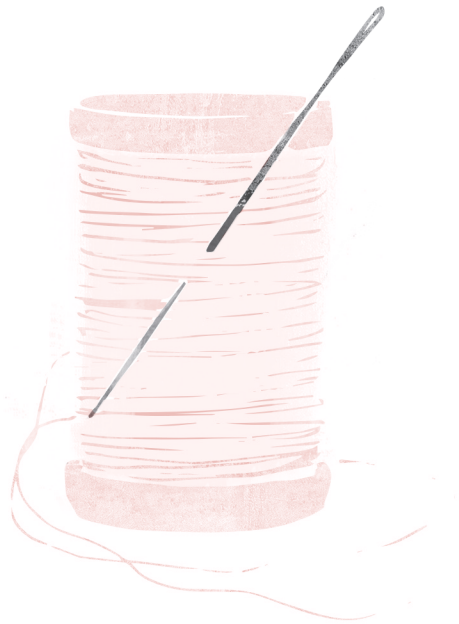


Seamless

Understanding the
Bible as One Complete Story



angie smith

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Dedication

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



MEET THE AUTHOR

Angie Smith is the wife of Todd (of the Christian music 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 her 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, to 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* and *What Women Fear*, and holds a Master's degree in Developmental Psychology from Vanderbilt University. Angie and Todd live with their house full of girls in Nashville.

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INTRODUCTION

SOMETIMES THE MOST MEANINGFUL WRITING DOESN'T HAPPEN IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER. AS I SIT TAPPING OUT THESE WORDS, I HAVE JUST RECEIVED THE PDF VERSION OF THIS STUDY IN ITS ENTIRETY.

And I won't bother sugarcoating my response—I sobbed.

Because 15 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: He 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



one

WEEK ONE

THE BEGINNING

The entire Bible is a vast library, written by 40 authors over 1,600 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 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 (Genesis 1). The symbol of man and woman represents the creation of Adam and Eve, the first people (Genesis 2). The snake—yes, you're getting this—Satan and the fall of humanity into sin (Genesis 3 and 4). The boat? Noah and the flood (Genesis 6–9). And the tower? Babel, where God humbled humanity (Genesis 11).

If you look at the back of the book you'll find a fold-out page we call the course map. On that one diagram you can see the icons that summarize our whole study. I hope you'll remember the parts of the Bible long after you've forgotten this study.

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.



GROUP SESSION GUIDE

Rather than a formal leader guide in the back, we've provided what we hope is a simple and functional group plan on these pages. Each week will begin with an introductory page like the previous one. Then you'll find a two-page group guide like this. My suggestion is that you divide your group time into three parts.

1. After this first week, you'll first discuss the previous week's homework.
2. Then watch the 12-15 minute video segment so I can come along. After all, you wouldn't want to leave me out, would you? Where's the fun in that?
3. Finally, end your group time with a closing discussion of the video. (And of course I'd recommend a party, but that's just me.)

The session guide for this first meeting is for us to get to know each other. Then we'll each go do our homework (it will be fun, I promise). Each day, plan to spend a few minutes with that day's study. Don't worry if some days you don't get it all. This isn't a race and you can come back later. When we meet next group session, we'll have this week's study to discuss. Now let's get to know each other and I'll join you by way of video.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

Getting to know each other:

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

- * *What drew you to this study?*

WATCH SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION (VIDEO RUN TIME 14:54)**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 and 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?*

DAY ONE

GETTING STARTED

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.

When they upped the ante with phrases like, "This story takes place in modern-day Iraq," I nodded. I couldn't point at modern-day Iraq on a map if my life depended on it, let alone do the mental bridge-building to get to the part where this realization was as euphoric as it seemed to be for other people.

Have you ever been there? It's all over your head and you're counting the minutes until you can leave the situation that reminds you that you aren't smart enough to "get it."

And it's the worst. *It's the absolute* WORST.

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. That's what the Bible was to me for many years: taunting tissue.

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

And 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?*

I memorized a few passages and did several amazing Bible studies, but the overarching 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. For example, if you would have asked me where the story of Samuel was, I would have looked in the only place I knew would help me: the index. And I still do that plenty of times, but more often than not, I have enough surrounding information to know the general circumstances of his life to find him.

Now, it looks more like this:

Samuel was the son of Hannah and was raised by Eli the priest. Eli was also a judge, and Samuel would grow up to become the very last judge before the people demanded a king and Saul was placed in that role.

Now I know the general story and time period for this particular person, and understanding who judges and kings were helps me know why his story is significant.

A lot of the time, you know a verse or a story, but you don't know where it lands in the bigger picture, so you miss the significance. Also, if you are confused about what I just said regarding Samuel, don't worry. You're in the right place. And trust me—in a few weeks, you'll be shocked at how you can look at the same sentences and make sense of them.

I'm so excited to travel these roads with you, and prayerfully, you'll make it to the other side with a newfound sense of the architecture of the Word of God.

JUDGES



SAMUEL



SAUL
(1ST KING)



THE BIBLE
WASN'T
WRITTEN
FOR EXPERTS.

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 will 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 the Word of God, and that it will empower you to claim its promises as your own.

As we go, I want you to remember something very important: the Bible wasn't written for a few experts to understand while baffling the rest of us.

Did you hear that?

The Bible was written for us, and we are claiming that right now, even before we turn a page. With that being the case, I want you to erase any part of your self-talk that says you aren't smart enough or educated enough or even spiritual enough. Deal?

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 other, "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 it.

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 it and to study it, the words became life to me. The reason I thought it was boring was pretty simple: I didn't understand it.

* How much do you agree with the following statements?

"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 the Word."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



“I have a hard time believing I could really understand Scripture the way educated 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 confidence 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 it and try to understand it.”

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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

Once you’ve listed the stumbling blocks and hesitations you have about studying the Bible, 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 He 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, which is the beginning.

And just think; in a few weeks, you'll be nodding because you understand, and not because you want to understand. It's going to be a blast to do this together, and I'm so grateful to be next to you.

So there you go—you've already finished day 1. Or, as I would call it if I was actually doing this Bible study instead of writing it, "the first of five sessions I will cram into the hour before I meet with my group."

It's OK, friends.

I'm one of you.

HELPFUL SIGNPOSTS ALONG THE WAY

We're at the beginning of an extraordinary journey, but before we take our first steps, I want to remind you 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're going, where we are, and where we've been, right? (And all my fellow "I consider myself adventurous if by 'adventurous' we mean 'aware of the exact plan'" sisters nod in glee.)

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 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 5 icons to indicate the "main points," and in the back of your book, you'll find a course map on page 177 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 holds. 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 7 days, but we’re going to hone in on the beginning of humanity.

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 God’s 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.

I have a friend who has a tattoo on his rib cage devoted to his wife. It’s a sticky note that reads, “You owe me one.”

I think it’s clever.

Anyway, Adam’s new wife brings some issues into the marriage. Namely, the fact that she doesn’t act like she’s 100% sure she trusts God. Don’t think this is a women-bashing session. It’s sure not. But facts are facts, and the first lady of the garden did her fair share of disobeying.

We label that original disobedience against God with a big theological term: the fall. Four letters, but trust me, it’s a big term.

* *From what you know, what resulted from the original act of disobedience against God—the fall?*

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

□ GENESIS=
the beginning

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 the question that haunts us to this day: “Does God really have my best in mind?”

God had been clear in His instructions: anything 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.

* *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 he 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—it really was the turning point for humanity.

God created a situation where His people could choose whether or not to live in accordance with His rules. They 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 from 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 heady stuff here, and if it was up to me I might have eased us into it. I wonder if you’re already sorting through questions in your mind, “Were they literally seven 24-hour days?,” “Were Adam and Eve real people?,” and probably many others. So let’s take this opportunity to deal with another big issue we’re going to face as we go so the elephant in the room doesn’t impede our main goal.

If we are genuinely seeking the glory of God, let’s agree for the time being to set down all of our preconceived notions and the bits and



MAN & WOMAN



pieces of arguments that have influenced our opinions. That's certainly not to say you shouldn't have those opinions, or that it's even an option to be wishy-washy, but I bring this up so that you don't miss the heart of what we're doing here. I'm not taking the easy way out, and I will volunteer my own thoughts, but I have seen the way pride and power can corrupt the purity of the Word of God. Many times, I have spoken out of a place that was more concerned with being right before men than it was of being right before God.

And many times, I just wanted to know the answer so I would feel like I had figured it out. That's my safety zone right there—control. But above and beyond any of my lofty desires is this unshakeable reality: I do not and will never know everything there is to know, nor was I created to understand all the mysteries of God.

It's not a cop-out to say you're clothing yourself in humility and seeking His voice. So before you get any further, spend just a moment praying over anything that rises up in you in an attempt to discredit the 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 heart 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.

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 will grow into a monstrosity before God, in His mercy, will send 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.”

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

Now listen. He’s God. He knows all things, so He isn’t actually trying to figure out where they’ve gone.

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

You could probably supply a couple good answers to this question, but in my mind the gist of it is that God wasn’t asking them to identify their location, but rather their condition. In effect He was asking: “Where are your hearts? What in the world are you thinking, imagining that you can so blatantly disregard Me and then hide?”

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

* *In other words, when you read the question, “Where are you?” imagine that He’s talking to you. Take a moment and jot in the margin the first responses that come to your mind. Don’t edit yourself or worry about sharing this publicly—this is just between you and Him. Are you hiding? Ashamed? Doubting? Be honest.*

No matter what you wrote, know this: it is not a surprise to God. He knows where you are exactly as He knew where they 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 account. Adam started out on the right path.

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

In other words? I screwed up, and then I really regretted 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 starts to corner Adam and he can feel the weight of that sin on his chest, he does something *I would never do* (untrue).

* *Who does Adam blame? (Genesis 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 she blame? (Genesis 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 is that neither Eve nor we are helpless victims. We always have the choice to believe either God or the Devil. It can't be both.

Next, God speaks to the serpent, and within this text we find the first reference to Jesus, the Savior who will be sent to restore our relationship with God. In Genesis 3:15, we read:



*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.*

GENESIS 3:15

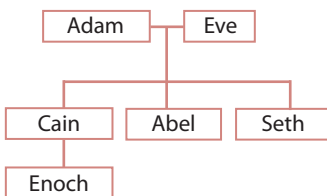
Adam and Eve could not understand these words from the vantage point that we (in possession of the whole of Scripture) now have, but the heart of what God is saying is this:

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 the Devil 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 to inflict injury is erased when the head is destroyed.

Here we see a promise from God, spoken just after His creation has gone astray: *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 repercussions we suffer if we're disobedient to Him? Why or why not?*



Does this 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 they (and we) will be 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 another cup of coffee 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 hadn’t mastered the art of naming children at that point. Enoch was recognized as being a man who loved the Lord.

- * *What three words in Genesis 5:22-24 describe Enoch’s relationship with God?*

If you’re anything like me, your tendency is to glance over the long list of names and continue to skim 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, so just 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 the words in 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.
GENESIS 6:5-8

God is taking stock of the way His creation is behaving, and He is grieved by how far from Him they have wandered. Knowing the depths of their hearts, He recognizes that this will continue to worsen, alienating them further and further from Himself. As a result, He determines the best way to deal with it is to wipe out creation.

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 inasmuch 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 love so what He does is ultimately loving whether we can presently 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, He has given us more than enough information on those to give us a secure faith.

I realize we've made it a grand total of 6 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.



FLOOD



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

Also, that was a long lesson. My apologies.

It's just that I'm trying to cram the whole Bible into six sessions and I'm realizing it may have been a bit, *ahem*, ambitious.

Stick with me. We'll get there.

SO FAR:
GOD CREATED
THE WORLD



GOD
CREATED
PEOPLE



ADAM + EVE
SINNED



THE FALL PUT
ALL CREATION
UNDER
THE CURSE
OF SIN



FLOOD

DAY 4

THE FLOOD

So where were we? Oh yes. God was about to destroy the earth and kill everyone. How's your day so far?

Actually, He wasn't going to kill everyone, but very few people were chosen to survive. Namely, Noah and his family.

God speaks to Noah, telling him that He is going to send a great flood, and that Noah is to build an ark to take his family to safety. Along with his wife, sons, and daughters-in-law, Noah is also instructed to bring seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals as well as seven pairs of birds in order to keep them alive and reproducing for generations to come.

God gives 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 comes.

* *How long did it rain? (Genesis 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.

* *The water didn't dry up after 40 days, it just stopped raining then. How long did it take for the water to dissipate? (Genesis 7:24)*

And do you know what *that* number signifies in Scripture? Sorry. Build-up for no good reason. I actually don't know that it symbolizes anything other than the fact that they were on the boat much of a year, (see Genesis 8:14) and I'm just saying that's a lot of quality family time.

Once they do get off the boat, what's the first thing they do? (Find a therapist! No, that's not it.) Read Genesis 8:20.

* Noah built an _____ and offered _____.



FLOOD



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 (Giddyup!), 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 good, and was recognized as such by God, who called it a "pleasing aroma." (Genesis 8:21)

You know what probably wasn't a "pleasing aroma?" The inside of the boat. I've cried uncle after a six-hour road trip with my kids for goodness' sake.

- * God blesses Noah for his faithfulness, and then He tells him to do something. What is it? (Genesis 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? (Genesis 9:13)

SACRIFICE SHOWS
OUR NEED TO BE
MADE RIGHT
WITH GOD



Now, maybe you just saw an image in your mind of a pretty little rainbow, and it's taking the edge off the whole mass destruction part, but you're not all that inclined to be moved by the gesture. But what it signifies is something profound and entirely indicative of the enduring love that God has for His people, and a reminder to us that He has chosen to be in relationship with us.

Still not excited about the rainbow? Let me say it in 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 roar of your own sense of entitlement, you might miss what that actually means.

God doesn't owe us 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 God's work, offered as a gift from the King of all kings.

Nothing else from here on out will land where it's supposed to if you don't at least have the desire to understand that truth. It's the reason we argue about secondary issues as the body of Christ—we've fundamentally missed 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 mental perspective shift. 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'm sorry to be such a party pooper, and I promise things are going to get better as we go. It's not going to be a pound-you-over-the-head kind of study, but if we don't lay it out here, we might not fully appreciate the beauty that lies up ahead.

And believe me, it is beautiful.



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, his health, and his 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 actually, 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, to embrace, and to teach.

* *Read Job 1:6-12 and write a brief summary of what is happening.*

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

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

I know. I hear you. I've asked the same. 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.

EVENTS SO FAR
GOD CREATED:

- the world
- adam and eve
- Sin wrecked everything
- the world went downhill until God sent the flood
- God started over with Noah
- Job believed God is good even through suffering

□ JOB =
faithfulness amidst
suffering



I decided to believe God was good, and He loved me. It isn'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 you've had some Job-like moments in your life, and maybe they've been what led to you losing faith. Your Heavenly Father isn't afraid of your questions, your doubt, or your frustration, and maybe this is a good place to just camp out with Him for a few minutes before we finish.

Again, this is for you and the Lord, so be honest.

- * *What experiences in your life have caused you to struggle with believing He is good and that He loves you? Write these down on a separate sheet of paper and then seal it up, so you can feel free to write just to God.*

This is just between you and Him. Talk to Him, not to anyone else. Maybe they are things you've never even put pen to paper about, 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 up this lesson together, OK?

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

- * *Read Chapter 11 of Genesis for yourself and then fill in the following: (Answers will vary slightly depending on the Bible translation you are using, but that's OK. You'll get the heart of the message!)*

*The whole earth had _____
_____. (v. 1)*

*They said, let us build _____
and make a _____ for ourselves. (v. 4)*



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 our need for humility.

Before we end this week's lesson, 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*

___ *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.*

Answers to the ordering exercise: 3, 2, 1, 4, 5, 6

