

Broken and Blessed

How God Used One Imperfect Family
to Change the World

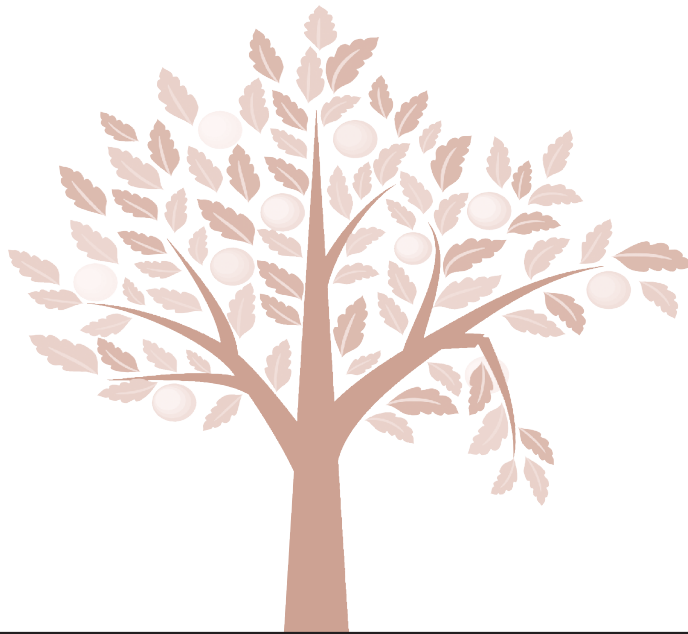


Jessica LaGrone

A Bible Study on Genesis

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**BROKEN AND BLESSED: HOW GOD USED ONE IMPERFECT
FAMILY TO CHANGE THE WORLD:
A BIBLE STUDY ON GENESIS**

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Introduction



In college I signed up for “Sociology of the Family.” We all groaned about these required liberal arts classes, since they had nothing to do with our majors. And, of course, we were sure our majors had everything to do with what we would do for the rest of our lives. Mine was pre-med biology. Go figure.

On the very first day of class our professor opened with a question: “Tell me about your family.” I immediately felt uncomfortable. This was a new semester, a new school year. I was convinced that telling people about my family background was not the best way to make a good first impression. The fact is, somewhere during the explanation of my family history of divorce, remarriage, re-divorce, alcoholism, suicide, family secrets and family feuds, stepparents, stepcousins, stepgrandparents, stepdogs and stepcats, I often began to feel like I was telling more about the plot-line of a soap opera than my own family tree.

I looked around to see if I could sneak out for a bathroom break and conveniently miss my turn to share—or at least hide under my desk until the whole exercise was over. Then a surprising thing happened. The girl who went first introduced herself, took a deep breath, and said: “I didn’t really grow up in a perfect family. My parents got divorced and remarried, but they only lived two streets apart, so we would spend one night at one house and one night at the other. It was a weird way to grow up.”

The next guy said: “I don’t really have a normal family either. My dad died when I was really young, and we moved in with my grandparents.”

This scenario went on and on around the room. There was the guy who had more stepsiblings than the Brady Bunch, and the girl who had been adopted from another country and looked nothing like her parents. There was the girl who grew up in a military family and had moved around so much that she couldn’t really say where she was from. Then there were people who had always felt different because they didn’t have any brothers or sisters.

By the time my turn came, I was feeling more comfortable about my own family! The interesting thing was that most people prefaced their introduction by giving some sort of disclaimer that their family was “not perfect” or “not like

everyone else's." It began to occur to me that there was no such thing as a normal family! In fact, all of our families were perfectly imperfect.

There is probably something that makes your family unlike everyone else's family. Some of those unique characteristics are wonderful things that we celebrate. Others make us feel, as I did that day in class, like there is something that makes us different in a not-so-wonderful way. What we sometimes forget is that because every family is different and distinctive, this actually gives all families something in common.

Nowhere is this truer than in the Book of Genesis. Genesis was one of my favorite books of the Bible long before I realized that all of the main characters in it are related. Genesis traces the branches of a single, perfectly imperfect family and God's constant and unfailing love for them.

The Book of Genesis serves as a kind of scrapbook for this family, recording both the good and the bad pictures of their experiences through the years. Some of their stories will make you smile with affection for these unusual kinfolk and their antics. Others may make you blush, cry, or shake your fist in anger. Part of the beauty of this family's story is that, while they are not perfect, they were chosen by God for a specific calling and purpose. They are both broken and blessed.

As I began to read the Genesis narrative as a family story, it helped me to understand that God doesn't wait for us to be perfect before loving us. I decided that if God chose to use this unusual family for His purposes, then maybe He wants to use me and my family to change the world too.

Something very personal happens when we flip forward in the Bible's family scrapbook to the New Testament. We find our own pictures there. Galatians promises us that because we belong to Christ, we are now part of the Genesis family, heirs to all the promises of blessing God made to Abraham and Sarah and their family long ago (Galatians 3:29). Now when we read Genesis, we can do so with the realization that this is our story, our family, and the origin of our own brokenness and blessing.

Maybe you sometimes feel as though your family came right out of a soap opera, like the characters and antics you find there could win the prize for putting the "fun" back in dysfunctional. If so, this study is for you.

Maybe you feel like you've had a uniquely normal family experience, nothing too far out of the ordinary. Maybe there are a few black sheep here and there in your family tree, but for the most part you are blessed by family who have loved you and given you a stable foundation to build on. If so, this study is for you.

Or maybe you consider yours to be the perfect family. Perhaps you're thinking, *There's not even a moderately gray sheep in my family, much less any black sheep.* If that's you, just remember: there's at least one in every family; if you can't figure out who it is, chances are it's you! So if you're in denial, this study is for you too!

This study is for anyone who wants to discover the roots of our biblical family tree, to trace the generations of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and

Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. It's for anyone who wants to ask the question, "Could God use my family to change the world?" As we read and study together, we'll learn that because the title "Child of God" belongs to us, this Genesis family is our family. And because of that, we are infinitely more blessed than broken.

Getting Started

For each week of our study there are five readings. Each of these readings includes the following segments:

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Read God's Word | A portion of the Bible story for the week, occasionally with other Scripture readings. |
| Reflect and Respond | A guided reflection and study of the Scripture with space for recording your responses. (Boldface type indicates write-in-the book questions or activities.) |
| Pray About It | A sample prayer to guide you into a personal time of prayer. |
| Act On It | Ideas to help you act on what you have read. (Boldface type indicates write-in-the book questions or activities.) |

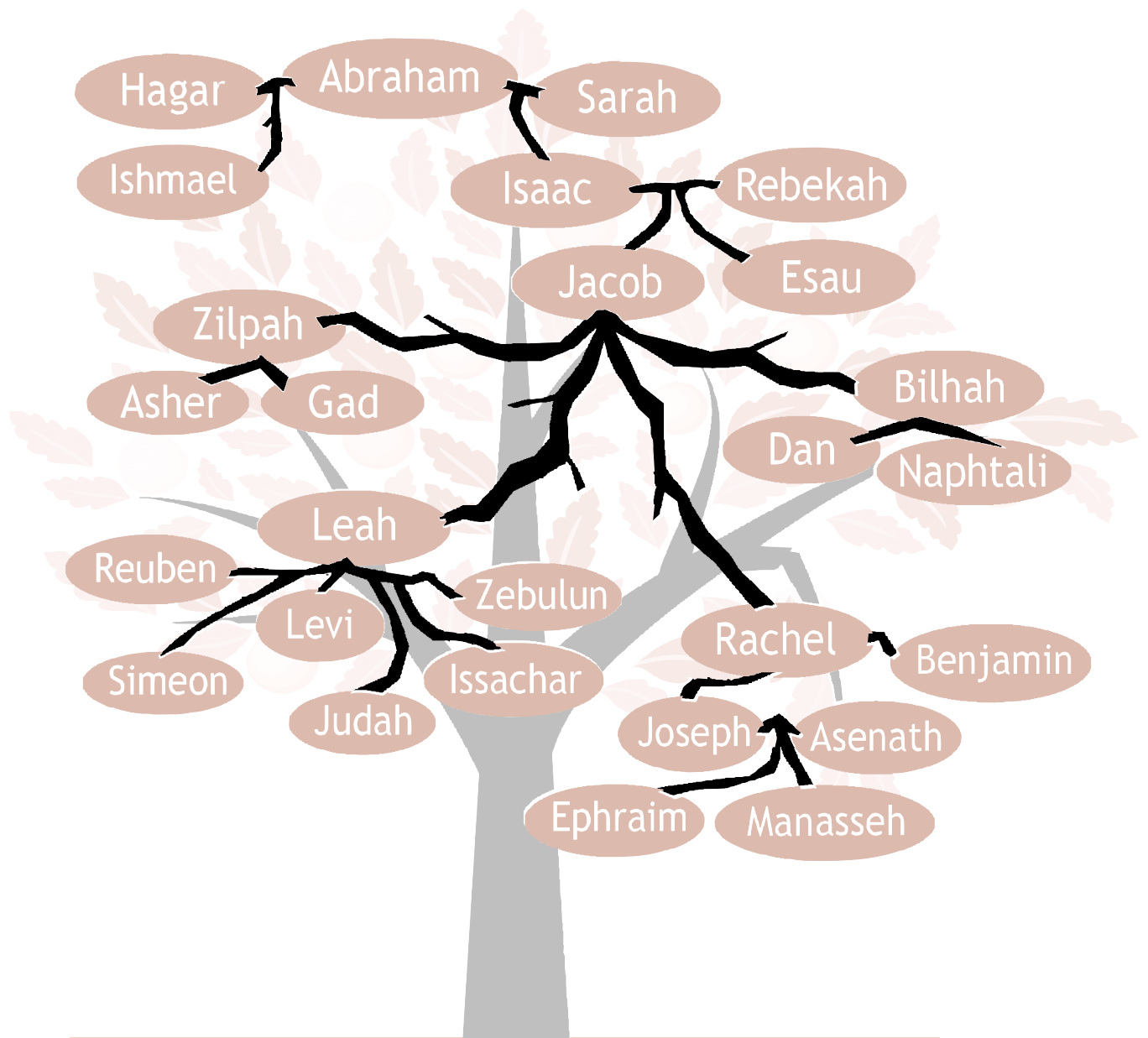
You will be able to complete each reading in about 20-30 minutes. (You will need a pen or pencil and your Bible.) Completing these readings each week will help prepare you for the discussion and activities of the group session.

Once a week you will gather with your group to watch a video in which I share additional insights into the stories and their application for our lives. I encourage you to discuss what you're learning and to share how God is working in your own life and family. You will find that sharing with one another will enable you to recognize God's activity in your life even more clearly and help you encourage and pray for one another.

Before you begin this journey, give God permission to work on your heart and your life. Offer yourself to Him and express your desire for Him to bring restoration, healing, and blessing wherever it is needed in your life and the life of your family. May God richly bless you as you study His Word and discover how God can bring blessing from brokenness.

Blessings,

Jessica



Abraham's Family Tree

Introductory Session

Video Viewer Guide

So God created humankind in his _____,
in the image of God he created them;
_____ and _____ he created them.

Genesis 1:27 NRSV

When God wants to change the world, He starts with a _____.

When God wants to change the world, He starts with a family.

But when God wants to change a family, He starts with one _____.

The only way people will know how an _____ God loves them
is if you love them first.

That is your most _____ work.



Week 1

Adam and Eve

My friend Tara knew from an early age that she was adopted. Even though she felt loved and accepted by her family, she always felt a sense of longing to know where she came from, to know her roots—her heritage. When people talked about their family histories, she would get a pang of longing to know her own history.

Once she was looking at some pictures of a friend and her mother, who at first glance didn't look that much alike. But when she looked closer, she saw that her friend's hands looked just like her mother's—a tiny piece of heredity hidden in the details. Tara wondered: Whose hands look like my hands? Whose laugh sounds like mine? All of this longing to know her origins was compounded by the fact that her adoptive father died when she was seven, and she had dreams about the man who had been her birth father. What did he look like? Did he ever think about her?

Finally, around the time she turned forty, Tara decided to stop wondering and do something about it. So she went to the courthouse in the county where she was born and asked for her original birth certificate, but the records were sealed. She learned, though, that somehow the system had overlooked one little clue. While the copy of the birth certificate she was issued did not have her birth parents' names, it did have a number. The same number possibly could be traced back through the records to locate her birth mother's name. She held her breath, wondering if this would lead to the meeting she had longed for.

In the basement of the courthouse, Tara discovered that the records from the 1960s were kept in huge, dusty books. She sat in a dimly lit room with the first yellowed book in front of her and followed her finger down the page—56 entries per page, 70,000 births in that state in 1965.

Since the records were arranged alphabetically by the mother's last name, a name she didn't have, she would have to manually examine each line in the records, scanning the six-digit numbers for one that matched her own. Her vision blurred after hours of gazing at books. She would sometimes come across a

number that was just one digit off and would think for one second it was hers. Her heart jumped in her chest as if she had matched the numbers on a winning lottery ticket. But then she would realize it wasn't the right number and that she had to keep looking. She went back every day for five weeks.

Finally, one day when she was almost at the end of the alphabet, her finger landed on a number. She matched the digits one by one. She checked it again. Next to it she found her birth date and an F for female. Following the line back to the beginning she saw a last name—and then a first name: Suzanne. Tears welled up in her eyes as she said the name over and over again to herself.

When she went to make a copy of the page, her hands were shaking so much she couldn't work the copy machine. The clerk looked at her a little strangely as she helped her push the buttons. All she could say was, "I found my mother. My mother's name is Suzanne."

Each of us has an innate longing to know where we come from, to find out what makes us who we are. It's why children love to hear the story of the day they were born. It's the reason all those old family stories from long ago get told over and over again. Some of us can trace our lineage back only a few generations. Others know the events and names that began forming us centuries ago.

The truth is that if we all search far enough back, following generations up the family tree, each of us will eventually find the same family—the same story. Open your Bible to Genesis 1. This is your story, the story of where you came from. Trace your finger over that first sentence as if you, like Tara, were discovering the roots of your story for the very first time. "In the beginning."

Our study begins where the Bible begins, with creation. This is the beginning of the earth we all call home and the God who made it. Into this home that God constructs for His children, He places a family that will become your family and mine, the relatives that tie every single person you encounter in the world together. This is a story you should take personally.

This is where your story starts. This is where your family begins.



Day 1: God's Job Description

Read God's Word

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2

Reflect and Respond

Tara wasn't just searching for a number or a name. She was searching for a relationship. That discovery in the basement of a rural courthouse wasn't the end of her search; it was just the beginning.

Tara did some searching online and found a Suzanne with the last name from the record book who lived near the city where she had been born. After a few days and several drafts, she hand-wrote a letter on special paper, said a prayer, and stuck it in the mail.

In reply Tara received an email from a woman who was guarded at first. She asked, "What makes you think I'm the woman you're looking for?" Tara sent her a photocopy of the page from the courthouse book along with an essay she had written about being adopted and searching for her family.

The email she received in reply said, "You're a wonderful writer. Your father was, too." Tara's breath caught in her throat at those words: "Your father."

The emails began to warm up a bit, becoming more curious and friendly. She sent Tara a birthday card a few weeks later. As Tara put it later, "It was a huge deal to get that card."

Cards, emails, and an awkward but happy phone call shaped their gradually unfolding relationship. Suzanne was happy to fill in some blanks for Tara as they got to know one another, but she wasn't ready quite yet for face-to-face contact. This would be a huge deal for Suzanne too, one she hadn't believed would ever happen.

Suzanne did, however, pass along information about Tara's birth father. In response to another carefully composed letter, Tara quickly got another email in reply, this one from her birth father, the man whose face she had dreamed about since she was a child. The first two sentences made her heart skip a beat: "This is epic. I've been waiting forty years for this letter." He signed the first email, "Love, Frank." A few emails later he began signing them, "Love, Dad."

He sent her a picture of him from years earlier holding her half-sister in his lap when she was a little girl. After staring at that picture for a long time, Tara noticed his hand resting on the girl's shoulder. In an instant she realized, "His hand looked exactly like mine. I can't tell you what that was like. Finally there was a piece of me in someone else. Those are my hands."

Tara was trying to figure out how to save enough money for plane tickets for her, her husband, and the kids to fly to California to meet this family she never knew. When her dad learned she couldn't afford it, he purchased tickets for her whole family and sent them to her. When I last talked to Tara, she was giddy and nervous as she anticipated looking into her father's eyes for the first time.

Opening the Book of Genesis is like unsealing the records of our origins. It's being introduced to the family that marks our beginnings. This is who we are—our background, our family history. Our hearts long for this glimpse into the past, but not just to discover information or facts. Just as Tara wanted to know her birth mother and father—to have a relationship with them—we, too, want a relationship—to know the One behind it all, the Father we've been longing for.

The word *Genesis* literally means "beginning." If you open a Latin translation of the Bible, the first word is *Genesis*, which comes from the Greek, meaning "origin, creation."¹ Even the Hebrew word that begins the Bible, *bereshit*, is a word that we have translated as the phrase "In the beginning."² That's what our hearts long to discover: our beginnings. But if we're honest, the specifics we find in Genesis may seem a bit vague for our taste.

My undergraduate degree is in biology, a discipline I chose because I have always felt close to God when admiring the intricate details of His creation. Genesis begins with the story of creation, but let's face it: it's short on details. When I read the creation story, the biologist in me wants to know *how*? How did all this happen? How does it fit with science: the fossil record, evolutionary theory, the existence of other planets? How long did it really take?

But when I search this story for the details of *how*, what I discover instead is that this story is all about the *who*. After the first word, *bereshit* or *Genesis* ("In the beginning"), the very next word is *elohim*, God.³ In the beginning, God. Instead of starting us out with *how*, *why*, or *what*, Genesis begins with *Who*—and that *Who* will be the central emphasis of our study together.

From its first verse, Genesis is a book of beginnings. It is deeply concerned with the origins of things—of the universe, humankind, relationships, sin, families, civilization, and one special family created and chosen by God to be the instrument through which He would bless the world. All of the things we see and experience in this world have their beginnings in Genesis—all except one: God. In a story of origins, we are introduced to a God who has no beginning and no end. When we open the first page, He's already there. Everything else has to be created from the ground up, with God as its beginning-less creator.

*Your throne
is established
from of old;
you are from
everlasting.*
Psalm 93:2 NRSV

Read the following Scriptures and note what they tell us about God:

Psalm 93:2

Isaiah 40:28

Revelation 22:13

In Genesis 1, there is no question of Who is in charge. God is the creator, and this is His creation. God stands in stark contrast to the material He's working with—His personality the opposite of the murky stuff He uses as raw material.

Reread Genesis 1:2 and fill in the blanks:

*Now the earth was _____ and _____,
was over the surface of the deep.*

It's a good thing that God loves a challenge, because this place clearly isn't going to whip itself into shape. It's formless (chaotic), empty, and dark.

When you hear those three words, what images come to your mind? Think about what is formless (chaotic), what is empty, and what is dark.

It is in this chaotic, empty, dark place that God begins to create.

Write Genesis 1:3 below:

What a method! Instead of pulling the earth out of a hat, magician-style, God spoke things into being. I don't know about you, but that's a superpower I could use. *And she said: "Let the table be cleared and the dishes cleaned." And the kitchen was cleaned down to the last spotless glass!* The power to create with words is the first astounding act we see God complete. It's a power like no one else in the universe possesses. From the beginning we can see that this *Who* is an amazing being.

As Genesis 1:3 tells us, the first thing God spoke into being was light. It was an important starting point.

Read 1 John 1:5. What does this verse tell us about God?

From the beginning we see that God and darkness are at odds with each other. God will not let darkness rule the earth. Where there is darkness in our lives, in our families, and in our world, we can be assured that God is speaking there, working to bring light in places of trouble and despair.

Lighting darkness is just the first step. If God's creating work is to make something from chaos, emptiness, and darkness, then we can use the opposites of these characteristics to piece together a job description of sorts for Him:

- God forms chaos into order;
- God fills emptiness;
- God lights darkness.

If we see the Bible as the story of God's actions in the universe, what we find is that from the very beginning God is forming, filling, and lighting. This is His job description throughout Scripture from the first day to the end of time.

Read the following Scriptures and note beside each how God forms (brings order from chaos), fills, or lights:

2 Kings 4:1-7

Matthew 14:13-21

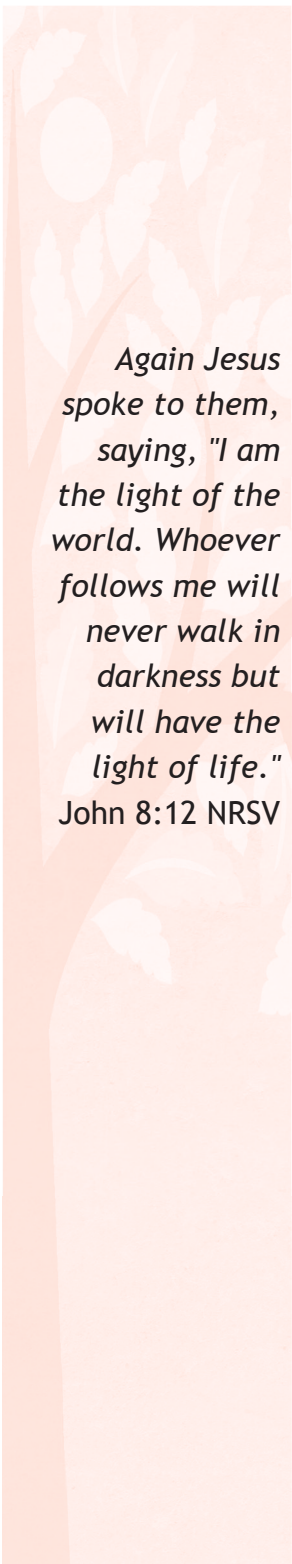
Mark 4:35-41

John 8:12

Acts 4:31

God could have chosen to start right off the bat with a place characterized by glowing beauty, order, and light; but He wanted to show us that He likes to start

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:5 NRSV



Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."
John 8:12 NRSV

with raw material. That's good news for those of us who are still a diamond-in-the-rough. It's good news for imperfect families, for struggling relationships, for lives that can't quite seem to get it together, and for a world that is unraveling at the seams. When God wants to create the remarkable, He chooses to work with the less-than-perfect. As our Genesis family story unfolds, we will be grateful for that simple fact, since the family He chose and blessed was perfectly imperfect—and every family since has been as well.

As we'll soon find out, Genesis is the story of one family. If God wanted to start the world with a human experiment, He could have chosen to fill creation with people. Or He could have started slowly with just one person for the first lifetime or so to see how the experiment would work out. Instead He chose to start the world with a family. This tells us that God loves people and that God loves families.

We will soon learn that the first humans are given the command to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28 NRSV). This is actually God's first blessing of humankind—the command to fill the earth and to subdue it—a word that could mean to subdue the chaos they find there, to civilize its wildness, acting as God's agents on earth of forming order (subdue) and filling (be fruitful). Later we will find out that we have a vocation to light the world as well.

Look up Matthew 5:14 and write it here:

In biblical terms we could say that if God's job description from Genesis 1:2 and throughout Scripture is to form and fill and light, then He deputizes the human family to be His agents on earth. God does some of His best work through the human family. Families exist to form and fill us and to light the darkness of the world with a radiant display of love and acceptance.

In the best of circumstances, families are the instruments through which God forms, fills, and lights our existence. In the worst circumstances, we find in them chaos, emptiness, and darkness. If we are honest, all of our families are the framework by which we live out the worst and best moments in our lives. There is nothing closer, nothing more personal, nothing that pushes our emotional buttons more—for good and bad—than our families.

How has your family formed you?

What did your family fill you with or instill in you?

Has there been a time when family (blood-related or chosen) has been a light in the dark world for you?

This chaotic, empty, dark place in which creation happens is rough material. Some of our families have rough material in them as well. Some of us have been formed in ways that were in reaction to hurtful words or actions. Some of us were filled with more negative messages about ourselves than blessings. While for many the family is a place of light and warmth, for others their picture of family is a place where darkness overshadows hope. The good news is that wherever there is chaos, wherever there is emptiness, wherever there is darkness, there is God.

Following this description of the raw material of the new world as formless, empty, and dark is the very last phrase that trumps it all: “and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). I love what a challenge this word *Spirit* is to translate. In Hebrew it’s the word *ruakh*, a word that means Spirit but also can mean wind or breath.⁴ Where there is chaos, there is God—hovering, waiting, forming a plan to make ordinary raw material into something extraordinary because of the presence of His Spirit there.

God’s Spirit never leaves us, even in our most difficult times.

Read Psalm 139:7-12. What are some of the places and actions listed that cannot hide us from the presence of God?

What would you add to this list from your own life experience?

If God was present before all creation, there is no place that we can flee from or hide from Him. No situation is too chaotic, empty, or dark for Him. Where we find struggles, darkness, imperfection, and the rawest of raw material, we can be sure that God is there, ready to act—speaking light and love to create something beautiful.

Pray About It

God, I am so thankful that You love new beginnings. When I am overwhelmed by the chaos, emptiness, and darkness I see in this world, remind me that You are here, bringing order, fullness, and light. Help me to offer You the raw material of my life and my family so that You may use them to create something beautiful. Amen.

The good news is that wherever there is chaos, wherever there is emptiness, wherever there is darkness, there is God.

Act On It

- Do some research into your family of origin this week. Call or write an older relative and ask him or her to tell you a story about the family. Or look through some old pictures or letters and take a moment to remember those stories yourself. Consider where you see God at work in your family's past.

Day 2: Home-Maker

Read God's Word

1 ¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night,

and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” ...

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

2 ¹Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Genesis 1:1-28, 31; 2:1-3

Reflect and Respond

When Jim proposed marriage to me in the “Christian Living” aisle of a bookstore, the countdown began. It was nine months and eight days from our engagement to our wedding, a whirlwind of planning. Months of wedding arrangements meant lots of opinions from friends and relatives about what a wedding should be like. When I told my mother I was weary of all the wedding advice, she rolled her eyes and laughingly responded: “Just wait until you have children!”

Many wedding customs in our country have stayed the same over the years; others have changed dramatically. I’m intrigued by the marriage practices of first-century Jewish families. Their version of engagement was actually a binding contract, with the fathers of both the bride and groom agreeing to the union, the bride accepting a proposal, an exchange of a gift from groom to bride, and then the seal of a toast with a glass of wine. After that, the bride and groom were bound together just as a married couple is bound together in our day. They took betrothal so seriously that cancelling a wedding was the equivalent of divorce.

One of the major differences between their culture and ours is that our engagements are often spent preparing for the wedding—hard work that, let’s face it, falls mostly on the bride. For the first-century Jewish couple, however, the hard work after the engagement was for the groom. With the betrothal in place, the only things standing between the couple and marriage were a ceremony and a house. Immediately after the engagement, the groom began planning and building a home for his future wife and family. When it was completed he could tell his bride that their home was ready and the wedding ceremony could begin.

First the home. Then the family. That’s the order that Genesis takes as well. The first chapter of Genesis is dedicated to God building a home: our world. Only when the environment is complete do the human inhabitants move in.

God’s job description of forming, filling, and lighting the world are clearly seen in this first chapter. He takes three days to order chaos, preparing environments, and then three days to fill emptiness, creating the inhabitants that belong there. Days 1–3 are a picture of the home; days 4–6 are a description of the family.

Fill in this table with a few words that describe God’s creation on each day:

| Environments Created | | Inhabitants Created | |
|-----------------------------|--|--|----------|
| Day 1 Gen. 1:3-5 | | Day 4 Gen. 1:14-19 | |
| Day 2 Gen. 1:6-8 | | Day 5 Gen. 1:20-23 | |
| Day 3 Gen. 1:9-13 | | Day 6 Gen. 1:24-25 Gen. 1:26-31 | 1. 2. |

It’s clear that this pattern is no accident. The first three days of creating environments (ordering chaos) are meant to line up with the next three days of

creating inhabitants (filling emptiness). The space created on Day 1 (the light and dark) is filled with the inhabitants of sun, moon, and stars. The environments created on Day 2 (the sky above and sea below) are filled with the inhabitants of fish and fowl. The environment created on Day 3 (dry land) is filled with the inhabitants of land animals and, finally, human beings.

Each of these created inhabitants would have a special relationship with the environment it was created to fill. And no being would have such a unique or more connected relationship with its environment as the human family.

The poetry of Genesis 1 means that there are patterns here that repeat again and again to draw our attention to the beauty and design of creation.

Take a look at today's Scripture (pages 18 and 19) and circle or underline the places you see the patterns listed below. If you're feeling creative, you can mark each phrase or pattern with a different symbol or color.

- "And God said"
- "And there was evening and there was morning, the _____ day"
- God saw that it was good or very good.
- The act of separating or gathering into two separate things.

This idea of creation by separation intrigues me. God orders the chaos by separating each aspect into its own realm. It reminds me of the way I try to order the chaos of our own family's environment—separating out toys into different bins in the playroom, separating the lights and darks before they go into the wash, separating the trash and recycling. The business of ordering chaos to make a home inhabitable is one that began this very first week of creation!

God's acts of separating chaos and making order take place when He contains darkness by separating it from light. He separates the waters above and below and creates an environment in the middle where there's some breathing room. Lastly, He separates the dry land from the water, creating an inhabitable space.

Each of the created animals is separated from the others, categorized in a way by being given its own day of creation. Human beings are clearly seen as special from the beginning, separated into their own category apart from the other life forms to indicate that we will have a special place in creation.

This home, this creation, is now filled with family. Environments have been ordered from chaos. Inhabitants have filled the emptiness. Light fills it all. God fills it all. From the very beginning, we see that He is present and active and interested. He is invested in His creation. And He is finished.

The last day of creation, Day 7, is not a day for ordering or filling.

Reread Genesis 2:2-3. What is this a day for?

God's presence is the greatest gift those of us who live in creation will receive.

Here is another form of creation by separation. God separates the last day from the previous six. He makes it different by not working. He creates it by not creating. The text tells us that he makes the seventh day “holy.” This is the first time we’ve heard this concept of holiness, but it won’t be the last. The term simply means that this day is different, separated from the other days, consecrated for a special purpose. Later we’ll learn that as people who love and have faith in this God, we are called to be holy as well. We will be separated out for a purpose, and that purpose will not only bring order and light to our lives but will spill over to bring order and light to creation itself.

The picture of God resting on the seventh day reminds us of God’s value to our universe in the creation story. God is not important because of the work He does—the *what*. His importance is not in the miraculous way He does that work—the *how*. The value and idea at the center of this story is the *Who*, God Himself. On the seventh day He is present, and that presence is a gift just as everything He formed in the first six days is. In fact, God’s presence is the greatest gift those of us who live in creation will receive.

Read Exodus 20:8. What command are we given in this verse?

When we have a chance to participate in the Sabbath that God created, it’s a reminder to us that our worth is not found in our work (what we do) or our skill (how we do it), but in who we are to God. We are valuable to God because He created us and loves us, not because of anything we do or don’t do.

Describe how you can honor the Sabbath that God created on the seventh day:

What does it feel like when you spend time at rest with God?

The day the Jewish groom completed the house would have to be the day he had been looking forward to all along because it meant he finally got to be with his bride. As he began his journey back to her home to share the news and begin the wedding ceremony, the first tradition of the wedding celebration began. Friends who noticed where he was going would run ahead, shouting a single phrase over and over until they reached her house, and then shouting it outside her window: “The bridegroom is coming! The bridegroom is coming!”

First a home. Then a family. This creation, this home, was prepared for us, prepared with purpose and care by a Bridegroom who longed to live in it side by side with the bride He was creating for Himself.

Pray About It

Creator God, thank You for the way You've shaped our earthly home and for the way You promise to live in it with us. Grant me the grace to help care for it well. Help me to separate out time for rest with You, and use that time to make me holy. Amen.

Act On It

- Spend some time in God's creation today. Examine the big picture and the little details. Where do you see the grandness of God? Where do you see His care for the smallest specifics of creation? Spend some time thanking Him for His handiwork.

Day 3: The Divine Picture Frame

Read God's Word

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Genesis 2:19-24

Reflect and Respond

Imagine that you're touring the headquarters of a large, powerful corporation. You're excited to see behind the scenes where something of such global significance is created from the ground up. You visit the lobby, the bustling mailroom, the grand boardroom, and the various offices. As you notice the offices getting bigger and the décor more lavish, you find yourself standing outside the door of the office of the corporation's head, the CEO.

The suite takes up half of the top floor with its dark mahogany interior, displaying awards, gifts from dignitaries, and photos of the boss with famous people. On the grand desk there's a single picture frame. In this setting reflective of rank and position, you want to see what picture sits in the most honored place of all. When you finally crane your neck to get the best viewing angle, there it is: a picture of two children, a girl and a boy, the CEO's family. The contrast to the atmosphere of power is stark: these two smiling faces where an influential and powerful person can gaze at them all day.

The placement of that picture tells quite a bit about the person who sits at that desk. It says: "No matter how important the work we do here, no matter how much money passes through our hands or how much global impact we have, I know what is really important. This is what's important to me. They are the reason behind my life, and everything I do here is with them in mind."

Genesis 1 and 2 act as a kind of global tour for us. We get to see the world from its beginnings on a grand scale. The lavish work that God is capable of takes our breath away. But a close look at the details shows us what is closest to God's heart: His children. Leon R. Kass says, "Man is the ultimate work of creation: he is the last of the creatures listed in hierarchic order, and once he appears, the work of creation is complete."⁵

When we look at the scale of creation, it's astounding that God felt a need to make someone who would communicate with Him, someone who would be made in His image, who would be called His child to be cherished and loved. What do we see in the picture frame on God's desk of creation? What's His most prized creation? The human family. And what do we learn about our family?

1. We are made in God's image.
2. We are made with a connection to our home and to our Creator.
3. We are made for each other.

Let's look more closely into that frame—the one where God keeps us close to His heart—and find what each of these insights reveals about us.

1. We are made in God's image.

The story of the creation of human beings stretches between Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis. Each chapter has its own distinct account of how the world came to be. They are different in many ways, but each highlights humanity as the pinnacle, the masterpiece of God's already remarkable work.

Our first view into the picture frame on God's desk comes in Genesis 1:27: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NRSV). Human beings are made in God's image. The Hebrew word for *image* here is *tselem*, which means to cut off, or to chisel.⁶ We are, in one sense, a chip off the old block of the God of the universe.

What do you think it means to be created in God's image?

Students of this passage have come up with many lists of what it may mean for us to be made in the image of God. Some have written about humanity's unique ability within the animal kingdom to love, to forgive, to have the power of speech and reason, to exercise judgment and decision making, and to have the freedom to imagine and create. Whatever belongs on this list, this portrayal of our origins is not something to be taken lightly. We are the only part of creation given this honor, the only creatures that carry the image of the Creator. When we notice that something is an image of something else (a photograph, sculpture, painting), we can see that it not only resembles it but also points to the model, reminding those who look at it that the original is something grander and more beautiful. Like the work of art that we are, the Creator intended that we should retain and resemble His image. And when we consider other human beings, no matter how likable or unlikable, we are to remember that they are made in His image as well.

As image-bearers of our Creator, what are the attributes of God that we can display? Read these verses and note some clues you find there.

Psalm 116:5

Philippians 2:6-7

*Gracious is
the LORD, and
righteous;
our God
is merciful.
Psalm 116:5
NRSV*

*Then the LORD
God formed man
from the dust of
the ground, and
breathed into
his nostrils the
breath of life;
and the man
became a living
being.*

Genesis 2:7 NRSV

Colossians 3:13

1 John 4:8

2. We are made with a connection to our home and to our Creator.

In the creation story of Genesis 2, we are given much more detail about the story of the creation of the human family.

Read Genesis 2:7. From what is the first human created?

The phrase “formed a man from the dust” is the English translation of the Hebrew verb *yatsar*, the same word we would use to describe a potter’s actions as he forms shapeless clay into a beautiful vessel.⁷ This is a supremely “forming” act, fitting perfectly into God’s job description of forming, filling, and lighting the universe. God forms a human being from the ground itself, the most common material to be found.

The word for *ground* in Hebrew is *adamah*,⁸ and the word for *human*—not the male word *man* but *human*, the word that encompasses both male and female—is *adam*.⁹ That’s where the first person gets his name, Adam, which means “human.”

That kind of word play, from *adamah* to *adam*, lets us know that of all the environments to be filled with inhabitants, God is doing something special here to give humans a significant connection with their environment, the earth. We will soon see that when humans flourish, their environment benefits. When humans sin, their environment suffers along with them.

Dirt is not the only part of the recipe that makes a human.

According to the second part of Genesis 2:7, what does God do to complete His human creation?

Into this dusty creature, as common as the ground we walk on, God breathes the breath of life. Suddenly we are not simply ordinary. We are infused with God’s own breath, the same breath that hovered over the waters in Genesis 1. We learn something very special about ourselves in this passage—about the balance of our ordinariness and the extraordinary God Who fills us with life. In an already incredible world, there is something special about us.

Humans aren't just the inhabitants, filling the environment of earth. We're also an environment created for the One Holy Inhabitant to occupy, filling us with His image, His breath.

What does 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 tell us about ourselves?

What does it suggest should be our response?

Of all the holy places on earth that God would choose to make His temple to live, He chose to dwell inside His people—inside you and me.

3. We were made for each other.

It's interesting that in the picture frame on God's desk of creation, there is not just one image. There are two children there—a set that is not identical but complementary. As good as creation may be (and it is very good), there is one last thing that is not good about it.

Read Genesis 2:18. What did God say was not good, and what was His solution?

With all the creatures surrounding him, the human is alone because there isn't another one like him. Even the presence of God Himself doesn't quite fit the need for this specific kind of companionship that the *adam* longs for.

Genesis 2 refers twice to the need for a "suitable helper" (vv. 18, 20). The Hebrew word for helper or helpmate, *ezer* (pronounced AY-zur, rhyming with laser), was never intended to imply subservience. In fact, besides this use in Genesis 2, all of the other uses of *ezer* in the Bible refer to God as our helper.¹⁰

What do you learn from the following Scriptures about God being our ezer?

Exodus 18:4

Deuteronomy 33:7

Psalms 33:20-22

The LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

Genesis 2:18
NRSV

“None [of us] is the full image of God alone. Only in community of humankind is God reflected.” ¹¹

—Walter Brueggeman

Humans are created to help other humans, to be ezers to them. The first two relationships on earth were intended for worshiping God and helping another human being. When we are living in the harmony that was created in Genesis, selfish ambition will be trumped by a desire to support others in our human family.

I recently attended a beautiful outdoor wedding under a blue sky. The bride and groom were both giddy with the joy of the day. The pastor performing the ceremony had a dual role: He was also the father of the bride. In that special position, his words of counsel and guidance to the bride and groom during the ceremony took on a very personal tone. One piece of wisdom for the bride and groom reflected our passage in Genesis so well. To both of them he gave this charge: “Love is meeting another person’s need when it is uniquely in your power to do so.” We are all given the calling of this relationship of service to others.

What instructions do we find in Philippians 2:3-4?

The second human isn’t created from the dirt; this time God takes a piece of the man himself. God performs the first surgery by removing Adam’s rib and fashioning from it a whole new being.

Reread Genesis 2:23. What does Adam exclaim when he lays eyes on this new creature?

The story of creation is complete only when this last step of companionship is in place. Humanity is now living in the companionship of family. It is the first building block of the seven billion people who reside on our planet today. Beginning in Genesis 2, every new human being will start life by emerging from the flesh of another, brought into the world to help other humans and reside in joyful community in the presence of our creator God.

In even the most powerful “office” in the world, there is a clue to the Boss’s heart. In God’s workspace, you are the person in that picture frame. Made in His image, you are the likeness He loves to gaze upon. You are the center of His creation, the one He takes most pride in, the one He would do anything to protect from harm and salvage from destruction. If that doesn’t wow you, it should. Even with the magnificent Himalayas, the breathtaking Grand Canyon, the speed of the cheetah, and the grandeur of the humpback whale, you are still His favorite—the pinnacle of creation.

Pray About It

Lord, thank You for creating us for relationship and for community. Help me to fulfill my role as helper to my fellow human beings. Amen.

Act On It

- Take your role as ezer, or helper, seriously by finding someone you can serve. Do it secretly, without telling the person what you're doing or why.

Day 4: My Original Sin

Read God's Word

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."...

* * *

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Genesis 3:1-10, 21

Reflect and Respond

Standing in the checkout line, I clutched the tail of my mother's shirt and let out a bored sigh. Nothing in this long trip through the grocery store had interested me—until now. I noticed that someone had placed an entire rack of colorful, tempting items right at my eye level. That's when I spotted it. The tag showed a picture of a girl with a large ball strapped to her wrist as she banged it like a punching bag. Her face reflected pure glee. Below, the bright red balloon quivered with potential, begging to be blown up. I needed, no, I deserved that balloon. Just as I turned to my mom to make my carefully worded plea, she shook her head, reminded me we were in a rush, and wheeled the shopping cart out to the parking lot, calling over her shoulder for me to follow.

I honestly don't remember what happened next. Did I forget that it was in my hand? Did I develop some devious plot? Whatever the cause, the next thing I knew, I was sitting in the backseat of the car with the balloon in my lap. All at once it hit me: I had sinned. I quickly stuffed it into my pocket, shame coloring my face. All the way home I was certain that the police were right behind us, that they had been tipped off by the clerk at the checkout: "That's her, officer, the one in the Scooby Doo T-shirt! She's the culprit."

At the house I slipped into the guest bathroom and concealed my sin at the bottom of a basket of magazines and then glanced both ways as I shut the door behind me to be sure no one had seen. For months my heart raced every time someone entered that bathroom, certain I would be found out. The colorful object of desire had deflated into a stone of shame in my heart, never to be played with.

Though I'm grown, I have to admit that my impulses still lead me astray sometimes. Often I don't even realize what they are until I've already "grabbed them off the rack."

How does this happen? How does something that starts so small—an idea, an urge—snowball into an act that leaves us ashamed, concealing our actions and throwing a wrench into our relationships?

One of the best descriptions of the path that leads us to the bottom of this pit can be found in Genesis 3. This story is essential because it's the story of not only the first sin but also every sin. It describes the anatomy of Eve's temptation, but it's our story too—a story about how, even when we start with the best of intentions, a single thought can develop into an act that upsets our entire world.

The anatomy of temptation can be traced from one of its parts to the next, all linked in an association of harmfulness. The head is the starting point. It sees and hears the possibilities and longs to taste the forbidden fruit. It also rationalizes, justifies, and makes up excuses. Sin would never happen unless we did the mental soft-shoe around the warning bells that go off when we are tempted.

The taste buds mark the moment of sin itself. So brief. So delicious. And then it's over. And regret sets in.

The body is where the actual consequences grow. Once we've ingested, we begin to feel the effects of our decision. Lives throb with remorse. Bellies ache with regret. We're stuck embodying the outcome of our choices.

Finally: the limbs. Sin never stays put. It grows outward to places beyond our control. No sin is private. It always reaches out, affecting others. It sprouts legs and runs beyond our reach. It grows arms and hurts the people we love.

Reread today's Scripture and identify the anatomy of temptation. Label the parts of the passage on page 29 with the appropriate body parts:

Head (starting point of temptation)

Taste buds (moment of sin)

Body (consequences grow)

Limbs (our sin affects others)

Eve and Adam's encounter with the serpent traces our human condition from head to toe. Every sin since has followed in their footsteps. Every relationship has been marred by the same consequences of blame and shame. And it all began so innocently, with a simple question.

What question does the serpent ask in Genesis 3:1?

Each temptation actually starts with a question about God. Did He really say that? Did He mean it? Does He matter? Every sin begins with the idea that God might not have our best interests at heart—that the rules He has given us might keep us from all the fun. The serpent's words are, of course, a misquote. Even God's words can be twisted. All temptation is a subtle attack on the character of God. How we formulate our answer always boils down to this: will we trust Him or will we decide to play God ourselves?

After twisting God's words, the serpent's next tactic is a lie contradicting God: "'You will not certainly die, . . . For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Genesis 3:4-5). The insinuation is that God is holding something back from His children and cannot be trusted to have our best interests at heart.

Think of a time you were tempted to believe something untrue about God or about yourself. How did you shake that temptation?

All temptation is a subtle attack on the character of God.

Sin often proceeds from deception, from believing untruths about God or ourselves. But the thing about deception is this: there is no power in a lie unless we believe it. The time you are spending studying God's Word is so important on many levels, but one of the most important is that it plants truth in your heart so that deception cannot tempt you to believe a lie that God does not love you or that you are not worthy of that love.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-11.

What do these verses say about the character of the one who loves to lie? (vv. 8-9)

What do they say about the purpose of the One who loves truth? (vv. 10-11)

When the first sin finally happens the description itself is so brief, its moment on the taste buds so fleeting, that it lasts only one verse. Eve chooses to play God, deciding to take matters of what's best for her and her family into her own hands and onto her own lips—and then onto her husband's. And the world is forever changed. The consequences of that one action dominate the rest of the chapter and the rest of their lives—and ours.

On the other side of this untested relationship is God. The world is so new that the first man and woman have no idea how God will answer sin, how He will treat children who disobey His commands. There's simply never been a sin to provoke His reaction. Here is the first test of God's character in the history of the world.

All we have seen so far is a God who interacts with perfect children in a perfect world. We may wonder: How will He react when things go wrong? And what will God do when this imperfect world is filled with imperfect humans? This is the question for all of us to consider, since we all live outside of Eden and we all sin—we all face the moment of coming before Him broken, asking for another chance.

Adam and Eve stand before Him, vulnerable, exposed, naked, and ashamed. Will He be wrathful? Angry? Cold? Rejecting?

Reread Genesis 3:21. How would you describe God's response to their sin?

The moment of suspense is answered by the unexpected. Instead of wrath they are shown kindness. Instead of rejection, grace. Out of compassion God cares for them by clothing their nakedness, taking the scratchy, disposable fig leaves they've patched together and providing instead the first clothing the world has ever known—a wardrobe of grace.

What truth about God reassures you when you've messed up?

The anatomy of a temptation doesn't end in a body of shame. Head, taste buds, body, limbs—all is covered by the grace of God. This happened the very first time humans messed up, and it has been happening ever since.

I think of the way I wrap a towel around my son's shivering, damp body at the end of a bath. No matter what a stinker he's been that day, that's all on its way down the drain as I lift that little dripping body wrapped in a bundle into my lap to hold him close. He's almost the age I was when I committed my first (memorable) sin in the checkout line. But I want him to know early: *You have a choice every day, a choice of which voice to listen to, a choice to be good. And when you're not, I'll be here loving you just the same.*

God loves you and me just the same, too. No matter what kind of day we've had, no matter what kinds of choices we've made, His love and grace wash over us. I'm so glad He has proved His love again and again, from the very beginning.

No matter what kind of day we've had, no matter what kinds of choices we've made, [God's] love and grace wash over us.

Pray About It

Lord God, Your ability to love me just the same when I make good choices and when I make bad ones is humbling and beautiful. I am so grateful! Help me to reflect onto others the grace You give to me, so that they will know such a depth of love exists in Your world. Amen.

Act On It

- Is there a wrong you've committed that still brings pangs of guilt when it comes to your mind? Make a tangible prayer of confession today by writing down a word or drawing a symbol on a piece of paper that reminds you of that sin. Pray a private prayer, and then do something to destroy that paper in the same way God destroys your guilt.

Day 5: Cracks in the Windshield

Read God's Word

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you."

¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;

*through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.*

¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return."*

²⁰ *Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.*

Genesis 3:8-20

Reflect and Respond

I was running late to my first job interview. I was following the gravel truck in front of me too closely, hoping the driver would get the message, when suddenly I heard a loud CRACK! A rock had bounced off my windshield and left a circular ding right in the middle, a tiny crack peeking out from its side. I thought hopefully, *I can still drive with that little imperfection there. Maybe it won't spread.*

Over the next few weeks, the tiny crack did spread, growing tributaries, which in turn grew their own. The blinding glare forced me to replace the windshield.

A single piece of fruit. A tiny crack in paradise. No one could have predicted the range of consequences of that first sin. Once again their story is our story as well—the mistake, the aftermath, the wishful thinking we all engage in when considering the outcome: *Maybe it's not that bad; maybe it won't spread.*

At the heart of a perfect garden there existed a collection of perfect relationships. Man and woman lived in loving harmony. Humans tended their environment while it supported them. And God walked with them in the garden.

When the woman tasted the forbidden fruit and offered it to her husband, who did the same, it didn't take long for those relationships to sting with the consequences of their actions. Ashamed, they hid from God, who called out for them.

Reread Genesis 3:11-13 and answer the following questions:

When God asked about their newfound guilt, whom did they blame?

Does God know why they're hiding and ashamed? (v. 11)

After blaming each other and God, do they confess their actions? (vv. 12-13)

Adam pointed the finger at his wife and then right at God: "The woman *you* put here with me." Eve responded with a classic: "The devil made me do it." Though they played the blame game, each of them admitted to eating the fruit. What follows in Genesis 3 is a list of the effects of sin that we are still dealing with today.

Review Genesis 3:14-19 and describe the consequences for each:

Let's talk about each of these consequences in the opposite order in which they are announced. God's first commentary on how the cracks of sin will spread into human lives has to do with the perfect relationship humans have had with their environment, created to provide them with food and shelter and beauty.

God has placed the *adam* on the earth to enjoy and oversee God's good creation with only one restriction. With the breaking of that one rule comes the breaking of the simple and symbiotic relationship humankind has enjoyed with the earth. Here is the negative side of the close connection between *adam* (human) and *adamah* (ground). When one is broken, the other suffers.

Originally it was an environment so ecologically ideal that no one had to plant or water or weed. No one had to kill in order to eat. It was the best of all harmonized worlds. Now there will be struggle to produce. Now identity will be bound up in the question "So what do you do?" and humans will confuse their worth with productivity, earning, rank, and success. The prediction that the eating of the fruit will result in death becomes clearer here as well.

Reread Genesis 3:19. What does God say about how their lifecycle will end and where they will return?

We've seen that human relationships with God and their earthly home will be different in this post-sin world. God also explains how their relationship with each other will be affected. The woman is told that she will suffer consequences in an act that she has not yet even experienced: bearing children. God says, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16a). If this doesn't make you a little upset with Eve, it should! We have Eve to thank for labor pains, swelling, and bloating; for

baby weight and postpartum depression. None of this was part of God's original plan. (Yet because we probably would have done the same thing in her situation, perhaps we should offer Eve some grace. God certainly did.)

If we naively believe that the pain of childbearing is limited to labor and delivery, then we'll be surprised by our panic in a child's first trip to the emergency room and by the ache of watching them get on the school bus for the first time. Along with the joy of watching our children grow will come late nights of waiting for them to come home followed by sleepless nights wondering if they'll ever leave the nest. Every parent knows the heartbreak of watching a child's heart break. Every parent would gladly take on a child's pain. "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you" should be the first page in every parenting book.

Read Genesis 4:8 in the margin. How will Adam and Eve experience the ultimate pain of parenthood?

Children are born through life with ongoing pushing, teaching, listening, loving, and grace. That's the lifelong, painful nature of childbearing. Parents suffer through it because the result—the chance to love a human being who, like themselves, is made in God's image—is so completely and undeniably worth it.

The other relationship that begins to show the cracks of consequences from sin is the one the woman shares with her companion, Adam. This has been the first model of human relationship, the gift of perfect human partnership created by God. Woman and man enjoy each other as perfectly matched companions. Now there exists a new gulf between them.

Reread Genesis 3:16b and fill in the blanks:

"Your _____ will be for your _____, and he will _____ over you."

The kind of desire described here is not a loving desire or even a sexual desire. This is the desire to control, to subdue, to dominate. Followed by the other half of the sentence, "he will rule over you," it means that both partners will struggle to exploit their relationship for their own gain, to control the other instead of enjoying the intimate bond and life of mutuality they began in God's perfect creation.

This same word used for *desire* is mirrored in the very next chapter of Genesis. Who is doing the "desiring" in Genesis 4:7? In this context, is *desire* a positive or negative word?

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.
Genesis 4:8 NRSV

God's first blessing to His children, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it," is now forever tainted with the pollution of human corruption.

Both the multiplying of relationships and the subduing of the earth just got a lot more difficult. Men and women will labor. Their relationships with God, their environment, and each other will all have difficulties, brokenness. Life is going to involve hard work from here on out.

Eve receives her name just after these pronouncements.

Reread Genesis 3:20. What does Eve's name mean? Do you think it's a gift or a curse in light of this story?

Strangely enough, there is a glimmer of good news in this list of consequences, which is embedded in God's message for the serpent. The one who matched wits with human beings is now doomed to the life of a belly-crawling, dust-eating snake. The serpent will exist forever in enmity with the offspring of the woman. The strange message encoded here comes in the form of a pronoun.

Reread Genesis 3:15 and fill in the blanks:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; _____ will crush your head, and you will strike _____ heel."

You and *your* refer to the serpent, and *hers* refers to Eve. But what about "he" and "his"? The grammar police would pull us over for having a pronoun without an antecedent. This "he," God says, will be one of Eve's offspring. He will receive an injury from the serpent, but in turn, He will strike the decisive blow in the battle. And He will eventually crush the serpent once and for all.

What do we learn about Christ in Colossians 1:15-17?

What do these Scriptures say about the victory that is ours because of Christ?

1 Corinthians 15:57

Romans 8:2

Hebrews 7:25-27

*For the law of
the Spirit of life
in Christ Jesus
has set you free
from the law of
sin and of death.
Romans 8:2 NRSV*

Inserted into the litany of consequences from the first sin we find a consequence the serpent probably didn't expect: that God will fight for His children. He will never give up on them, no matter how long and wide the cracks of their mistakes grow. God's grace spreads farther than the reach of any sin, filling in the cracks with mercy and forgiveness. There is no place outside the reach of God's love.

According to Romans 8:38-39, what can separate us from God's love?

So far we've learned a lot from the first family on earth. They've had flawless beginnings, a tempting proposal, and a big fall. Rather than feeling disappointed that God would begin the Bible with the story of an imperfect family, it gives me hope. If God continued to walk with them in a new and imperfect world, maybe there is hope for our families, too—the hope that only Christ can bring.

"All love causes pain," says Mary Pipher in her book on families, *The Shelter of Each Other*.¹² But with all the love and all the pain humans are bound to feel in this post-Eden world, I'm thankful that God, too, knows the pain of bearing imperfect children through life. I'm thankful, too, that He found a way from the beginning to plant His plan for rescue, His seed of grace, right at the moment of our first sin, right there in the garden so we could watch it grow.

God's grace spreads farther than the reach of any sin, filling in the cracks with mercy and forgiveness.

Pray About It

Jesus, I am Your dearly loved, flawed child. Just like Adam and Eve, I need Your love and Your grace to live in an imperfect world. When I am afraid or anxious, remind me again that nothing will ever be stronger than the bond of Your love for me. Amen.

Act On It

- Today, say to at least two people: "Tell me about your family." Listen well. Then, if given a chance, tell them something about yours. Remember that transparency and openness with our own stories helps others feel they are not alone. Make sure to pray for those two people and their families before you sleep tonight.