jashub,^d and Shimron.

¹⁴ Zebulun's sons: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

¹⁵ These were Leah's sons born to Jacob in Paddan-aram, as well as his daughter Dinah. The total number of persons:^e thirty-three.

¹⁶ Gad's sons: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.

¹⁷ Asher's sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah.

Beriah's sons were Heber and Malchiel.

¹⁸ These were the sons of Zilpah — whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah — that she bore to Jacob: sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁰ Manasseh and Ephraim were born to Joseph in the land of Egypt.

They were born to him by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, a priest at On.^f

²¹ Benjamin's sons: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.

²² These were Rachel's sons who were born to Jacob: fourteen persons.

²³ Dan's son:^g Hushim.

²⁴ Naphtali's sons: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.

²⁵ These were the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel. She bore to Jacob: seven persons.

^a45:26 Lit Jacob's heart was numb ^b46:4 Lit will put his hand on your eyes ^c46:13 Sam, Syr read Puvah; 1Ch 7:1

^d46:13 Sam, LXX; MT reads Iob ^e46:15 Lit All persons his sons and his daughters: ^f46:20 Or Heliopolis ^g46:23 Alt Hb tradition reads sons:

Israel Moves to Egypt

GENESIS 47

My grandmothers spent their last decades as widows living in a foreign land. They immigrated to the United States from Indonesia and lived near my family or with us. I doubt that when they were young my grandmas ever imagined living in California, much less dying there. They crossed an ocean to be with their family.

When Jacob traveled from the land of Canaan to Egypt, he did it to see Joseph, the son he had thought was dead. Not only was he reunited with Joseph but Pharaoh gave him “the best part of the land” (Gn 47:6). When Pharaoh asked about his age, Jacob replied “my pilgrimage has lasted 130 years” (v. 9). Jacob wasn’t home in Canaan or Egypt. He looked at himself as a stranger in the entire world, a pilgrim moving toward another one.

Our current address isn’t nearly as important as our eternal one. As we journey closer to the end of this earthly life, God has good things in store. Jacob would go on to live 17 more years in Egypt, and perhaps these were the happiest of his life. Joseph made sure that his father, his brothers, and all their dependents had food, even in times of famine. They acquired property and became fruitful and numerous (v. 27). This lavish care speaks not only of Joseph’s goodness, but of God’s goodness. It was God who raised up Joseph for this purpose. God faithfully took care of Jacob during his last years.

Our culture tends to glamorize youth. I looked up synonyms for “senior citizen” and found words like “old-timer” and “old fogey.” These are not typically terms of endearment. The Bible calls us to “rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old” (Lv 19:32). If you have parents or grandparents who are living, remember to show them honor and respect, taking care of them as you are able.

When my grandmothers were alive, I remember praying with them, holding hands in a circle. One of my grandmothers liked to pray for a very long time, which was a terrible inconvenience as a child. She prayed in Dutch and Indonesian, which made it even worse. Although I didn’t understand the words then, I know now that God has answered many of my grandmother’s prayers of blessing for my family.

You never know the impact your life will make on generations to come. The nation of Israel multiplied so quickly that the 70 people, including Jacob who moved to be near Joseph, grew to a great number within a few generations. This happened to fulfill God’s covenant promise to Abraham. Do not fear when you consider the future. The best is still yet to come. God can multiply your ministry and your legacy to others beyond your wildest dreams.

Better Together

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- ²⁶ The total number of persons belonging to Jacob — his direct descendants,^a not including the wives of Jacob's sons — who came to Egypt: sixty-six.
- ²⁷ And Joseph's sons who were born to him in Egypt: two persons. All those of Jacob's household who came to Egypt: seventy^b persons.

JACOB ARRIVES IN EGYPT

²⁸ Now Jacob had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to prepare for his arrival^c at Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, ²⁹ Joseph hitched the horses to his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel. Joseph presented himself to him, threw his arms around him, and wept for a long time.

³⁰ Then Israel said to Joseph, "I'm ready to die now because I have seen your face and you are still alive!"

³¹ Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's family, "I will go up and inform Pharaoh, telling him, 'My brothers and my father's family, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³² The men are shepherds; they also raise livestock. They have brought their flocks and herds and all that they have.' ³³ When Pharaoh addresses you and asks, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴ you are to say, 'Your servants, both we and our fathers, have raised livestock^d from our youth until now.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen, since all shepherds are detestable to Egyptians."

PHARAOH WELCOMES JACOB

47 So Joseph went and informed Pharaoh: "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the land of Goshen."

² He took five of his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. ³ And Pharaoh asked his brothers, "What is your occupation?"

They said to Pharaoh, "Your servants, both we and our fathers, are shepherds." ⁴ And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to stay in the land for a while because there is no grazing land for your servants' sheep, since the famine in the land of Canaan has been severe. So now, please let your servants settle in the land of Goshen."

⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Now that your father and brothers have come to you, ⁶ the land of Egypt is open before you; settle your father and brothers in the best part of the land. They can live in the land of Goshen. If you know of any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

⁷ Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?"

⁹ Jacob said to Pharaoh, "My pilgrimage has lasted 130 years. My years have been few and hard, and they have not reached the years of my fathers during their pilgrimages."

¹⁰ So Jacob blessed Pharaoh and departed from Pharaoh's presence.

¹¹ Then Joseph settled his father and brothers in the land of Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's family with food for their dependents.

THE LAND BECOMES PHARAOH'S

¹³ But there was no food in the entire region, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan were exhausted by the famine. ¹⁴ Joseph collected all the silver to be found in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan in exchange for the grain they

^a46:26 Lit Jacob who came out from his loins ^b46:27 LXX reads 75; Ac 7:14 ^c46:28 Lit to give directions before him ^d46:34 Lit fathers, are men of livestock

were purchasing, and he brought the silver to Pharaoh’s palace. ¹⁵ When the silver from the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan was gone, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us food. Why should we die here in front of you? The silver is gone!”

¹⁶ But Joseph said, “Give me your livestock. Since the silver is gone, I will give you food in exchange for your livestock.” ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks of sheep, the herds of cattle, and the donkeys. That year he provided them with food in exchange for all their livestock.

¹⁸ When that year was over, they came the next year and said to him, “We cannot hide from our lord that the silver is gone and that all our livestock belongs to our lord. There is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we die here in front of you — both us and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. Then we with our land will become Pharaoh’s slaves. Give us seed so that we can live and not die, and so that the land won’t become desolate.”

²⁰ In this way, Joseph acquired all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh, because every Egyptian sold his field since the famine was so severe for them. The land became Pharaoh’s, ²¹ and Joseph moved the people to the cities ^a from one end of Egypt to the other. ²² The only land he did not acquire belonged to the priests, for they had an allowance from Pharaoh. They ate from their allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.

²³ Joseph said to the people, “Understand today that I have acquired you and your land for Pharaoh. Here is seed for you. Sow it in the land. ²⁴ At harvest, you are to give a fifth of it to Pharaoh, and four-fifths will be yours as seed for the field and as food for yourselves, your households, and your dependents.”

²⁵ “You have saved our lives,” they said. “We have found favor with our lord and will be Pharaoh’s slaves.” ²⁶ So Joseph made it a law, still in effect today in the land of Egypt, that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. Only the priests’ land does not belong to Pharaoh.

ISRAEL SETTLES IN GOSHEN

²⁷ Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They acquired property in it and became fruitful and very numerous. ²⁸ Now Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years, and his life span was 147 years. ²⁹ When the time approached for him to die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise me that you will deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt. ³⁰ When I rest with my fathers, carry me away from Egypt and bury me in their burial place.”

Joseph answered, “I will do what you have asked.”

³¹ And Jacob said, “Swear to me.” So Joseph swore to him. Then Israel bowed in thanks at the head of his bed. ^b

JACOB BLESSES EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

48 Some time after this, Joseph was told, “Your father is weaker.” So he set out with his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² When Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to you,” Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

³ Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me. ⁴ He said to me, ‘I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make many nations come from you, and I will give this land as a permanent possession to your future descendants.’ ⁵ Your two sons born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt are now mine. Ephraim and Manasseh

^a47:21 Sam, LXX, Vg read and he made the people servants his staff

^b47:31 Or Israel worshiped while leaning on the top of his staff

- and you defiled it — he^a got into my bed.
- 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers;
their knives are vicious weapons.
- 6 May I never enter their council;
may I never join their assembly.
For in their anger they kill men,
and on a whim they hamstring oxen.
- 7 Their anger is cursed, for it is strong,
and their fury, for it is cruel!
I will disperse them throughout Jacob
and scatter them throughout Israel.
- 8 Judah, your brothers will praise you.
Your hand will be on the necks
of your enemies;
your father's sons will bow down
to you.
- 9 Judah is a young lion —
my son, you return from the kill.
He crouches; he lies down like a lion
or a lioness — who dares to rouse him?
- 10 The scepter will not depart from Judah
or the staff from between his feet
until he whose right it is comes^b
and the obedience of the peoples
belongs to him.
- 11 He ties his donkey to a vine,
and the colt of his donkey
to the choice vine.
He washes his clothes in wine
and his robes in the blood of grapes.
- 12 His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth are whiter than milk.
- 13 Zebulun will live by the seashore
and will be a harbor for ships,
and his territory will be next to Sidon.
- 14 Issachar is a strong donkey
lying down between the saddlebags.^c
- 15 He saw that his resting place was good
and that the land was pleasant,
so he leaned his shoulder to bear a load
and became a forced laborer.
- 16 Dan will judge his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.
- 17 Dan will be a snake by the road,
a viper beside the path,
that bites the horse's heels
so that its rider falls backward.
- 18 I wait for your salvation, LORD.
- 19 Gad will be attacked by raiders,
but he will attack their heels.
- 20 Asher's^d food will be rich,
and he will produce royal delicacies.
- 21 Naphtali is a doe set free
that bears beautiful fawns.
- 22 Joseph is a fruitful vine,
a fruitful vine beside a spring;
its branches^e climb over the wall.^f
- 23 The archers attacked him,
shot at him, and were hostile
toward him.
- 24 Yet his bow remained steady,
and his strong arms were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One
of Jacob,
by the name of^g the Shepherd, the Rock
of Israel,
25 by the God of your father
who helps you,
and by the Almighty who blesses you
with blessings of the heavens above,
blessings of the deep that lies below,
and blessings of the breasts
and the womb.
- 26 The blessings of your father excel
the blessings of my ancestors^h

^a49:4 LXX, Syr, Tg read you ^b49:10 Or until tribute comes to him, or until Shiloh comes, or until he comes to Shiloh
^c49:14 Or sheep pens ^d49:19-20 LXX, Syr, Vg; MT reads their heel. ^e49:22 Lit daughters ^f49:22 Hb obscure
^g49:24 Syr, Tg; MT reads Jacob, from there ^h49:26 Or of the mountains

Good from Evil

GENESIS 50

Fourteen years ago, my husband and I packed up our small family of three and moved into an apartment in Section 8 housing, located in a tiny town in the Blue Ridge Mountains. We moved in September, as the leaves were beginning to change and just as baby number two was beginning to round out my body. We'd been invited to join some other church planters in starting small, indigenous churches in impoverished neighborhoods. In our wild, youthful naiveté, we signed up to oversee a church that met in an apartment complex.

We unloaded our U-Haul into a three-bedroom apartment with no carpet and no central air. It reeked of stale cigarettes and stewed spring onions, and anytime the humidity level began to rise, nicotine would roll down the walls. It was cold in the winter and steamy in the summer, but it was home.

Our church plant met in the community building on the apartment grounds. Our life's work was found in the intentional neighboring that happened in the daily, mundane act of living. Days were filled with cake baking and coffee making and meal taking and babysitting and truth telling. We quickly fell in love with our people and our place. Life was beautiful and hard, and because we loved our community, we tethered ourselves to the side of the mountain where we lived until the rope we were using began to unravel.

After late-night conversations with ministry leaders about funds, we started to wonder what the future held. We couldn't continue working for an agency that was raising funds for churches no longer in existence. So, as we began to pray for a road off the mountain, things unraveled in a matter of days. And after one long meeting behind closed doors, we were fired and given four days to get out of town. We packed up the apartment and then followed the script of how we were to leave, assuming that if we did as we were told and left quietly, we could start over when we arrived back home.

Before our U-Haul ever pulled out, a plan to ruin our reputation and smear our character had been set in motion. By the time we arrived home, a cloud of suspicion had been hung over our heads and a root of shame had been planted in our hearts. For two years, the cloud would not be lifted, nor the root cut out. And for two years, God would allow us to walk through some dark times while He worked behind the scenes to bring good from the evil done to us.

In the book of Genesis, we find that God is working a plan to turn evil into future good for His glory. Joseph was the beloved son of Jacob and the hated brother of the other sons. He had the gift of dream interpretation, his father's favor, and the misfortune of being the target of his brothers' envy, which grew into hatred. That hatred grew into a decision to sell him into slavery for a handful of silver.

But God was with Joseph.

God was working a plan to bring future good to an entire generation of people from the evil done to one man. Joseph was eventually bought by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh. He was granted charge over everything in Potiphar's house. Joseph was then falsely accused and thrown into jail. But God blessed Joseph, and he was eventually given

access to Pharaoh's throne to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Then Joseph was even made a ruler in Egypt.

When his brothers came asking for food, Joseph was able to recognize God's perfect plan coming together, for his good, for the good of others, and for God's glory.

"You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people" (Gn 50:20).

And from the brokenness of Joseph's life, God was glorified.

I've studied the story of Joseph over the past fourteen years. In the beginning, when the wounds were still fresh and the suffering still palpable, I could only identify with the sins done against Joseph and the faithfulness of God. I knew God was good, but I could not wrap my head around the truth hidden in my heart that God was going to bring good from the evil done to us. Eighteen months later we moved to Dallas to attend seminary. A sizable check, intended to cover the cost of seminary training, landed in our mailbox that first month, and every month after that for the next five years.

You see, during the great wrecking of our life, during that period of time after we were fired and before we left for seminary, we were invited to serve a congregation of people who did not condemn us for the cloud of suspicion hanging over our heads or the shame hidden in our hearts.

From that congregation, God revealed His faithfulness to us through a family who paid for our entire seminary education so that we might be equipped to serve the Church.

Because we are humans living in a fallen world, we are going to experience suffering. In that suffering, God is with us. His plans are for our good and His glory. If a measure of suffering is necessary for our greatest good and His greatest glory, then so be it.

We are His servants and He our God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- When have you seen God redeem a difficult situation?
- How have you seen His hand in the difficult circumstance you may be facing now?
- What gifts has He given to you that may be a blessing to others in their difficult seasons or trials?

Second Chances

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