

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY

PERSONAL DEVOTION QUESTIONS

*As you read through the chapters of *The Story* each week, use the following questions to journal and make notes. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.*

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CHAPTER 1, THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

DAY 1

1. God created Eve because He felt that it was not good for Adam to be alone (p. 4). When have you felt most alone? How would your life be different if you were experiencing deep community? What might you do to help someone else who is alone and isolated?
2. Adam and Eve hid from God because they felt shame and guilt. Both failed to accept responsibility for their sins and failures. Often, the first step to the healing and the restoring of relationships is to accept responsibility for our mistakes. What, if anything, do you need to own this week?
3. Adam and Eve's disastrous decisions demonstrate our own inability to choose well between right and wrong. Describe a wrong choice you made and how it affected your life. How has God helped you heal from that choice?

DAY 2

1. Cain's feelings of jealousy and hurt led to Abel's murder. Is there anyone in your family who you have hurt, or who has hurt you? What might you do to reconcile with this person? Identify a family relationship in your own life that is loving and secure. Share your thankfulness for that person with a note or phone call.
2. When God looked at the earth and saw that it was only evil all the time, He "*regretted that He had made human beings, and His heart was deeply troubled.*" Our hearts are often deeply troubled when we observe the horrors of this world. How might you respond to someone who asks how a good God could allow so much evil to take place?

DAY 3

1. God pursued Adam and Eve after they had sinned. God pursued Cain even as Cain was steeped in anger. Describe a time in your own life that God sought you out. What happened? How did it deepen your relationship with God?

2. Noah is noted for being “righteous” and “blameless.” Are there any areas of your life that could be described this way? What areas of your life are most difficult to act righteously or blamelessly? Who do you know who could hold you accountable for these things?

CHAPTER 2, GOD BUILDS A NATION

DAY 1

1. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, for two reasons: First, to test his faith and, second, to point to the future sacrifice of the Heavenly Father's only Son. Is there an area of your life that God is calling you to "sacrifice" or entrust to Him? Identify the next step you need to take.
2. God's chosen people are both faithful and flawed. List the "faithful" attributes of either Abraham or Sarah that you want to follow. List the "flawed" attributes and mistakes of either Abraham or Sarah that you want to avoid.
3. When God does not deliver on His promise to provide offspring for Abram, he starts to take matters into his own hands (p. 15-16). Despite his good intentions, this caused several complications for him domestically. When have you tried to take things into your own hands or force God into action? What was the result?

DAY 2

1. The maidservant Hagar fled from Sarah's harsh treatment. Alone, hurting, and in despair, God saw her. But she also saw Him and declared, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (p. 16). When have you seen God most vividly acting in your life?
2. Esau and Jacob are prime examples of sibling rivals. We learn from the story that they were estranged for more than 20 years (p. 22). What life lessons can be gleaned from observing each character throughout their reconciliation? Can these life lessons be applied to an estranged relationship of your own?

DAY 3

1. In the midst of a deep, personal crisis in Jacob's life, we read about a curious struggle in the wilderness (p. 23-24). In the end, Jacob's name was changed to Israel because he struggled with God and man and overcame. (In the ancient world, a name represented the character of a person.) Identify a crisis in your own life that entailed "wrestling" with God. If God was to change your name to represent the outcome, what do you suppose it would be?

2. Nearly everyone has experienced the playground process of "choosing teams." Compare the way God chooses His "team" with the way you choose your "team." Who in your life do you need to see from God's perspective?

CHAPTER 3, JOSEPH: FROM SLAVE TO DEPUTY PHAROAH

DAY 1

1. Compare the sin of Adam and Eve with the sin of Joseph. Then compare the sin of Joseph's brothers with that of Cain. What similarities do you discover? What similarities do you see to the sin in your own life? How can the pattern be broken?
2. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, his boss' wife, and his friends in prison. Instead of becoming bitter, he trusted God. How can you avoid becoming bitter when you are betrayed?
3. What character traits do you see in Joseph that made Potiphar trust him (p. 31)? How might your boss describe your character? What is a trait Joseph had that you can improve on this week?

DAY 2

1. How was Joseph able to resist the sexual temptations of Potiphar's wife (p. 31)? What can you do to protect yourself from sexual sin?
2. Twenty years after his brothers sold him into slavery, they came to Joseph to buy grain. How does Joseph's story serve as an example to you of forgiveness, trust, and restoration? What is the hardest thing you have ever had to forgive? Be forgiven for?

3. Looking back on his life, Joseph said that what others intended for evil, God intended for good. When has an evil done to you turned out for good? How can you use this to help you in the future? What does this reveal about God?

DAY 3

1. Joseph's brothers had been lying about his disappearance for 20 years and were afraid of how he might react, especially after their father's death. They told Joseph a made-up story saying that Jacob had asked them to request that Joseph not harm them. They were having trouble forgiving themselves. Is there a mistake you have made where you've found it difficult to forgive yourself?

2. Reflect upon the first three chapters of The Story. What family cycles emerge? What life lessons can you apply to your own life from observing these cycles?

CHAPTER 4, DELIVERANCE

DAY 1

1. During the scene at the burning bush, Moses has trouble believing God could use him. Do you think his hesitancy came from his own insecurities or from his lack of faith in God? Are there areas in your life where you feel insecure? How might this story help you?

2. You may never have seen a burning bush, but have you experienced “standing on holy ground” – a time when you definitely felt the presence of God in your life? What was that like? Take a few moments to recall, journal the experience, and thank God for making Himself known in a tangible way.

DAY 2

1. When Moses told the Israelite leaders about God’s plan for deliverance, their response was to bow in reverence and worship; Pharaoh’s response was to increase their workload. This was obviously the opposite of what they had hoped for. What strengthens your faith when circumstances turn out differently than you’d hoped?

2. Only God could have solved the Israelites problems. Both Israel and Egypt discovered He alone was LORD. Can you identify a situation in your own life (or someone else’s) that testifies to God’s deliverance alone—that no one else could take credit for? Who could your story serve to encourage?

3. Moses and Aaron received instructions from God and then “did just as the LORD had commanded.” Think of an instruction God has already given you, and how you can be more obedient to it this week.

DAY 3

1. Israel celebrated Passover annually and we celebrate communion regularly to remind ourselves corporately of God's deliverance. What personal reminders could you initiate to celebrate what God has done in your life?

2. Only days after being set free, the Israelites complain, saying they want to go back. Have you ever been tempted to return to a past way of life, even when you know it will be destructive? What attitude change would help you make healthier, more faithful choices?

CHAPTER 5, NEW COMMANDS AND A NEW COVENANT

DAY 1

1. Moses said, *“Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning”* (p. 61). Describe what it means to “fear God.” How does your life show that you fear God?

2. Moses was an intermediary between Israel and God. Has there been someone in your life who prayed for you, helped you see God’s will, or acted as a spiritual mentor? Would that type of relationship be a blessing to you today?

DAY 2

1. God continued to use Aaron, even after the Golden Calf debacle. Have you ever felt like your sin disqualified you for service to God? How does Aaron’s story encourage you?

2. Moses prayed to God on Israel’s behalf (p. 66). Who in your life needs you to intercede for them? Make a list in your journal and offer a prayer for them now.

DAY 3

1. Could you be described like God: compassionate, slow to anger, gracious, abounding in loving kindness? Which of these traits best describes you? Which are most difficult?

CHAPTER 6, WANDERINGS

DAY 1

1. Israel's complaining is a reminder of how easy it is to become ungrateful. List five things you for which you are grateful. How does gratitude change your perspective?
2. God punishes Miriam and Aaron for slandering Moses. Have you ever had to deal with lies spoken against you? How did you handle it?
3. If you had been one of the 12 spies, how would you have described the Promised Land?

DAY 2

1. How many examples of answered prayer can you find in this chapter? Which most encourages you and why?
2. The story of Baal at Shittim is only one of many examples of the link between sexual immorality and idolatry. How has ungodly sexuality affected your life?

CHAPTER 7, THE BATTLE BEGINS

DAY 1

1. What can we learn about godly leadership and succession planning as we watch the baton passed from Moses to Joshua?

2. We often draw black and white lines when we disagree with others. Read Joshua 5:13-14. How do people today co-opt Jesus to ensure He's on "their side?"

DAY 2

1. God gave Joshua assurances to face the coming battles, but Joshua still had to act in faith. What battles are you currently facing? How can God's presence and promises change the way you cope with them?

2. Do you suppose God viewed Rahab as a woman of sin or a woman of faith? Who in your life needs to be viewed through "grace-colored glasses?"

3. How does the destruction of peoples and cities in the Promised Land square with God's Upper Story of redemption?

DAY 3

1. Observe the battle between Israel-Gibeon and the five kings of the Amorites (p. 95-98). What human factors and what divine factors led to victory? What parallels can be drawn between this battle and your own spiritual battles today?

2. Joshua is known for the statement, *“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”* (Joshua 24:15). What habits and attitudes have you seen in other families that are good examples of leading a household in serving the LORD? How can you emulate them?

CHAPTER 8, A FEW GOOD MEN AND WOMEN

DAY 1

1. God used Israel's enemies to turn them back to himself. Have you ever had a painful or dangerous experience that led you back to God?
2. Deborah's military leader was named Barak, which means "lightning" or "flashing sword." Did he live up to his name? Describe a time when fear held you back from living up to the name "Christian."
3. In the evil days after Joshua, "every man did what was right in his eyes." In a pluralistic society, why is it dangerous when everyone gets to pick their own definition of right and wrong?

DAY 2

1. What are some characteristics of Deborah that make her a good role model for young women?
2. The angel of the Lord greeted Gideon as a mighty warrior though he was from the weakest clan and of the least in his family (p. 108). Do you tend to define yourself by your weaknesses or by the potential God sees in you because He is with you?

3. Samson's strength did not make up for his moral weaknesses. When has a strength of yours been insufficient to overcome your conditions?

DAY 3

1. In examining Samson's marriages, what takeaways would strengthen yours?

2. Think of some of the prayers in this chapter, such as Gideon's or Samson's. What does this teach us about prayer?

CHAPTER 9, THE FAITH OF A FOREIGN WOMAN

DAY 1

1. How would you describe the relationship between Naomi and her daughter-in-law? Is there anything you can apply to your relationship with your in-laws or future in-laws?

2. Ruth and Boaz provided for Naomi. In what tangible ways can you provide for the less fortunate both in your family and your community?

DAY 2

1. Boaz praised Ruth saying, “May the LORD repay you for what you have done [for Naomi]. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (p. 123). How did God answer Boaz’ prayer for Ruth? How does an “others-centered” life create blessings for the giver?

2. As you reflect on times of need in your life, when have you experienced divine providence and unexpected provision?

3. Character is revealed by what we do, what we say, and often by what others say about us. How does Boaz serve as an example of a godly man or Ruth as a godly woman for you?

DAY 3

1. The theme of redemption is found throughout this story. Compare Boaz' redemption of Ruth and Naomi to how Christ has redeemed you.

2. Faithful Boaz and Ruth were great-grandparents to King David and therefore they were also in the line of Messiah Jesus. Who in your family tree has been a godly example to you? Who in your church family stands as an example of godliness?

CHAPTER 10, STANDING TALL, FALLING HARD

DAY 1

1. Hannah wanted a child so badly she promised God that she would give the child over to Him.
2. Have you ever made a bargain with God? What thing do you want the most?
3. What do we learn from Hannah about how to pray?

DAY 2

1. How did Eli help Samuel know when he was hearing the voice of God? How can you tell when God is speaking to you?
2. The Ark of the Covenant was treated like a good luck charm. Do people treat God, or symbols of God, like that today? What is the difference between giving God the respect he deserves and treating a symbol like a rabbit's foot?
3. Samuel was hurt that the Israelites wanted a king, instead of remembering God was their king. Why was this such a temptation for them? When have you found it hard to trust God to take care of you?

CHAPTER 11, FROM SHEPHERD TO KING

DAY 1

1. Contrast God's view of David with man's view of David. Would you say you are winsome in the world's eyes? How does God see you?

2. Who or what are the giants in your life that need to be faced with courage? How can you equip yourself to do this?

DAY 2

1. Think of a time when jealousy has somehow overtaken you. How can focusing on the Upper Story help conquer these feelings?

2. Review the exchange between David and Saul at En Gedi (p. 153-154). What does Saul's response to David's offer of grace teach you about God's grace?

3. "The Lord does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (pg. 145). What words or acts of encouragement can you offer today to others (from family to strangers) based on God's view of them?

DAY 3

1. When David wanted to build God a temple, God redirected him, just as God sometimes constrains our best intentions because He wants us to serve Him in other ways. How has God redirected you? Looking back, was this initially disappointing?

2. After Nathan delivered God's revelation, David went to the LORD in humble awe and praise (p. 159-160). Praise God using your own words by writing a short Psalm.

CHAPTER 12, THE TRIALS OF A KING

DAY 1

1. List three to five lessons that you can apply to your own life from the episode of David's sin.
2. God used Nathan to confront David about his sin. Has anyone ever confronted you about a sin in your life? Who has permission to be your "Nathan"?
3. Compare David's confrontation with Nathan to Saul's confrontation with Samuel (p.162-163 and p. 141-143.) What does David seem to understand that Saul does not?

DAY 2

1. Psalm 32 (p.165-166) shows what David felt like when he kept his sin a secret. Do you have a secret sin? How does keeping it secret affect you?
2. After David's baby died, he arose and worshiped (p. 165). What does this say about the nature of worship? About David's ability to release the past?

DAY 3

1. King David grieved over his son Absalom's death, even though Absalom had betrayed him. Why do you think he reacted this way?
2. David was excited to give his time, money, and effort to building a temple he would not even live to see. Is giving easy or hard for you? How can you be a more cheerful giver?

CHAPTER 13, THE KING WHO HAD IT ALL

DAY 1

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Solomon is humble, and looks to God for help. By the end of the chapter, he is using political power and slave labor to maintain his reign. What led to this change?
2. Solomon was only 20 when he became king. One of his first acts as king was to ask God to give him wisdom. Where you have influence, when did you last ask for wisdom?
3. If the LORD offered you anything you wanted, what would you ask for?

DAY 2

1. What does the prayer of Solomon teach us about God and how we approach Him?
2. Despite Solomon's wisdom, he also made some poor decisions. Which would you say was the core bad decision and how will you avoid this in your life?

DAY 3

1. The Queen of Sheba traveled a long distance to experience the wisdom of Solomon. Who do you go to for wise advice? How can you take better advantage of those relationships?

2. As Solomon grew older, he was a rich and established ruler. He did not apply the wisdom that defined his early career. How can you continue to seek wisdom, even after you have experienced success?

CHAPTER 14, A KINGDOM TORN IN TWO

DAY 1

1. Rehoboam sought counsel from the elders who had served his father first and then to the young men who had served him. To whom do you turn when you need advice in making difficult decisions? Why?

2. This chapter is full of stories of conflict. Do you avoid conflict or are you more apt to provoke it? What lessons about conflict and conflict resolution can you learn from the stories in this chapter?

DAY 2

1. Jeroboam turned away from the LORD and caused Israel to sin in order to hold on to his position and power. When in your own life have you sinned against God in order to maintain a position, hold on to power or boost your standing? What safeguard could you put in place to help you make God-honoring choices in the future?

2. When the man of God spoke against Jeroboam, the king was outraged (p. 196-197). How do you receive correction?

3. The anger of the LORD is mentioned four times in this chapter (p. 198, 202). If someone asked you what makes God angry, what could you tell him or her? To which of the Ten Commandments was God's anger related (p. 61-62)?

DAY 3

1. Review the summary statements made about Kings Asa and Ahab (p. 201). In a single sentence, write a summary statement that you would like to define the character of your life. If it is not true of your life now, what steps do you need to take toward that goal?

2. What are a few of the ways that the national leaders of this chapter shaped the populace of their nations? Our nation has new leadership. Based upon what you have learned from this chapter, write a prayer for them and for our country.

CHAPTER 15, GOD'S MESSENGERS

DAY 1

1. God sent Elijah to the Kerith Ravine where he was fed by ravens. How has God provided for you in unlikely or surprising ways?

2. Elijah experienced a great miracle, defeating the prophets of Baal, but then began to fear for his life. Why do you think this miracle was not enough for him?

DAY 2

1. What role did prayer play in Elijah's life? Look up James 5:16-18. What made Elijah's prayer effective? What makes you righteous and your prayers effective? (See 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:6 for further insight.)

2. When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he prayed, "I have had enough, LORD. Take my life." Who do you know that could be experiencing similar despair? What can you do to help?

3. After a dramatic series of events, God revealed himself to Elijah in an undramatic way. Why would God choose to dwell in the whisper?

DAY 3

1. Elisha and Solomon were both given the opportunity to ask for whatever they wanted. What did they ask for? What does this teach us about what we should ask God for?

2. According to the prophecies of Amos and Hosea, what does God warn is coming? What is His ultimate purpose in Israel's judgment? What does this teach you about God?

CHAPTER 16, THE BEGINNING OF THE END

DAY 1

1. The reigns of kings Hoshea and Hezekiah overlapped for about six years. Which king seemed to have God's Lower Story in view and which seemed to have His Upper Story in view? How do you know?

2. God used the Assyrians to discipline his people. Look up Hebrews 12:4-11. According to Hebrews, what should be the outcome of God's discipline? Has this been your reaction?

DAY 2

1. What do these stories of kings and their people teach you about leadership?

2. The Assyrians tried to convince the people of Judah not to trust God. Whose "voice" is most likely to cause you to doubt God? To whom do you listen when you feel surrounded by your enemies?

3. Isaiah lists several analogies that show God's love for His people (p. 227-228). Which ones are most reassuring to you?

DAY 3

1. Consider Isaiah's vision of the LORD in the temple. What made Isaiah so aware of his own sinful condition?
2. Isaiah realized that his whole nation needed cleansing. Write out a prayer for our nation and for its cleansing.
3. God used Isaiah to warn Judah of an imminent judgment. God also provided the promise of restoration through Isaiah. What specific promises (p. 227-228) might bring you comfort in those times that you feel forsaken or forgotten by God?

CHAPTER 17, THE KINGDOM'S FALL

DAY 1

1. List the evil practices of Manasseh that aroused the anger of the LORD. Can you find examples of any of these practices in our own community?
2. Where did Manasseh set up his altars and Asherah poles? According to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, where is the temple of God now? What are the implications for you personally?
3. What does Manasseh's redemption teach you about God? About people?

DAY 2

1. Look up 2 Chronicles 33:14-20, 23. What was Manasseh's response to the grace of God?
2. God told Ezekiel, "You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious," (p. 236). Have you ever been fearful to speak the truth?

DAY 3

1. What must it have been like to be Jeremiah as Jerusalem was destroyed? How did he view God's Upper story and His Lower story, according to his lament (p. 243-245)?

2. List the specific promises that God says He will do for Israel (p. 245-246). According to the text, what is the result of God's Spirit in you? How does it affect your life to have the Spirit in you?

CHAPTER 18, DANIEL IN EXILE

DAY 1

1. Carefully observe how the chapter describes Daniel (p. 249, 257-258, 259). Do other characters in the chapter confirm or deny such attributes?
2. How does your prayer life compare to that of Daniel? Is it difficult for you to set aside time for regular prayer?
3. Although they might have only been teenagers, Daniel and his friends stand out for their choices to observe a strict diet and only worship their God. How can you help the young people you know be more like Daniel and his friends?

DAY 2

1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were punished for their faithfulness to God. How would you answer the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to people of faith?"
2. Daniel and his friends remained faithful to God, although they were given leadership positions in a pagan government. What can you learn from their leadership? What can you learn from their relationships with their boss and co-workers?

DAY 3

1. Did God promise Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego deliverance from the fiery furnace? What consequences are you willing to accept in order to stand firm in your faith?

2. Daniel's integrity was so consistent and above reproach that even his enemies could find no grounds to accuse him (p. 257-258). Examine your own life. Do any inconsistencies exist between your public life and your private life?

CHAPTER 19, THE RETURN HOME

DAY 1

1. If you had been an Israelite exile in Babylon when King Cyrus permitted your return, would you have returned to the Promised Land or would you have remained in Babylon? Why?
2. How had the LORD's 70-year discipline affected the people of Israel? Have you experienced personal change as a result of the LORD's discipline?

DAY 2

1. What did Israel's enemies do to undermine their efforts to rebuild their temple (p. 265)? When have you experienced a similar situation wherein someone tried to undermine something important to you? How did you respond?
2. Read pages 266-267 and list the reasons the temple work had ceased. Do you struggle with misplaced priorities? What are some ways you can reprioritize your life?
3. Some were disappointed that the new temple was no match to the glory and beauty of Solomon's temple. How can such comparisons be dangerous? According to Haggai's second message (p. 267-268), what is the remedy for their – and our – discouragement?

DAY 3

1. Haggai the Prophet encouraged the people to get back to work on the temple building project that had stalled for sixteen years (p. 267). Are there areas of your spiritual growth that have stalled out?
2. Review Zechariah's message of hope and promise. What did God promise the faithful Israelites He would do? List the ways they were to respond to God's grace (p. 269). How do you rate in these areas?

CHAPTER 20, THE QUEEN OF BEAUTY AND COURAGE

DAY 1

1. Compare and contrast either Queens Vashti and Esther or Mordecai and Haman. Consider how their actions and words reveal their characters and synthesize your conclusions into a simple life lesson that applies to you today.

2. Mordecai seemed to have God's Upper Story in view when he sent word to Esther, "*And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*" (p. 282). When has God most recently placed you in a position to serve a greater purpose than you desired? How did that make you feel?

DAY 2

1. How did Esther respond to Mordecai's instruction to approach the king and beg for mercy (p. 282)? Other than courage, what else was driving Esther's response?

2. Briefly list all that Haman boasted of to his wife and friends (p. 283). Why then was he not satisfied? What does this teach you about pride and discontentment?

DAY 3

1. The story of Esther demonstrates the need for fasting when facing a major crisis. Fasting is not an effort to "bribe" God into granting our request, but instead is done in reverence of His sovereignty and to focus our efforts. Have you ever fasted? What was the result?

2. A Medo-Persian king's edicts could not be repealed. How might your words or speech be different if you could not undo them? (See Matthew 5:37, James 3:1-11, James 5:12, and Ephesians 4:29.) What should characterize a Christian's words?

3. What was supposed to be a day of great destruction became a day of great deliverance and celebration of God's faithfulness. If you were to commemorate a time when God delivered you or providentially watched over you, what would it be and how would you celebrate it?

CHAPTER 21, REBUILDING THE WALLS

DAY 1

1. Ezra “*devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel*” (p. 292). How has your own devotion to the study of God’s Word changed since the beginning of *The Story*?
2. Review Ezra’s praise prayer (p. 294). Compare it to Proverbs 21:1. How might this help inform your view of our country’s newest government leaders?

DAY 2

1. Why did Nehemiah and Zerubbabel respond differently to opposition? (Review p. 264-266.) How are you most likely to respond when you face opposition?
2. Compare Nehemiah’s self-defense (p. 296-298) with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:38-45. How do you reconcile the differences?
3. What characteristics make Nehemiah a good leader? Which characteristic do you most need in your life?

DAY 3

1. Nehemiah chose Hananiah as a co-leader of Jerusalem “because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do” (p. 300). How would you benefit from surrounding yourself with “Hananiahs?”

2. Compare Malachi’s message on marriage with 1 Peter 3:7. Of what is marital unfaithfulness a symptom? What warnings might you give to a friend who treats a spouse poorly?

CHAPTER 22, THE BIRTH OF THE KING

DAY 1

1. Many people dispute Jesus and His true nature. Some say He was only a good man. Others say He was a god. What does p. 309 or John 1:1-14, 18 teach you about The Word, Jesus?

2. *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”* (p. 309 or John 1:12-13). Look up 1 John 3:1-3, 4:7-11, and 5:1-5. How does someone become a child of God? What does it imply for *you* to be a child of God?

DAY 2

1. What do you suppose Mary might have thought and felt after Gabriel’s visit?

2. Describe Joseph’s character and faith. What makes him an especially good role model for men today?

3. Mary “pondered these things in her heart” (p 313, 316). Surely her understanding of who Jesus was grew and matured over the years. How has your understanding of Jesus grown through this study of The Story?

CHAPTER 23, JESUS' MINISTRY BEGINS

DAY 1

1. Review the temptation of Jesus (p. 322). Look up Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:14-16. How does Jesus' temptation benefit you personally?
2. John the Baptist pointed two of his own disciples toward Jesus (p.324). They "*went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him*" (p. 324). If you could spend the day with Jesus, what would you ask?
3. Both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman struggled to understand what Jesus meant by eternal life. What do these passages teach you about eternal life? How would you explain eternal life to someone else?

DAY 2

1. "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (p. 329). What do you suppose she said and why do you suppose it was so effective? Practice sharing your testimony by writing a brief paragraph of what Jesus has done in your life. Finally, pause and pray that the LORD will give you an opportunity this week to share it.
2. What do you learn about the heart of God from Jesus' interaction with the sick, the seekers and the sinners (p. 329-332)? Which group of people could you cultivate a greater compassion for?

CHAPTER 24, NO ORDINARY MAN

DAY 1

1. Review the story of the soils (p. 335-336). Which best fits your faith walk?
2. Who do the shepherd and the woman in the lost sheep and lost coin parables represent? What do they value (p. 337)? Compare what God values in these parables to what the Pharisees value (see Luke 11:42-43 and 16:14.) Has your heart aligned more with God's or with the Pharisees' in the past week?
3. What does the Sermon on the Mount (p. 342, Matt. 6:25-34) teach you about worry and anxiety? In light of Jesus' teaching, what should be your relationship to wealth and material possessions?

DAY 2

1. Describe the Gerasene demoniac before and after his encounter with Jesus (p. 343-344). Compare this with Paul's description of every believer in Ephesians 2:1-10. What can you learn from this man about gratitude?
2. Review the healing of the woman with the bleeding disorder (p. 344-345) and then look up Leviticus 15:25-30. What do you suppose her life had been like for the past 12 years? How do you treat social outcasts and the infirm?

CHAPTER 25, JESUS, THE SON OF GOD

DAY 1

1. Jesus' audience thought He was going to establish His kingdom by force, but He strongly rebuked Peter for such thinking. Reflect on a time when you have struggled between doing things the easy way and doing things God's way.

2. Despite confessing Jesus to be the Christ and witnessing the transfiguration, Peter continued to struggle to be faithful. What miracles has God done in your life that you sometimes forget?

DAY 2

1. During the Festival of Tabernacles, a celebration of God's provision while Israel wandered in the desert, Jesus claimed to be the way of salvation. Why would He choose this festival to make this claim? Does John 1:14 bear on this?

2. Look up 1 John 1:5-7 and 2:8-11. Jesus said that His followers "will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." How does Jesus illuminate our Lower Stories?

3. Why did Jesus delay in coming to Mary and Martha? What does this tell you about God's timing? Does this relieve or intensify your own anxieties and concerns?

CHAPTER 26, THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

DAY 1

1. While in the upper room with His disciples, Jesus knew his death was imminent. What was most important to Him (p. 367-371)? How would you spend the last day of your life and why? How might your answer shape your daily life now?
2. In John 14:1-17 (p. 369-370), Jesus described His relationship with the Father and the Spirit. This relationship, referred to as the Trinity is foundational to our understanding of God. How would you describe their community?
3. What did Jesus teach about the relationship of the Spirit to you personally?
4. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep my commands"* (p. 370). Looking at your past week, in what ways have you succeeded in following Jesus' commands?

DAY 2

1. List some ways we see Jesus' love for his enemies. How does this compare with your treatment of your enemies? Your loved ones?
2. Describe Peter's volatile relationship with Jesus. What lessons from him can you apply to your own relationship with the LORD?

CHAPTER 27, THE RESURRECTION

DAY 1

1. Seventy-five pounds of spices and aloes was an unusually large amount to use to prepare Jesus' body for burial. It was enough to bury a royal king. How do you suppose Nicodemus changed over time in his relationship with Jesus and what might account for that change (p. 381-382)? (See p. 326-327, John 3:1-18.) When in your own life have you experienced the greatest change in your faith and what accounted for it?
2. What were Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome going to do that early morning and what does it indicate they expected about the resurrection (p. 382)?

DAY 2

1. As Jesus talked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they later reported that "our hearts [were] burning within us while He talked to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us" (p. 385, Luke 24:13-35)? Has your heart ever burned with insight into God's Word? What did you learn?
2. Jesus in essence explained the Upper Story to the downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the Eleven (p. 384-386). How have you been changed by watching the thread of the Upper Story weave throughout the Old Testament?

DAY 3

1. The night before He was crucified, Jesus taught Peter and the other disciples about abiding in Him (John 15:1-5). How does this teaching relate to the fishermen's miraculous catch and Jesus' call on Peter's life (p. 386-388)? Reflecting on these events, how do you know that you can carry out the mission God has on your life?

2. What does Jesus' Great Commission on the mountain in Galilee require of all His disciples (p. 388)? What are the various ways you can obey this command?

CHAPTER 28, NEW BEGINNINGS

DAY 1

1. Just 50 days earlier Peter denied Christ and cowered in fear and shame. Now we find Peter preaching in the first megachurch, facing down Jewish religious leaders, and noticeably full of courage. What factors accounted for this change?
2. What was the new church doing to build relationships and to make disciples in Jerusalem (p. 392, 395)? How can our church do the same?
3. How did early Christians regard material possessions (p. 395)? What should be the role of the church in helping the poor today?

DAY 2

1. Why do you suppose the early believers “enjoyed the favor of all the people” (p. 392) and “were highly regarded by the people” (p. 395)? How critical is this to the mission of the Church?
2. When ordered by the Sanhedrin to discontinue teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus, Peter answered, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (p. 396). He was also willing to accept the consequences of his stance. Yet Christians are also called to respect and to submit to governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). When do you think it is okay for Christians to resist authority and when is it not?

DAY 3

1. Cornelius' conversion along with his household dramatically changed the direction of the church. What began as a Jewish messianic movement would now cross ethnic barriers. Consider the ethnic and racial barriers that exist in the Church today. What are some ways that our church can promote greater racial and ethnic integration and harmony in the church locally? Globally? Personally?

2. What did you learn about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and believers from this chapter of The Story? What does this mean for you?

CHAPTER 29, PAUL'S MISSION

DAY 1

1. What method did Paul consistently use to prove that Jesus is the Messiah?
2. Paul took three missionary journeys throughout Asia and Greece to help fulfill the mandate to be witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Locate some of the cities and territories that Paul visited using the map in the back of The Story. If you could go on a short-term mission trip to anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
3. What did you learn about the relationship between faith and suffering from Paul’s life and the church at Thessalonica (p. 414-415, 416-419)? How might this help you cope as you endure your own trials and suffering?

DAY 2

1. Describe Apollos (p. 420). What can you learn about Christian discipleship from his relationship with Priscilla and Aquila?
2. 1 Corinthians 13 is often called the “love chapter” (p. 427, 1 Corinthians 13:1-7). This kind of love is sacrificial and benevolent, not self-serving but doing what is best for another—John 3:16 love. Notice the list of things that love is and is not. Choose one or two to practice this week. How could your family relationships be affected if you practiced this kind of love this week? Your friendships? Your church family relationships?

DAY 3

1. Review Paul's teaching on the Gospel (p. 427-428, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). List the key points of the Gospel that Paul said were of "first importance." How many people saw the resurrected Christ and what makes His resurrection such a crucial piece of the Gospel?

2. Look through this chapter at the many times the Holy Spirit directed Paul and the apostles. What did He influence? How does this constant direction compare with His control of your life?

CHAPTER 30, PAUL'S FINAL DAYS

DAY 1

1. Paul said to the elders in Ephesus, "Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (p. 440, Acts 20:13-35). List several ways a shepherd is a good metaphor for the role of an elder and why it's important to remember that the church belongs to God. Even if you are not an elder, how do the passages apply to you?

2. Review Paul's personal testimony that he gave to the Jews from the steps of the barracks (p. 442-443, Acts 21:37-22:21). What pattern in Paul's example might help you articulate your own testimony?

DAY 2

1. Paul was wrongly accused by his enemies, just as Daniel and Jesus had been. How did each of these men respond to false accusations and what can you learn from them? How might you respond when confronted with anger about your Christian beliefs?

2. Which unlikely situations did Paul use as opportunities for evangelism in this chapter? What are some unlikely situations in your own life that can be used as opportunities to evangelize?

DAY 3

1. Review Ephesians 2:1-10 found in the second paragraph of page 453. Make a “before and after” list of those things that are true of all people before salvation and after salvation. Name at least three outwardly observable ways that you can apply these truths to your life because you are in Christ. Now that I am in Christ, I am no longer _____.
2. What did Paul’s letter to the Ephesians teach about family relationships and why would he include this as part of living “a life worthy of the calling you have received” (p. 455, Ephesians 4:1, 5:22-32)?
3. Look up Acts 9:15-16, Philippians 4:11-14, and 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Paul asked Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel (p. 456, 2 Timothy 1:8). What does Paul’s life teach you about suffering? If Paul had asked you, like Timothy, to join him in suffering for the Gospel as he had, what might have been your response?

CHAPTER 31, THE END OF TIME

DAY 1

1. As you study this final chapter of The Story throughout your week, develop a comprehensive description in your journal of God the Father and of Jesus the Son. For example, on page 459, Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” How does this portrait of Christ in Revelation compare to the Christ of the Gospels?
2. Jesus had a message for each of the churches in Asia (p. 461-462). Identify the problem and the solution in each church. What was promised to the one who overcomes it? How could we apply the messages to these Asian churches to ourselves today?

DAY 2

1. Sketch or paint the throne room of God as it is described on pages 463-464.
2. How will Christ’s second coming (p. 466) differ from His first coming in purpose and in scope? (See Matthew 25:31-34, 41; Mark 10:45; John 3:16-17; and Acts 17:30-31 for further insight.)
3. Read Matthew 24:29-44, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, and Titus 2:11-14. How should Christ’s second coming apply to your life now?

DAY 3

1. Now that you have studied the New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem, what do you look forward to the most (p. 466-469)?
2. What did this chapter of *The Story* contribute to your understanding of God's Upper Story of redemption? How might you respond to a Christian friend who sees no value in or is confused by studying Revelation?
3. Spend a few minutes reflecting on your *Story* experience and then capture some of those thoughts in a paragraph below. Be sure to include how God's Upper Story impacts how you live now.