



A serpent lay coiled beside me. His dark, clever eyes held a secret, his hiss low and reassuring as he spoke.

"I hear you and your man aren't allowed to eat fruit here in the garden," the serpent said. "Is that true?"

"You must have heard wrong. We can eat from any tree we want. And they're all so delicious! There's only one we can't touch—the tree over there in the middle," I explained. "God said its fruit makes you go to sleep and never wake up."

"Oh, you're quite mistaken, dear woman." The serpent's eyes gleamed. His tongue flickered. "It won't make you sleep. That fruit will wake you up! It has special powers."

God hadn't told me anything about special powers. "One taste and you'll see things only God has seen. You'll know things only God knows. God wants to keep it for himself, but, believe me, it can be yours, too."

I glanced at the tree. My mouth watered. Something dark twitched in the back of my mind.

In that moment, nothing else mattered. It was all I wanted. I had to have it.

The serpent nodded slowly. "God knows this is true. He knows you'll become just like him and discover his secrets. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

I felt...strange. As if icy and hot water were washing over me at the same time. The ground swayed under

my feet. Half of me was shouting *yes, yes, yes!* while the other half screamed *no, no, no!*

"Do you want to be like God?" the serpent hissed. I did.

My first step toward the tree was a half-step. I could at least *look* at it, I thought. What would I see if—*when*—my eyes were finally opened? What secrets would be revealed? What powers could I possess?

A few timid paces later I found myself close enough to touch the tree. I slid a finger along the edge of a smooth leaf, staring at the fruit hanging before my eyes. My tongue swelled and my mouth watered. I reached out slowly and touched it, ever so gently. And then I plucked the fruit from the branch and held it in my hand.

The serpent's voice echoed in my ears. "Be...like...God."

I took a bite. Mmmm... Juicy and sweet, just like the serpent said. But there was something else—it had a sting to it, a sharpness that bit back.

I felt...different. As if I was trying to remember something I'd forgotten, circling a hollow place inside me that hadn't been there before. The sun shone brighter, but I felt...darker.



Something was off. I needed Adam's help. I called, my voice strange in my ears. He came running—something in my voice had frightened him.

I placed the fruit in his hand.

"What is this?" He stared at the fruit, and then me.

"You know what it is. It's God's little secret," I whispered. "I ate it...and didn't die. I'm still alive—*more* than alive. Take a bite. It will open your eyes, too."

Juice trickled down Adam's fingers, glistening like sun on water. The hair on his arms stood, his breath all but stopped. But then he closed his eyes and took a bite. Chewed. Savored. Swallowed.

And everything changed.

When Adam opened his eyes, he looked at me as if he'd never seen me before. His face melted from one expression to the next: surprise...embarrassment...desire...then horror.

"What have we done?" he gasped, dropping the fruit onto the grass.

I saw it, too. Adam was naked. *How could I have missed that? Has he been naked this whole time?* Then I noticed my own body, bare and exposed. The shame was instant, and overwhelming.

"What *have* we done?" I cried.

Adam grabbed my hand, and we ran. Ran as fast and far from that tree and the serpent as we could. As we covered our bodies with fig leaves, we heard footsteps—someone walking through the garden. We

darted into a thick grove and crouched low.

"Where are you?" called a familiar voice. It was God. Adam stood, his voice trembling. "We heard you coming, so we hid. We were afraid you would see us...naked."

"Who said you were naked?" God asked, deep sorrow in his voice. "Did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat?"

My husband pointed one fruit-stained finger at me. "It's not my fault! *You* gave me this woman, and *she* gave me the fruit."

"It...it was the serpent. He lied to me. That's why I ate it," I said.

I'd never seen God angry or disappointed. I didn't even know what anger *was*. But now that my eyes were opened, I could see God's fury as clearly as the dark clouds gathering over Eden.

My ears were open, too, and I heard God's every word as he cursed us.

First, God told the serpent: "Because of what you did, all snakes will spend their lives on their bellies, slithering in the dust."

Then God said to me: "From this moment on, you'll feel pain like never before, especially in childbirth. You'll try to keep your husband happy, but he'll keep you under his thumb. That will hurt, too."

I could feel the pain already.





I felt sick when I heard God's plans. Just... gutted. My first thought was of my family, my wife and three sons: Shem, Japheth, and Ham. They have wives, too. None of us was perfect, but we loved and worshipped God. Why kill my wife and kids? Why me?

I can't tell you how relieved I was when God said he'd spare me and my family. We'd be the only people left on the planet, the only ones to watch glorious sunsets, kiss each other good night, and stretch our legs when we woke up in the morning. The only ones to get a do-over.

But first, God wanted me to make a boat. God gave me instructions down to every last inch: all wood, 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high, with three decks. How do you build something huge like that? I'll tell you how: one plank at a time. I waterproofed the whole thing with pitch inside and out. It took years. You wouldn't believe the splinters and bruises.

And the whole time we didn't get a drop of rain. Not one sprinkle.

At times I thought I'd lost my mind. Did God really mean what he said? Was I spending all those years building the world's biggest boat so I could look like the world's biggest fool?

At the end of the day, I had to take God at his word. I mean, who should I trust more: Me? Or the Creator of everything?



And then animals started showing up. Pair after pair after pair of them, gathering around the boat. Some were beasts I'd never seen before. Giant, gray leathery ones with arm-like noses, doddering ones covered with prickly needles, impossibly tall ones, and far too many slithery ones. They were spectacular and not a little frightening, but they were calm—somehow they knew God was taking care of them.

My sons and I wrangled aboard a male and female of every kind of animal, plus an extra six pairs of birds and the animals God considered "clean"—ones we could eat and offer as sacrifices. Plus, enough food for everyone. *Tons* of food.

With everyone on board, God closed the door with a loud thud—shutting the door to the world as we knew it.

I held my breath and squeezed my wife's hand as the first raindrops hit the dirt. It wasn't long before the light taps on the roof turned into thunderous pounding. Rain poured down in waves and didn't stop for 40 days. Torrents beat down without mercy. Water gushed up in bursts out of the ground. The land disappeared—all of it, even the highest mountaintops—along with everything else. Now my family and our floating sanctuary were the only living, breathing things on the planet. (Except for the fish. The fish were fine.)

And then we waited.





Then God made us a promise: He'd never again destroy the earth with a huge flood. And he sealed that promise with a spectacular arc of colors in the sky—the brightest, most vivid colors I'd ever seen! We called it a rainbow. And every time I see it, I'm reminded of God's promise—a promise that his love will last forever.

I wish I could tell you that the sunshine and rainbows lasted forever, but they didn't.

People still rejected God. They continue to choose to do the wrong thing. I've had a few failures of my own. I know we must be breaking God's heart all over again.

But God is a God of promises. And I believe God will find a way, someday, somehow, to prove to people just how much he loves them.



EYE TO EYE WITH NOAH

One question continues to nag at me: How could God bring such a terrible tragedy on people he said he loved so much? I don't know if I have a good answer for that. But I do know there is a better question I *can* answer:

What will I do with the second chance God has given me?

God knows humans can't help messing things up, yet he gave us the freedom to make choices. He cares for us despite our faults. God loves us—loves *YOU*—fanatically, profoundly, and endlessly.

For God, love is forever. Unlike the flood, it's here to stay.

That's a promise. Instead of pouring down waves of destruction, God showers us with love, grace, and friendship. Because he's not only the God of second chances; he's the God of promises, too.

Remember that when you see a rainbow in the sky.





BIG SHOT

BY DAVID — 1 SAMUEL 17:1-51

Terrified. That's how I'd describe Saul's army. *Our* army.

Our soldiers stood atop a hill overlooking the valley of Elah, armed and ready for battle. But their eyes were hollow, their silent throats full of dust, and their shoulders slouched from the weight of their fear.

Across the valley stood another army. The Philistines had been our enemy for as long as we could remember. They screamed insults, shook their fists, and slammed their swords against their shields. They were tough. Eager. Battle-hardened.

And the toughest of them all was a warrior named Goliath, standing alone in the middle of the valley. Some called him a giant, and for good reason. He was taller than even our own King Saul, who was the tallest of the Israelites. The sun glinted like a wall of jewels on Goliath's bronze armor.

"COME FIGHT ME!"

Goliath's booming voice echoed through the valley. He waved his spear, taunting our soldiers. "I'm not afraid of you! Send your best man out to battle me. If he kills me, the Philistines will be your slaves. But if I kill him, Israel will be *our* slaves!" He spat into the dirt.

"Only one man has to die today. Who will it be?"



LOVE IS EVERYTHING

BY PAUL — 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-7, 13

Here's what God has taught me about love...

You could be the most gifted speaker in the world, but your voice will sound like nothing more than obnoxious banging and clanging if you don't truly love people.

You could know all the secrets of the universe, predict the future, and have mountain-moving faith, but none of that will matter if you don't truly love people.

Even if you're the most generous and selfless person on the planet, it will be utterly meaningless if you don't truly love people.

So what is love?

You love when you're patient.

You love when you're kind and caring.

You love by never getting jealous of others' success or happiness.

You love by never bragging about yourself.

If you think of yourself as more important than others, that's the opposite of love.

You love by being respectful and paying attention.

If you insist on getting your own way, you're not showing love.

You love by not getting irritated at people.

You love by never keeping track of the wrong things other people do.

If you find yourself being happy when something bad happens to someone else, you've abandoned love.

You love when you embrace honesty.

Never give up or lose faith—love doesn't do that.

Instead, expect good things to happen. Love is hopeful!

It doesn't matter what happens in your life; don't let any circumstance lessen your love for other people.

There are three things that will last forever: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these things, by far, is love.

