



STICKS

ROOTING YOUR FAITH IN GODLY WISDOM
WHEN YOUR DECISIONS MATTER THE MOST

— KAT ARMSTRONG —

STORYLINE

I'm convinced that the Bible is somehow powerfully simple and beautifully complex. Like a diamond viewed from different angles, Scripture continually confronts my heart in fresh ways. This Bible-study series offers insightful perspectives and gives its participants a refreshing opportunity to admire the character of God and be transformed by the truth of his Word. Our souls need to meander through the minutiae and metanarrative of the Bible, and the **Storyline Bible Studies** help us do both.

KYLE IDLEMAN, senior pastor of Southeast Christian Church and bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and *One at a Time*

If you are longing for a breath of fresh air in your spiritual life, this study is for you. Kat Armstrong brings to life both familiar and less familiar Bible stories in such an engaging way that you can't help but see how the God of the past is also working and moving in your present. Through the captivating truths revealed in this series, you will discover more about God's faithfulness, be equipped to move past fear and disappointment, and be empowered to be who you were created to be. If your faith has felt mundane or routine, these words will be a refreshing balm to your soul and a guide to go deeper in your relationship with God.

HOSANNA WONG, international speaker and bestselling author of *How (Not) to Save the World: The Truth about Revealing God's Love to the People Right Next to You*

We are watching a new wave of Bible studies that care about the Bible's big story, from Genesis to Revelation; that plunge Bible readers into the depths of human despair and show them the glories of the Kingdom God plans for creation; and that invite readers to participate in that story in all its dimensions—in the mountains and the valleys. Anyone who ponders these Bible studies will come to terms not only with the storyline of the Bible but also with where each of us fits in God's grand narrative. I heartily commend Kat's **Storyline Bible Studies**.

REV. CANON DR. SCOT MCKNIGHT, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary

Kat Armstrong is an able trail guide with contagious enthusiasm! In this series, she'll take you hiking through Scripture to experience mountains and valleys, sticks and stones, sinners and saints. If you are relatively new to the Bible or are struggling to see how it all fits together, your trek with Kat will be well worth it. You might even decide that hiking through the Bible is your new hobby.

CARMEN JOY IMES, associate professor of Old Testament at Biola University and author of *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*

Kat Armstrong takes you into the heart of Scripture so that Scripture can grow in your heart. The **Storyline Bible Studies** have everything: the overarching story of God's redemption, the individual biblical story's historical context, and the text's interpretation that connects with today's realities. Armstrong asks insightful questions that make the Bible come alive and draws authentically on her own faith journey so that readers might deepen their relationship with Jesus. Beautifully written and accessible, the **Storyline Bible Studies** are a wonderful resource for individual or group study.

LYNN H. COHICK, PHD, provost and dean of academic affairs at Northern Seminary

Christians affirm that the Bible is God's Word and provides God's life-giving instruction and encouragement. But what good is such an authoritative and valuable text if God's people don't engage it to find the help the Scriptures provide? Here's where Kat Armstrong's studies shine. In each volume, she presents Bible study as a journey through Scripture that can be transformational. In the process, she enables readers to see the overarching storyline of the Bible and to find their place in that story. In addition, Armstrong reinforces the essential steps that make Bible study life-giving for people seeking to grow in their faith. Whether for individuals, for small groups, or as part of a church curriculum, these studies are ideally suited to draw students into a fresh and invigorating engagement with God's Word.

WILLIAM W. KLEIN, PHD, professor emeritus of New Testament interpretation and author of *Handbook for Personal Bible Study: Enriching Your Experience with God's Word*

Kat has done two things that I love. She's taken something that is familiar and presented it in a fresh way that is understandable by all, balancing the profound with accessibility. And her trustworthy and constant approach to Bible study equips the participant to emerge from this study with the ability to keep studying and growing more.

MARTY SOLOMON, creator and executive producer of *The BEMA Podcast*

You are in for an adventure. In this series, Kat pulls back the curtain to reveal how intentionally God has woven together seemingly disconnected moments in the collective Bible story. Her delivery is both brilliant and approachable. She will invite you to be a curious sleuth as you navigate familiar passages of Scripture, discovering things you'd never seen before. I promise you will never read the living Word the same again.

JENN JETT BARRETT, founder and visionary of The Well Summit

Kat has done it again! The same wisdom, depth, humility, and authenticity that we have come to expect from her previous work is on full display here in her new **Storyline Bible Study** series. Kat is the perfect guide through these important themes and through the story of Scripture: gentle and generous on the one hand, capable and clear on the other. She is a gifted communicator and teacher of God's Word. The format of these studies is helpful too—perfect pacing, just the right amount of new information at each turn, with plenty of space for writing and prayerful reflection as you go and some great resources for further study. I love learning from Kat, and I'm sure you will too. Grab a few friends from your church or neighborhood and dig into these incredible resources together to find your imagination awakened and your faith strengthened.

DAN LOWERY, president of Pillar Seminary

Kat Armstrong possesses something I deeply admire: a sincere and abiding respect for the Bible. Her tenaciousness to know more about her beloved Christ, her commitment to truth telling, and her desire to dig until she mines the deepest gold for her Bible-study readers makes her one of my favorite Bible teachers. I find few that match her scriptural attentiveness and even fewer that embody her humble spirit. This project is stunning, like the rest of her work.

LISA WHITTLE, bestselling author of *Jesus over Everything: Uncomplicating the Daily Struggle to Put Jesus First*, Bible teacher, and podcast host



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Sticks: Rooting Your Faith in Godly Wisdom When Your Decisions Matter the Most

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A Message from Kat

THE BIBLE IS a literary masterpiece.

Whether you are new to the Christian faith or a seasoned Bible reader, I wrote the **Storyline Bible Studies** to guide you through the storyline of Scripture—each following a person, place, or thing in the Bible. Maybe you are practiced in dissecting a passage or verse and pulling things out of the text to apply to your life. But now you may feel as though your faith is fragmented, coming apart at the seams. The **Storyline Bible Studies** will help you put things back together. You'll discover cohesive, thematic storylines with literary elements and appreciate the Bible as the literary masterpiece that it is.

Tracing a biblical theme, with imagery like mountains and valleys or sticks and stones, will spark your holy curiosity and empower you to cultivate a biblical imagination. I'm praying that your time studying God's Word is an awe-inspiring catalyst to engage and experience God's truth—that you will marvel at the artistry of God's storytelling. And that the Bible will never feel dull or boring ever again.

I wrote *Sticks* when my whole life felt like one big decision tree. If there was an existential question about my career, my family, or our future, we were asking it. We made more big decisions then than in any other season of our twenty-year marriage. And each time I made a hard choice, the stakes felt high and my faith was tested.

I needed God's wisdom—his help in discerning what to do regarding the weighty decisions. And when the next right step seemed clear, I needed the Spirit's empowerment to follow through. So I began to look for stories in the Bible where people were seeking God's wisdom, making hard choices, or finding their faith tested, knowing that God would illuminate my own story through studying.

As I spent time meditating on Adam and Eve's story in the Garden of Eden, I noticed the beginning of a pattern in Scripture. Adam and Eve's big decision happened near two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And as I explored further, searching for guidance in stories where people had to make choices with lasting impact . . . I found more trees.

If you're struggling with decision fatigue, studying the trees in the Bible will help you prioritize the decisions that need your attention. All the little choices will take up less brain space because you'll be able to focus on what really matters.

If you're looking for wisdom, studying trees in the Bible will root you deeply in the Source of wisdom. Many of the people in our faith history faced hard choices, too, and their successes and failures can be our teacher.

I'm praying your time studying trees in the Bible is an awe-inspiring catalyst to engage and experience God's truth—that you would marvel at the artistry of God's storytelling. And that the trees in the Bible will connect you to the Tree of Life, enabling you to live wisely and to make hard choices that honor God.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kat". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Storyline of Scripture

YOUR DECISION TO STUDY THE BIBLE for the next few weeks is no accident—God has brought you here, to this moment. And I don't want to take it for granted. Here, at the beginning, I want to invite you into the most important step you can take, the one that brings the whole of the Bible alive in extraordinary ways: a relationship with Jesus.

The Bible is a collection of divinely inspired manuscripts written over fifteen hundred years by at least forty different authors. Together, the manuscripts make up tens of thousands of verses, sixty-six books, and two testaments. Point being: It's a lot of content.

But the Bible is really just one big story: God's story of redemption. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible includes narratives, songs, poems, wisdom literature, letters, and even apocalyptic prophecies. Yet everything we read in God's Word helps us understand God's love and his plan to be in a relationship with us.

If you hear nothing else, hear this: God loves you.

It's easy to get lost in the vast amount of information in the Bible, so we're going to explore the storyline of Scripture in four parts. And as you locate your experience in the story of the Bible, I hope the story of redemption becomes your own.

PART 1: GOD MADE SOMETHING GOOD.

The big story—God's story of redemption—started in a garden. When God launched his project for humanity, he purposed all of us—his image bearers—to flourish and co-create with him. In the beginning there was peace, beauty, order, and abundant life. The soil was good. Life was good. We rarely hear this part of our story, but it doesn't make it less true. God created something good—and that includes you.

PART 2: WE MESSED IT UP.

If you've ever thought, *This isn't how it's supposed to be*, you're right. It's not. We messed up God's good world. Do you ever feel like you've won gold medals in messing things up? Me too. All humanity shares in that brokenness. We are imperfect. The people we love are imperfect. Our systems are jacked, and our world is broken. And that's on us. We made the mess, and we literally can't help ourselves. We need to be rescued from our circumstances, the systems in which we live, and ourselves.

PART 3: JESUS MAKES IT RIGHT.

The good news is that God can clean up all our messes, and he does so through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one denies that Jesus lived and died. That's just history. It's the empty tomb and the hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after his death that make us scratch our heads. Because science can only prove something that is repeatable, we are dependent upon the eyewitness testimonies of Jesus' resurrection for this once-in-history moment. If Jesus rose from the dead—and I believe he did—Jesus is exactly who he said he was, and he accomplished exactly what had been predicted for thousands of years. He restored

us. Jesus made *it*, all of it, right. He can forgive your sins and connect you to the holy God through his life, death, and resurrection.

PART 4: ONE DAY, GOD WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

The best news is that this is not as good as it gets. A day is coming when Christ will return. He's coming back to re-create our world: a place with no tears, no pain, no suffering, no brokenness, no helplessness—just love. God will make all things new. In the meantime, God invites you to step into his storyline, to join him in his work of restoring all things. Rescued restorers live with purpose and on mission: not a life devoid of hardship, but one filled with enduring hope.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S STORYLINE

If the storyline of Scripture feels like a lightbulb turning on in your soul, that, my friend, is the one true, living God, who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is inviting you into a relationship with him to have your sins forgiven and secure a place in his presence forever. When you locate your story within God's story of redemption, you begin a lifelong relationship with God that brings meaning, hope, and restoration to your life.

Take a moment now to begin a relationship with Christ:

God, I believe the story of the Bible, that Jesus is Lord and you raised him from the dead to forgive my sins and make our relationship possible. Your storyline is now my story. I want to learn how to love you and share your love with others. Amen.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

ROMANS 10:9

How to Use This Bible Study

THE **STORYLINE BIBLE STUDIES** are versatile and can be used for

- individual study (self-paced),
- small groups (five- or ten-lesson curriculum), or
- church ministry (semester-long curriculum).

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Each lesson in the *Sticks* Bible study is divided into four fifteen- to twenty-minute parts (sixty to eighty minutes of individual study time per lesson). You can work through the material one part at a time over a few different days or all in one sitting. Either way, this study will be like anything good in your life: What you put in, you get out. Each of the four parts of each lesson will help you practice Bible-study methods.

SMALL GROUPS

Working through the *Sticks* Bible study with a group could be a catalyst for life change. Although the Holy Spirit can teach you truth when you read the Bible on your own, I want to encourage you to gather a small group together to work through this study for these reasons:

- God himself is in communion as one essence and three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Interconnected, interdependent relationships are hallmarks of the Christian faith life.
- When we collaborate with each other in Bible study, we have access to the viewpoints of our brothers and sisters in Christ, which enrich our understanding of the truth.

For this Bible study, every small-group member will need a copy of the *Sticks* study guide. In addition, I've created a free downloadable small-group guide that includes

- discussion questions for each lesson,
- Scripture readings, and
- prayer prompts.

Whether you've been a discussion leader for decades or just volunteered to lead a group for the first time, you'll find the resources you need to create a loving atmosphere for men and women to grow in Christlikeness. You can download the small-group guide using this QR code.



CHURCH MINISTRY

Church and ministry leaders: Your work is sacred. I know that planning and leading through a semester of ministry can be both challenging and rewarding. That's why every **Storyline Bible Study** is written so that you can build modular semesters of ministry. The *Sticks* Bible study is designed to complement the *Stones*

Bible study. Together, *Sticks* and *Stones* can support a whole semester of ministry seamlessly, inviting the people you lead into God's Word and making your life simpler.

To further equip church and ministry leaders, I've created *The Leader's Guide*, a free digital resource. You can download *The Leader's Guide* using this QR code.



The Leader's Guide offers these resources:

- a sample ministry calendar for a ten-plus-lesson semester of ministry,
- small-group discussion questions for each lesson,
- Scripture readings for each lesson,
- prayer prompts for each lesson,
- five teaching topics for messages that could be taught in large-group settings, and
- resources for deeper study.

SPECIAL FEATURES

However you decide to utilize the *Sticks* Bible study, whether for individual, self-paced devotional time; as a small-group curriculum; or for semester-long church ministry, you'll notice several stand-out features unique to the **Storyline Bible Studies**:

- gospel presentation at the beginning of each Bible study;
- full Scripture passages included in the study so that you can mark up the text and keep your notes in one place;
- insights from diverse scholars, authors, and Bible teachers;
- an emphasis on close readings of large portions of Scripture;
- following one theme instead of focusing on one verse or passage;
- Christological narrative theology without a lot of church-y words; and
- retrospective or imaginative readings of the Bible to help Christians follow the storyline of Scripture.

You may have studied the Bible by book, topic, or passage before; all those approaches are enriching ways to read the Word of God. The **Storyline Bible Studies** follow a literary thread to deepen your appreciation for God's master plan of redemption and develop your skill in connecting the Old Testament to the New.



INTRODUCTION

THE STICKS STORYLINE

Other than God and people, the Bible mentions trees more than any other living thing. There is a tree on the first page of Genesis, in the first psalm, on the first page of the New Testament, and on the last page of Revelation. Every significant theological event in the Bible is marked by a tree.¹

MATTHEW SLEETH, *REFORESTING FAITH: WHAT TREES TEACH US*
ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD AND HIS LOVE FOR US

ADULTHOOD IS OVERGROWN with a matrix of decision making. Whether it's whom to date, whether to get married, which job to take, which school to send your kids to, or where to live, our decision trees branch out in several directions simultaneously. If I had to guess, I'd bet you're in the middle of making some major life decisions right now. You're not alone—I'm right there with you.

Sometimes the decision tree is overwhelming, with too many options to choose from. Other times, there's an obvious choice, but it requires more effort than I want to give. In these moments of decision fatigue, I want to reach for the low-hanging fruit of autonomy and just do what's easiest—things that seem right in my own eyes.

I don't know about you, but when crucial choices are too daunting or uncertain, I freeze. Meanwhile, new choices just keep popping up in life. It's never-ending.

But Scripture offers us an anchor. What I have found studying trees in the Bible is that God meets us in our decisions and offers us clarity and hope.

Every tree, bush, or vine we survey in this Bible study is deeply embedded in an ancient, symbol-driven world where imagery of a story didn't just matter—it had meaning. Sometimes God repurposes familiar symbols or images to signal deeper significance. The *Sticks* Bible study will guide you through five parts of the Bible where tree imagery is a key element, symbolizing what you and I might call “decision trees.” Trees are where God's people go to seek godly wisdom and make hard choices that honor God.

My botanist friends are going to feel as though I stretch the metaphor a bit as I group together Bible stories with trees, a bush, and a vine with branches. As modern readers, we know that trees and bushes and vines are all different plant species. Ancient readers would have been aware of the visual differences too, but I wonder if they connected all the plants, vines, and trees that created firewood or fire sticks together. Based on my word searches and research, there is a thematic connection between all the trees, bushes, and vines we'll study together.²

In *Sticks*, we're going to explore these passages:

- *Genesis 2–3*: The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil will show us how to choose wisely and not to take matters into our own hands.
- *Exodus 3*: The Burning Bush will help us choose to notice when God is trying to get our attention.
- *Isaiah 1, 6, 11, 53*: The Messiah Tree will help us choose to branch out from our shady family trees.
- *John 15*: The True Vine will teach us how to choose to stay connected to Jesus for a fruitful life.
- *Revelation 22*: The Tree of Life will help us choose to reframe our views from the treetops.

We're going to do this by looking at each story with tree imagery through four different lenses:

- **PART 1: CONTEXT.** Do you ever feel dropped into a Bible story disoriented? Part 1 will introduce you to the passages with tree imagery and help you study those passages in their scriptural context. Getting your bearings before you read will enable you to answer the question *What am I about to read?*
- **PART 2: SEEING.** Do you ever read on autopilot? I do too. Sometimes I finish reading without a clue as to what just happened. A better way to read the Bible is to practice thoughtful, close reading of Scripture to absorb the message God is offering to us. That's why part 2 includes close Scripture reading and observation questions to empower you to answer the question *What is the story saying?*
- **PART 3: UNDERSTANDING.** If you've ever scratched your head after reading your Bible, part 3 will give you the tools to understand the author's intended meaning both for the original audience and for you. Plus you'll practice connecting the Old and New Testaments to get a fuller picture of God's unchanging grace. Part 3 will enable you to answer the question *What does it mean?*
- **PART 4: RESPONDING.** The purpose of Bible study is to help you become more Christlike; that's why part 4 will include journaling space for your reflection on and responses to the content and a blank checklist for actionable next steps. You'll be able to process what you're learning so that you can live out the concepts and pursue Christlikeness. Part 4 will enable you to answer the questions *What truths is this passage teaching?* and *How do I apply this to my life?*

One of my prayers for you, as a curious Bible reader, is that our journey through this study will help you cultivate a biblical imagination so that you're able to make connections throughout the whole storyline of the Bible. In each lesson, I'll do my best to include a few verses from different places in the Bible that are connected to our tree passages. In the course of this study, we'll see the way God shows up in tree imagery throughout his Word—and get a glimpse of how he might show up in our lives today.

God's Word is so wonderful, I hardly know how to contain my excitement. Feel free to geek out with me; let your geek flag fly high, my friends. When we can see how interrelated all the parts of Scripture are to each other, we'll find our affection for God stirred as we see his artistic brilliance unfold.

LESSON ONE

CHOOSING WISELY INSTEAD OF TAKING MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS



**THE TREE OF LIFE AND THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL:
WHERE ADAM AND EVE LISTEN TO THE WRONG VOICE**

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 2-3



PART 1

CONTEXT

Before you begin your study, we will start with the context of the story we are about to read together: the setting, both cultural and historical; the people involved; and where our passage fits in the larger setting of Scripture. All these things help us make sense of what we're reading. Understanding the context of a Bible story is fundamental to reading Scripture well. Getting your bearings before you read will enable you to answer the question *What am I about to read?*

BEAR GRYLLS IS FAMOUS in our house for his harrowing adventures and survival skills. You and I don't know each other well—at least not yet—so I'll tell you now that adventure and survival are not in the realm of my interests. Safety, security, and comfort rank as some of my highest values. But my husband, Aaron, and my son, Caleb? They welcome opportunities to emulate the hero of the *Man vs. Wild* TV show.

Bear Grylls is renowned for

- serving in the British special forces;
- fighting his way back to health after breaking his back in three places during a free-fall parachuting accident;
- being one of the youngest people to scale Mount Everest;

- starring in Emmy-award-nominated TV shows, where he adventures with people like former president Barack Obama; and
- writing over ninety-five books.¹

The dude's intense. He's kind of like a real-life, wilderness-bound James Bond, foraging for life among the wild. I don't get it. Send me to the beach for some sun and a nap, please. But not Bear Grylls. His insatiable curiosity compels him to explore the wilderness, hunting for adventure.

If I enter my house to the sound of howling laughter or roaring *ahs*, I know Aaron and Caleb are glued to a Bear Grylls TV show. One time, Caleb explained that Bear was trying to decide if he wanted to eat raw bird eggs for sustenance or risk digesting the berries excreted in bear poop. My usual response to this kind of commentary is "Why, though? Just why?" Caleb will say, "Because it's awesome, Mommy!"

In a desperate attempt to involve me in a Bear Grylls adventure, Caleb asked me to imagine knowing what Bear knows. If I could navigate the wilderness, he suggested—if I were wise to the animal kingdom, if Mother Nature and I were besties—I wouldn't just love what Bear Grylls accomplished, I'd try it for myself. The innocence of children is a precious thing. I didn't want to put a damper on my son's dream, so I simply responded with a "Maybe."

If you take my resistance out of the equation, my son's reasoning is sound. Knowing how to navigate the wilderness would make it fun, *potentially*. Bear knows the lay of the land anywhere he goes. He knows which plants to eat and not, which animals to hunt and not, which terrain is safe and not. All his wise choices are founded on awareness and understanding of what will be good for him and what will be bad.

I have zero desire to emulate Bear's adventures, but I'd love to have as much knowledge and confidence as he does when he makes his decisions in the wilderness. I want to navigate my life with wisdom—knowing what is good for me and what is not.

Here's what I want to suggest to you: The Bible has a whole lot to teach us

about discernment. You and I can't treat the Bible like our personal decision-making handbook, but we can seek God's wisdom in the Scriptures. And when we do, we'll find that God is inviting us to learn from him and his people.

We are about to enter the wild world that is the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible. Here we will see the first of many mentions of tree imagery in the Scriptures. Trees planted by God, our Cosmic Gardener, sprout from verses from the beginning of the Bible to the end, growing to provide life's necessities. But two central trees begin the storyline of Scripture: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Embedded in the Genesis Creation narratives are verses we can use to shape our theology of sin and humanity, our understanding of humanity's origin, and many other important subjects. As Reverend Fleming Rutledge would say, "its depths are inexhaustible."² But in our study together, we're focusing on one particular goal: how the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil can function as literary devices—a thread in the storyline of Scripture.

Navigating the Garden of Eden as Western, modern Christians presents real challenges, so before we dive in, let's get a bird's-eye view. The Torah was written and edited by Moses to create a single, unified story with an overarching message: "God's relationship with his people has a future, even though they have proven faithless in the past."³ Yes, and amen.

It's important to remember that *although the Bible is for us, it was not written to us*. Moses had a specific audience in mind when he wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy: the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land.⁴ The Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph—had all passed away. The escape from Egypt, through the Red Sea, was in the distant past. As they emerged from the wilderness, Moses' audience faced a critical choice: Would they follow God, or would they repeat the unfaithfulness of generations past? They were on the

The garden is an act of utter graciousness. But the trees disclose the character of that graciousness. There is no cheap grace here.⁵

Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*

precipice of the land God promised—but could they, would they, choose wisely and actually reach it?

Moses begins the Torah with God’s creative activity: breathing the world into order and breathing life into his image bearers. The Creator exhorted Adam and Eve to enjoy all the trees in the Garden, even the Tree of Life. But there was one limitation: They were not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

It’s God’s garden and God’s covenant with Adam and Eve, so he gets to set the terms. Do you bristle at that? I know I do. My Western culture encourages me to be self-sufficient and independent, without limitations. Good or bad, those are some of the messages I’m consuming on a regular basis, and they’ve shaped me, whether I like to admit it or not. That’s why living on God’s terms can be a challenge.

But your limitations, and mine, were designed by our Creator in love. I know as soon as I mention our limitations, some of us are already problem-solving our finitude. But taking matters into our own hands is not going to lead to flourishing lives. Adam and Eve will show us that much is true.

The qualities in the Garden of Eden put human nature to a test.⁶

Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*

Embracing that God knows best *and* has our best in mind is a truth I hope takes root in our souls through this lesson. We don’t have to have all the answers to make wise choices—we need to trust God’s wisdom and wait on him to dispense wisdom to us as we come

to him with our questions, seek out wise counsel, and search the Scriptures for guidance.

As we follow the tree line and zoom in on the Garden of Eden, Moses will teach us about ourselves, our world, and the human condition through the tale of two trees.

You’re going to see in this lesson that taking matters into our own hands is not going to lead to flourishing lives.

1. PERSONAL CONTEXT: What is going on in your life right now that might impact how you understand this Bible story?

2. SPIRITUAL CONTEXT: If you've never studied this Bible story before, what piques your curiosity? If you've studied this passage before, what impressions and insights do you recall? What problems or concerns might you have with the passage?