

Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis

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Study Through the Bible

Genesis

Why read this book?

If you're like most people, you've wondered about the deep questions of life: *Why are we here? What is life all about?* Genesis takes you back to the beginning of time to find the answers. It tells about many beginnings: the first plants and animals; the first man and woman; the first sin; the first news of God's salvation. It also shows God's dealings with Noah, Abraham, and others, demonstrating his desire to fellowship with his people.

Who wrote this book and when?

Moses probably wrote it around 1440 B.C. But since he was not an eyewitness to the creation, he relied on revelation from God and, perhaps, earlier oral or written records.

What period of history does it cover?

From the time of the creation (a date that can only be speculated) to the time when the Israelites arrived in Egypt and grew into a nation (about 1800 B.C.).

Why was it written?

To show that when God made the creation, it was good. But Genesis goes on to say that when sin entered the world, it corrupted the creation, and caused God to initiate his plan for salvation. Genesis provides the framework upon which the rest of the Bible builds.

To whom was it written?

Since this book announces that *all peoples on earth will be blessed* through Abraham (12:3), it seems fair to conclude that all people can benefit from the account of this patriarch and his descendants.

What to look for in Genesis:

Notice the focus Genesis places on the relationship between God and humanity—broken in the garden and restored through sacrifices and personal encounters with God. Through the stories of history, Genesis illustrates cycles of sin and repentance.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

Our Broken World

Believing a cosmic lie shattered paradise.

Our world is broken. It has been twisted too far, and we can't put it back together again. Relationships are broken, our sexuality is broken, and we're slowly breaking the Earth. Our hearts break, nations break down and go to war, our health breaks, and our politics break. All the glue, tape, and positive thinking can't put it all back together again. So, how did we get here and is there any hope for us?

Scripture:

Genesis 3:1-24

Based on:

The sermon series "The Gospel in Genesis," by Matt Woodley, PreachingToday.com

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Matt Woodley shares:

When I was about ten years old, my dad, a medical doctor, received a special gift from one of his patients: a beautiful globe with shiny sequins. The globe spun around on its base and played one of my dad's favorite songs. My dad proudly demonstrated how it worked: grab it by the base, slowly wind it counter-clockwise, and then release it, letting it spin clockwise while playing beautiful music. He told us, "You can touch it but don't wind it, because you might break it."

A week later, while my dad was at work, I found the globe and brought it to my room. And although I heard my dad say, "Don't wind it up," I decided to wind it up anyway. I gave it a little twist and let it play. It played, but only for five seconds. So I gave it another twist and another twist and five more twists and then—snap! The globe separated from the base. I tried desperately to put it back together again. I forced the two pieces together. I tried gluing it. I tried taping it. Finally, as I stared hopelessly at the two pieces of the globe, I realized it was broken beyond repair. So I went into my closet, shut the door, and hid.

It was Genesis 3 all over again. Every day of our lives we are living in Genesis 3.

Read Genesis 3:1–24.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What did Matt Woodley mean when he said that his father's broken globe was Genesis 3 all over again?
- [Q] How did our world become broken through the events of Genesis 3? Give evidence of that brokenness.

Optional Activity: Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with several magazines that contain a lot of ads and photos. Ask each group to find two or three photos that demonstrate how our world is broken. When everyone has finished, share the photos with the whole group and discuss.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We reject God's goodness.

The serpent in Genesis 3 is crafty and seductive. He and Eve had a theological bull session about God, but no one actually talked *to* God. Then the serpent sowed seeds of mistrust with a simple question: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The Devil was saying: What kind of God is that? That's not a good God; that's a cosmic killjoy or a prude!



Read what God actually said in Genesis 2:16–17.

Everything begins to unravel with the simple question: “Did God really say ... ?” Everything hangs on that one question; with it, the serpent begins to chip away at the rock of God’s goodness.

It’s the central question behind the story of Genesis and the story of your life: Will I trust God or turn away from God? For the Christian, this is the taproot of every disorder of the human soul: Can I trust God? Can I take him at his word? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will never go hungry” (John 6:35). Can I trust that, or do I have to go looking for my own bread to satisfy my spiritual hunger? The Bible says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Can I trust that, or do I need to find another place to bring my cares and anxieties? The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Do I believe that, or do I have to work harder to get my sins cleansed before a holy God?

For most of us, it’s not always an easy question. We have doubts. Some come from deep wounds—abuse, abandonment, rejection, betrayal, or disappointment. Like arrows, these actions have pierced our hearts with sorrow, hurt, and fear. So we numb our hearts and don’t trust.

On top of that, God often acts in ways we don’t understand. We want God to fix our problems and make our lives smooth, but then his Word says things like, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2). Doubt is part of the spiritual journey, but will the doubt drive us toward God and his goodness—sometimes arguing, lamenting, crying out to God—or will it drive us away from God? Will I trust God or will I believe the biggest lies in the universe: You are alone. You must make it on your own. You must grab the fruit for yourself.

[Q] What do you have trouble believing about God?

- That he is good
- That he will provide for you
- That he loves you in spite of your behavior
- That he will forgive you
- That he has everything under control
- Other

[Q] What other lies and misconceptions do you think you believe about God?

[Q] Give an example of how sin has looked good when you have been tempted. And an example of how that temptation became completely dissatisfying once you gave in.

[Q] Explain how you try to “hide” from God when you know you’ve sinned.

Teaching point two: We avoid responsibility.

No one takes responsibility. Everyone evades, excuses, and blames. Where is Adam in the Genesis 3 story? Is he wandering around the garden totally oblivious? Probably not. All of the



pronouns in verses 2–5 are in the plural. After Eve ate the fruit, Adam seemed to be right there. He's watching his wife have a friendly bull session with Satan, and he keeps his mouth shut. Human history is going down the cosmic toilet, and Adam stands to the side and looks the other way.

Adam should have stood between the serpent and his family, but what does he do instead? He blames God. He blames Eve. He has willingly participated in the whole mess, and all he can say is: Well, God, it's the woman that you gave me.

He doesn't own any of it. He just gets defensive.

Eve isn't much better. She says: I'm just a poor little damsel in distress, and the big bad serpent tricked me. My worthless husband just checked out. I can never rely on him to be the spiritual leader of our home.

That's all partially true, but the serpent deceived her because she was already distorting the truth. She invited the devil in for a nice chat, and she wanted that forbidden fruit. Eve is like all of us: surrounded by beauty, goodness, and God's provision, but the one thing she really wants—that tree right in the middle of the garden—is denied her.

This is the beginning of the world's brokenness. It's a pattern that looks like this:

- Mistrust and a distortion of God's character
- Acceptance of the cosmic lie
- Pursuit of anything that looks good
- Man checks out and woman acts like a victim
- No one takes responsibility, but instead blames, evades, and denies
- A hurried flight from God that results in the breakdown of marriage, friendship, and community
- Shame and cover-up in an attempt to prove we are not naked and defective

The New Testament has a name for this scenario: the "law of sin and death." Read Romans 7:7–24.

- [Q]** Give an example from your own life of how we humans continue to avoid responsibility for the things we do wrong.
- [Q]** What does the Romans passage tell us about our behavior? What things can you relate to in this passage?
- [Q]** Do you think the "law of sin and death" is a good name for what plagues us? Why or why not?
- [Q]** Looking at the above list, where do you think you are in the progression, and why? Or if you have been through this progression, share with the group what your journey looked like.



Teaching point three: We need to find our way back to the Garden.

How can we get back to the Garden? Our mistrust has grown deeper. Our shame and blame have become more intense. Is there any hope for us? The Bible says, "Yes!" It's called the gospel. The New Testament says another law has entered the cosmos: the "law of the Spirit of life" in Christ Jesus. Read Romans 7:25–8:2.

The gospel is God's story of how God won our freedom back through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus died because we were locked in a hopeless downward spiral called the law of sin and death. The spiral started in the Garden and has been repeated for thousands of years. Christ died for us because we were trapped in sin, shackled by death. Christ came as a warrior—better than Superman, Spiderman, or William Wallace—to set us free from the law of sin and death. He lived and died and rose again so you can call out to him, "Lord Jesus, I truly believe you are the one who can set me free from the law of sin and death. I trust in you!" What does that mean? As one great Christian writer wrote, it means we can "walk Adam's dance backwards."

[Q] What Christ has done for us means all of the following. What in the list do you find most encouraging and why?

- I can trust God because he is for me and not against me.
- God's heart toward me is always good and kind and compassionate.
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- I can be content with what I have; I don't need to always crave more.
- I don't need to check out, and I don't need to act like a victim.
- I don't need to evade responsibility or blame others.
- I don't have to hide behind my shame. I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ himself.
- I can give myself away to others in love and service.

[Q] What hope does Romans 7:25–8:2 give?

[Q] If we've given our lives to Christ and trusted him to remake us, why do we still sin?

- How can we deal with that reality?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

When you come to Christ and place your faith in him, there is a miraculous renewal of your person. You're no longer in the grip of sin and death. Christ has set you free. Live your freedom. Celebrate your freedom. Worship the one who has set you free. And share that freedom. Be a signpost of God's mercy, the hope of Jesus, in the midst of this broken world.



Action Point: Discuss with the group how you can live, celebrate, and share your freedom in Christ. Give practical ideas and ask the group to hold you accountable to them. Give them permission to ask you how it's going.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Our Broken World

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[Q] What do you have trouble believing about God?

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Teaching point two: We avoid responsibility.

[Q] Looking at the following, where do you think you are in this progression, and why? Or if you have been through this progression, share with the group what your journey looked like.

- Mistrust and a distortion of God's character
- Acceptance of the cosmic lie
- Pursuit of anything that looks good



- Man checks out and woman acts like a victim
- No one takes responsibility, but instead blames, evades, and denies
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PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Action Point: Discuss with the group how you can live, celebrate, and share your freedom in Christ. Give practical ideas and ask the group to hold you accountable to them. Give them permission to ask you how it's going.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

Where Are You?

This is God's persistent, loving question to lost people.

The Bible is a story of lost and found. God is the seeker and we are the lost fugitives. Throughout the Old Testament, God says to his people: Return to me. Come back to me. What happened to the intimacy we once had? You moved away.

Throughout the Bible, God gives us clues, mapping out a path for us to return to him. God keeps saying: A new day is coming. There is a new way for you to come to me, a new way to heal your brokenness, a new way to cover your shame, a new way to live, a new way to love others, a new way for the entire earth.

Then Jesus comes and says: That new day has come. I am the new way that was promised.

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Identify the Current Issue

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Do you know what it's like to be lost, left out, and alienated? It hurts. I sat on the steps and cried. Of course, this story has a happy ending. When they arrived at the Dairy Queen, my mom noticed I wasn't there (my older brother also noticed, but he "forgot" to tell anyone). They turned that huge Ford station wagon around and sped back to find me.

Has someone ever searched for you and then found you? How does that feel? It feels wonderful! You're home! You feel loved because someone cared enough to go after you and find you.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Have you ever had a similar experience of being left out, alienated, or lost? Tell us about it.

[Q] Have you ever considered yourself "lost" in your life journey? Explain.

Optional Activity: Ask for a volunteer in your group to leave the room. Make sure that person is out of hearing of the rest of the group. As a group, decide on a subtle gesture that you will perform as each person recites a short Scripture verse by memory. It can be touching your hair, rubbing your nose, crossing your legs, etc. When the person comes back into the room, tell him or her to mimic each person. Of course, the person who was outside the room will be concentrating on the words and will likely not notice the gesture, so they will be told they didn't get it right. When finished, ask the person how it made them feel to be left out.



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We are broken.

The Bible is basically the story about how we got lost and God came to find us. Of course, in the Bible, God didn't mess up and forget to do a headcount; we walked away from God. We hid from God. We ditched God. Read Genesis 3:8–9.

What question did God ask Adam and Eve?

- Why would he ask that if he knew where they were (since he knows everything)?
- How does God ask us the same question?

“Where are you?” is perhaps the most important question you will ever face. It captures the complete story of how we got lost and how we can be found. Most importantly, this question can bring us into the presence of the most important person in the universe—God, the one who asks this question of you and me.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, we find a story of beauty, glory, and perfection. Read Genesis 1:27–31.

[Q] Name two or three things from this passage that show what humans were supposed to be like, but which were ruined by the Fall. Contrast the ideal with the way it has been warped.

In Genesis 3 comes the Fall. We got lost. This story is both historical and personal in the sense that it is our story, too. It's a story of mistrust and rebellion against the good heart of God. Our first parents walked away from God, and from then on, the story of all of humanity becomes a story of great rebellion and fleeing from God.

[Q] How does Genesis 2:25 contrast with what happened in Genesis 3?

[Q] How would you describe shame? What is it and what does it do for us?

- How can Satan warp even shame into something it shouldn't be?

Leader's Note: *The man and his wife didn't have any major issues in life. But after sin entered the world, shame entered the picture. Shame is that sense of unease at the heart of our being. It's the sense that something is not right inside us. Some people call it alienation or brokenness.*

This is more than just not being perfect. It's much worse than that. It means the brokenness in the cosmos isn't just out there, it's inside us. It's inside me. Not only do I live in a broken universe, in a broken planet, and in a broken country—I am broken. I'm not just a passive victim of brokenness; I am a perpetrator of brokenness.

This truth leads to shame—the healthy, normal, God-given sense of unease over all not being well with me.

[Q] Give examples of ways you know you are broken. How do you perpetuate brokenness?



[Q] In what way is our relationship with God the key to everything being made right again?

Teaching point two: There are consequences of this brokenness.

Albert Camus wrote a book called *The Fall*. Camus's story centers on a respected, arrogant, successful lawyer named Clamence. Clamence views himself as a moral, decent human being. He never accepts bribes. He tries to be generous to everyone. There isn't a problem he cannot solve. He sleeps with many different women but never hurts anyone. He is secure in his self-esteem.

All of this changes when a young woman attempts suicide by plunging into the river, and Clamence does nothing to rescue her. At that moment he sees who he really is, and it isn't pleasant. His indifference during the crisis becomes what he calls the bitter waters of his baptism. He notices his selfishness, his irritation when someone interrupts one of his stories, his anger when someone dares to disagree with him, and his inability to love and remain faithful to one woman. Finally, he confesses, "I was not simple, for modesty helped me to shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress." He is a coward and a hypocrite. He comes to the painful realization that he's no better than anyone else—he is a fallen, flawed, broken human being.

Our sense of fallenness brings a deep sense of shame. And notice what shame does in the story of the Fall: it separates us from others. It builds walls of fear and hostility. It drives us toward fixing what is wrong on the surface—to heal the symptoms of the disease and cover what has been exposed. John Powell wrote a powerful book called *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* In it, he writes about how we are afraid to tell people who we are because if they saw "the real me," it might not be good enough. We would be exposed as defective, broken, dirty, disgusting, or inadequate. So it's better and safer to put on fig leaves and hide.

Fig leaves represent anything we do to cover our nakedness and shame. I have fig leaves. You have fig leaves.

[Q] Name some "fig leaves" that you've observed people using.

Leader's Note: *Status, awards, degrees, intellectualism, clothing, materialism, morality, blaming others, religion, etc.*

[Q] Read Genesis 3:8. What words in this verse show God's continuing presence with the man and woman?

God comes looking for the lost man and the lost woman. And what do they do? They keep running. "They hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

If it was up to us to seek and find God, we'd all be hopelessly and eternally lost. Read Romans 3:10–20.

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once wrote, "You cannot have the truth in such a way that you catch it, but only in such a way that it catches you." Our relationship with God is the same way: God catches us.



- [Q] What did Kierkegaard mean when he said, “You cannot have the truth in such a way that you catch it, but only in such a way that it catches you”? Give examples of this from your own life.
- [Q] Romans 3:10 declares that no one is righteous. What about people who seem to be really good or who seem to seek God? Why does God consider them unrighteous?
- [Q] How does lack of fear of God (Romans 3:18) lead us away from him?
- [Q] Look through the following list from Romans 3, and silently think about how you may have done each of the following at one time or another in your life.
- Turned away from God
 - Behaved worthlessly
 - Throat an open grave
 - Deceitful tongue
 - Poison of vipers on lips
 - Mouth full of cursing and bitterness
 - Swift to shed blood (even in your thoughts)
 - Ruin and misery mark your ways
 - No way of peace
 - No fear of God
- [Q] When we think through our sinful ways, how does it demonstrate that “every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God”?
- [Q] How does it demonstrate that the law can never make us righteous?

Teaching point three: God pursues broken fugitives.

Here’s the amazing twist to this hide-and-seek story: God calls out to a lost humanity. He pursues the fugitives. On the one hand, God’s call to these lost fugitives is like a summons. After all, God will call all of us to account for our lives.

But on the other hand, he calls for his lost children as a parent would call. Have you ever thought that God misses you? Did you ever think beyond the idea of being “in trouble” with God to realize that the God of the universe notices your absence, your waywardness, your flight from him, and wants you back?

That’s exactly what the Bible teaches. The Bible is a story of lost and found. God is the seeker and we are the lost fugitives. Throughout the Old Testament, God says to his people: Return to me. Come back to me. What happened to the intimacy we once had? You moved away.

Throughout the Old Testament, God provided a way for us to come back, to cover our nakedness and shame, to lure us out of hiding. As you read through the Old Testament, you see



how serious our sin is. It isn't just, "Oops! My bad!" It's deadly to our relationship with God. It creates a debt that we could never pay.

Throughout the Bible, God gives us clues, mapping out a path for us to return to him. God keeps saying: A new day is coming. There is a new way for you to come to me, a new way to heal your brokenness, a new way to cover your shame, a new way to live, a new way to love others, a new way for the entire earth.

Then Jesus comes and says: That new day has come. I am the new way that was promised.

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the debt for our waywardness and built a bridge to people who were lost. At the cross, he covered our shame. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28–30.

- [Q] Share how God has pursued you.
- [Q] How can we answer Christ's invitation to "Come to me" (Matthew 11:28)?
- [Q] A yoke is what was put on oxen so they could pull a plow. How can such a thing give us rest?
- [Q] Give an example of how Christ's yoke is easy and his burden light.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The righteousness of Christ is available to you. That means that when you place your faith in Jesus, when you trust him with your whole heart, he covers your shame. You don't have to wear fig leaves anymore. You don't have to hide anymore. So come home.

Action Points:

Break into pairs and answer the questions: Where are you? What are your fig leaves? What (or who) do you think you need to prove that you're adequate? Then share how you plan to leave those fig leaves behind.

Take time to read through the entire Gospel of Mark this week, circling every question Jesus asked. Think about why he asked it, and what it can teach you.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 2

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Has someone ever searched for you and then found you? How does that feel? It feels wonderful! You're home! You feel loved because someone cared enough to go after you and find you.

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Teaching point one: We are broken.

Teaching point two: There are consequences of this brokenness.

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Cain-R-Us

We're bad, too, but not beyond the loving reach of God.

Two realities exist side-by-side: human sin and God's grace and power of redemption. Almost every story in the Bible—and our own story—boils down to those two things: sin and grace. But here's the hope: it's precisely out of the mess of human sin that God brings the glory of redemption and grace.

Scripture:

Genesis 4:1–24

Based on:

The sermon series "The Gospel in Genesis," by Matt Woodley, PreachingToday.com

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Matt Woodley says:

I read an article in *The New York Times* about the abundance of new wealth in Khartoum, Sudan. It featured pictures of well-dressed, laughing young people eating luxurious meals in air-conditioned cafés and buying \$165,000 BMWs. Meanwhile, a mere 600 miles away in Darfur, thousands of people are being starved, persecuted, and murdered. I felt outrage as I read the article, saying to myself, *These are exactly the kind of people described in Genesis 4. These people are just like Cain.*

Then, a few days later, I was driving by Port Jeff Station, where there's a tiny storefront Hispanic church. For nearly four years, I've driven by this simple, poor church and felt a little nudge from God, saying, "Stop and check it out. They might need some help." I'd think about trying to eke out a living on Long Island as an immigrant family. I'd think about the families that live in the woods three miles from my house and the Hispanic teenagers lost in gang life. But then I'd always say, "Yeah, sure, maybe later, God." But on this day, I finally stopped at that storefront church and looked in the window. There were empty boxes and garbage strewn on the floor. The church was obviously closed, and the pastor had left town.

I don't have a nice moral to this story, except to say that maybe life isn't as simple as I thought. Maybe I have a lot in common with those well-dressed, rich young people in Khartoum. And maybe there's more of Cain in my heart than I'd like to admit.

Perhaps that sounds depressing, but I want to jar us out of the common view that Genesis 4 contains a simple, flat, moralistic tale about good guys and bad guys—Abel is the good guy, and Cain is the bad guy. We hear the story and insist we're not like Cain, making us good guys. And because we're the good guys, we can go home a little more smug and secure. But now I find this story much more messy and disturbing—and more hopeful and joyful—than I ever dared to imagine.

As we walk through this story, we'll repeatedly find two realities that exist side-by-side: human sin, and God's grace and power of redemption. Almost every story in the Bible—and our own story—boils down to those two things: sin and grace. But here's the hope for us today: it's precisely out of the mess of human sin that God brings the glory of redemption and grace.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] How are we like the people of Khartoum? What does that tell us about ourselves?
 - Does anyone have a similar story—a specific experience when you realized you were called to be a blessing to others?
- [Q] Cain killed his brother. Most of us haven't killed anyone, so in what way are we like Cain?



[Q] How do human sin and God's grace work side-by-side in everyday life?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God confronts us about our attitudes.

Two brothers showed up for a worship service. Each brought an offering appropriate to his job, but we're told that the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but not on Cain and his offering. Look at how sin and grace intertwine in Genesis 4:1–8.

[Q] What do you think was wrong with Cain and his offering?

Cain's response reveals the heart behind his worship. Worship (which is all about God) can become manipulation (which is all about us). Then worship is no longer a public way for us to lay our lives down in love, adoration, and joyful service; it's just another avenue to get our way. This isn't just Cain's story; at times, this is the state of our hearts, too.

[Q] Have you ever used worship in an attempt to get your own way? If so, tell us about it. What is wrong with that idea?

[Q] What choices does Cain have when God asks him "Why are you angry?" How should he have responded?

There's an underlying lesson for us here: don't come to Jesus if you want to stay stuck in your bad attitudes and behaviors. He loves you as you are, but he won't let you stay that way. God graciously confronted Cain with the painful truth about his heart condition, and it pierced like a knife.

Sometimes we hear the hard truth about ourselves and it hurts. Sin is like a cozy bed on a cold Saturday morning; you want to stay under the covers and sleep a little longer. Sin lulls us, and when someone comes to rip us out of our cozy place where we get our own way, we resent it—even when it's God doing the pulling.

[Q] Give an example of a time when God yanked you out of your comfortable place of security and summoned you to grow up.

[Q] How is sin pictured in verse 7? What does this description bring to mind?

The New Testament picks up on this theme and presents its own powerful picture of sin. Sin is not just "bad stuff" we do; sin is a power. Sin makes us slaves. You may wonder: *Why do I keep going back to that bad habit or that sin?* You keep going back because it's your master!

But you must master it. We're responsible for our sin. Some of you have been truly victimized by life: rape, sexual abuse, physical abuse, the divorce of your parents, or a hundred other things that have wounded your hearts. But you are not first and foremost a victim of life. You are a fugitive from God, a sinner. None of us will stand before God and say, "It was my wife's fault (or my husband's fault or my parents' fault). That's why I couldn't love and trust and obey you." That's what sin does. It attacks us and turns us into slaves.



- [Q]** Does worship change you? Are you different because you've been in worship—kinder, gentler, more loving, more courageous, more passionate to tell others about Jesus, more in love with God, more in awe of God? Explain.

Teaching point two: Sin has a cost.

Read Genesis 4:9–24.

The heart of the story—the mess of sin and the beauty of grace—is found right here. God comes with a question so simple and so searing: “Where is your brother?” It’s the second big question in Genesis. After Cain’s father, Adam, sinned, God said, “Where are you?” Now God asks Cain: Where’s your little brother, the one you were supposed to take care of?

- [Q]** What was the difference between Adam’s response to God’s question and Cain’s response to God’s question?

Leader’s Note: *Adam was at least a little sheepish. Cain responded with a bald-faced lie and hard-hearted sarcasm.*

- [Q]** Sin continues to snowball through the generations. How does Cain’s sin become even worse in Lamech?

- What does that tell us about how our sin affects our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren?

In Genesis 4:23–24, Lamech composes an arrogant, pompous, violent song: “Adah and Zillah listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy seven times.”

Lamech exalts vengeance, but Jesus will mock Lamech. When Jesus was asked how many times we should forgive someone, Jesus told us to forgive “seventy times seven.”

How many times have you been offended by someone, and you struck back by hurting them just as bad, if not worse? You’ve just chosen the way of Lamech and his great-great-great-grandfather Cain.

How does God respond to this reality of human sin? First of all, he judges it. In Genesis 4:11–12, God issues a curse on Cain. The ground would prove resistant to Cain’s farming techniques and, even worse, Cain would be a restless wanderer on the earth, sent far away into the land of Nod. This is the impact of sin in our lives: we’re cut off from God, cut off from deep community with other human beings, and cut off from our true selves. We become wanderers. We don’t have the roots we need to live well and live deeply. Our sin puts us under a curse.

- [Q]** What is the curse that humans are under? Give an example of how you know that humans are under a curse.

Teaching point three: We all benefit from common grace.

But here’s the amazing Good News: God doesn’t leave us under a curse. God doesn’t leave us in the land of Nod, the land of wandering. Nod represents all the times and places we can’t find God or ourselves. Nod is the land that seems beyond hope or redemption. It’s the place where



you feel weak, lost, and helpless: when your marriage seems hopeless, when your children ignore you, when your parents abuse you, when your life is falling apart. God pursued Cain into Nod. God, who called the world into being, does not stop calling out to this broken man named Cain.

This is what the Bible calls grace. And how does grace manifest itself? Most Bible scholars talk about two kinds of grace: common grace and saving grace. Common grace is just that—it's common to every person on this planet. God showers it indiscriminately on the just and the unjust. Look at Genesis 4:17–22 for a picture of common grace.

[Q] How does this passage demonstrate common grace?

Do you realize the sheer grace of this scene? Here's Cain, the one who made a mess of his life, and what's he doing now? He's starting a family! He's building a city, naming it in his son's honor! Does Cain deserve this? No, he deserves death—he shed innocent blood. But God is so patient.

[Q] Reread Genesis 4:19–22 and name some more evidences of common grace.

Leader's Note: *The children of Lamech, the great-great-great-grandchildren of Cain, are fathers of those who raise livestock, play musical instruments (we get the word jubilee from Jubal), and forge bronze and iron. Naamah means “lovely” or “beautiful.”*

God's good creation allows for all of this. Music, art, dance, tools, construction, technology, sound, beauty, farming, gardening—it's all good. God smiles on it and showers common grace on all the descendents of Cain. God is unfathomably good, kind, and patient. He could wipe humanity off the face of the earth. Instead, he allows the arts to flourish.

[Q] How does common grace help us understand why there is goodness in the world in spite of all the sin?

Optional Activity: *Break into groups of three or four. Ask one person in each group to record the answers as they brainstorm all the ways they see common grace around them. After about five minutes, reconvene and ask each group to share the list they came up with. Then ask: How does knowing about common grace help your relationship with or view of God?*

Teaching point four: God offers us saving grace.

Along with common grace, there's also God's saving grace. In Genesis 4:13–14, Cain cries out, “My punishment is more than I can bear ... and whoever finds me will kill me.” Notice what God does: he promises to protect Cain. This is totally unexpected! Cain is a pampered, spoiled brat who uses worship to get his way. He murdered his younger brother in cold blood. Now he asks God for protection—and God agrees! He places a mark on Cain as both a sign of judgment and a sign of God's presence and grace. God makes a pact with Cain: You're a mess, but no one's going to mess with you.

What Cain should have done for his little brother, God now does for Cain. This is astounding mercy and grace—undeserved, surprising, and free. All of this is foreshadowing what followers of Jesus call the gospel or the Good News. Sin cannot and will not be ignored. We are no better than Cain—which means we stand under a curse as well—but here's the amazing thing: sin



moves the heart of God to both judge and save. The New Testament says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). In other words, when Jesus died on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our sin. Every sin was placed upon him, and then he gave us a new mark. Read Ephesians 1:13.

This is incredibly good news! When we turn from our sin, placing our trust in Christ, we are changed in at least four ways:

1. We become incredibly grateful; we stand amazed and in awe of what God has done for us.
2. We become liberated. The New Testament says the blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. The blood of Abel cried out in judgment. The blood of Jesus cries out, "I love you" and "I forgive you." If you're holding on to sin, guilt, and condemnation, let them go.
3. We become accepting of others; we move toward people and not away from them.
4. We become committed to sharing grace and justice.

[Q] Which of these gifts means the most to you, and why?

- Amazement and gratitude
- Liberation from sin and guilt
- Acceptance of others
- Sharing grace and justice
- Other

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Sin has a hold on us. It has the power to overtake us and to judge us. It places us under a curse. If you think you're beyond it or assume you don't have to battle it every day, you're mistaken. But there's something greater than our sin: the grace of God.

Action Point: Write a note of thanks to God for all he has done for you. Take it home with you and add to it throughout the week.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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Teaching point one: God confronts us about our attitudes.

Teaching point two: Sin has a cost.

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The Gospel in Genesis - Study 4

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"The students had quickly taken my mercy for granted," Sproul later reflected. "They assumed it. When justice suddenly fell, they were unprepared for it. It came as a shock, and they were outraged."

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] Give an example of a time that you received mercy when you deserved justice.
- [Q] Give an example of a time when you felt outraged about a punishment you received, even though you knew you deserved it.
- [Q] What do these examples tell us about God's justice and mercy?



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Humanity takes a downward spiral, but God remains the same.

Just like Sproul's students, we often take God's mercy for granted. When judgment finally appears, we're shocked and outraged. That's exactly what happened in Genesis 6. Up to this point, men and women who were made in the image and likeness of God—made to reflect God's incredible glory and goodness—blatantly turned away from God. They ignored God's commandments, rebelled against his good heart for them, resented his leadership in their lives, trampled on his plan for relationships, and then started hating and murdering one another. Throughout these chapters, we find examples of God's mercy and patience. God promises judgment, but the judgment always seems to be delayed or softened with mercy.

Then, in Genesis 6, God's judgment finally hits with full force. Read Genesis 6:1–13.

"The Lord saw." The last time we heard that phrase was back in Genesis 1:31: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." We have moved from "God saw that it was very good" to "God saw how great man's wickedness had become." This wickedness not only controls our actions; it also controls our thoughts and imaginations.

Verse 11 could literally read: "Gone to ruin was the earth." It's the same Hebrew word used for a potter's spoiled pot in Jeremiah 18:4. It can't be fixed, so the potter must begin with a new lump of clay. In other words, when God sent the flood, he was judging something that was already ruined.

How was everyone responding to this moral deterioration? Genesis 6:1–2 shows us that most people in those days were responding like most of us—with outright apathy and indifference. Read Jesus' description in Matthew 24:37–39.

They were just like us—stuck in the everyday nature of life, knee-deep in trivialities, without vision for anything great, wonderful, or beautiful. Life was meant to be a grand adventure with God—knowing God, pursuing God, living passionately for God and with God, caught up in God's mission for the world. It should seize us, compel us, and burn within us; trivial stuff will still exist, but will be much less important on our agendas.

This passage says the human race had taken a turn for the worse. In Genesis 4, we saw a downward trend toward violence, brutality, and arrogance, but apparently no one seemed to care. No one stopped to remember the glory of the Garden of Eden. No one had a hunger or a thirst for the beauty and harmony that used to exist. Everyone was accommodating to ugliness, disharmony, violence, brutality, human arrogance, and hatred—everyone except God, that is!

[Q] Which of the following best describes what you think when you hear about God's judgment?

- I'm in trouble.
- It's about time.
- God is a hard taskmaster.
- I'm innocent!



- Others deserve it.
- God is so patient.

Why did you choose this statement?

- [Q] What would the earth be like if God never judged a nation or people? What is good about judgment?
- [Q] What does Genesis 6:1–13 tell you about what God is like?
- [Q] What can we learn from the Genesis 6 account considering what Jesus said in Matthew 24:37–39?
- [Q] What comfort is there in the fact that God doesn't change?

Teaching point two: God weeps for us.

Genesis 6:7 tells us how God responds: “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth.” The Hebrew word for “blot out” means “to erase by washing.” It’s a total cleansing act. Imagine you wake up tomorrow morning, and someone has spray-painted vulgar graffiti all over the side of your house. Initially, you’re sad and outraged. Later in the day, you’ll probably rent a power washer and start to wash it off. That’s the way God feels about his creation, except there’s one crucial difference in this scene from Genesis. It isn’t just surface graffiti; it’s a dangerous mold that’s crept into the wood, sheetrock, flooring, and even the furniture and clothing. You’re forced to tear the house down and start over from scratch.

God will judge our sin, violence, and indifference because God is not indifferent. God is passionately pro-creation. God is pro-life in the broadest definition of that word. God’s heart is for us. God doesn’t like our destruction of his good creation and his good plan for our lives. Most of us like hearing about God’s love and grace, but what kind of God never fights against the world’s wrongs? What kind of God would watch evil triumph over good, winking at human violence, brutality, arrogance, and apathy, throwing up his hands and chuckling, “Oh well, whatever?” The Bible has many examples of God’s mercy, but mercy is never a given. God’s judgment is as real as his mercy.

This is exactly what some of you have come to expect from religion, churches, or the Christian faith. We screw up and God judges us. Some of you might be thinking, *This is exactly why I don't come to church; I'll get creamed with judgment!* You’re partially right: God’s judgment in this passage is real and unmistakable. But in the midst of God’s judgment, there are two very surprising twists. First, notice Genesis 6:6: “His heart was filled with pain.” Humanity’s behavior and the needed judgment were like arrows that pierced God’s heart with grief. The Hebrew word for *grief* is an intense word. This word was used in the following situations:

- When a group of brothers discover their sister had just been raped (Genesis 34:7).
- When King David was told his oldest son, Absalom, had just been murdered (2 Samuel 19:3).
- When a wife has been abandoned by her husband (Isaiah 54:6).



That same word is used to describe the heart of God. God looks at the broken and fragmented creation he must now blot out and grieves as if his sister has just been raped, or his son has been murdered, or his wife has just deserted him.

When God appears in human flesh—in the person of Jesus—he demonstrates his vulnerable heart. There are two occasions in the gospel accounts when Jesus cries for others. One is at the gravesite of his good friend Lazarus (John 11:35). The other is for Jerusalem, who rejected his coming (Luke 13:34). The Greek word indicates big, convulsive sobs of grief.

[Q] Give an example of when you have had to discipline or correct someone and it caused you grief.

➤ How is this experience similar to what God feels? How is it different?

[Q] How does the Genesis 6 story actually show how patient God is?

[Q] How can we face God if we feel we deserve judgment?

Optional Activity: *Provide everyone with pen and paper. Ask each person to write down one thing that has happened to them that has caused them great grief. They will not be asked to share this thing with the others. Considering our discussion so far, ask them to imagine how God must have felt about that horrible thing.*

Teaching point three: God provides a way out of the mess.

We can't avoid God's judgment, but in the midst of judgment, we find a God with tears streaming down his face. And in the midst of judgment and cleansing, we find God making a way out of the mess. Genesis 6:8 says, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

In the midst of judgment and cleansing, there is grace. Grace is receiving what you don't deserve as a free, lavish, over-the-top gift. That's what Noah found. The order here is important: God's initiative of grace comes before Noah's righteousness. God finds Noah before Noah finds God. In the midst of this mess and darkness and violence and self-destruction, God reaches out his hand, reaching down to Noah.

Noah is not a powerful and famous person; he's just an ordinary guy. But God chooses him anyway. That's the way God's grace always works.

Every time there is judgment in the Bible, God provides a way out. Going back to our house illustration, it's almost as if God says: Look, this has been condemned. It's coming down soon. The mold, rot, and mildew are too deep and destructive. The house must be judged and condemned. But you don't have to stay in the house. Let me show you a way of escape so you can go free.

[Q] What is the "way out" for us?

[Q] How does God's grace produce our righteousness?

➤ Why doesn't it work the other way around?

[Q] Give an example of when a person has shown you grace.



- How does God show you grace in your daily life?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The Bible is, at least in part, a story that shows us how seriously God takes our sin. But the Bible is also a grand, joyful story about how God has provided for us a way out. Throughout the Bible, we see hints and clues about a grand story of how the good God of creation can be both the world's Judge and the world's Savior. This big, grand story leads right to the cross of Jesus.

Action Point: Provide a time of silent reflection. Ask the group to consider any sin they need to confess to God. Assure them that according to 1 John 1:9, God promises to forgive that sin. Then ask them to thank God for forgiveness, purpose, and meaning as they move forward.

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Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 4

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The Gospel in Genesis - Study 5

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Costly, Messy, Beautiful Obedience

Find favor with God.

Obedience can seem like a nasty word. We're suspicious of obedience. It's something that's good for dogs, but not human beings. It's mindless, scary, and hurtful. Or is it? Genesis 6 tells the story of messy, costly, beautiful obedience from an ordinary man named Noah. It's not what we might expect about obedience. Through his story, we learn that obedience to God occurs when we love, know, and experience him.

Scripture:

Genesis 6:1–9:23

Based on:

The sermon series "The Gospel in Genesis," by Matt Woodley, PreachingToday.com

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

In Google's search results for the word *obedience*, the most popular sites fall into two categories: dog obedience or the Stanley Milgram experiments.

In the early 1960s, Milgram, a Ph.D student at Yale, started a series of experiments called Obedience to Authority. Participants included a learner, a teacher, and an experimenter. The experimenter represented the voice of authority. The teachers, who were ordinary people like you and me, were supposed to administer electric shocks to the learners whenever they answered a question incorrectly. The teachers didn't know it, but the learners were actually paid actors. When they received a shock, they would cry and groan, but in Milgram's experiment, most of the teachers obeyed the instructions of the experimenter and kept increasing the level of the shock. Ultimately, over two-thirds of the teachers kept obeying the experimenter in the white coat until they punished their learners with the maximum shock of 450 volts.

Based on this little survey, *obedience* is a nasty word. We're suspicious of obedience. It's something that's good for dogs but not human beings. It's also mindless, scary, and hurtful.

Or is it? Genesis 6 tells the story of messy, costly, beautiful obedience from an ordinary man named Noah. It's not what we might expect about obedience. Through his story, we learn that obedience to God occurs when we love, know, and experience him.

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What comes to your mind when you hear the word *obedience*? Is it a positive or negative word to you?
- [Q] Is obedience to God different from obedience to people? Why or why not?
- [Q] Why would God demand obedience? What good is it?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles**Teaching point one: God makes the first move.**

The story of Noah's obedience—like every story of obeying God—does not begin with Noah; it begins with God. In the midst of the human disaster of Genesis 6:5, there is this bright ray of hope: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." Noah found grace because God, in his grace, found Noah.

The world is filled with ancient flood stories, but there are crucial differences and themes in the biblical story that set it apart. The Babylonian flood stories, for example, emphasize the heroic image of the main character. The biblical flood story begins with God and emphasizes his grace.



Only then does it tell us about Noah's simple, humble, but costly response to God's grace. It all begins with God.

Here we have a foretaste of the Good News of Jesus. In the New Testament, we're told over and over again that God saves us, favors us, chooses us, forgives us, and sets us free from the power and penalty of sin and the sting of death. We are also reminded it is not by our own moral effort or progress; it's all by his grace.

- [Q] What difference does it make that our obedience to God begins with him, not us?
- [Q] How is the story of Noah a foretaste of the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- [Q] Read Ephesians 2:1–10, and list all the things God has done for us according to this passage.
 - How might these things motivate you to love and obey God?
 - According to verse 10, what is one of the results of being in Christ Jesus?
- [Q] So if I'm saved by God's grace in Jesus and it isn't based on my good deeds, why would I want to be good? Couldn't I just live the same life I've always lived and then ask for forgiveness?

Once you understand God and his grace, you want to change. Jesus is the one who set you free from the bondage of sin. He redeemed you when you were utterly lost, and as a result, you love him. When you're in love, it changes everything about you—your actions, attitudes, motivations, and affections.

When you're chosen and loved beyond your wildest imagination, you will love God in return. When you love him, it changes everything. You will live a life of costly, messy, beautiful obedience.

Teaching point two: Noah, an ordinary guy, was radically obedient.

Noah was a man who epitomized costly, messy, beautiful obedience. Genesis 6:9 tells us, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." The word for *blameless* means free from defect, wholesome, sound. It does not imply Noah was perfect or sinless, but it does imply something special about Noah: he was consistently obedient to God.

Noah's motto was, "Just do it—God's way." He's not a mindless robot. He's a flesh and blood human being with real problems and struggles. John Polkinghorne, the brilliant physicist, said, "Many people think that faith involves shutting one's eyes, gritting one's teeth, and believing six impossible things before breakfast, because the Bible or the Pope ... tells us so. Not at all! Faith may involve a leap, but it's a leap in the light, not the dark. The aim of the religious quest, like that of the scientific quest, is to seek motivated belief about what is the case ... It's not a technique for whistling in the dark to keep our spirits up."

Noah may well have questioned, doubted, and argued along the way, but all we have is the end result of his journey. He received God's grace and then responded by listening and obeying. Noah perfected the art of obedience—not the art of thinking about obedience. He put his faith into practice.



- [Q] Read Genesis 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16; 8:15–16, 18. How does each of these verses demonstrate that Noah listened to and obeyed God?
- [Q] But Noah wasn't perfect, either. Read Genesis 9:20–23. What does this tell you about even a godly person's journey of obedience?
- Why do we sometimes fail, even when we are intent on obeying God?
- [Q] What do you think it means to walk with God?
- [Q] Describe what you think a "blameless" life would look like.
- [Q] What did Polkinghorne mean when he said that faith is a leap in the light, rather than a leap in the dark?

Teaching point three: Obedience is costly.

Obedience will cost you something. Notice the details of the ark in Genesis 6:14–16. Someone has estimated that the dimensions imply Noah's boat was 95,700 square feet. That's much smaller than the modern ocean liner Queen Elizabeth II, but it's also much larger than Columbus's Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. The length of 450 feet equals one and a half American football fields. This was a massive project! Imagine what obeying God cost Noah. It wasn't a hobby; it consumed his time, money, energy, and life. When you're in love, it affects everything about you. Obedience is the flow of God's love in your life.

When King David entered a worship service, he said, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

- [Q] Does your faith cost you anything? Does it cut into your lifestyle at all? Does your worship cost you anything? Give examples.

Optional Activity: Break into groups of three or four. In your group, give each person time to answer the following: If money and time were no object in your service to God, what would you do? After everyone has had time to answer that question, ask the following and ask group members to give you their perspective: Are these things something you could trust God for and step out into obedience? Why or why not?

Teaching point four: Obedience is messy.

Noah's obedience was also messy. Christian spirituality means living for God and walking with him in the midst of a hurting, broken, messy world. Jesus said normal Christian spirituality means letting your light shine in the midst of darkness.

Too often we—the people of Jesus—slip into an ark mentality. An ark mentality says, "We just have to get inside, shut the doors, keep the bad influences out, and then hold on until Jesus comes, God opens the doors, and lets us out so we'll be free at last!" In the midst of a flood, an ark is a wonderful thing. But an ark is also a very messy place. It's part of life in the ark.

The whole point of the ark was not to permanently escape the world; the ark was created so Noah and his community could reenter the world as bearers of an alternative reality. In other



words, the church isn't a refuge from the culture around us; it's the place that helps us enter into and engage the culture.

- [Q] How do you tend to slip into an “ark mentality,” or how do you tend to want to escape the world, rather than get into the midst of its messiness?
- [Q] How can the church help you enter into and engage the culture around you, rather than retreat from it?
- [Q] Give practical examples of how you can engage (and love) the culture around you. What might messy obedience look like in your case?

Teaching point five: Obedience is beautiful.

At this point, you may be thinking, *Costly, messy obedience—why would I ever want that?* Noah's life shows us something else about obedience: it's beautiful. Obedience brings life to Noah and his family.

Perhaps that's one of your fears about obedience: it's ugly, hurtful, and painful. We've all heard awful stories about people who said, “God told me to do this. God told me to leave you. God told me to hurt you.” In other words, obedience turns people into total creeps. But that's not what happened with Noah. God's call and Noah's obedience produced a thing of beauty for Noah, his family, and the whole earth. Obedience leads to blessing. Read Genesis 9:8–11.

Through his obedience, Noah became the bearer of a new, alternative reality—the reality of blessing, the reality of God's grace. Through his obedience, Noah bore witness to and left a legacy of God's grace.

- [Q] How might you leave a legacy of God's grace through your obedience? Use your imagination and see how many ways you can come up with. What are your hopes and dreams for future generations because of the way you lived?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We read God's Word and then we obey it. But there's an important element in between, called love. God loves us and showers us with grace, and it changes everything about us. We want to respond with love for God and others.

To all of us broken sinners, here's the Good News: Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This proves God's love for you.

God is waiting for us right now. We've been in the far country. We've been wandering in the land of disobedience. But our Father is calling us. We can come home. Every time we look at the Cross, we remember that God's love is vast, deep, unconditional, and everlasting. When we look at the Cross, we remember this isn't mindless, wishful thinking. Turn and run home. Run into your Father's arms. Romp in your Father's house because Jesus has invited you in.

Action Point: Where does your obedience refuse to go? Where do you say, “Sorry, God, but that's too messy, too costly, too inconvenient?” If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, if



you consider yourself to be under his loving authority, where are you in active or passive disobedience? If you have put your faith in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit—the one who will guide you into all truth—dwelling within you. Silently and prayerfully consider how he is trying to guide you.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

Costly, Messy, Beautiful Obedience

Find favor with God.

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Genesis 6 tells the story of messy, costly, beautiful obedience from an ordinary man named Noah. It's not what we might expect about obedience. Through his story, we learn that obedience to God occurs when we love, know, and experience him.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God makes the first move.

Teaching point two: Noah, an ordinary guy, was radically obedient.

Teaching point three: Obedience is costly.

Teaching point four: Obedience is messy.

Teaching point five: Obedience is beautiful.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Action Point: Where does your obedience refuse to go? Where do you say, "Sorry, God, but that's too messy, too costly, too inconvenient?" If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, if you consider yourself to be under his loving authority, where are you in active or passive disobedience? If you have put your faith in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit—the one who will guide you into all truth—dwelling within you. Silently and prayerfully consider how he is trying to guide you.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

God Remembers

Without the redemptive memory of God, we are nothing.

Every time God remembers, it means he will act for someone according to his covenant promises. When he remembers, God will surprise, stun, overwhelm, and lavish unexpected and undeserved goodness and grace on his people. For example, as soon as God remembered Noah, the floodwaters started to subside. When God sees the rainbow, he remembers his covenant with the earth and blesses it. When God remembers, it's not just mental activity; it's redemptive activity.

Scripture:

Genesis 8:1; 9:1-17

Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

In the 1960s, Jim “Wrong Way” Marshall was a member of the “Purple People Eaters,” the fearsome defensive unit of the Minnesota Vikings football team. In a game played on October 25, 1964, Marshall scooped up a fumble and started racing toward the end zone for a touchdown. Unfortunately, it was toward the other team’s goal line. He ran for 66 yards and then jubilantly tossed the football into the stands. Marshall had no idea he had just scored a safety, meaning two points for the other team. In fact, his run was the longest safety in the history of pro football!

Generally speaking, memory is a good thing. It’s bad to forget. Of course, this applies to more important things than football games. For instance, advanced cases of alcoholism sometimes lead to Korsakov’s syndrome, a profound and permanent loss of memory due to neuron destruction. Huge blocks of a person’s memory are wiped out. Oliver Sacks, a neuroscientist, quotes one of his patients as saying, “You have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all ... Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.”

Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What is your favorite memory?
- [Q] What is your worst memory?
- [Q] How have each of these memories shaped your life?

Optional Activity: Break into groups of three or four. Provide for each group a poster board, scissors, glue, and old magazines that have a lot of pictures in them. Ask each group to make a collage representing their combined favorite memories. When everyone is finished, ask each group to explain their poster.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles**Teaching point one: We are not orphans, because our Father remembers.**

From a literary viewpoint, Genesis 6–9 forms an inverted, V-shaped story. Everything in the story flows into or flows out of the point of the V. The tip of the inverted V—the emotional, spiritual, and literary center of this story—is found in Genesis 8:1: “But God remembered Noah ...”

The text doesn’t say, “God forgot about Noah.” This is the way of atheism or agnosticism, two worldviews that view God as irrelevant, absent, or uninterested. Nor does the text say, “Noah remembered God.” That would be the way of religion, a system of life that puts all the pressure



on us to stay close to God. Either of these two options forces us to live as spiritual orphans whose actions, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes convey a deep lack of trust in God's fatherly love and care. As spiritual orphans, we won't live with a radical, heartfelt, and peaceful trust that God is our heavenly Father who cares for us. It sounds too simplistic, too unsophisticated, or too good to be true. We feel much more comfortable lowering our expectations, playing it safe with God's love and the daring call to follow Jesus.

But that's not the Good News we have in this story. "God remembered Noah." And what does it mean that God remembered? It certainly doesn't mean that he forgot, and then remembered, like we do. We can understand the power of God's remembering with a quick survey of a few passages in the Bible. Read Genesis 9:16; 30:22 and Exodus 2:24–25.

The phrase "God remembers" occurs 73 times in the Bible. Every time God remembers, it means God will act for someone according to his covenant promises. When he remembers, God will surprise, stun, overwhelm, and lavish unexpected and undeserved goodness and grace on his people. For example, as soon as God remembered Noah, the floodwaters started to subside. Whenever God sees a rainbow, he remembers his covenant with creation. As soon as God remembered Rachel, she became pregnant. As soon as God remembered his people in slavery, he started their journey of redemption. When God remembers, it's not just mental activity; it's redemptive activity.

- [Q] When in your past have you felt that God remembered you? What redemptive action did he take in your life?
- [Q] What would it mean for God to remember you now? What redemptive action would he take in your life?
- [Q] Read Jeremiah 31:34 and silently thank God for what he chooses not to remember.

Teaching point two: God acts in goodness, according to his covenant.

A covenant means a commitment through thick and thin. Marriage is the best human model for God's covenant with us.

- [Q] Can you think of any other modern-day examples of a covenant?

In the Bible, God comes to a specific group of people (the Jews), and says: I want to be your God, and I want you to be my people—forever. I will love you and provide for you, and I ask that you would respond with love and obedience.

Israel didn't represent the best, prettiest, strongest, or coolest people on the face of the earth. As a matter of fact, they were tiny, insignificant, awkward, and stubborn. But God approached them anyway and said: Do we have a covenant? Do we have a marriage?

They responded: Yes! Praise the Lord!

Over time, though, they "slept around" with other gods. Eventually, they turned to God and said: Get lost and leave us alone!

You get the picture. Our end of the covenant is fickle, but God's end of the covenant remains steadfast and faithful. It is like a flame that keeps burning.



Read Genesis 6:18 to see the first time the word *covenant* is mentioned in the Bible.

Notice a few things about covenants:

(1) A covenant is God's doing, not ours. God initiates the covenant with us because, quite frankly, we're not a bit interested in establishing a covenant with God! In fact, we're actively fleeing a covenant with God.

[Q] Give an example of how God initiated something with you when you weren't seeking him.

(2) A covenant is always two-sided. God wants something from us. By bringing us into a covenant with him, God wants to pour goodness out of us into the world.

[Q] How can God pour goodness out of us? Give an example of how he has done that in and through you.

(3) A covenant is all about love. The Flood came as an act of cleansing (Genesis 6:5). But the Flood didn't improve us. That's the way punishment works: it's necessary, it wakes us up, it prevents evil from getting worse, but it doesn't change our hearts. But love changes us. That's what the covenant is all about. God keeps saying, "I love you. I want you. I'm here for you."

We can't understand the covenant without Jesus and the Cross. His death was not only an example; it was a substitution. Christ died for us, in our place, because of our debt. He died to set us free. Before he died, he gave he established a New Covenant.

Because of the New Covenant, we have been grafted into the story and the love of the covenant-making God—a God who says, "I will love you forever."

On Valentine's Day, 1948, Robertson McQuilkin proposed to his sweetheart Muriel, and they married in August that same year. For the next three decades, they raised six children and served God together. The first sign their lives were about to change appeared in 1978. Muriel loved to tell stories, but one day she started repeating a story she had just finished a few minutes earlier. In 1981 doctors urged Robertson to consider the possibility of Alzheimer's disease. From that point on Robertson watched helplessly as his fun, creative, loving wife slowly faded away. By 1990 Robertson knew he needed to make a decision about his career. His work needed him 100 percent, and Muriel needed him 100 percent. Robertson chose to resign.

"People think it must be so difficult," he said, "but ... even on the emotional side, I didn't look back with any regrets at all. I enjoyed the new life."

On Valentine's Day, 1995, Muriel suddenly woke up from her mental fog, smiled, and spoke for the first time in months. She said, "Love ... love ... love." Those were the last words Muriel ever said aloud.

Muriel died on September 19, 2003. In a letter to friends, Robertson wrote, "For 55 years Muriel was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. So it's like a ripping of my flesh and deeper—my very bones. But there is also profound gratitude. For ten years I've delighted in recalling happy memories. I still do. No regrets. I'm grateful."

That is a picture of God's covenant love for us. He loves us not as a chore but because it brings him delight.



- [Q] Why does love work when rules and punishment don't? Can you give an example from your life?
- [Q] How does God's love for you motivate you to love others sacrificially as Robertson McQuilkin did for his wife?

Teaching point three: God remembers his love for us.

Read Genesis 9:12.

We are sign-making creatures. For instance, a wedding ring is a sign of love. We need signs of love and friendship, signs of the covenant. So God gives us signs. The sign he gave Noah was a rainbow. But who is the sign for? It's not a memory aid for us—it's a sign for God: "Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the covenant." Does that mean God has Korsakov's syndrome or Alzheimer's? No! God's memory is just fine. But God likes painting rainbows in the sky and then lavishing us with love.

In the Book of Exodus, in the story of Passover, God set his people free from years of slavery. God remembered and he acted. He told his people to sprinkle blood on their doorposts so death would pass over their houses. The blood was a sign for them, but it was also a sign for God. When God saw the sign, he remembered the covenant, remembered his "I'll love you forever," and then acted in mercy and deliverance to save his people.

The Lord's Supper is a reminder for us—like a wedding ring or a piece of string around our finger. But what if the bread and wine are for God? What if, just like the rainbow and the blood on the door, the bread and the wine are for God and not just for us? What if every time God sees the bread and wine he remembers the New Covenant in Jesus, Jesus' death for our sins, the power of the Holy Spirit that is available to you, how much he loves you, and the original calling and destiny he has for your life (something so rich, grand, and noble that it would take your breath away)?

- [Q] Why do you think God gives us signs of remembrance?
- [Q] How do you explain God making a sign of remembrance for himself? What do you think that is about?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God remembers and acts according to his covenant promises. God remembers me because he remembers me in Jesus. That's the gospel. It means I'm no longer a spiritual orphan. And I remember I have a part in this covenant as well. It's called faith. By faith, I must say "yes" to God's covenant promises. By faith, I turn from my self-sufficiency and grab on to God's promises in Jesus. By faith, I open my heart to the New Covenant of Jesus.

So allow the God of covenant and everlasting love to love you. Let him remember you. Let him remember his covenant and act on your behalf.



Action Point: Share with the group how you would like God to act on your behalf, and ask them to pray for you in this.

Study by Matt Woodley, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Gospel in Genesis - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We are not orphans, because our Father remembers.

Teaching point two: God acts in goodness, according to his covenant.

Teaching point three: God remembers his love for us.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

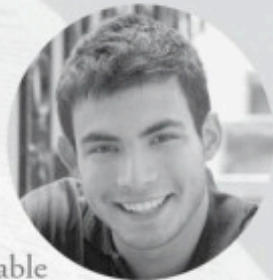
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