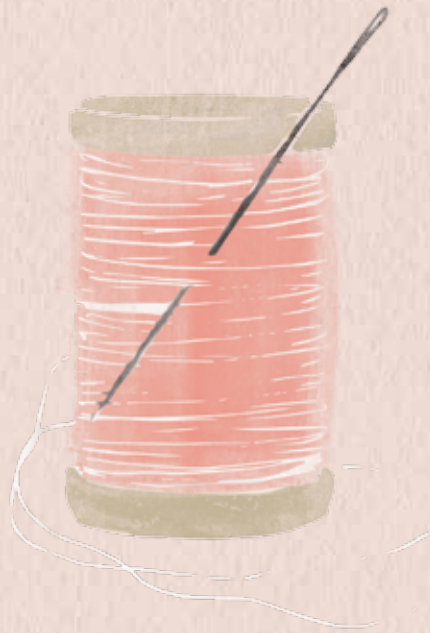


A Bible Study for Teen Girls

Seamless

Understanding the
Bible as One Complete Story



angie smith

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Understanding the
Bible as One Complete Story

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DEDICATION

For Beth, who introduced me to the love of my life.



MEET THE AUTHOR

Angie is the wife of Todd (of the Christian group Selah), and mom to five girls: twins Ellie and Abby, Kate, Audrey, and Charlotte. Many women met Angie through her blog a few years ago when she walked through the difficult days of their daughter Audrey's diagnosis during pregnancy and her brief life. Angie's passion is to make the Bible feel accessible and relevant, to share her ups and downs to encourage others in their faith, and hopefully provide a few laughs along the way. She is a best-selling author of two children's books and several adult books, including *I Will Carry You*, *What Women Fear*, and *Chasing God*, and holds a Master's degree in Developmental Psychology from Vanderbilt University. Angie and Todd live with their house full of girls in Nashville.

INTRODUCTION

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, I would have told you that Jesus was a myth, a legend, a fairy tale for those who needed a distraction from this life. I would have sounded intellectual, too. I had degrees, published studies, and years of fancying myself as some sort of expert on life—all at the ripe age of 23. I still see that girl in my mind's eye as I hold this work in my hands, and the irony isn't lost on me.

I wouldn't even walk into a LifeWay store because I was so convinced I wasn't "one of them," and now I'm signing off on my first Bible study with them as my publisher. And here's the best part: God knew it all along.

He watched me search, cling, and grasp at anything that felt like truth, all the while being well aware that one day I would bow before Him. And the fact that His mercy reaches all the way into the heart of a rebellious, stubborn, undeserving (let me guess, you're starting to feel a little anxious about me being your guide) mess of a woman, well, I can't quite explain what that does to my heart.

The weight of these pages is more than you can feel. It's the love song I never thought I would sing to the Creator who gave me a voice. And while it's not perfect, I pray that it honors Him.

I have had more Bibles than I can count since I began my journey with Him. Many of them are weathered, marked, and littered with notes and prayers. It took me years and years of reading to begin to understand the story of Scripture, but when I began to, the world came into sharp focus for the first time.

Maybe you can relate?

You love the stories you know, but you aren't sure how they fit together. Or maybe you understand it from an academic perspective, but you can't quite get your heart to care. Or possibly, you've simply done what you could to understand enough to get by in small group, and you go home feeling like you're behind the curve.

A million scenarios could have led you to this study, but whatever the case, I'm praying for you right this minute. You. God knows your name, your circumstances, and exactly what He has in mind for the next several weeks. And I have the great pleasure and distinct honor of joining you in that journey.

Thank you for the privilege, truly. I can only pray that you are as blessed by reading it as I have been by writing it. The Word is alive. It's active. It pierces us, bringing us near to Him and to the cross that freed us.

That's actually in the Bible. It's in the book of Hebrews. We'll get there.

Of course, that particular book of the Bible doesn't exactly happen in chronological order; but as I said, that's often the way it goes.

Today is a new day for you, my friend.

Circle it on the calendar and mark it in your Bible, whatever you want to do to commit yourself to the days ahead. We're in it together, and I'm cheering you on every single step of the way.

With Love,

Angie

week one

THE BEGINNING

The entire Bible is a vast library, written by 40 authors over 1600 years. You can explore the nooks and crannies for a lifetime. But the amazing thing is those 66 books tell one seamless story about the God who made us, loves us, redeems us, and has a future for us.

As we journey through Scripture together, we'll use pictures to help us see the story unfold before us. Each week, you'll find five icons or pictures at the bottom of the page that represent major moments or turning points in the story. Each day we'll highlight the image that represents the part of the story we are unpacking.

For week one, we'll be covering the first 11 chapters of the Bible using the icons below to highlight the major themes. The globe represents the creation of the world (Gen. 1). The symbol of man and woman represents the creation of Adam and Eve, the first people (chapter 2). The snake, yes, you're getting this, represents Satan and the fall of humanity into sin (chapters 3 and 4). The boat? Noah and the flood (chapters 6-9). And the tower? Babel, where God humbled humanity (Gen. 11).

Did you notice anything strange about the chapters and icons? Yes, I left out some chapters. Actually Genesis 5 and 10 are pretty much genealogy anyway, but the icons are to help us absorb the main story of the Bible. Also note the days and icons don't always match, but they do tell and picture the story of Scripture in order.

That's enough about the flow and format of the study. Let's get started digging into the beautiful story of Scripture. I'm so glad you've chosen to join me on this journey.

This week at a glance:



INTRODUCTION:

- * What is one thing you want your group to know about you?

- * What made you want to participate in this study?

WATCH: Session 1 Video (14:47)

Use this space to make note of any Scripture references or statements from the video that you want to remember.

DISCUSS:

- * How did Angie's experience of feeling lost or stupid trying to study the Bible resonate with you? What have been your own challenges in studying the Bible?

- * What do you hope to gain as you study and participate with this group in the coming weeks?

- * How as a group can you help one another avoid discouragement, feeling overwhelmed, and stay accountable to stick it out for the whole study?

- * What are some steps you will take this week to devote yourself to the work of this study?

“The best book is not one that informs merely but one that stirs up the reader to inform himself.” A.W. Tozer

Video sessions available for purchase
at www.lifeway.com/seamless

day one

GETTING STARTED

Okay girls, let's begin our journey with an honest look at where we are starting from. Don't worry, this is not a test you'll be graded on—just a simple quiz to help you get your bearings. **Circle the number from 1 to 10 that best represents how much you agree with each statement below.**

* "I understand the general story of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I feel nervous in settings where my biblical knowledge could be tested."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I've never thought of myself as a student of God's Word."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I don't think I could ever understand Scripture the way other people do."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I've just never really been interested in understanding the Bible as a story."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I wish I felt more confident in my Bible knowledge."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "It's just too much for me—too many facts and details to make sense of."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

* "I don't have enough time to read and understand the Bible."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

One of the first things I learned about successfully fitting in with Christians was the power of nodding. It made people think I understood things I didn't, and it covered over the insecurity and frustration of feeling like the Bible was never going to make sense to me. So, when they said things like, "I'm so inspired by Paul's courage," I would bob my head and make a mental note to investigate later.

Have you ever been there? It's all over your head and you're counting the minutes until you can leave the situation that makes you feel like you're not quite smart enough to "get it." It's the worst feeling.

I'm a relatively bright person, and I tend to pick things up (fairly) quickly, but the Bible? That was different. I just couldn't make sense of it. So many pages. Such thin, thin pages. Like tissue that taunted me.

I eventually got so frustrated that I walked into my local Christian bookstore and asked them to point me in the direction of the children's section. I sat cross-legged on the floor thumbing through the bright photos and short summary stories for a few hours.

Don't laugh, because it actually helped me. I bought a few children's storybook Bibles and after I was finished with my classes each day, I would sit on the balcony of our apartment and read—slowly, and without letting the voice of condemnation speak louder than the voice of devotion.

**Whatever it takes, Lord. I want to know
You and see You in these words.**

* Help a girl out here. Tell me I'm not the only one. What kind of Bible discussions make you feel lost or left out?

What Bible stories do you remember from your childhood? Use the space below to draw images like you'd find in those colorful children's storybook Bibles...



I memorized a few passages and did several amazing Bible studies, but the over-arching story escaped me. Details just floated there in space without anything to anchor them down to the bigger picture. It wasn't until I spent time investing in understanding the basic story that the characters and themes of Scripture really came to life for me, and my greatest desire is for this study to do the same for you.

Don't misunderstand me—I am by no means a Bible scholar, and I'm sure I've barely scratched the surface when it comes to understanding the Word, but I've made progress. I know enough about the general story of the Bible to be able to make an educated guess about the where and why of a particular story, and that's an amazing feeling. I want you to experience that feeling too. I'm excited to travel these roads with you, and prayerfully, you'll make it to the other side with a newfound sense of the beauty and architecture of God's Word.

Before we start, though, I want you to make a commitment to really see this through over the next several weeks. Tell yourself right now that you are going to work hard, praying the Holy Spirit would speak to you in new ways as you go. No matter how little (or how much) you know, I pray this study will breathe life into your love for Scripture, and that it will empower you to claim God's promises as your own.

The first step in embracing the story of Scripture is acknowledging the authority of Scripture. So, let's start with this foundational question:

- * *Do you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, filled with absolute truth? Why or why not?*

Read the following verses, and write what each passage says about the purpose and authority of God's Word:

- * Hebrews 4:12

- * 2 Timothy 3:14-16

I want you to discover the life-changing power of God's Word and see what a beautiful gift you hold in your hands (or on your smartphone). The Bible isn't an outdated piece of literature as some in our culture claim. And it wasn't written for a few experts to understand while baffling the rest of us. The Bible was written for us.

Did you hear that? Give it a minute to sink in.

Let's claim that right now, even before we turn another page. This journey is not about being smart enough or spiritual enough to grasp truth. I can't tell you how many people I meet who hang their heads in conversation because they don't think they measure up to "smarter" Christians. LISTEN. That's the Devil calling, and we aren't answering. He is no longer going to have that power over our lives. You are capable, intelligent, and loved by the Author of the story. And we're putting our full weight into believing that.

Alright, so we've gotten that out of the way, but a voice in your head may still be whispering another lie about Scripture: it's boring.

In all honesty, there was a time when I would have said the same. But once I made a commitment to read and study it, the words became life to me. The reason I thought it was boring was pretty simple: I didn't understand it.

- * *On the lines below, write anything you can think of that has kept you from studying the Bible. Maybe you have a lack of confidence, desire, or any number of other reasons. Let's get them on paper so we can be honest about what we're bringing into this.*

Fill in the blanks:

For the word of God is _____ and _____, sharper than any two-edged _____, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the _____.

Hebrews 4:12



Once you've listed the stumbling blocks and hesitations you have about studying Scripture, take a deep breath and say these words with me:

It's going to be different this time.

We're throwing off anything that has held us back, and we're moving forward in full confidence that God will bless us with the desire of our hearts—to know Him better. With that, we begin.

**Lord, reveal Yourself in every step of this journey,
imparting Your wisdom and grace as we go.**

Are you ready? We're going to start at the only logical place to start: the beginning.

HELPFUL SIGNPOSTS ALONG THE WAY.

We're at the beginning of an extraordinary journey, but before we take our first steps, I want to give you a little glimpse into how we'll stay oriented as we go. It's easy to get lost in the details and lose sight of the main points when you're covering so much ground, and I don't want you to leave this study feeling like it was a big jumble of information that you can't simplify. I mean, we've got to know where we are, where we're going, and where we've been, right?

And as we all know, visuals can only help the process. So our amazing designer created these fantastic little icons that you'll see at the bottom of the pages in order to help us stay on track. And when I saw them, I squealed and shouted, "They're ADORABLE!!!! I LOVE THE PINK!" I have no solid evidence to back up my theory, but I believe that was the biblical response.

Each week we will have five icons to indicate the "main points," and in the back of your book, you'll find a course map on pages 166-167 so you can see the entire Bible in pictorial form. Go ahead. SQUEAL WITH ME.

day two CREATION & FALL

"In the beginning..."

GENESIS 1:1

Three simple words launch us into the pages of God's love for us. The first book of the Bible is called "Genesis," and you would be hard-pressed to find a fiction book with as many twists and turns as Genesis.

In the first several verses we learn the order in which God created all things. There's a handy little doodad on the sidebar to see what God created on each of the seven days, but for most of this session, we're going to focus on the beginning of humanity.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3 and envision the scene as it unfolds.

* *Creation is often a hotly debated topic in our culture. Why do you think many people reject the biblical account of creation?*

You might be sorting through your own questions about creation like: "How long ago did God create the earth?" "Were the seven days of creation literal 24-hour days?" "Were Adam and Eve real people?"

There can be lots of questions surrounding creation, so let's get something squared away right here at the beginning of our journey. All kinds of questions and opinions will surface as we dig into Scripture. If we are genuinely seeking the glory of God, let's agree for the time being to set aside any preconceived notions and opinions that have influenced our understanding of God's Word. That's certainly not to say we shouldn't have opinions, but I don't want us to get sidetracked and miss the heart of what we're doing here. I'm not advocating the easy way out—I want us to wrestle with difficult truths, but I want us to do it in a way that honors the purity of the Word of God.

1 light/dark
& day/night

2 sky/heaven

3 earth/seas
& plants

4 sun/moon/
stars

5 birds/fish

6 land animals
& humans

7 rest



creation

In my experience, there have been times when I just wanted to know the answer so I would feel like I'd figured it out. That's my safety zone right there—control. But above and beyond any of my lofty desires is this unshakable reality: I do not and will never know everything there is to know, nor was I created to understand all the mysteries of God. The same is true for you.

Before you go any further in this study, spend just a moment praying over any doubts or any attempts to discredit God's Word. Make a commitment to yourself and to God that this study is not a place for wrestling out every question you have, but rather an opportunity to grow in knowledge. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to take what you learn and apply it, but the point of this study is to come to the Lord with our hearts open, refusing to let a defensive stance prevent us from growth.

- * Write down any thoughts that come to mind, asking the Lord to bless you as you seek Him in these next weeks.

Okay, now that we've got that out in the open, let's pick back up at the beginning of all things. We see in the first chapter of Genesis that God created Adam (the first man) from the dust of the earth. I don't know a whole lot more about how that went down, but the bottom line is God created this man in His own image. He wanted this person to reflect Him and to be a beautiful representation of the way He loves.

God wanted Adam to have a partner, so He put Adam into a deep sleep, removed one of his ribs and used it to create Eve—the woman who would be Adam's wife.

Adam's new wife brought some issues into the marriage. Namely, she didn't act like she was 100% sure she trusted God. Don't think this is a women-bashing session. It's definitely not. But facts are facts, and the first lady of the garden did her fair share in disobeying. We label that original disobedience against God with a big theological term: the fall. The word fall only has four letters, but trust me, it's a big term.

- * Based on what you know already, what resulted from the original act of disobedience against God (a.k.a. "the fall")?

Everything was going swimmingly for Adam and Eve. They had a great place to live and all of their needs were met. But even from the beginning of time, there was a question that haunts us to this day: **Does God really have my best in mind?**

God had been clear in His instructions: any fruit in the garden was fair game to eat with the exception of the fruit from one particular tree. Well, we humans buck anything that feels like a limitation on our "rights." So Satan, clothed as a snake, shimmies into the picture and plants a seed of doubt in Eve's mind.

Read Genesis 3:1-7.

- * What does Satan ask Eve in Genesis 3:1?
- * How would you describe Satan's approach in verses 2-7?

Do you see how subtle Satan is? How conniving? How he undermines God and presents what feels like a logical case? Yeah, he still does that.

Eve falls for it. She decides the fruit is a good thing—after all, why wouldn't a loving God want her to have this fantastic knowledge? So she takes a bite and hands one to Adam. And everything changes. Forever. I'm not just trying to be dramatic.

Have you ever doubted God's goodness? If so, what were the circumstances?

GENESIS=
the beginning



fall

This was the turning point for all of humanity.

God created a situation where His people could choose whether or not to live in accordance with His rules. Adam and Eve chose not to. That decision shaped every person who would ever be born after them, because their disobedience resulted in separation from God. God is perfect, so the stain of sin put them (and us) in a state of opposition with Him. In and of ourselves, we do not have the power to bridge that gap.

Now listen, I know we're starting out with some pretty heavy stuff here, and if it were up to me, I might have eased us into it. But it's so important for us to understand the context as the story of Scripture unfolds before us.

You may not feel like we covered a lot of ground in this first section, but we've introduced the thread that will weave its way through the end of time. Sin took root in the garden of Eden, and it grew into a monstrosity before God, in His mercy, sent His Son to us.

day three

RESULTS OF THE FALL

After their disobedience, Adam and Eve were filled with shame, suddenly aware of their nakedness and fearful of the consequences of sin. They attempted to hide themselves from God and as they did, God asked His own "first question."

Read Genesis 3:6-15.

* *What did God ask in Genesis 3:9?*

Now listen. He's God. He knows all things, so He wasn't actually trying to figure out where they had gone.

* *What do you think God was actually getting at here?*

You could probably supply a couple of good answers to this question, but in my mind, God wasn't asking them to identify their location, but rather their condition. In effect He was asking: "Where are your hearts?"

As you read through Scripture, I want you to challenge yourself to think critically about the passages, and apply them to yourself instead of seeing each story as a far-removed history lesson.

* *Imagine God is asking you the question, "Where are you?" Take a moment and jot in the margin the first responses that come to your mind. Are you hiding? Ashamed? Doubting? Be honest. This is just between you and God.*



No matter what you wrote, know this: it is not a surprise to God. He knows where you are just like He knew where Adam and Eve were—body, soul, mind, and spirit. What He wants from you is also the same as what He wanted from them; to come to Him, no matter how difficult it seems, instead of allowing Satan to continue oppressing you with lies.

I wish I could say I didn't see myself in what happens next, but of course I do. God spoke again to Adam and Eve, asking them to give an explanation. Adam started out on the right path.

* *What does Adam say in Genesis 3:10?*

In other words? "I messed up, and I really regret it." Good place to start when you're chatting with the God of the universe who breathed life right into your lungs. But when God probes deeper and Adam can feel the weight of his sin, Adam does something *I would never do* (untrue!).

* *Who does Adam blame? (Gen. 3:12)*

- the dog Eve God both Eve and God
 Eve, God, and the dog

Oh, clever, Adam. Way to throw in the, "You're the One who gave her to me" part. I'd say Adam blamed both his wife and God. Adam has his finger pointing at Eve, who evidently also minored in "passing the buck" at the University of Eden.

* *Who does Eve blame? (Gen. 3:13)*

"He tricked me! I call foul! I mean, how was I supposed to know all of this would happen?" The trouble was and still is that neither Eve nor we are helpless victims. We always have the choice to believe God or the Devil. It can't be both.

Next, God speaks to the serpent, and within this text we find the first direct reference to Jesus, the Savior who will be sent to restore our relationship with God.

Read Genesis 3:15.

Adam and Eve could not understand these words from the vantage point that we (in possession of the whole of Scripture) now have, but the heart of what God is saying is this: Satan will bruise the heel of God's people—he will wound them and have a negative effect on their lives. He is the Enemy of God and will always do his best to injure and mislead God's children. But a wound to the heel is not lethal; it is temporary.

On the other hand, crushing the head of a serpent results in death. It's interesting to note that a snake's poison is in its head, so the power of inflicting injury is erased when the head is destroyed.

Here we see a promise from God, spoken just after His creation has gone astray. I'm paraphrasing here, but in essence He was saying:

The state you have placed yourself in is temporary, and out of My deep love for you, despite how little you deserve it, I will bring a solution to bridge the chasm between us.

* *Do you think this promise from God eliminates the earthly consequences we suffer when we're disobedient to Him? Why or why not?*

Does the promise eliminate repercussions? I would say no. Indeed God speaks directly to both Adam and Eve, detailing the ways that their sin will continue to affect all generations to come.

Read Genesis 3:16-19 to see the specific ways humanity has been affected.



After God sends Adam and Eve out of the garden, we see the pattern of sin continue in their children. The world's first murder takes place as one of their sons (Cain) kills the other (Abel) out of anger. Cain marries and has a son of his own (Enoch), and some time later Adam and Eve give birth to another son (Seth).

* Does anything in that last paragraph strike you as odd?

Did you wonder where Cain got his wife? After all, we've been given the names of two sons of Adam and Eve, and given that they are the only humans on the planet at this point, where did Cain's wife come from? The answer appears in Genesis 5:4, where we read "The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters." In other words, not all of their children are named, and it is to be assumed that Cain was married to (and produced children with) one of his sisters.

It's not like there were a lot of choices on his eHarmony® app, that's all I'm saying.

Please note: we are about to dig into some lineage. We're looking at who was born to whom and why that will eventually matter. If you feel the need to grab some form of caffeine and give yourself a quick pep talk, I'll be waiting right here for you.

One of the descendants from Seth was named Enoch. Yes, the same name as Cain's son. Apparently they had not quite mastered the art of naming children at this point in history. Enoch was recognized as being a man who loved the Lord.

Read Genesis 5:22-24.

* What three words in this passage describe Enoch's relationship with God?

If you're anything like me, your tendency is to glance over the long list of names until something that seems important and relevant shows up. But the truth is, having an idea of how much time passed between people and events is really helpful to seeing the big picture.

* Take a few minutes and fill in the following names from Genesis 5:21-32.

Enoch fathered _____,
 who fathered _____,
 who fathered _____,
 who fathered, _____,
 _____ and _____.

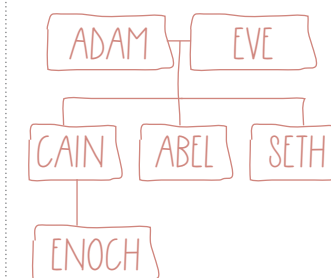
See? It's not so bad.

Unfortunately, the conditions of humanity continued to decline, until we come to Genesis 6:5-8.

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

Circle the words in this passage that describe the state of humanity. Underline God's plan of action. Draw a star by the sentence that highlights God's grace and our hope.

God took stock of the way His creation was behaving, and He was grieved by how far from Him they had wandered. Knowing the depths of their hearts, He recognized that this would only get worse, alienating them further and further from Himself. As a result, He determined the best way to deal with it was to wipe out creation.



flood

I'm sure this comes across as an aggressive strategy, and actually, it is meant to. There is nothing passive about our Father God, and as much as He is good, He is also just. You might be tempted to cross your arms at this point, shaking your head at a God who would destroy His own creation. While I agree that it's a drastic approach, I would urge you to keep in mind one teeny-tiny-itsy-bitsy detail...

We aren't God.

That means we can't "put ourselves in His place," and any attempts to apply our own standards and expectations on Him are basically futile. He is entirely separate from us and fully sovereign—meaning He can do what He wants, when He wants. He is also fully loving, so what He does is ultimately loving whether we can fully understand or not.

But (and this is important), He cannot go against His nature or His promises, and as we will see in the coming weeks, we have been given more than enough information on those to give us a secure faith.

I realize we've made it a grand total of six chapters so far, and you're probably wondering how in the world we're going to move to a good understanding of Scripture in one study if we keep up this pace. Don't worry—we'll get there. But the foundation we are laying will help you to think critically as you read, and the time we have spent here will serve us well as we build up our knowledge base.

As you close out this section, spend some time in prayer, focusing on any concerns or struggles you have with the passages so far. Are you unsettled by anything? Curious? Confused? Speak honestly and thoroughly with the Lord, asking Him to give you eyes to see Him in all His splendor as we continue on.

Also, that was a long lesson. My apologies. It's just that I'm trying to cram the whole Bible into six weeks and I'm realizing it may have been a bit, ahem, ambitious.

Stick with me. We'll get there.

day 4 THE FLOOD

So where were we? Oh yes. God was about to destroy the earth and kill everyone. Actually, He wasn't going to kill everyone, but very few people were chosen to survive. Namely, Noah and his family. How's that for a cheery way to begin today's reading?

God spoke to Noah, telling him that a great flood would be sent, and that he was to build an ark in order to take his family to safety. Along with his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law, Noah was also instructed to bring two of every kind of animal in order to keep them alive and reproducing for generations to come (Gen. 6:19).

God gave Noah detailed information on the exact dimensions of the ark as well as the materials to be used and the other preparations that should be taken before the flood came.

Read Genesis 7.

* *How long did it rain? (Gen. 7:4)*

Here's a Bible trivia tidbit for you. Every time the number 40 is used in Scripture, it indicates a time of testing.

* *How long did it take for the water to dry up? (Gen. 7:24)*

Can you imagine that? They were on the boat for about a year (Gen. 8:14), and I'm just saying that's a lot of quality time with the family!

What was the first thing they did after getting off the boat? (Find a therapist! No, that's not it.)

Read Genesis 8:20-9:17.

How do you respond when you sense God calling you to do something that seems impossible?



flood

* Noah built an _____ and offered _____
_____. (Gen. 8:20)

This brings us to one of the central themes of Scripture: the use of sacrifice as a symbol of our need for atonement.

Atonement: the reconciliation between God and humankind ultimately accomplished through Jesus Christ.

* Look back a few chapters to Genesis 3:21. What was the first sacrifice made, and who made it? For what purpose?

We're going to talk more about animal sacrifices and their symbolism later (Giddy up!), but for now, just be aware of the following:

1. Animal sacrifices were modeled by God and required by Him.
2. Because of this, Noah's immediate action after returning to land was seen as honorable and was recognized as such by God, who called it a "pleasing aroma" (Gen. 8:21).

* God blesses Noah for his faithfulness, and then He tells him to do something. What is it? (Gen. 9:1)

Be _____ and _____ and _____.

Go on. Have kids. Have lots of kids. And let's try this whole humanity in God's image thing over again. And God is also making His end of the bargain clear: I'm never going to do this again. I will never flood the earth this way again. Ever.

* What does He use as a symbol of His promise? (Gen. 9:13)

Now, maybe you just saw an image in your mind of a pretty little rainbow, but it's not quite taking the edge off the whole mass destruction part. Here's what you need to know about that rainbow: it signifies something profound and entirely indicative of the enduring love God has for His people, and it continues to this day as a reminder to us that He has chosen to be in relationship with us.

Still not excited about the rainbow? Let me say it another way, and I'm praying you hear it as the heartbeat of this study:

Even when we didn't deserve it, God gave us another chance.

In the wake of your own sense of entitlement, you might miss what that actually means. We aren't owed a single thing. It's His show, y'all. Every bit of it. And as much as you might intrinsically recoil at that statement, I promise you this: the greatest freedom and joy you will ever know are wrapped up in it, offered as a gift from the King of kings.

Nothing else from here on out will make sense to you if you don't at least have the desire to understand this truth. Without it, you will miss the whole point of the story. God doesn't have to love you, but He does. You can't do anything to earn it, because you're flawed in ways that make your best efforts completely useless.

In the quietness of your own heart, I want you to consider this shift in perspective. Instead of wondering why He did something as drastic as killing an entire world of people, ask yourself a more pressing question: why did He let anyone live?

So often, we go into situations in life with our fists up, ready to defend our rights and our opinions, but this is one area where attempting to do so is dangerous. I promise things are going to get better as we go, but if we don't lay it out here, we might not fully appreciate the beauty that lies up head. And believe me, it is beautiful.

In what ways do you see God's grace in the story of Noah's ark?



flood

day 5

JOB & BABEL

I'm going to take what appears to be a rabbit trail here, but it's actually not. One of the reasons the Bible is hard to understand as one complete story is that it didn't necessarily happen in the order we read it.

For example, the Book of Job was written about a man named Job who suffered immensely, losing his family, health, and wealth in a very short amount of time. If you look in your table of contents, you'll see that it's the 18th book of the Bible, nowhere near where we are in the Book of Genesis. But in reality, Job's story probably happened right around where we are in this chapter. Historians have indicated that based on the language and other cues given, Job lived sometime shortly after the flood.

I think Job is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand, embrace, and teach. But because it is part of God's story, we need to wrestle with the truths found within it.

Read Job 1:6-12.

* Use the space provided to write a brief summary of this passage.

God gives Satan permission to do whatever he wants to with Job, so long as he doesn't kill him. With bated breath, we watch as Job's life is stripped away from him, and if we're honest, we are tempted to be angry about it.

Why would God do such a thing? What kind of loving God would willingly allow one of His own to be treated this way?

I know. I hear you. I've asked the same questions. It feels cruel and unnecessary as we turn the pages, but all I know to say is this: I believe God is good even when I don't understand all the particulars of His decisions. I don't say this flippantly. I say it as a woman who has stood in a cemetery while her daughter was being buried. And with the thud of every shovelful of dirt that separated us, I had a decision to make about the God who allowed it: either He loves me or He doesn't. Either He is good or He is not.

I decided God was good, and He loved me. It wasn't a decision based on emotion or shallow hope—it was, quite simply, the only place I found safe enough to rest my weary bones.

I'm willing to bet, even at your young age, you've had some life-altering moments that have tested your faith. Your Heavenly Father isn't afraid of your questions, your doubt, or your frustration. Maybe this is a good place to just camp out with Him for a few minutes before we move on. This is between you and the Lord, so be honest.

What experiences in your life have made it difficult for you to believe that God is good and that He loves you? Write these down in the margin or if you need a more private space to be honest, write them on a separate sheet of paper, then seal it.

Maybe there are circumstances or deep hurts you've never even expressed, but this is your chance. Talk to Him—He's listening.

Good for you, friend. I know that wasn't easy. We're tucking this away for now, but not forever. Take a deep breath. Let's wrap this week up together, okay? We're picking back up at Genesis chapter 9.

* Noah's three sons, named _____, _____, and _____ (Gen. 9:18) had children, those children had children, and eventually the world began to fill up with people again.

Read Genesis chapter 11, then fill in the following: (Answers will vary depending on the Bible translation, but that's okay. You'll get the heart of the message!)

* The whole earth had _____ (Gen. 11:1). They said, let us build _____ and make a _____ for ourselves (Gen. 11:4).

JOB =
faithfulness amidst
suffering



tower

It didn't take too long for people to move in ways that elevated themselves and not God, did it? When God saw this happening, He intervened again by dispersing the people and confusing their language.

You may have heard this story before, as its name is famous, but now you'll have some context for the "Tower of Babel." It was a monument that stood for man's desire to be important, and when God scrambled their ability to understand language and had them spread out instead of building power together, He was reinforcing their need (and ours) for humility.

Before we end this week's time together, take a few minutes to consider what you've learned, praying that God will continue to strengthen the foundation that will lead to steady building in the coming weeks.

* Put the following events in order (try to do this from memory, but skim your notes if you need to!):

- ___ The first murder occurs
- ___ Sin enters the world
- ___ God creates Adam
- ___ God floods the world
- ___ The Tower of Babel is built
- ___ The first animal sacrifice occurs
- ___ People are scattered and their language is confused

* If you had to summarize the main storyline of Genesis up to here, how would you do it? Think about the nature of man and the nature of God as you answer, being aware of patterns that you've already seen thus far.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT...

You've probably heard the story of Noah and the ark a thousand times, and you've likely seen murals in kid's rooms and church hallways of all the animals climbing in "two by two."

When Todd and I found out our first baby was actually, um, babies, we were tempted to make a cuddly little "Noah's ark" nursery. It's one of those stories that seems much sweeter in watercolor than in the text of the Bible. The reality is that this was probably a messy, struggle-filled time of wrangling and heart pounding while Noah and his family prepared for the devastation God had revealed to them.

Throughout this study, I'm going to highlight verses that you've probably heard and are likely familiar with, but maybe not in their true context. My intention isn't to get you to peel off your wall decals or turn in your Scripture-quoting t-shirts, but there is incredible power in understanding the true meaning of "commonly quoted" verses in their fullness. Noah's ark is often depicted as a peaceful and happy scene, but it's really an intense (and sobering) moment in human history where the wrath and power of God were put on display.

I can't help but feel a little bit of inner cringing when I see images of Adam and Eve smiling as they hide from God, or even Noah and his wife perched on a ship and waving like they're about to go play shuffleboard on the deck. Granted, we don't need to paint graphic and disturbing images on preschool walls, but it does us some good to keep in mind what these stories are actually telling us: we should stand in awe of our holy God, recognizing both His grace and His holiness to us—a bunch of people who don't deserve the former and bow deep to the latter.

