

## **Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It**

### *The Story – Chapter 1; Genesis 1 - 9*

Personal Study Guide

September 6-12, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

#### **Day One**

1. The opening verses of the Bible (page 1) make the powerful point that nature is in fact not "natural." The cosmos exists because Someone willed it to exist. Furthermore, only humans are made in God's image. (They have traits like personality, will, responsibility, etc.) In light of these profound truths, what difference does it make to you to know you were "created" and have "His image?"
2. The Bible first spoke to people in an ancient culture (like the Canaanites and Egyptians) who thought the sun and the moon were gods. What observations can you make about how radical "a creator of all and over all" must have seemed? How does this truth affect your view of nature?

#### **Day Two**

1. The serpent tempts Eve (page 5) by first distorting God's words, making Him seem stingy. He then calls God a liar ("you will not certainly die"), and convinces Eve that God is withholding some really good thing from them ("your eyes will be opened"), calling into question God's generosity. What comparison can you make to this strategy and how the Devil tempts you now?
2. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. How have you hidden from God recently?

#### **Day Three**

1. God makes garments from animal skins to clothe the man and woman (page 6). What comparisons can you make to that act and to the provision God makes to "cover" our sin through Jesus Christ?
2. People often wish God would do away with all evil. The truth is the line between good and evil runs through every human heart — we are all part of the problem. What lessons do you think God wants us to take away from this story of His widespread judgment and Noah's deliverance (page 8)?

## **God Builds A Nation**

*The Story – Chapter 2; Genesis 12-13, 15-17, 21-22, 32-33, 35, Rom. 4, Heb. 11*

Personal Study Guide

September 13-19, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. When God gives His first promised blessing to Abram (page 13), who else does He say will ultimately be blessed through him? How is that universal blessing fulfilled in Jesus Christ (the Seed of Abraham—see Galatians 3:16, 19)?
2. Abram's trust in God's promise (page 15) was "credited to him as righteousness." How is salvation through Jesus a similar "righteousness through faith?" (See Romans 4:1–5, 9–25; Galatians 3:29.)

### **Day Two**

1. Abraham had to wait 25 years for the promised son, Isaac (page 18). What is a long wait God has allowed, or is allowing, you to endure? What helps you keep your faith?
2. After waiting so long for Isaac, Abraham was asked to give him back to God (page 19). In what sense do we possess—but not possess—what God graciously gives us?

### **Day Three**

1. Jacob's name change was significant (pages 23 and 25) because "Deceiver" was now "God-wrestler." Though we may not have new names, how is the new nature we receive from Christ similar to Jacob's "rebirth" experience? (See also Isaiah 62:2 and Revelation 2:17.)
2. Part of God's work to reshape Jacob's character was to reconcile him to his brother, Esau (page 22). In the same way, God wants us to be at peace in our relational world (Romans 12:18 and Matthew 5:43–47). Where does God want you to make peace? What is the next step you can take this week?

**Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh**  
*The Story – Chapter 3; Genesis 37, 39, 41-48,50*  
Personal Study Guide  
September 20-26, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

**Day One**

1. Joseph had dreams of his own greatness (page 26 summary and page 28). Do you think Joseph was at all responsible for the animosity his brothers felt toward him? Why or why not?
2. Potiphar's household, a jail (page 32), and ultimately all of Egypt (page 33) were better off because of Joseph's willingness to be God's servant wherever he found himself. How do you bring God's blessing where you live and work? What is a way you could be even more of God's servant?

**Day Two**

1. Joseph had to take extreme measures to avoid sinning with Potiphar's wife (page 31). Have you ever done something for the sake of purity or justice that only God understood? Is there something like that you need to do now?
2. Anticipating the famine, God provided for the people of Egypt by commanding restraint in their consumption and storing up for the future (pages 33). What principles can you extract for how God might be directing you to prepare for your future?

**Day Three**

1. Joseph had every reason to be bitter, yet he did not take vengeance (page 39). What beliefs helped Joseph not lash out at his brothers (page 40)? How can Joseph's story help you show grace?
2. Joseph's family found they could live contentedly with God in a foreign land even though they'd been promised something else (page 40). What analogies can you make to our lives today?

## **Deliverance**

### *The Story – Chapter 4; Exodus 1-7; 10-17*

Personal Study Guide

September 27 - October 3, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

#### **Day One**

1. Moses' parents faced a dilemma: obey Pharaoh and allow their child to perish, or hide their son and possibly incur the punishment of Pharaoh (page 44). Imagine yourself in their situation. What would you have done and why?
2. Moses' mother "technically" obeyed the command to cast her son into the Nile (page 44), though her real intent was to give God an opportunity to deliver him. What difficult problem are you facing right now? Make a short list of things you could or should do, and another list of things you have to completely leave up to God. Pray about both lists, and then identify which action point should be your next step.

#### **Day Two**

1. The injustice Moses saw needed correction (page 44) but Moses' solution—murder—was criminal. What injustice around you angers you so much you might be tempted to do what is wrong to make it right? What is an alternative action that would still make a difference, but not compromise your integrity?
2. Moses doubted his ability to complete the assignment God gave him (page 46 - 47), so God reminded Moses of the capacities He had built right into him. What would you say are the main gifts and abilities God wants you to use for His work? How might you use those gifts and abilities this week—maybe even in ways that scare you some?

#### **Day Three**

1. The Egyptian magicians counterfeited some of the extraordinary acts of God (page 49). What do you believe are spiritual counterfeit experiences happening these days? How do you think Christians can be taken in, even by other Christians? How can you be discerning without becoming judgmental or cynical?
2. Newfound freedom brought hardships (pages 54-55) and the Israelites were selective in what they chose to remember about their life in Egypt (page 55). What are some of the challenges "freedom" (being a Christ-follower) brings to you? In what ways does the "old life in Egypt" (your pre-Christian life or the life seekers live) seem better than what you have now? What lie(s) trip you up and make that seem plausible?

## **New Commands and a New Covenant**

*The Story – Chapter 5; Exodus 19-20; 24-25; 32-34; 40*

Personal Study Guide

October 4-10, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Why do you think God went “over the top” with His frightening display of power at Mount Sinai (page 60)? One of the reasons God gave for showing such power was to help keep people from sinning. How much does experiencing God's tremendous power keep you from sinning? What else has God said or done that helps you resist sin?
2. How does each of the Ten Commandments (page 61-62) show something of who God is by what it prohibits? Which one seems especially appropriate for you to keep in mind as you head into this week?

### **Day Two**

1. Most of us would not be tempted to melt down our possessions, like the Israelites did, into a god we would then worship (page 64). But do you ever let your possessions control you? How do you sometimes allow things you own to interfere with your supreme affection for, and obedience to, God?
2. Note that Aaron constructed an altar in front of the calf idol (page 64) and spoke of having a festival to the Lord—as if to justify the idea that as long as we include the true God, we can have other gods, too. What might be a modern parallel to this kind of spiritual dishonesty? How can you protect yourself from such self-deception?

### **Day Three**

1. The text says God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (page 67). Jesus once told His disciples they were His “friends” (John 15:15). Why do you suppose that what God wants most from us is friendship (even though we keep sinning)? What stands in the way of you becoming a better friend to God?
2. God expressed His commitment to Moses as leader of the Israelites in warm terms: He said His “presence will go with” Moses, He was “pleased” with him, and He knew Moses “by name” (page 67). Write a brief note as if from God expressing those same ideas with your name as the one He is addressing.

## **Wandering**

*The Story – Chapter 6; Num. 10-14; 20-21; 25;27 Deut. 1-2; 4; 6; 8-9; 29-34*

Personal Study Guide

October 11-17, 2021

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. God was angry with Israel because they rejected Him and were longing for the very slavery from which He delivered them (page 71). What parallels can you make to how, in times of pain, you have been tempted to reject God and consider going back to your "Egypt?"
2. Leaders are subject to correction like anyone else, but when Miriam and Aaron had a problem with Moses, it turned out to be an issue of their pride, not his character (page 73). What lessons can you take away from Moses' example for leadership, humility, and dealing with opposition?

### **Day Two**

1. When Joshua and Caleb gave their report about the land of Canaan, they spoke of both the opportunities and the dangers there. The other 10 spies had a more one-sided take (page 75). Why do you think the spies' view of themselves had such an impact on the action they recommended? How do you see that same dynamic operating in your own experience?
2. God's discipline of the nation's unbelief was severe (page 76-77), but justified; Moses' angry outburst also had dire consequences (page 79). While they didn't lose God, they lost the opportunity to enter the Promised Land. What opportunities have you lost through sin that you can never get back?

### **Day Three**

1. Why did God caution His people about why He was establishing them in the land of Canaan (page 86)?
2. In Moses' final speech (page 87), he spoke of the free choice God gave the Israelites to obey Him and reap the benefits—or to disobey Him and reap the consequences. What parallels can you make to the opportunities and warnings God offers you?

## **The Battle Begins**

*The Story – Chapter 7; Joshua 1-2; 6; 8; 10-11; 23-24*

Personal Study Guide

October 18-24, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. God gave Joshua very specific instructions (page 89) about keeping the “Book of the Law” (Genesis–Deuteronomy). How would you put in your own words God’s instructions to Joshua? What promises accompanied God’s command?
2. Knowing that God is everywhere at all times, what did God mean when He told Joshua, “[I] will be with you wherever you go” (page 89)? Consider keeping that thought before you for a whole day. You might wear a rubber band as a reminder, or write “I am with you” and keep it in a prominent place. Before bed, jot down all the ways you noticed God’s presence throughout the day.

### **Day Two**

1. When Rahab described the mighty acts of God, she concluded, “the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below” (page 91). Given that culture’s prevailing belief that gods were territorial and mostly personal (“my god versus your god”) what is the significance of Rahab’s statement? How might unbelievers misunderstand the phrase “my God” when used by Christians?
2. In addition to its impressive walls, Jericho’s gates were “securely barred” (page 92). Yet God told Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands....” What is a “securely barred gate” in your life that God wants to break down? What simple step could you take today that shows you trust Him to do that?

### **Day Three**

1. At the end of his life, Joshua reminded the Israelites, “not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed” (page 100). What are three good promises God has given you—from Scripture—that you are counting on? How is your life different because you are trusting Him to fulfill those promises?
2. Before Joshua died, he challenged the people to choose between the gods everybody around them served and the One True God. What “gods” (for example, skewed values, prejudices, or priorities) from your family or the surrounding culture pull you away from wholehearted devotion to God? What would “throwing away” those idols look like for you?

**A Few Good Men ... and Women**  
*The Story – Chapter 8; Judges 2-4; 6-8; 13-16*  
Personal Study Guide  
October 25-31, 2021

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

**Day One**

1. This era of Israel's history was full of sin and darkness (pages 103). The sin most commonly committed was idolatry, which almost always included sexual promiscuity as "worship." What comparisons can you make to how sex was misused in that culture and in our own today? How can sex and/or romantic attention—good gifts from God when properly expressed—turn into idols for you?
2. God chose to withhold His protection as a way to discipline and test the Israelites (page 103-104). While that action may seem harsh, God's intention was to bring them back to walking in His ways. How has God done a similar thing in your life when you (or someone you know) were engaged in a sinful pattern? What lessons did you take away from that experience?

**Day Two**

1. One of the bright spots in this era was the life of Deborah (page 105). Knowing it was primarily a patriarchal society, what might God have been teaching people about His ideal plan for men, women and leadership?
2. Another bright spot was Gideon. God deliberately chose a "nobody" from an unlikely family to lead the people. God then trimmed Gideon's army from 32,000 men to 300. What reason did God give for doing so (page 109)? In light of God's explanation, what is the difference between knowing and using your gifts versus boasting about or relying on them?

**Day Three**

1. Samson's physical strength was obvious, but how was he morally weak (pages 112-117)? What cautions from his life story can you take away for yourself?
2. The women in Samson's life, like Samson himself, were mostly bad examples. The Bible teaches by showing both negatives to be avoided and positives to be emulated. What lessons about being a woman of God can you draw from the text?

## **The Faith Of A Foreign Women**

### *The Story – Chapter 9; Ruth 1-4*

Personal Study Guide

November 1-7, 2021

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

#### **Day One**

1. The chapter begins with a famine (page 121). God clearly is able to use even tragic circumstances in the unfolding of His grand plan, as He did with a previous famine (chapter 3). Have you experienced any tragic circumstances that you can now see were part of God's bigger plan?
2. Naomi lost her husband and sons, and Ruth never knew how important to God's plan her descendants would be. Is there a circumstance in your life that you must accept without seeing how it is part of a bigger plan? What helps you trust God?

#### **Day Two**

1. Ruth's tender words of commitment (page 122) have often been used at weddings because they so closely parallel the ideals of marriage. What about Ruth's pledge do you see as commendable? How can we order our relational world so people experience the blessing of this kind of stability?
2. Gleaning allowed the poor to follow behind harvesters and, through their own hard work, be sustained. As you consider this God-ordained practice, what observations can you make about God's heart toward the poor (note the preservation of dignity) and the values being instilled in the wealthy?

#### **Day Three**

1. Boaz was impressed with Ruth's faith in God and her commitment to her mother-in-law. He commended her to be rewarded by the God "under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (page 123). What has "refuge under God's wings" looked like in your life? How are you in need of His covering right now? Ask God to bless you as you come under His care.
2. In the women's blessing of Obed (page 127), the "fame" that they asked for eventually came in Obed's offspring, Jesus. Perhaps a principle from this text is that we should not sow blessings sparingly, because we never know how far they will go. Who needs a blessing from you today? Don't wait—write a note or make the call.

## **Standing Tall, Falling Hard**

*The Story – Chapter 10; 1 Samuel 1-4, 8-13, 15*

Personal Study Guide

November 8-14, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Young Samuel heard the voice of God, but didn't know it was God speaking to him (page 132). Sometimes we might have a thought, yet not realize that God actually put in our mind. Describe a recent prompting you believe came from God. How do you know it was from Him—or if you're not sure, what additional confirmation do you need? If you rarely receive promptings, what do you think might help them occur more frequently?
2. Samuel received hard words to relay from God, and Eli had to swallow his pride to hear them (page 132). When God calls you to say hard things, how do you do? When someone brings hard words to you, how do you receive them? What can you do to be a braver speaker of hard words— and a humbler receiver of them?

### **Day Two**

1. The people wanted a king even though God didn't want them to have one. What contributed to that desire (pages 135-136)? What can we learn from their motives, both good and bad?
2. One lesson we can take away from the Israelites' yearning for a king is that God doesn't necessarily deny His people their wrongful desires—and persisting in what we know is harmful may lead to terrible consequences. What parallels can you make to choices and consequences in your own life?

### **Day Three**

1. Through Samuel, God gave the people instruction on what to do once they recognized their sinful choice to have a king (page 140-141). Which of God's directives can we follow when we sin? What did God promise His people (and by extension, us) even though they disobeyed?
2. Saul's actions in sparing Agag and the spoil from the battle (page 143) may at first seem compassionate. But it is clear Saul's pattern was "selective obedience." What are some ways you are tempted toward external compliance but not whole-hearted obedience? What do you stand to lose if that doesn't change?

## **From Shepherd To King**

*The Story – Chapter 11; 1 Sam. 16-18, 24, 31; 2 Sam. 6, 22; 1 Chron. 17; Ps. 59*

Personal Study Guide

November 22-28, 2021

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. The text says God looks at the heart, not outward appearance, when He evaluates people (page 145). What are some ways you have been duped by externals when it comes to people's character? Why do you think we so easily focus on external appearances rather than internal character strengths?
2. David could face Goliath because of the confidence he'd developed facing other life-threatening challenges with God's help (page 148-149). Those two things together—real-life experience and confidence in God—are powerful developmental tools. What challenge is in front of you today that your experience coupled with God's support will enable you to face? What doubts or fears still need to be addressed?

### **Day Two**

1. Saul was jealous not just of David's successes, but also of how the people felt toward him (page 151). How do you think a godly leader should act when a subordinate succeeds? How can you be more like that ideal and less like Saul in your leadership roles?
2. By not taking advantage of the opportunity to kill Saul, David illustrated an important spiritual principle about the surprising power of non-violence (page 153; compare with Romans 12:20-21). How can you be a better example of using this power? In what ways do you doubt that non-violence is really effective?

### **Day Three**

1. David was willing to appear "undignified" (page 157-158) if it meant choosing God's pleasure over what people thought of him. Some have compared water Baptism in our day as a similar "undignified" act that shows our love and appreciation to God. What other examples can you think of? Can this ever be taken too far? Explain.
2. David was overwhelmed at God's goodness toward him personally, and amazed at how God blessed the whole nation (page 160). How does David acknowledge that God's blessing of him/the nation is not just about him/them exclusively? What caution would you add to make sure these words are not misused to promote a smug, spiritual-superiority complex?

## **The Trials Of A King**

*The Story – Chapter 12; 2 Sam. 11-12, 18-19; 1 Chron. 22, 29; Ps. 23, 32, 51*

Personal Study Guide

November 29 - December 5, 2021

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. David's sin with Bathsheba (page 161) didn't begin in bed; sex was merely the culmination of a series of bad choices:
  - David was not leading the army [avoided responsibility]
  - Was on the roof late at night [vulnerable to sin (hungry/angry/lonely/tired)]
  - Sought out Bathsheba after accidentally seeing her [acted on temptation]
  - Sent for her [made sin "easy"]
  - Committed adultery, then tried to use Uriah [chose cover-up over confession]
  - Arranged for Uriah to be killed [made another person suffer rather than face consequences]

Think about which pattern(s) you are susceptible to and what you can do to protect yourself from sin. Then—and this may be very hard for you— share this information with someone you trust.

2. A kind of "poetic justice" followed David's sin. God told him (pages 163) he would reap what he sowed and his sinful consequences would be amplified. Describe how you have seen these two kinds of justice occur. Does it always work out that way? Why or why not?

### **Day Two**

1. David's Psalm of confession (page 163-164; Psalm 51) contains a great model of approaching God when we've sinned. What does David say about repenting, confessing, and being restored?
2. David's other Psalm of confession (page 165-166; Psalm 32) describes the price he paid for his cover up. Contrast the effects of secrecy and hiding with those of being open and honest.

### **Day Three**

1. Although David was "a man after God's own heart," he was also a man of bloodshed, adultery, and failure at parenting. What was God's stern warning, and the reason behind it, to David concerning building the temple (page 170)? What does that say about how God wants us to live?
2. Perhaps David's most famous Psalm is Psalm 23 (page 173). Why do you think it has such a powerful effect on people? Choose one phrase and make it your prayer—or declaration—this week.

## **The King Who Had It All**

*The Story – Chapter 13; 1 Kings 1-8, 10-11; 2 Chron. 5-7; Prov. 1-3, 6, 20-21*

Personal Study Guide

January 3-9, 2022

choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time. Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. What good character qualities do you see in Solomon's request—and the manner in which he made it (page 177)? Jesus once said, "But seek first [God's] kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). How is Solomon's life an example of the truth of Jesus' teaching?
2. What reality about human nature did Solomon seem to understand as he helped discover the real mother of the child (page 178)? How can that understanding help you be "as wise as Solomon" as you go about the activities of this day?

### **Day Two**

1. Solomon's curiosity and knowledge was not just "spiritual" (as some define it) but included plants and vegetation (page 178-179). Knowing that "all truth is God's truth," how can we Christ-followers follow Solomon's approach to learning (and teaching our children) about the world we live in?
2. Solomon had a good business relationship with and a positive influence on King Hiram (page 183). What comparisons can you make to Solomon's interactions with this non-believer and how we ought to conduct ourselves with seekers in our day?

### **Day Three**

1. The queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's fame, wisdom, and relationship with God (page 189) and came to find out more. How is this yet another way in which God's dream of blessing the whole world through Israel is coming to pass? What aspect of your relationship with God is worth holding up for the world to see (see Matthew 5:16)?
2. Scripture sums up Solomon's powerful influence when he was at his best (page 191). What was that influence? When he was at his worst, what did Solomon do (page 191-192)? What is your best influence for God? In what way might God want you to bring your whole heart into alignment with Him?

**A Kingdom Torn In Two**  
*The Story – Chapter 14; 1 Kings 12-16*  
Personal Study Guide  
January 10-16, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

**Day One**

1. King Rehoboam could have received wise counsel to help him rule, but instead made a bad decision (page 194). Why do you think he selected the advisors he eventually followed? What can you learn from Rehoboam's decision?
2. King Jeroboam set up his own religious centers and practices for worship. What was his motivation to do so (page 196)? What comparison can you make to the choices he made and those we might be tempted to make today?

**Day Two**

1. Leadership is a serious responsibility, but Jeroboam cared little for putting the right people in those roles (page 197). Why do you think Jeroboam was so careless? What might have been the people's motivation for wanting those positions?
2. God warned Israel they would become like the pagan nations they refused to drive out and sure enough, Israel engaged in horrific practices (page 199). We are called to avoid the sinful patterns of those around us, yet to love our pagan neighbors and seek their redemption. How are you doing at living a holy life and being loving to those far from God?

**Day Three**

1. King Asa was a reformer and put God's priorities above even family loyalties (pages 200). In what ways is God calling you to put him above a family influence, custom, or loyalty? How can you do that without seeming self-righteous or arrogant?
2. The brief story of Hiel rebuilding Jericho (page 202) is an illustration of the principle outlined in Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." Are you building anything in your life (a relationship, a business, a plan) that God might not be fully endorsing? Knowing it is vain to go forward without God's approval, what do you think is your next step?

## God's Messengers

*The Story – Chapter 15; 1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2, 4, 6; Hosea 4-5, 8-9, 14; Amos 1, 3-5, 9*

Personal Study Guide

January 17-23, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### Day One

1. Elijah's bold question to the people about their divided loyalties (page 204) is worth utilizing in a regular practice of self-examination. Ask yourself and answer as honestly as you can: Where am I wavering in my complete devotion to God? What might happen if you simply cast aside whatever is competing for your full devotion to God?
2. If ever sincerity and intensity could make wrong belief right, the prophets of Baal would qualify for the exemption. But all their devotion to the wrong deity was worthless (page 204). Does it seem fair to you that people who are deeply devoted to the wrong belief system should be held accountable for those errors? Why or why not?

### Day Two

1. Elijah's deep depression right after his amazing spiritual victory on Mount Carmel is striking (page 206). What might explain his dreary outlook? Have you ever had a similar experience of exhaustion and discouragement, even in the midst of a season of great spiritual activity? If so, why do you think that can happen?
2. What do you make of Elijah's experience of God through a "gentle whisper" rather than through a more spectacular natural display (page 207)? Though Elijah felt spiritually alone, what did God tell him to encourage him? What truth might God tell you about how alone you feel at times?

### Day Three

1. The Shunammite woman's complaint to Elijah when her son died is certainly understandable (page 210). How can we keep from getting discouraged when good gifts from God—which are never permanent this side of eternity—are lost?
2. Elijah's spiritual understanding that "those who are with us are more than those who are with [the enemy]" (page 212) is a universal truth applicable to every true child of God at all times (see also Romans 8:31). In what way do you need to be reminded that God has "allies" for your well-being, regardless of how numerous or powerful those are who oppose you?

## **The Beginning Of The End**

*The Story – Chapter 16; 2 Kings 17-19; Isa. 3, 6, 13-14, 49, 53*

Personal Study Guide

January 24-30, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Israel had a sacred trust from God—to be faithful to him for their own sake, and for the benefit of the world. Yet Israel chose idolatry and failed to trust God (pages 219-220). How is our sacred trust as Christ-followers similar to theirs? In what ways do we all pay when someone fails to fulfill that trust?
2. What was Hezekiah's response to the taunts of the Assyrian king (pages 222-223)? Though you likely don't have someone threatening your life, how are the king's taunts similar to things people say or thoughts you have about your own spiritual vulnerability? What response can you imagine God giving you?

### **Day Two**

1. When invited to go on a tough assignment, Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me!" (page 225). How did God strengthen Isaiah for the task? What challenging situation is God calling you to step into? How is he preparing you— perhaps as with Isaiah, through a "touch" and a "truth"?
2. Notice that God's discipline of his people had a purpose, and God reiterated that foreigners would experience some of his blessings (page 227). What "foreigners" might God be asking you to bless through the spiritual riches he has provided you?

### **Day Three**

1. God told Israel, "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (page 228)— a stunning prefiguring of the crucifixion of Jesus, whose hands were definitely scarred out of love. What does it mean to you to have such great love from God?
2. God said, "Those who hope in me will not be disappointed" and "the whole human race" will know that I am "Savior," "Redeemer," and "the Mighty One" (page 229). Despite how mighty God is, disappointments are a part of life. How can we understand God's words without pressing the text to promise what wasn't intended?

## **The Kingdoms' Fall**

*The Story – Chapter 17; 2 Kings 21, 23-25; 2 Chron. 33, 36;  
Jer. 1-2, 4-5, 13, 21; Lam. 1-3, 5; Eze. 1-2, 6-7, 36-37*

Personal Study Guide

January 31 - February 6, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. The terrible story of Manasseh (pages 231-232) makes for depressing reading, yet God wants even the “bad news” in the Bible to be instructive. What stands out for you as a lesson to be learned from Manasseh's life and legacy?
2. Ezekiel's charge was to be faithful in speaking truth even though his audience frightened him (page 236). Jeremiah was to be faithful even though he was young (page 237). What fear do you need to press through so you can be faithful in what God has called you to?

### **Day Two**

1. Jeremiah pointed out two sins committed by the people (page 238-239): they forsook God, who was their living water; then they tried to make their own cisterns—find meaning and purpose apart from God—that didn't really work. How do we today leave God's living water and substitute other things to quench our thirsty souls? What living water from God do you need now?
2. Jeremiah pointed out that people turn their backs on God and seek other gods, and then when times get hard, they run back to God asking him to rescue them (page 238). Why is such behavior not true repentance?

### **Day Three**

1. Imagine having to deliver the message that God would punish his beloved city (page 242). How does this go against an easily made presumption about what having God “for us” might mean? Compare this to Jeremiah saying God's mercies are new every morning (page 244) after the destruction had occurred. What did it mean to have God “for you” if you were living in Jerusalem—or in exile—back then?
2. Ezekiel painted a vivid picture of having a new heart and spirit (page 246). What are the features of this “new life”? What similarities do you see to the New Testament idea of being “born again”?

## **Daniel In Exile**

*The Story – Chapter 18; Daniel 1-3, 6; Jeremiah 29-31*

Personal Study Guide

February 7-13, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Daniel did not expect the officials to take his beliefs about proper diet on faith, but rather told them to do an experiment (page 250). In what way is this similar to how we can present evidence to non-believers about our faith and its claims?
2. Daniel and his friends were outstanding leaders in a totally pagan environment (page 250). How can we believers follow their example in the secular environments in which we find ourselves?

### **Day Two**

1. The three men thrown into the furnace did not know whether or not God would deliver them (page 255), yet they trusted him explicitly with any outcome. How does that compare to your trust level toward God these days? What would help you to have faith like theirs?
2. While the three men were in the furnace, a fourth man appeared with them (page 256). It's obvious this was God's way of visibly being with them. But such manifestations are rare—nothing like that happens again in the book of Daniel, nor is it a common occurrence in biblical history. Knowing that, what is the timeless takeaway for us from this passage?

### **Day Three**

1. Daniel became a loyal subject of the new regime under Darius, and again excelled as an employee in a pagan administration. In particular, we are told he was "trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent" (page 257). How can you increase your reputation for living out those qualities in your work, school, or volunteer environment?
2. One of the more remarkable biblical prophecies in the Old Testament is the prediction that the people will spend 70 years in exile in Babylon (page 261). The passage also speaks to the ways God wants to be with them—not just have them back in the land. What words or phrases can you take to heart as you read what God plans for and promises the people?

## **The Return Home**

*The Story – Chapter 19; Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1, 8*

Personal Study Guide

February 14-20, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. God moved in Cyrus' heart and also in the hearts of many Jews (page 263) to set in motion the Temple rebuilding process. While the text does not say, do you think people typically recognize heart-stirring as God at work? To what extent do you sense God directing your heart in everyday life?
2. Taking the above question one step further, put Philippians 2:13 in your own words: "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Does that make Cyrus, the Jews, and you, robots under God's control? Explain.

### **Day Two**

1. What do you think made the older folks weep at the dedication of the Temple (page 265)? Describe a time when God was at work and yet you wept— what was going on in you?
2. God explained to his people that because of their self-serving agenda, they were not fully experiencing the fruit of their labors (page 266). Psalm 127:1 reinforces this spiritual principle: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." How have you experienced this? How do you explain those times when people seem to prosper in spite of their rejection of God's priorities?

### **Day Three**

1. Haggai's prophecy of a future "shaking" included the promise that "what is desired by all nations" would come to the Temple (page 268). Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy when he came to the Temple during his earthly life. How do you think Jesus is what every nation—not just the Jewish nation—ultimately desires?
2. The prophet Zechariah declared what God wants from his people: two things to do, and two things to not do (page 269). What are those things? Notice they go beyond personal morality and include concern for social justice. Which of these things do you sense God might want you to focus on?

## **The Queen Of Beauty & Courage**

### *The Story – Chapter 20; Esther 1-9*

Personal Study Guide

February 21-27, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

#### **Day One**

1. One unique feature of this chapter (the book of Esther) is it is the only book in the Bible that never mentions the word "God." Yet, God is at work through "coincidences" on almost every page. How have you recently seen God at work through a "coincidence" in your own life? Why do you suppose God doesn't always make his behind-the-scenes activity obvious—especially when there are so many doubters?
2. Esther stood in a place of opportunity at a crucial time in history. Mordecai urged her to recognize her unique position and to not remain silent (page 282) in spite of the risks. What "position" do you hold that God might want to work through?

#### **Day Two**

1. Esther's courageous response to Mordecai's challenge was for her to enter—literally—a life or death situation (pages 282). You probably won't have to say, "If I perish, I perish," but what is at risk for you if God doesn't come through in a challenge you face?
2. Notice the timing of the king's sleeplessness and how it benefited Mordecai at a crucial moment—preventing Haman from killing him (page 283). When have you seen God take circumstances set up against you and make them work for your good?

#### **Day Three**

1. The turn of events in the Jews' favor had a profound effect on non-believers in their vicinity: many converted to Judaism (page 287). This was exactly what God had in mind when he made the promise to Abraham to bless all nations, not just his nation, through him (Genesis 12:3). How are you helping those who don't know God to see him in your life?
2. Although we do not celebrate Purim (page 288-289) in the era of the New Covenant, what events in this story, if called to mind more often, would help you trust God's work in your life?

## **Rebuilding The Walls**

*The Story – Chapter 21; Ezra 7; Neh. 1-2, 4, 6-8; Mal. 1-4*

Personal Study Guide

February 28 - March 6, 2022

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Although Ezra expressed gratitude for the king's honoring of the Jewish Temple (page 294), Artaxerxes was likely also being driven by self-interest. How have you seen God use someone's (or your own) self-interest as a tool to help them move toward a good end, even if their motives were less than pure?
2. Nehemiah took reasonable precautions against the plot to thwart his work on the wall (page 297). He asked for God's help rather than thinking it was all up to him. And he showed restraint by setting up an adequate defense rather than taking a preemptive strike. How can you apply these principles in a situation where you currently feel threatened?

### **Day Two**

1. Ezra and the Levites read from the law and "[gave] the meaning so that the people understood what was being read" (page 300). That is a great parallel to the value of teachers in the body of Christ today. To what extent are you exposing yourself to good teachers who can build you up in your faith?
2. Malachi chastised the people for offering God their lame or diseased animals instead of their best animals (page 302). What is a way you are tempted to offer God something less than your best? What would giving your best to him look like?

### **Day Three**

1. Through the prophet Malachi, God challenged the people's excuses: as in, What good is all your religiosity if you don't even treat your spouse right? (page 302-303). How do you sometimes fail to offer yourself in service to those closest to you—maybe even excusing yourself by means of "church" activities?
2. God knows that following him can be hard. Yet God promises that in due time, a "distinction" will become clear (page 303). Part of what the people did to encourage themselves in this situation was "talk with each other" (page 303), embracing the power of community. How about you? In what ways does following God seem like a chore these days? Or when you look at those without God, how do they seem to have it better? How can your community help you?

## **The Birth of the King**

*The Story – Chapter 22; Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2; John 1*

Personal Study Guide

March 7-13, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Jesus, the Word, is both with God and also identified as God; he is declared to be the One through whom all things in the universe were made (page 309). What implications does this have for the belief that Jesus was a "good man" or perhaps even a prophet—but nothing more? Why do you think the writer wants us to know this profound theological truth as the story of Jesus begins?
2. Some people rejected Jesus and others accepted him (page 309). How would you put the meaning of "believed in his name" into words your non-Christian friends would understand? When people do put their trust in Jesus, what "right" does the Bible say is now theirs? What other advantages come to God's children that those who are not in relationship with him miss out on?

### **Day Two**

1. Jesus' birth was announced to simple shepherds—hardly an impressive audience by any standards. What does this tell you about the heart of God and who he wants to include in his new community?
2. Four fulfilled Old Testament prophecies are mentioned in the story so far: the birth by a virgin (page 310), the birth city of Bethlehem (page 313-314), the time spent in Egypt (page 259), and the weeping of mothers after Herod's slaughter (page 314). Why do you think such details are important for the gospel writer to convey? What difference does fulfilled prophecy make to you as you consider Jesus?

### **Day Three**

1. Though little is known about Jesus' childhood, at a young age Jesus had a clear sense of his heavenly origin, knowing the Temple was also his "Father's house" (page 316). Why do you suppose the writer included this detail in the story?
2. As a child, Jesus lived obediently to his human parents progressing through all the natural stages of growing up (page 316). What is so important about a "fully human" Jesus?

## **Jesus' Ministry Begins**

*The Story – Chapter 23; Matthew 3-4, 11; Mark 1-3; Luke 8; John 1-4*

Personal Study Guide

March 14-20, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance, which simply means “do an about face” (page 321). Perhaps in modern language he might have said, “Come out of your denial and face the truth!” Why is such a turning so important for our spiritual journey? Could someone be in God's Kingdom without that? Explain.
2. Though Jesus responded to Satan's temptations with three different responses, what phrase was common to all three answers (page 322)? How might you use his same technique to fortify yourself against temptations?

### **Day Two**

1. What requirement did Jesus give Nicodemus for seeing and entering the kingdom of God (page 326)? Nicodemus was already a devout person—he believed in God and tried to follow his commandments. But Jesus told him, “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.” Why is being born again the only way to enter eternal life, even for an outwardly “religious” person?
2. Probably the most famous verse in all of Jesus' teaching is found on page 327 and begins, “For God so loved the world.” The “good news” is we can have eternal life through Jesus. What is the “bad news”? Is “belief” in him simply a matter of intellectual agreement with a set of facts, or something else? Explain.

### **Day Three**

1. The religious leaders criticized Jesus for the kind of people he ate with (pages 331). Why might religious convictions lead someone to think they shouldn't hang around with non-believers? Has that ever happened to you? What can you do to show love to someone far from God this week?
2. Among Jesus' closest associates were women—three of whom are named on page 333. Note that these women were not simply followers of Jesus; they helped fund the enterprise. What observations can you make about Jesus' view of women and his willingness to defy accepted gender limitations given his inviting them to travel and serve alongside him?

## **No Ordinary Man**

*The Story – Chapter 24; Matthew 5-7, 9, 14; Mark 4-6; Luke 10,15; John 6*

Personal Study Guide

March 21-27, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. The parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son (page 337-338) are central to Jesus' overall message. What are the common elements in all three parables? In the parable of the lost son, what is the older son's reaction to the returning brother? What kind of attitude do you think Jesus is trying to correct by including this detail?
2. "The Good Samaritan" (page 338) is such a famous story that the term has become part of everyday language. Yet another emphasis is Jesus' indictment of the not-so-good characters. Who would they correspond to in our day? How do you sometimes act like those folks? Who in your world needs you to be a Good Samaritan right now?

### **Day Two**

1. Jesus' model prayer, sometimes called the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father (page 341) is a good outline to use when praying. Yet what does Jesus say just before this prayer that should keep us from rote repetition of it? What are the main themes of this model that you could put into your own words as you pray?
2. Jesus' classic words about worry (page 342) are as counter-cultural today as they were back then. Jesus challenges us to rightly view our bodies, our inherent value, and our God as the antidote to worry. How do wrong views of these things sometimes affect you?

### **Day Three**

1. Jesus once redirected people who sought him out for temporal benefits to "not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life" (page 349). When they asked for clarification of exactly what work God requires, Jesus gave a startling answer. What did he say? Why is this work the foundational "effort" of all Christ followers – without which no other spiritual work really matters?
2. Jesus was not universally popular. After experiencing his power, one group of people begged him to leave (page 344). The Pharisees ridiculed his ministry by accusing him of using demonic powers (page 346). And even some of his close followers eventually turned back and chose not to follow him (page 350). What comparisons can you make to these people and those who dismiss Jesus in our own day? What do you imagine might ever pull you away from following him? What steps can you take to prevent such a tragedy?

## Jesus, The Son of God

*The Story – Chapter 25; Matt. 17, 21; Mark 8-12, 14; Luke 9, 22; John 7-8, 11-12*

Personal Study Guide

March 28 - April 3, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### Day One

1. On page 353, Peter made the most important proclamation of his life: Jesus is the Messiah. Ironically, just after that Jesus rebuked him for saying something foolish. What observations can you make about our human capacity for “getting it” and then “losing it” as seen in Peter's life? Though Jesus sternly corrected him, he didn't reject him. When has Jesus done a similar thing with you?
2. Jesus said it is a bad bargain “to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul” (page 354). What part of the world might you be seeking to gain—or retain—to the peril of your soul? What do you suppose Jesus would say to you about your situation?

### Day Two

1. Notice the misunderstanding of Scripture on the part of those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah (page 355-356). Not only did they not bother to get all the facts about Jesus (his Bethlehem birth), they also ignored parts of Scripture: Galilee was prophetically significant, as Isaiah 9:1 and 6 clearly say, “...in the future [God] will honor Galilee...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” How have you sometimes made a similar mistake in your spiritual pursuits: either not getting all the facts before making a judgment, or not taking into account the whole of Scripture and thus believing or acting in an unbalanced way?
2. One of Jesus' most intriguing claims about himself came during an argument with some Jewish skeptics (page 358). For Jesus to have claimed existence “before Abraham was born” was startling enough. To use the present tense “I am”—a phrase God used when defining himself (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 43:10-13)—was blasphemous. If you had heard Jesus say this, how would you have responded? What convinces you that he was not blaspheming?

### Day Three

1. After his friend Lazarus died, Jesus demonstrated his power over death itself (pages 358-360). What claim did Jesus make about himself when he spoke with Martha on the way to her home? What question did he immediately ask of her? If he asked you that question, how would you answer, and what does your answer mean in your everyday life?
2. Jesus pointed out that the teachers of the law limited the Messiah's role to being a “son” of David—merely another king over a liberated Israel (pages 364-365). Yet Jesus correctly noted that the Messiah is so exalted in prophetic Scripture the great king David calls him “Lord”—hardly appropriate unless the Messiah is much more than an earthly king. Why do you think Jesus stressed this point to his audience? Why do we need to help folks see this same reality about him in our day?

## **The Hour of Darkness**

*The Story – Chapter 26; Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 22-23; John 13-14, 16-19*

Personal Study Guide

April 4-10, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Jesus' willingness to humble himself, put on the serving towel, and wash the disciples' feet follows the fact that "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" (page 368). Why do you think knowing that affected his serving capacity? What comparisons can you make to Jesus' self-knowledge and the kind of knowledge that can help you be a better servant?
2. Jesus spoke of being "the way and the truth and the life" (page 370). How would you put that claim into your own words? Jesus followed that up by saying we can't come to the Father unless we go through him. If God's heart for those far from him is so big, what explains this apparent narrow road of return?

### **Day Two**

1. Jesus warned us that even though we are his followers, "in this world you will have trouble" (page 371). Why become a follower of Jesus if he doesn't always make things in this world better for us? How does his example of willingness to die in service to others help us through our own hard times?
2. Jesus combined an understandable desire not to suffer with a readiness to do whatever the Father willed (page 372). How does this illustrate both his humanity and his divinity? What from Jesus' example can we take away as guidance for our own prayer life?

### **Day Three**

1. How is Barabbas' release—the guilty one freed as the innocent Jesus was condemned instead (page 376)—a metaphor for how we are saved? If you were Barabbas, what would you have felt? How close is that to what you actually feel as a rescued sinner?
2. In what ways do the taunts and mocking questions thrown at Jesus on the cross (page 378) parallel how the devil tempted him at the beginning of his ministry? Why was it so important for Jesus to know who he was and not have to "prove" himself in the way they demanded? What knowledge do you think helped him stay strong during that excruciating experience?

## **The Resurrection**

*The Story – Chapter 27; Matt. 27-28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 19-21*

Personal Study Guide

April 11-17, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Jesus' death occurred precisely as predicted by prophetic Scriptures (page 381). What do these details offer us as far as reinforcing the trustworthiness of the Bible? What are some other things you read in the Bible that help you have confidence in its divine origin? What questions still remain for you?
2. The particulars of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem as well as details of his death were well known to all in the area—a fact pointed out by Cleopas and the other disciple with him (page 384). Why do you suppose it was important for God to perform this act in such a public way? Given how widespread knowledge about all this was, how is it possible anyone still refused to become a Christian? How have you seen similar resistance to God in our own day?

### **Day Two**

1. Jesus' resurrected body was a curious blend of physical properties normal to human beings, like being able to eat fish and having flesh and bones (page 385-386), but it also had features unlike our bodies, such as having wounds that did not bleed and being able to go in and out of rooms miraculously (page 385 and 386). How do these realities confirm that it is really Jesus who resurrected, and also teach us that resurrected existence is very different from normal biological life?
2. Jesus explained to his disciples how the Scriptures predicted the details of his life and suffering, and he gave his disciples a gift: "he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (page 385-386). How does he do that for us today? Describe a time recently when you felt God impress the meaning of a Scripture on your heart in this way.

### **Day Three**

1. Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus took place over a charcoal fire; and now, on page 387, he is asked by Jesus to affirm his love three times—also over a charcoal fire. What do you think Jesus is up to in Peter's life by recreating those details?
2. Jesus' final words to the disciples include the phrase "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (page 388). What if he had said, "teaching them everything I have commanded you"? What is the essential difference between those two commands? What is an "obey" issue you are aware of in your life these days?

**New Beginnings**  
*The Story – Chapter 28; Acts 1-10, 12*  
Personal Study Guide  
April 18-24, 2022

Read the chapter from The Story in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. On page 389 Jesus commands his disciples to wait for a "gift". What was that gift and why was it so critical for them to wait in obedience? When and how was this gift given (page 390)? This "baptism in the Holy Spirit" was and still is for the purpose of sharing our faith with others. Who do you need to tell God's good news to this week? Ask the Lord for courage to lovingly share the gospel with those people.
2. Notice how Peter, once cowering in fear of the Jews (see John 20:19), now stands before the crowds, full of the Holy Spirit, preaching the gospel (page 391) and 3,000 put their faith in Christ that day (page 392). Can you see how the power of the Holy Spirit made the difference? In what ways do you need the Holy Spirit's power working in your life today?

### **Day Two**

1. Pages 394-397 record how Peter and John faced early opposition from the established church leaders. How did they endure those early trials? How are you mistreated for your faith in Christ? Will you respond in God-honoring ways to persecution? Take time today to pray for believers around the world who are being harmed for the sake of Christ.
2. Throughout these chapters, we get glimpses of how the young church functioned. What do we learn about "normal Christian living" from the bottom of page 392 and the center paragraph on page 395?

### **Day Three**

1. On pages 399-400 we read the story of Saul's conversion. Reflect on how you came to trust Christ with your life. Are you living in obedience to the call He's placed on your life today?
2. Humility is an important aspect of godly teachers and leaders. What lessons can you draw from the following leaders' words and actions?
  - Peter before Cornelius (page 402)
  - Herod before the people (page 404-405)

## **Paul's Mission**

*The Story – Chapter 29; Acts 13-14, 16-20; Rom. 1, 3-6, 8, 12, 15;  
I Cor. 1, 3, 5-6, 10, 12-13, 15-16; Gal. 1, 3, 5-6, I Thess. 1-5*

Personal Study Guide

April 25 - May 1, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Paul and Barnabas were sent off together to fulfill the Great Commission. What does that say about the power of teamwork? Who are you doing life with that helps you develop in your walk with Christ? What's keeping you from teaming up with others to grow? Who can you encourage to follow Christ in whole-hearted devotion?
2. Lydia is best remembered as the original convert for the gospel in Europe (page 412). She was the first person on record ever to respond to the message of Christ during the apostle Paul's original missionary journey into Europe. Her conversion marked the earliest foothold of the church on a continent that ultimately became the hub of the gospel's witness worldwide. As a Gentile Lydia was giving up what would have been a normal business day to meet together with Jewish women to pray. What does this tell you about the priority that she had placed upon getting to know God better? What priorities in your life are likely to change as you actively seek to know Him better?

### **Day Two**

1. On page 419 Paul mentions the process of sanctification (becoming like Jesus). In what ways are you sensing God's sanctifying work in your life? Take a moment to thank Him for being faithful to complete this process of holiness in your life.
2. When the believers needed to make a clean break with their occult past, what did they do (page 422)? What are some ways you may need to "clean out" your life from past sinful lifestyle influences?

### **Day Three**

1. What can you learn from Paul's summary of the supremacy of love (page 427)? Which trait of love do you need to put into practice this week?
2. Paul contrasts the acts of our sinful nature with the fruit of the Holy Spirit (page 431). While we might not have all of the manifestations of the sinful nature in our lives, the "fruit" of the Spirit is singular: one thing, with multiple dimensions, meant to be fully displayed in us. Where have you been quenching the Spirit's work lately? How can you take steps to let his fruit be borne in you more fully?

## **Paul's Final Days**

*The Story – Chapter 30; Acts 20-23, 27-28; Eph. 1-6; II Tim. 1-4*

Personal Study Guide

May 2-8, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. Paul summarized his ministry when he met with the elders from Ephesus (pages 439-440). Make a quick list of all the things he mentions that could be valuable traits or tasks of any leader. Which of those elements do you think God is asking you to have more of in your ministry or leadership role?
2. Paul was able to speak to the crowd after his arrest (pages 443). What was the comment that got them so mad they wouldn't let him speak anymore? Given the fact God has always wanted his people to reach out to those far from him, why do you suppose they had come to despise those far from God instead of long for their redemption? How do we sometimes fall into a similar trap?

### **Day Two**

1. Although God wanted his chosen people to accept their chosen Messiah, most first-century Jews who heard about Jesus did not accept him. Consistent with Isaiah's prophecy, Paul proclaimed that the Gentiles—those without a background in the Hebrew Scriptures—would actually be more receptive (page 451-452). How can we make sure we don't harden our hearts and shut out God's message the way so many of God's chosen people did?
2. What does Paul say is the relationship between grace, faith, and salvation (page 453)? What do you think it means that "God prepared in advance" the good works we will do?

### **Day Three**

1. Why do you think there is such a stress on "oneness" in Paul's writing—and in God's design for our faith and practice (page 454-455)? Summarize in your own words how that oneness plays out in family relationships (page 455).
2. According to Paul, who "breathed" out the Scriptures (page 457)? Give examples from your own life of the "usefulness" they have with regard to the values he identifies.

## **The End of Time**

*The Story – Chapter 31; Revelation 1-5, 19-22*

Personal Study Guide

May 9-15, 2022

Read the chapter from *The Story* in one sitting. Consider doing the reflection questions on three separate days to put space between your learning and allow for better and deeper retention. If three separate reflection times aren't practical, you may choose to read and answer all three days' questions in one extended personal devotional time.

### **Day One**

1. One of the themes of Revelation is the manifold glory of Jesus and his full identification with Almighty God. When the Lord God calls himself “the Alpha and the Omega” (page 460) it's a title taken from the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Who else is called “the First and the Last” later on that page? A similar title is “the Beginning and the End”. How many firsts and lasts can there be? What is John's inescapable conclusion about the identity of Jesus? Why do you think persecuted people needed to be reminded of this truth? Why do you need to live in light of it?
2. Falling down and worshipping is appropriate toward some (page 460), and not appropriate toward others. In which category is John? Angels? God? Jesus?

### **Day Two**

1. The church at Ephesus was commended for many things (page 461). Yet Jesus had a very serious charge against them. How would you put the commendable things about the church and Jesus' admonishment to them in your own words? In what ways could you fall—or have you fallen—like they did? How can you make that right?
2. What do you think the Laodicean church meant by boasting they were “rich” (page 462)? What is a way we can make a similar false claim in our day? Why do you think a church that claims it is “rich” will also likely be called “lukewarm” by Jesus?

### **Day Three**

1. Notice that God recognizes our thirst (pages 467 and 469) but does not shame us for our need. Instead, he promises to quench it with his freely given water of life. What is your deepest “thirst” that you need God to quench? How can you go to him for that need, instead of the alternate sources listed (or others not listed) that lead only to “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (page 467)?
2. Who is the light and who is on the throne in the New Jerusalem (pages 469)? What do you think “light” represents in that passage? What difference can that light make to you now?