The Message *is a contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages, crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language.*

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THE MESSAGE®

DEVOTIONAL BIBLE

featuring notes & reflections from

EUGENE H. PETERSON

NavPress™

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Introducing
The Message Devotional Bible

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Our conversations with each other are sacred. Those that take place in the parking lot after Sunday worship are as much a part of the formation of Christian character as the preaching from the sanctuary pulpit. The small talk that happens around the ritual of putting children to sleep for the night is as sacred as the most solemn of Eucharistic liturgies.

But conversation, as such, though honored by our ancestors, is much neglected today as a form of Christian discourse. If we're to be in touch with all the parts of our lives and all the dimensions of the gospel, conversation requires equal billing (although not equal authority) with preaching and teaching.

The conversations I would like to have with you are more casual than formal—the kinds of conversations we would have if we walked through the mountains together, stopping here and there to catch our breath. We'll travel a lot of terrain together, some of it breathtakingly scenic, some of it ploddingly plain, and some of it precariously uncertain. Here and there along the way I'll point out details in the biblical landscape, drawing attention to a particular word, pointing out a pertinent piece of historical background, pausing a moment to talk with you and to lead you in prayer.

With that in mind, it's my personal joy to come alongside you in the wondrous and perilous journey that is your life and my pastoral privilege to walk with you through the Scriptures. I come as a guide as well as a fellow traveler.

Traveling mercies for us both.

EUGENE H. PETERSON

How to Use
The Message Devotional Bible

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The Message Devotional Bible is intended to help you read the Bible more thoughtfully, to let the wisdom of the Scriptures seep more fully into your spirit. Several special features will support your Bible reading experience.

Introductions. At the beginning of each section of Scripture and at the start of each book (or, in some cases, collection of books) is a thematic introduction. These introductions are less focused on scholarly curiosities, such as dates and geographic locations, and more on the ways in which the grand vision of God that runs throughout the Bible bubbles up in particular words written to and about particular people in particular places. Read these introductions to get an overview of what you're about to read.

Contemplative Readings. Sometimes the best way to get into a book of the Bible is to sit with God for a bit first. At the outset of most of the books in *The Message Devotional Bible* are brief contemplations of significant passages. A reflective thought will prepare you to interact with and pray about the passage's big idea. These contemplations will prime the pump for your further engagement with the book. (You'll also find related readings in other parts of the Bible in case you want to chase the thought a little further.)

Insights. Peppered throughout the Bible are short meditations to help you process what's happening in a passage—or what might be happening in you as you read that passage. An index of where these writings come from can be found in the back of this Bible.

Questions. Here and there you'll be invited to "pause" your reading of the Scriptures to consider how what's happening in the text intersects what's happening in your life. A "pause" question may direct you to think more critically about the passage, or it may ask you to reflect on your personal history. Or it may invite you to pray or otherwise act in faith based on what you're reading.

Neighboring Reflections. A small but steady undercurrent of the Scriptures has to do with *incarnation*. Our God is not like other gods: Our God is *with* us—a truth demonstrated most completely and profoundly in Jesus. Our God is the One who "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood"

(John 1:14). In *The Message Devotional Bible* you'll find special reflections on passages that address the implications of God's incarnation, which frames the whole story of God in a way that is as encouraging and challenging as it is illuminating.

Of course, the most significant and important feature of this—or any—Bible is the Bible itself. We open this book and find that on page after page it catches us off guard, surprises us, and draws us into *its* reality, pulls us into participation with God on *his* terms. The Scriptures not only reveal who God is but also who we are. We submit our lives to this text so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Introduction to The Message

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Reading is the first thing, just reading the Bible. As we read we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. We soon realize that we are included in the conversation. We didn't expect this. But this is precisely what generation after generation of Bible readers do find: The Bible is not only written about us but to us. In these pages we become insiders to a conversation in which God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

We aren't used to this. We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But this is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us in by invitation and command to participate in God's working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realize that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes his grand rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). "Revelation" means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed or figured out on our own. Revelation is what makes the Bible unique.

And so just reading this Bible, *The Message*, and listening to what we read, is the first thing. There will be time enough for study later on. But first, it is important simply to read, leisurely and thoughtfully. We need to get a feel for the way these stories and songs, these prayers and conversations, these sermons and visions, invite us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible and illuminates what it means to live here—really live, not just get across the street. As we read, and the longer we read, we begin to "get it"—we are in conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us: who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and—most of all—the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see—more to everything!—than we had ever dreamed, and that this "more" has to do with God.

This is new for many of us, a different sort of book—a book that reads us even as we read it. We are used to picking up and reading books for what we can get out of them: information we can use, inspiration to energize us, instructions on how to do something or other, entertainment to while away a rainy day, wisdom

that will guide us into living better. These things can and do take place when reading the Bible, but the Bible is given to us in the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God, God's Word and world, and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.

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Our reading turns up some surprises. The biggest surprise for many is how accessible this book is to those who simply open it up and read it. Virtually anyone can read this Bible with understanding. The reason that new translations are made every couple of generations or so is to keep the language of the Bible current with the common speech we use, the very kind of language in which it was first written. We don't have to be smart or well-educated to understand it, for it is written in the words and sentences we hear in the marketplace, on school playgrounds, and around the dinner table. Because the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that the "boy that driveth the plough" would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the "unspiritual" quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and he contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a "nicer" world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures. It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry

out in indignation, "You can't let this happen!" For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn't offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagine. But our Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.

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God doesn't force any of this on us: God's Word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing—but not forcing. Not coercing. We are given space and freedom to answer, to enter the conversation. For, more than anything else, the Bible invites our participation in the work and language of God.

As we read, we find that there is a connection between the Word Read and the Word Lived. Everything in this book is live-able. Many of us find that the most important question we ask as we read is not "What does it mean?" but "How can I live it?" So we read personally, not impersonally. We read in order to live our true selves, not just get information that we can use to raise our standard of living. Bible reading is a means of listening to and obeying God, not gathering religious data by which we can be our own gods.

You are going to hear stories in this book that will take you out of your preoccupation with yourself and into the spacious freedom in which God is working the world's salvation. You are going to come across words and sentences that stab you awake to a beauty and hope that will connect you with your real life.

Be sure to answer.

OLD TESTAMENT

THE BOOKS OF MOSES

An enormous authority and dignity have, through the centuries, developed around the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as the Books of Moses. Over the course of many centuries, they have prompted a truly astonishing amount of reading and writing, study and prayer, teaching and preaching.

God is the primary concern of these books. That accounts for the authority and the dignity. But it is not only God; we also get included. That accounts for the widespread and intense human interest. We want to know what's going on. We want to know how we fit into things. We don't want to miss out.

The Books of Moses are made up mostly of stories and signposts. The stories show us God working with and speaking to men and women in a rich variety of circumstances. God is presented to us not in ideas and arguments but in events and actions that involve each of us personally. The signposts provide immediate and practical directions to guide us into behavior that is appropriate to our humanity and honoring to God.

The simplicity of the storytelling and signposting in these books makes what is written here as accessible to children as to adults. But the simplicity (as in so many simple things) is also profound, inviting us into a lifetime of growing participation in God's saving ways with us.

The image of human growth suggests a reason for the powerful pull of these stories and signposts on so many millions of men, women, and children to live as God's people. We can sketch the five books as five stages of growth in which God creates first a cosmos and then a people for his glory.

Genesis is Conception. After establishing the basic elements by which he will do his work of creation and salvation and judgment in the midst of human sin and rebellion (chapters 1–11), God conceives a people. He will reveal himself to them—and through them, over time, to everyone on earth—as a God of salvation. God begins small, with one man: Abraham. The embryonic People of God grow in the womb. Gradually details and then more details become evident as the embryo takes shape: Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The pregnancy develops. Life is obviously developing in that womb, but there is also much that is not clear and visible. The background history is vague, the surrounding nations and customs veiled in a kind of mist. But the presence of life, God-conceived life, is kicking and robust.

Exodus is Birth and Infancy. The gestation of the People of God lasts a long time, but finally the birth pangs start. Egyptian slavery gives the first intimations of the contractions to come. When Moses arrives on the scene to preside over the birth itself, ten fierce plagues on Egypt accompany the contractions that bring the travail to completion: At the Red Sea the waters break, the People of God tumble out of the womb onto dry ground, and their life as a free People of God begins. Moses leads them crawling and toddling to Sinai. They are fed. God reveals himself to them at the mountain. They begin to get a sense of their Parent. They learn the language of freedom and salvation—a word here, a word there, the Ten Words (Commandments) as a beginning, their basic vocabulary. The signposts begin to go up: Do this; don't do that. But the largest part of their infant life is God, the living God. As they explore the deep and wide world of God, worship becomes their dominant and most important activity. An enormous amount of attention is given to training them in worship, building the structures for worship, mastering the procedures. They are learning how to give their full attention in obedience and adoration to God.

Leviticus is Schooling. As infancy develops into childhood, formal schooling takes place. There's a lot to know; they need some structure and arrangement to keep things straight: reading, writing, arithmetic. But for the People of God the basic curriculum has to do with God and their relationship with him. Leviticus is an almost totally audiovisual book, giving a picture and ritual in the sacrifices and feasts for the pivotal ways in which God's people keep alert and observant to the ways their relationship with God goes awry (sin) and the ways they are restored to forgiveness and innocence (salvation). Everyday life consists of endless and concrete detail, much of it having to do with our behavior before God and with one another, and so, of course, Leviticus necessarily consists also of endless detail.

Numbers is Adolescence. The years of adolescence are critical to understanding who we are. We are advanced enough physically to be able, for the most part, to take care of ourselves. We are developed enough mentally, with some obvious limitations, to think for ourselves. We discover that we are not simply extensions of our parents and we are not just mirror images of our culture. But who are we? Numbers asks, *Who are we as the People of God?* The People of God in Numbers are new at these emerging independent operations of behaving and thinking and so inevitably make a lot of mistakes. Rebellion is one of the more conspicuous mistakes. They test out their unique identity by rejecting the continuities with parents and culture. It's the easiest and cheapest way to "be yourself," as we like to say. But it turns out that there isn't much to the "self" that is thus asserted. Maturity requires the integration, not the amputation, of what we have received through our conception and birth, our infancy and schooling. The People of God have an extraordinarily long adolescence in the wilderness—about forty years of it.

Deuteronomy is Adulthood. The mature life is a complex operation. Growing up is a long process. And growing up in God takes the longest time. During their forty years spent in the wilderness, the People of God developed from their birth on the far shore of the Red Sea and were carried and led and nourished and protected under Moses to the place of God's revelation at Sinai—taught and trained, disciplined and blessed. Now they are ready to live as free and obedient men and women in the new land, the Promised Land. They are ready for adulthood, ready to be as grown up inwardly

as they are outwardly. They are ready to live as a free people, formed by God, as a holy people, transformed by God. They still have a long way to go (as do we all), but all the conditions for maturity are there. The book of Deuteronomy gathers up that entire process of becoming the People of God and turns it into a sermon and a song and a blessing. The strongest and key word in Deuteronomy is *love*. Love is the most characteristic and comprehensive act of the human being. We are most ourselves when we love; we are most the People of God when we love. But love is not an abstract word defined out of a dictionary. In order to love maturely we have to live and absorb and enter into this world of salvation and freedom, find ourselves in the stories, become familiar with and follow the signposts, learn the life of worship, and realize our unique identity as the People of God who love.

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The Books of Moses are foundational to the sixty-one books that follow in our Bibles. A foundation, though, is not a complete building but rather the anticipation of one. An elaborate moral infrastructure is provided here for what is yet to come. Each book that follows, in one way or another, picks up and develops some aspect of the messianic salvation involved in becoming the People of God, but it is always on this foundation. This foundation of stories and signposts has proven over and over to be solid and enduring.

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A note on translating the name of God: In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the generic name for divinity used by both Israel and its neighbors is translated "God" (or "god"). But the unique and distinctively personal name for God that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14) I have translated as "GOD." The Jewish community early on substituted what we would translate as "LORD" for the unique name out of reverence (because our lips are not worthy to speak the name) and caution (lest we inadvertently blaspheme by saying God's name in vain). Most Christian translators continue that practice.

Genesis

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives—where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our lives long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives—we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God's creative acts, God's intervening and gracious judgments, God's call to a life of faith, God's making a covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless truth or principle. We are given a succession of stories with named people—people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in Heaven and Earth. God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing.

Created to Live Rhythmically

A CONTEMPLATIVE READING ON GENESIS 1:1–2:4

THE MOST PROMINENT feature of Genesis 1 is its rhythmic structure. The Creation account is arranged in a sequence of seven days. Six times a segment of Creation work is introduced with the phrase "God spoke," which is followed by the phrase "It was evening, it was morning" and the number of the day, one through six.

But the seventh day is treated very differently, and that difference sets it off for special emphasis and attention. Instead of the number being the concluding phrase, it's in the introduction: "By the seventh day . . ." (2:2). The number seven is then repeated twice in successive sentences. So "seventh" is used three times, giving this seventh day an emphasis far beyond that of the first six.

So here's what we notice: God's work of Creation is conveyed to us rhythmically. We enter the rhythms of Creation time and find ourselves internalizing a Creation sense of orderliness and connectedness and resonance that is very much like what we get from music. In his commentary on Genesis, Bruce Waltke conveys the musical and rhythmic character of Genesis 1 by naming this text the "libretto for all of Israel's life." As we incorporate this libretto into our way of living, these rhythms get into us and are expressed in our language and work.

We were created to live rhythmically in the rhythms of Creation. Seven days repeated in a sequence of four weeks places us in the rhythm of the twenty-eight-day phases of the moon circling the Earth. This lunar rhythm is repeated twelve times in the annual sweep of the Earth and moon around the sun. These large, encompassing rhythms call forth regularities of spring births, summer growth, autumn harvest, and winter sleep. In Creation we are immersed in rhythms.

But we're also composed of rhythms. Physiologically we live out rhythms of pulse and breath. Our hearts beat steadily, circulating blood through our bodies in impulses of sixty or eighty or a hundred times a minute. Our lungs expand and contract, pushing oxygen through our bodies fifteen, twenty, or thirty times a minute. This is the nature of the creation of which we are a part. We're embedded in time, but time is also embedded in us.

The understanding and honoring of time is fundamental to the realization of who we are and how we live. Violations of sacred time become desecrations of our most intimate relationships with God and one another. Hours and days, weeks and months and years are the very stuff of holiness.

Time is the medium in which we do all living. When time is desecrated, life is desecrated. The most conspicuous evidences of this desecration are hurry and procrastination. Hurry turns away from the gift of time in a compulsive grasping for abstractions that it can possess and control. Procrastination is distracted from the gift of time in a lazy inattentiveness to the life of obedience and adoration by which we enter the fullness of time. Whether by a hurried grasping or a procrastinating inattention, the holiness of time is violated.

Contemplative Questions

If the moments of your day-to-day life were recorded as musical notes, what kind of music would they make? Would they sound dissonant, cacophonous, and stressful? Would the music be breezy and digestible but ultimately forgettable? Or would it be beautiful—rhythmically and harmonically resonant?

Prayer

Dear Lord,
Help me to realize that there is a reason
why you structured the universe the way you did.
There are natural rhythms that I must not only acknowledge but also enter into.
There are musical rests that are necessary if the music is to have resonance.
Help me to see that when my life is all work and no rest,
I'm violating the very music at the heart of the universe,
putting my life out of harmony with yours.
Give me grace in this area, Lord.
Especially I pray . . .

Further Reading

Exodus 31:12-17—The command to observe the Sabbath.
Hebrews 4:1-11—The spiritual application to resting on the Sabbath.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

1 1-2 First this: God created the Heavens
and Earth—all you see, all you don't see.
Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

3-5 God spoke: "Light!"
And light appeared.
God saw that light was good
and separated light from dark.
God named the light Day,
he named the dark Night.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day One.

6-8 God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters;
separate water from water!"
God made sky.
He separated the water under sky
from the water above sky.
And there it was:
he named sky the Heavens;
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Two.

9-10 God spoke: "Separate!
Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place;
Land, appear!"
And there it was.
God named the land Earth.
He named the pooled water Ocean.
God saw that it was good.

11-13 God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties
of seed-bearing plants,
Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."
And there it was.
Earth produced green seed-bearing plants,
all varieties,
And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Three.

14-15 God spoke: "Lights! Come out!
Shine in Heaven's sky!
Separate Day from Night.
Mark seasons and days and years,
Lights in Heaven's sky to give light to Earth."
And there it was.

16-19 God made two big lights, the larger
to take charge of Day,
The smaller to be in charge of Night;
and he made the stars.
God placed them in the heavenly sky
to light up Earth
And oversee Day and Night,
to separate light and dark.
God saw that it was good.
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Four.

20-23 God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life!
Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!"
God created the huge whales,
all the swarm of life in the waters,
And every kind and species of flying birds.
God saw that it was good.
God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean!
Birds, reproduce on Earth!"
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

24-25 God spoke: "Earth, generate life!
Every sort and kind:
cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds."

The Spirit of God Is Still Creating (1:1-2)

"Create" is not confined to what the Spirit *did*; it's what the Spirit *does*. The Spirit of God who moved over the face of the primordial waters continues to move, continues to create. The Genesis Creation text isn't confined to telling us how the world first came into being; it's also telling us that the Spirit of God is *still* creating, here and now, in you and in me and in everyone around us.

We Need One Another (1:26-28)

The image of God is both male and female. The implication of this is that we need someone else to complete us. This doesn't mean that we can't be whole persons until we're married. Relationship isn't limited to family life or to the expression of sexual intimacy between two people. But it does mean that we need one another. If I make myself the center and gather the world into myself, arranging life around me for my own convenience, I become smaller, not larger. I don't grow; I diminish. There's no completion, and there's no wholeness.

And there it was:
wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.
God saw that it was good.

26-28 God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."
God created human beings;
he created them godlike,
Reflecting God's nature.
He created them male and female.
God blessed them:
"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!
Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

29-30 Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."
And there it was.

31 God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

2 1 Heaven and Earth were finished,
down to the last detail.

2-4 By the seventh day
God had finished his work.
On the seventh day
he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day.
He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from his work,
all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,
of Heaven and Earth when they were created.

ADAM AND EVE

5-7 At the time God made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—God hadn't yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!

8-9 Then God planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. God made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.

PAUSE: *Genesis 1 and 2 are less about* how *and more about* who. *From the first verse of Genesis 1, it is God, God, and more God. If life begins with God, what kind of relationship must you have with him to really live?*

10-14 A river flows out of Eden to water
the garden and from there divides into four
rivers. The first is named Pishon; it flows
through Havilah where there is gold. The gold
of this land is good. The land is also known
for a sweet-scented resin and the onyx stone.
The second river is named Gihon; it flows
through the land of Cush. The third river is
named Hiddekel and flows east of Assyria.
The fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 God took the Man and set him down in
the Garden of Eden to work the ground and
keep it in order.

16-17 God commanded the Man, "You can
eat from any tree in the garden, except from
the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.
Don't eat from it. The moment you eat from
that tree, you're dead."

18-20 God said, "It's not good for the Man
to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a com-
panion." So God formed from the dirt of the
ground all the animals of the field and all the
birds of the air. He brought them to the Man
to see what he would name them. Whatever
the Man called each living creature, that was
its name. The Man named the cattle, named
the birds of the air, named the wild animals;
but he didn't find a suitable companion.

21-22 God put the Man into a deep sleep.
As he slept he removed one of his ribs and
replaced it with flesh. God then used the
rib that he had taken from the Man to make
Woman and presented her to the Man.

23-25 The Man said,
"Finally! Bone of my bone,
flesh of my flesh!
Name her Woman
for she was made from Man."
Therefore a man leaves his father and
mother and embraces his wife.
They become one flesh.
The two of them, the Man and his
Wife, were naked, but they felt no
shame.

3 1 The serpent was clever, more clever
than any wild animal God had made. He
spoke to the Woman: "Do I understand that
God told you not to eat from any tree in the
garden?"

2-3 The Woman said to the serpent, "Not at
all. We can eat from the trees in the garden.
It's only about the tree in the middle of the
garden that God said, 'Don't eat from it; don't
even touch it or you'll die.'"

4-5 The serpent told the Woman, "You won't
die. God knows that the moment you eat from
that tree, you'll see what's really going on.
You'll be just like God, knowing everything,
ranging all the way from good to evil."

6 When the Woman saw that the tree
looked like good eating and realized what she

People of a Place (2:1-15)

While Genesis 1 is structured by time, Genesis 2 is structured by place. Place is a companion gift to go with time; it locates us on the Earth where we become oriented, find work, experience freedom in obedience, and find companionship in a community of others.

The place in these early chapters of Genesis is defined as a garden as opposed to a wilderness. A garden implies boundaries and intention. It isn't a limitless "everywhere" or "anywhere." It's local: "God planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (2:8).

Everything that the Creator God does in forming us humans is done in a place.

One of the seductions that bedevils Christian formation is the construction of utopias—ideal places where the righteous life can be lived unimpeded. The word *utopia* literally means "no place." But we can live our lives only in an actual place, not in an artificial place. Once in time past, that place was Eden. But ever since the Fall, that place has been east of Eden (see 3:24; 4:16), in a land of thorned resistance that opposes not only the work of our own hands but also the work of God's hands as he labors to form Christ in us.

A Greed to Be God (3:1-8)

A curious thing happens to us when we get a taste of God. It happened in Eden, and it keeps happening today. The experience *of* God—the ecstasy, the wholeness of it—is accompanied by a temptation to reproduce the experience *as* God. The taste *for* God is debased into a greed to *be* God. We abandon the personal presence of God and take up with the impersonal serpent. We flee the shining face of God for a slithery world of religion that gives us license to manipulate people and acquire godlike attributes for ourselves. The moment we begin cultivating the possibility of acquiring that kind of power and glory for ourselves, we will flee from the presence of the Lord and seek a place where we can become more prominent and acquire even more power.

This is what led to the downfall of Adam and Eve. This is also what leads to our own downfall, where we find ourselves, like them, living far from the presence of God.

would get out of it—she'd know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 Immediately the two of them did "see what's really going on"—saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

8 When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from GOD.

9 GOD called to the Man: "Where are you?"

10 He said, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid."

11 GOD said, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?"

12 The Man said, "The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it."

GOD said to the Woman, "What is this that you've done?"

13 "The serpent seduced me," she said, "and I ate."

14-15 GOD told the serpent:
"Because you've done this, you're cursed,
cursed beyond all cattle and wild animals,
Cursed to slink on your belly
and eat dirt all your life.
I'm declaring war between you and the Woman,
between your offspring and hers.
He'll wound your head,
you'll wound his heel."

16 He told the Woman:
"I'll multiply your pains in childbirth;
you'll give birth to your babies in pain.
You'll want to please your husband,
but he'll lord it over you."

17-19 He told the Man:
"Because you listened to your wife
and ate from the tree
That I commanded you not to eat from,
'Don't eat from this tree,'
The very ground is cursed because of you;
getting food from the ground
Will be as painful as having babies is for your wife;
you'll be working in pain all your life long.
The ground will sprout thorns and weeds,
you'll get your food the hard way,
Planting and tilling and harvesting,
sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,
Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you'll end up dirt."

20 The Man, known as Adam, named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living.

21 GOD made leather clothing for Adam and his wife and dressed them.

22 GOD said, "The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should

reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!"

23-24 So GOD expelled them from the Garden of Eden and sent them to work the ground, the same dirt out of which they'd been made. He threw them out of the garden and stationed angel-cherubim and a revolving sword of fire east of it, guarding the path to the Tree-of-Life.

4 1 Adam slept with Eve his wife. She conceived and had Cain. She said, "I've gotten a man, with GOD's help!"

2 Then she had another baby, Abel. Abel was a herdsman and Cain a farmer.

3-5 Time passed. Cain brought an offering to GOD from the produce of his farm. Abel also brought an offering, but from the firstborn animals of his herd, choice cuts of meat. GOD liked Abel and his offering, but Cain and his offering didn't get his approval. Cain lost his temper and went into a sulk.

6-7 GOD spoke to Cain: "Why this tantrum? Why the sulking? If you do well, won't you be accepted? And if you don't do well, sin is lying in wait for you, ready to pounce; it's out to get you, you've got to master it."

8 Cain had words with his brother. They were out in the field; Cain came at Abel his brother and killed him.

9 GOD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"

He said, "How should I know? Am I his babysitter?"

10-12 GOD said, "What have you done! The voice of your brother's blood is calling to me from the ground. From now on you'll get nothing but curses from this ground; you'll be driven from this ground that has opened its arms to receive the blood of your murdered brother. You'll farm this ground, but it will no longer give you its best. You'll be a homeless wanderer on Earth."

13-14 Cain said to GOD, "My punishment is too much. I can't take it! You've thrown me off the land and I can never again face you. I'm a homeless wanderer on Earth and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 GOD told him, "No. Anyone who kills Cain will pay for it seven times over." GOD put a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one who met him would kill him.

16 Cain left the presence of GOD and lived in No-Man's-Land, east of Eden.

17-18 Cain slept with his wife. She conceived and had Enoch. He then built a city and named it after his son, Enoch.

Enoch had Irad,
Irad had Mehujael,
Mehujael had Methushael,
Methushael had Lamech.

19-22 Lamech married two wives, Adah and Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal, the ancestor of all who live in tents and herd cattle. His brother's name was Jubal, the ancestor of all who play the lyre and flute. Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who worked at the forge making bronze and iron tools. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

23-24 Lamech said to his wives,
Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
you wives of Lamech, hear me out:
I killed a man for wounding me,
a young man who attacked me.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
for Lamech it's seventy-seven!

25-26 Adam slept with his wife again. She had a son whom she named Seth. She said, "God has given me another child in place of Abel whom Cain killed." And then Seth had a son whom he named Enosh.

That's when men and women began praying and worshiping in the name of GOD.

If We Treat God with Contempt (4:1-18)

The next part of the story involves Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. Sin, which in the parents had been vertically oriented—that is, it had upset the close relationship between humankind and God—in the sons became horizontally oriented, upsetting the relationship between brothers. Sin, which had begun with what looked like a fairly innocuous eating of a piece of fruit, in a short time expressed itself in murder. If we treat God with contempt, it won't be long before we will be treating our brother or sister with contempt as well.

PAUSE: When God speaks, life springs forth. So what made sin and death spread in Adam and Eve's lifetimes? How does disobedience to God produce deadly results in the world around you?

THE FAMILY TREE OF THE HUMAN RACE

5 1-2 This is the family tree of the human race: When God created the human race, he made it godlike, with a nature akin to God. He created both male and female and blessed them, the whole human race.

3-5 When Adam was 130 years old, he had a son who was just like him, his very spirit and image, and named him Seth. After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Adam lived a total of 930 years. And he died.

6-8 When Seth was 105 years old, he had Enosh. After Seth had Enosh, he lived another 807 years, having more sons and daughters. Seth lived a total of 912 years. And he died.

9-11 When Enosh was ninety years old, he had Kenan. After he had Kenan, he lived another 815 years, having more sons and daughters. Enosh lived a total of 905 years. And he died.

12-14 When Kenan was seventy years old, he had Mahalalel. After he had Mahalalel, he lived another 840 years, having more sons and daughters. Kenan lived a total of 910 years. And he died.

15-17 When Mahalalel was sixty-five years old, he had Jared. After he had Jared, he lived another 830 years, having more sons and daughters. Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years. And he died.

18-20 When Jared was 162 years old, he had Enoch. After he had Enoch, he lived another 800 years, having more sons and daughters. Jared lived a total of 962 years. And he died.

21-23 When Enoch was sixty-five years old, he had Methuselah. Enoch walked steadily with God. After he had Methuselah, he lived another 300 years, having more sons and daughters. Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

24 Enoch walked steadily with God. And then one day he was simply gone: God took him.

25-27 When Methuselah was 187 years old, he had Lamech. After he had Lamech, he lived another 782 years. Methuselah lived a total of 969 years. And he died.

28-31 When Lamech was 182 years old, he had a son. He named him Noah, saying, "This one will give us a break from the hard work of farming the ground that GOD cursed." After Lamech had Noah, he lived another 595 years, having more sons and daughters. Lamech lived a total of 777 years. And he died.

32 When Noah was 500 years old, he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

GIANTS IN THE LAND

6 1-2 When the human race began to increase, with more and more daughters being born, the sons of God noticed that the daughters of men were beautiful. They looked them over and picked out wives for themselves.

3 Then GOD said, "I'm not going to breathe life into men and women endlessly. Eventually they're going to die; from now on they can expect a life span of 120 years."

4 This was back in the days (and also later) when there were giants in the land. The giants came from the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men. These were the mighty men of ancient lore, the famous ones.

NOAH AND HIS SONS

5-7 GOD saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. GOD was sorry that he had made the human race in the

***The History of Salvation Is Thick with Names* (5:1-32)**

The genealogical lists in the Bible document the most exciting parts of the story. The gospel addresses not a faceless, nameless mob, but individual people. The history of salvation is thick with names. A name is the form of speech by which a person is singled out for personal love, particular intimacy, and exact responsibilities. The biblical fondness for genealogical lists isn't a pedantic antiquarianism; it's a search for personal involvement, a quest for a sense of personal place in the web of relationships in which God fashions salvation.