



90 DAYS
THRU THE
BIBLE



A DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY FROM
WALK THRU THE BIBLE

Finally, a devotional guide that paints the big picture of God's redemptive story. *90 Days Thru the Bible* masterfully covers the biblical account from beginning to end in a way that not only enlightens the reader but also connects God's story with the work He's doing right now, in and through us. This book is high-octane nourishment for Christians at all levels of spiritual maturity.

MEL SVENDSEN

Lead pastor, Riverview Church, Bonsall, CA

If you want to read the story of the Bible, do not miss *90 Days Thru the Bible*. It takes the story of the Bible, which many people have learned through Walk Thru the Bible's live events—Walk Thru the Old Testament or Walk Thru the New Testament—and puts it into an easy-to-read and easy-to-understand story . . . a simple narrative that will lead you through the major people, places, and events in a way that will capture your imagination in fresh and creative ways. In an age of biblical illiteracy, what an awesome way to see and remember the greatest story of all time.

STEVE KEYES

Pastor

90 Days Thru the Bible is a beautifully written devotional that provides a powerful and penetrating journey through God's Word that enables the reader to draw from the depths of Scripture for encouragement, strength, and wisdom for life application.

LT. COL. KENNETH W. MAYNOR

Territorial secretary for program, The Salvation Army

Many have said, "You can't see the forest for the trees." When it comes to grasping God's message to us in the Bible, it's important to see both the forest and the trees! *90 Days Thru the*

Bible helps us do just that. The writing gives us a clear picture of the overall message of the Bible and helps us see the particular truths of the Christian faith. Get this book!”

KEITH MOORE

Senior pastor, Dogwood Church, Tyrone, GA

90 Days Thru the Bible



A DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY FROM
WALK THRU THE BIBLE

with Chris Tiegreen



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Introduction

One might think that the bestselling book of all time would be one of the most understood books of all time, but it isn't. Though many people have found inspiration in the pages of the Bible, far fewer have actually read it from beginning to end. Many have believed the overall message of the Bible, but few have grasped the entire story. That's because God's message is simple enough for a child to embrace, yet His epic story is complex enough to mystify even the most curious intellect. We grasp the pieces much more easily than we comprehend the whole.

Many people can recite the basic message of the Bible—God created a good world, human beings sinned and fell, and God eventually sent a solution in the form of His Son, who was offered as a sacrifice for sin and will one day return to rule—and many have learned important life principles from the lives of prominent biblical characters—faith from the life of Abraham, courage from the conflict between David and Goliath, compassion from the story of the Good Samaritan, forgiveness from the parable of the Prodigal Son. Meanwhile, huge portions of the Law and the Prophets—and even a few New Testament letters—remain largely untouched. Between the basic message and some of the well-known stories, deep, dark sections of Scripture remain obscure.

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The pages of many Bibles are ruffled in predictable spots and pristine in equally predictable spots.

It's entirely possible, then, for us to be well versed in certain specifics and yet ignorant of major themes. We may know key doctrines of our faith—especially those favored by our particular denomination or historical tradition—and miss the heart of God. That in itself is a biblical phenomenon. Entire generations of God's people in Scripture became experts in their sacred writings but didn't recognize God's voice as spoken through the prophets; many missed the Messiah Himself because they studied Scripture through a certain lens and failed to comprehend the heart of it. We don't want to do that. We can't afford to proclaim the certainty of God's Word while remaining ignorant of huge sections of it. Our voices carry no weight when we declare that the God of the universe has revealed Himself in the Bible and simultaneously admit that we haven't actually read all of it. We far too often tend to ascribe glory to God's Word and then never get around to exploring it fully for ourselves.

This ninety-day devotional won't explore the Bible fully, of course; it's impossible to be that thorough in short daily readings. Rather, the purpose of this book is to draw the major themes out of each book of Scripture and to meditate on how each one contributes to God's great story. At one level, it's an overview, but it's designed to go much deeper than that—more like admiring the beauty of each piece of a puzzle and contemplating how it contributes to the whole picture. In the process, we will encounter the major characters, events, and themes of the Bible and discover a divine flow that connects them all. We will see how God unveiled Himself and His purposes over diverse centuries and through diverse people. The majesty of Scripture will inspire us more deeply and enhance our appreciation of the heart of God.

Underneath this journey through Scripture, underlying even the Bible's very existence, is a truth often unacknowledged in this

INTRODUCTION

world: *God speaks*. He is not silent. By implication, this also means He is neither distant nor indifferent. He is not the cosmic Creator who wound the world up like a clock and then left it to run on its own. He is not an “absentee landlord,” as some have charged. No, God is a communicator. He has desires and purposes and answers to impart. He wants to be known.

That’s a landmark truth, and when we realize its implication—that not only does God speak, but He speaks *to us*—our interest is piqued and our lives are changed. Every human being with any instinct that God exists knows what it’s like to pray to Him and desperately wait for His responses. The entire world seeks truth. The simple knowledge that our God is not silent and that He has revealed Himself not only to the world as a whole but also to us as individuals is an alluring thought that sends us in search of answers. We want to know more. We know we need His Word, if only we can understand it.

This book will explore the Word that has been revealed. It won’t cover every detail, summarize every story, or mention every character; we have to read the Bible itself for that. But it will help us understand the often-obscure collection of inspired writings comprised by Scripture, and it will illuminate huge, life-altering themes that give our lives meaning. Somewhere in the process, we will hear the voice of the One who speaks.



THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament can be intimidating, not only because of its size, but also because of its complexity. Some of its stories seem simple, but the lists of laws and rituals and the chronicles of kings and prophets—many of them not presented in chronological order—make for dense reading. Beneath the surface are layers upon layers of meaning that we don't see. The heart of the story can get lost in the details, as can the God who authored it.

When reading the Old Testament story, it's important to look at the way certain characters and themes develop. We see human beings, made in the image of God, become rebels and then wanderers. Out of these disconnected people, God chooses a man, gives him a family, and then grows his family into a nation. After the nation is chosen and cultivated, the people are disciplined harshly for years because they give their hearts to lesser gods, but then they are restored—all of which sets the context for and leads up to a supernaturally new creation.

We can see a story line with God, too—first as Creator, then as Judge, and as powerful Lord. But His more personal characteristics begin to come through as He shows Himself to be a Deliverer, Redeemer, Healer, and Provider. As the story continues, we see God portray Himself not only as Master but also as a gentle Shepherd and a compassionate Father. In the New Testament, this progression of intimacy continues all the way to Friend and then Bridegroom. Again and again, God pursues closeness with His people. What began as a rescue turned into a courtship, a betrothal, and eventually a marriage between the human and the divine. There are times of separation, the greatest of which—an exile—occupies the attention of many of the prophets.

But chastisement is only one side of God's love, and certainly not the dominant side. Throughout the Old Testament, God wants His presence to be known among His people. This connection was broken with the Fall, but the distance was bridged by God's presence in a Tabernacle and then a Temple, and the prophets foretold a time when it would get much closer than that. In every instance, God reveals Himself very personally as someone who zealously wants to be known.

This relationship is a partnership, too, with a mission that begins at Creation—to fill the earth and subdue it—and continues with God's people being set apart for Him as a nation of priests for the world, a light that reflects His glory, and bearers of His truth. This mission develops into a full-blown Kingdom agenda that, at the end of Scripture, involves our not only serving God, but also ruling with Him. This is a God with a purpose.

Central to this purpose, the key to the rescue, is the sacrificial death of God made manifest in human flesh, Jesus Christ. The Crucifixion wasn't a backup plan; it was God's way to achieve His desire for ultimate closeness with *us*, His creation. God's saving work through the promised Messiah can be seen in virtually every book of Hebrew Scripture—in symbols, signs, and stories, and in living parables that God arranged but whose participants could not have known what they were representing. Everything in Scripture points either toward the coming Messiah (Old Testament) or to the risen and living Lord (New Testament). He is the centerpiece of God's story—God Himself stepping personally into the world He created.

But before God, in flesh and blood, steps into human history, He prepares the way over the course of centuries. He works through His people, speaks through His prophets, and lays out pieces of His plan. He calls and cultivates, chastens and refines, and progressively reveals glimpses of His true nature. Over time, He draws all of His people back to Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What first comes to mind when you think of the Old Testament? How important do you think it is to our understanding of the New Testament? Why?



DAY 2

GENESIS 1–3

In a sense, the whole Bible is contained in the book of Genesis. Granted, much of it is veiled—there are only subtle hints of God’s plan of redemption and His ultimate purpose for humanity—but the scope of Scripture is remarkably foreshadowed by the fifty chapters of Genesis. The seeds of every major facet of our faith are planted here. We read of a Creator who was greatly pleased with His original creation; we learn why life is so hard now; we get profound pictures of our own struggles in the lives of the people portrayed; we glimpse the big-picture plan of a God who has the whole world on His heart and a particular people in His strategy; we take comfort in the fact that God works through people of enormous dysfunction to accomplish His purposes; we see pictures of the One coming to redeem what was lost; we confront the fundamental questions of life.

Genesis gives us answers to those questions—not complete, systematic answers, but answers nonetheless. Whereas some religions view cosmic history as a never ending cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and the nonreligious view it as purely a material existence, the Bible tells us that human life has a supernatural beginning, progresses in a linear fashion, and will reach a fulfilling climax that lasts for eternity. There is purpose and direction in this

story. Our nagging questions—“Why are we here?” “What is the meaning of it all?” “If there is a God, what is He like?”—are all dealt with coherently. Genesis is the Rosetta stone of the human experience, the key that cracks the code on all the big questions. We still have some interpreting to do, and many details will be filled in later, but the template is there.

It begins with a voice—God’s voice speaking into the dark nothingness and creating a vast universe that includes at least one small planet teeming with life. Like an artist’s brush, the voice paints light and shadows, colors and continents and seas, plant life and animal life, and the right environment for life to thrive. Then, to form the crowning piece of creation, He breathes life into dust and puts His own image into human beings. At every stage of creation, the artist is pleased with His work. It is good—until He sees that the man is alone. That isn’t good. So He creates a companion, another bearer of the image. Now, as male and female together, they reflect the strength and beauty, the power and grace, the conquering and nurturing aspects of God’s own character. Human beings are told to fill the earth with plenty of offspring—more pictures of God’s image—and to tame the wildness of the world. In other words, the beauty and order of Eden is meant to spread.

But instead of the goodness of the Garden spreading outward into the world, the chaos of rebellion wells up in the form of a deceptive serpent. The tempter casts shadows on God’s goodness. Perhaps the good Creator is holding out on His image-bearers. Are they really like Him? Not if they don’t have His knowledge, the serpent suggests. Not if He put really good-looking fruit right in front of them and told them not to eat it. Not if His words can be twisted enough to make it seem as if He is keeping secrets that would be good for them to know.

So they eat—first the woman, then the man. And the serpent was right. They know things. They see the distinction between good and evil. Now they can judge right and wrong, each other,

and even God. History will now be filled with accusations against God's goodness, all because the image-bearers fell for a lie, invited evil into their own lives, and then turned their newfound ability to judge back at Him. Never mind that their perspective is limited; the world is broken, and they know it. And for generations to come, the bearers of a now-distorted image will wrestle with each other, the world, and the God who created it for allowing the pain and suffering that is now a part of their existence.

Even so, God has a plan. If we read closely enough, we sense that His reaction to the Fall is premeditated, that His plan was already in place. We're told much later in Scripture that the Lamb had been slain from the foundation of the world; the sacrifice for our rebellion was an eternal fact before our rebellion even happened. Just as God knows all our mistakes before we make them and weaves them into His purposes, He knew that this is how His world would turn, and He had already made provision. The rest of Scripture is the story of how that provision unfolds.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How did God demonstrate in Genesis that He had already planned a solution for humanity's fall? Do you think God already has solutions for the crises we face today? Why or why not?



DAY 3

GENESIS 4–11

The pages of Scripture between the Fall and the story of Abraham are few, but they cover thousands of years of human history. Life outside of Eden isn't pretty—brother kills brother; an entire

generation becomes so evil that God feels compelled to wipe it out, except for a man named Noah and his family; another curse immediately follows the rescue in the ark, as one of Noah's sons exposes the shame of his father; and a prideful people on the plains of Shinar, one day to be known as Babylon, come together to make a name for themselves and ascend to godly heights. Their tower project is abandoned when God scrambles their languages. Babel becomes a symbol of the futility of human effort, the place where self-exalting plans are foiled. By God's design, history is filled with such frustrations. There is no way to get to God or solve our problems on our own.

We tend to think of the Bible primarily in terms of how it relates to us: what it tells us about ourselves, what it commands us to do, and so on. But it is first and foremost a revelation of God. Think of what God shows us about Himself in just the first eleven chapters of Genesis—primeval history from the moment of creation to God's choice of Abraham as a father of nations. God has incomprehensible power; His spoken words can create entire worlds. He takes great satisfaction in His works—every “it was good” in the Creation story makes that clear. He gets angry over evil and grieves its effects—the fiasco in the Garden of Eden and the events leading up to the Flood show us that. He gives us a sense of His “otherness” in the Creation story and in the fact that He has to “come down” to Babel to see humanity's highest accomplishment. And we see His foresight and His mercy in the fact that He has a redemption plan ready even before His image-bearers distort the image through the Fall. Even before evil's earliest intrusion into His creation, God demonstrates His relentless love. His nature breathes from the pages of this first book of Scripture.

We also learn a lot about ourselves from these first eleven chapters. We know, for example, that we are created in God's own image. In other words, we are uniquely designed to be able to relate

to God intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. We can connect with Him at the deepest levels of relationship. Why? Because God apparently wants to share who He is with creatures who can not only appreciate Him—angels can do that, too, to a degree—but also engage with Him in some semblance of a give-and-take dynamic.

We also know that this image was somehow fractured and damaged by human rebellion. Some aspect of our connection with God has been lost, and without it we sink deeper and deeper into skewed perceptions, twisted thoughts, misplaced emotions, and unseemly actions—all driven by a self-centered focus rather than a focus on God.

The result is that we forget the mission humanity was given in the Garden—to fill the earth and subdue it, to spread God’s garden outward, to exercise dominion over a world that was once “formless and void”—and we begin pursuing our own agendas and missions. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has given us heavy doses of independence; that’s always a by-product of having confidence in our own knowledge. Carried away as wanderers and estranged from God, we subject ourselves to His opposition, not because He opposes *us*, but because He opposes the direction we have taken. He judges with a flood because of humanity’s thorough corruption. He scatters at Babel because of humanity’s attempt to unite and build a monument under the banner of self-made religion. In the first few chapters of Genesis, creation is clearly not fulfilling its purpose. Yet.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

In what ways does Genesis 4–11 reflect the truth of Romans 8:20-21?



GENESIS 12–24

When primeval history gives way to particular history in Genesis 12, God's story gets much more personal. He chooses a single man named Abraham, makes a covenant with him, and begins to separate people for Himself. This relationship, as well as all relationships with God that follow, becomes the stage for revealing what God is like. Through Abraham, God shows us what it means to hear and know Him, implying that this kind of closeness is open to anyone who seeks it. The patriarchs are clear evidence that God designed human beings for relationship; Abraham becomes a case study in how to become God's friend.

But it's an odd friendship at first. Abraham's story begins with his wife's barrenness and his family's wandering. These are cold contradictions to the original design—fruitfulness and a garden to live in—but they make a perfect environment for a God who wants to restore His people to their design by making promises about descendants and land. How better to show His purposes and power than to take a man with no children and promise innumerable offspring, or to call a drifting nomad into a land to be passed on from generation to generation? God delights in turning contradictions into miraculous fulfillments of His plan.

This is how God works, as we discover throughout history—biblical history and our own personal stories. He steps into our crises and makes them the platform for His displays of character and power. We have needs, He makes promises, and then He fulfills them—sometimes after long and excruciating delays in which our faith stretches and strengthens. Growing in faith and in our relationships with God is a process, and rarely a comfortable one.

If we learn anything from the patriarchs in Genesis, it's that being chosen by God is full of both *pain* and *promise*.

For Abraham and Sarah, the interplay between pain and promise lasts for the twenty-five years they wait for a son, with lots of questions and missteps along the way—Abraham fails to defend his wife, fathers a son with Sarah's servant, doesn't exactly honor the biological mother of that first child, suggests alternative solutions to God's promise, and laughs when the promise is reaffirmed. Nevertheless, the New Testament commends his faith and tells us he did not waver. When the child of the promise is a young man, Abraham's belief in God's faithfulness must endure the ultimate test—a sacrifice of the only visible means for the promises to be fulfilled: his son Isaac. God appears at times in Abraham's story to be a cruel tease—a promiser who doesn't follow through or a giver who takes His gifts back—yet He makes it clear that He rewards those who believe Him persistently and in spite of appearances. He looks for those who insist on trusting Him even when His will seems to make no sense. Though God certainly knows the story He is writing, Abraham cannot understand the significance of the drama as he offers Isaac—the graphic picture of a Father offering His Son as a sacrifice on a cross centuries later. Still, Abraham's faith has grown to the point of implicit obedience, the kind of obedience that we admire in retrospect but would have condemned in the moment. Surely, a man of faith would realize that God's voice would never order such a brutal act. But it *is* God's voice, and Abraham complies. He sees beyond the visible. Eternal kingdoms are built on such faith.

Sarah, too, is later commended in Scripture for her faith, even though she has as many struggles with the promise as Abraham does. Like Abraham, she laughs at the promise when it's resurrected after years of waiting and then denies to God Himself that she laughed. God's response—"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"—becomes a foundational issue for all people of faith. Of

course nothing is too hard for Him. He can meet the needs of a servant named Hagar as she tries to survive exile in the desert with Abraham’s “plan B” son. He can protect Sarah even when Abraham doesn’t. He can work our worst mistakes into His plans. He can judge rebellious cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah and still show grace in the midst of the judgment. He sets Himself up for miracles to come—in the formation of the Jewish nation, in the centuries of preparation for the coming of the Messiah, and in our lives today.

Is anything too hard for God? This is the issue we all must settle in our hearts. Are we willing to trust God’s promises and wait for Him to fulfill them? God’s story with His people begins with hope, promises, and faith and continues with those same themes today. Even now, we experience the hope of His promises to the degree that we embrace them.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

In what ways do you relate to Abraham and Sarah’s long wait for a fulfilled promise? What temptations did they face in the process? What similar temptations have you faced, and how have you overcome them?



GENESIS 25–36

We see the pain and promise of being chosen not only in Abraham but also in his grandson Jacob. Jacob wrestles with God one night—or for most of his life, depending on how we read his story—and lives to tell about it. In fact, he prevails against God,

persevering to the point that the divine wrestler “s[ees] that he could not overpower him” (Genesis 32:25, NIV). That merits not a rebuke, as our religious instincts would expect, but an honorable name change and the founding of a nation by that name. God births Israel in that encounter. This God of relationship apparently invites wrestling from those made in His image and lowers Himself into a genuine give-and-take connection with them. It’s true that He requires faith, but He also provokes questions and honors those bold enough to struggle with Him. A God who created people simply for a master/servant relationship would never tolerate such a thing. A God who created people for intimacy would. That’s the kind of God we see from the earliest pages of Scripture.

Jacob’s story begins the same way his grandparents’ story began—with barrenness. His mother, Rebekah, can’t conceive. For some reason, barrenness is a significant theme in Scripture. God gave Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth, and other women the children they desired, but only after many long, painful years of waiting. It’s a picture of the circumstances we all face, whether for ourselves (the dreams and desires we long to have fulfilled), for our families and churches (the mission and purpose God has given us), or for our world (the redemption of this broken, groaning creation). God is a master of bringing hope out of hopelessness, fruitfulness out of barrenness, fulfillment out of impossibilities, and even life out of death. Eventually, Isaac and Rebekah are blessed with twins, who seem to battle for primacy even before birth. Esau is born first, but barely, with Jacob grabbing his brother’s heel on the way out of the womb.

The competition continues for years. Jacob finagles the birth-right from his slightly older brother, who gives it up far too willingly. When the time comes for Isaac to give his sons the family blessing, Jacob and his mother deceive Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing intended for Esau. This leads to Jacob’s flight—ostensibly to find a wife from the old “home” country, but really to rescue his

life from the violent tendencies of his enraged brother. It is in the midst of such uncertainty, passion, conflict, and guilt that Jacob encounters God. He has a dream, a nighttime vision of a stairway between heaven and earth with angels going up and down. Above this stairway, God Himself reiterates Abraham's covenant to Jacob, the one who will now carry it forward. To Jacob, the place of meeting had just been a place to lay his head for the night. But God was there. Jacob names the place *Bethel*, which means "the house of God," and God's holy presence there prompts a very conditional vow: *If* God will protect Jacob and bring him safely back to the land one day, then Jacob will be loyal to God. As tentative as this promise is, it's the first significant step on an even more momentous spiritual journey that will shape salvation history forever.

That's what significant spiritual steps do. They shape history. Jacob could not have known that journey would lead to the love of his life, a bride named Rachel, and that marrying her would bring him face-to-face with the same kind of deception he had inflicted on his father. His mother's brother, who was also becoming his father-in-law, switched brides before the ceremony, and in a culture in which women often remained veiled, Jacob didn't realize until morning that he had married Rachel's sister, Leah. He also could not have known that this injustice, which resulted in his having two wives—he married Rachel the next week after agreeing to another seven years of labor—would lead to twelve sons who would form the identity of the nation of Israel, the name given to Jacob after his wrestling match with God. At times, his personal life was a mess. But his journey had an everlasting purpose.

Through enormous family dysfunction—we read of rape and retribution and hostile rivalries—God shapes the story for His purposes. We don't know how He does that, but it's extremely comforting because we all, to some degree, have dysfunctional families. If God can speak into the chaos of the patriarchal family and bring meaningful design, just as He spoke into the chaos of

Genesis and brought forth a world teeming with life and beauty, He can speak into our lives with the same purpose and the same result. Even a life filled with missteps and mistakes can be a vital part of God's plan.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

In what ways do you relate to Jacob's wrestling match with God? Why do you think God invites us to interact with Him like that? In what ways does it encourage you that God's chosen people in Genesis were at times examples of extreme dysfunction? How does this challenge modern perceptions of the kinds of people God chooses to work through?



GENESIS 37–50

Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son and also his favorite, is one of the few people in Scripture with a sterling reputation throughout his story, yet he endures some of the most difficult circumstances of any biblical character. He has God-given dreams that offend everyone around him, as God-given dreams often do. He's betrayed by his own family, sold into slavery, slandered into an unjust prison sentence, and seemingly forgotten in captivity—and God lets it all unfold without stepping in to vindicate him. Joseph is left to wonder whether God is really good and in charge. For some time, God keeps him in limbo, and we are given no glimpses of the questions Joseph must have had.

But God continues to favor him, even in oppressive circumstances, and He vindicates him in the end. Joseph gets revelation from God that provides a practical solution for real-life society—Egypt’s society, in fact. This region-wide blessing of provision reveals that God’s interest in and love for nations extends well beyond Israel. Joseph comes through this lengthy, painful process with grand statements of God’s sovereignty over even the worst evils and human errors.

As with Abraham and Isaac, God uses Joseph to paint a dramatic picture of another descendant of Jacob’s, who would come centuries later. This favored Son would also make extravagant but offensive claims that would provoke violent reactions from many of Jacob’s offspring. He would be considered dead by the family of Israel, but later found to be alive. In the meantime, He would become a blessing to Gentiles and eventually be recognized by the tribes of Jacob. For all eternity, He would faithfully represent God’s goodness and express God’s revelation for everyone to see.

We see ourselves in the characters of Scripture—many besides Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, but especially these three. We relate to their struggles of faith, their problems and pain, and perhaps even the enormous dysfunction of their families. We take comfort in the fact that God works through people like these. We look to them as examples of how to hold on to promises; how to follow God without knowing where we’re going; how to cling to the belief that God is good even when circumstances suggest otherwise; how to surrender to God’s will when He makes it clear; and how to wrestle with His will when He doesn’t. These stories become epic, life-altering sagas for us.

In Genesis, God crafts thousands of years of real-life experiences that display who He is and what He intends for His people. Genesis contains a wealth of spiritual truths and fascinating pictures of the coming Messiah—the One who will crush the serpent’s head, who appears to Abraham as a mysterious priest of

peace and righteousness named Melchizedek, who submits to His Father's sacrificial offering like Isaac did, and who is betrayed by His brothers and will reconcile with them after He blesses other nations. At its most fundamental level, Genesis teaches us that God is zealous for His broken creation, that He desires a relationship with His people, and that the condition for that relationship is, above all else, faith.

When life gets tough, we need to remember that pain and hardship can be explained by the debacle in Eden. But the story doesn't end there, though many people act as if it does. Genesis tells us that history and our own lives are going somewhere and that faith is the key to getting in on the plan. Yes, we have to wrestle with the serpent's question every day: *Is God really good?* We don't deal with temptations about eating from the wrong tree, at least not literally. But the temptation to doubt God replays again and again in our daily lives. We ask God whether He is holding out on us or not, whether He's looking out for us or we're left to look out for ourselves. And we should know the answers to those questions. When in doubt, we can look to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and the other faith figures in Genesis for examples of how to apply those answers to our lives. They prove it: Yes, God is good. No, He isn't holding out on us. Yes, He's in charge and working all things together for good. And yes, there's a plan. And it's only just beginning.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

In what ways do you relate to Joseph's trials? How do you respond to being treated unfairly? How easily do you express forgiveness? How does knowing that God is ultimately in charge of your life make it easier to forgive others and trust Him in the midst of difficult circumstances?