



GENESIS

A TEN-WEEK CORE GROUP STUDY

**YALE
CHI
ALPHA**

GENESIS

When we think about the original hearers of Genesis, their top question was likely not, *how were we made?* But rather, *who is this God that has just delivered us? Who is it that we are being asked to follow?*

God is reshaping who His people believe Him to be through the stories He is writing through humanity. The biblical authors set forth the themes and ideas they wanted to communicate often by repetition—which makes sense in a culture where information is passed down through stories.

From the first few chapters in Genesis, we see the major themes of scripture unfold: the infinite, all-knowing, magnitude of God, His unfaithful, sinful creation, and God's ultimate plan for redemption—all in pages one through five of your Bible. The rest of the biblical narrative is simply a repetition of these themes playing out with real, flawed people time and time again, with the faithful response of a loving God who will stop at nothing to keep His promises.

As we read through this study we will see the metanarrative of scripture begin to play out through God's interactions with flawed, yet often faithful people.

Our prayer for you is that as God reveals Himself in scripture to the Israelites, we might in turn, truly know, love, and learn to fully trust God too.

STUDY OUTLINE

THE STORY OF HUMANITY

WEEK 1

REAL COMMUNITY

WEEK 2

WORK

WEEK 3

SHAME

WEEK 4

BROKEN SHALOM

WEEK 5

THE VALLEY OF FAITH

WEEK 6

THE GOD WHO SEES ME

WEEK 7

LAY DOWN YOUR IDOLS

WEEK 8

DEEP WOUNDS & DISAPPOINTMENT

WEEK 9

WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

WEEK 10

TRUSTING GOD IN OBSCURITY

THE PATRIARCHS



FALL READING PLAN

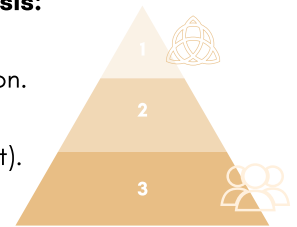
While the Bible is one unified story of God’s creation and redemption of humanity, it’s helpful to think of it as a mini-library of 66 books—all of which have different genres, literary styles, and purposes. Each book of scripture plays by its own rules, and knowing the rules is critical to shape our views of who God is and how we live in light of His Word. This semester, we will be diving into Genesis and the gospel accounts of Mark, Luke, and John.

READING GENESIS AS BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

We read Genesis as a biblical narrative—that is a purposeful retelling of historical events that help provide meaning and direction for God's people. These narratives do not retell what *should have* happened, but report the raw (sometimes ugly) facts. As we work through this study, we will see that biblical narratives are *not* allegories full of hidden meaning. They are *not* intended to teach us moral lessons (though we might observe the consequences of immorality), nor do they answer all of our questions about life. But they reveal to us a true story where God is the hero, protagonist and main character driving the plot of redemption forward.

There are three levels of narrative at play in Genesis:

- Level I is the *metanarrative*: this is the entirety of God's redemptive plan worked out through creation.
- Level II is God's redeeming of a people for His purposes (both through the old and new covenant).
- Level III is the hundreds of individual stories that comprise the first two levels.



As we read about individual events and people, be mindful of how they weave together to reveal to us the ultimate plan and purpose of scripture: that we may know God's heart for the redemption of His people.

WEEK ONE	WEEK TWO	WEEK THREE	WEEK FOUR	WEEK FIVE
I Genesis 1, Mark 1	I Genesis 6:9-22, Mark 7	I Genesis 11:1-9, Mark 13	I Genesis 15, Luke 3	I Genesis 20, Luke 9
II Genesis 2, Mark 2	II Genesis 7, Mark 8	II Genesis 11:10-32, Mark 14	II Genesis 16, Luke 4	II Genesis 21, Luke 10
III Genesis 3, Mark 3	III Genesis 8, Mark 9	III Genesis 12:1-9, Mark 15	III Genesis 17, Luke 5	III Genesis 22, Luke 11
IV Genesis 4, Mark 4	IV Genesis 9:1-17, Mark 10	IV Genesis 12:10-20, Mark 16	IV Genesis 18:1-15, Luke 6	IV Genesis 23, Luke 12
V Genesis 5, Mark 5	V Genesis 9:18-28, Mark 11	V Genesis 13, Luke 1	V Genesis 18:16-33, Luke 7	V Genesis 24, Luke 13
VI Genesis 6:1-8, Mark 6	VI Genesis 10, Mark 12	VI Genesis 14, Luke 2	VI Genesis 19, Luke 8	VI Genesis 25, Luke 14
VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day

WEEK SIX	WEEK SEVEN	WEEK EIGHT	WEEK NINE	WEEK TEN
I Genesis 26, Luke 15	I Genesis 30:25-43, Luke 21	I Genesis 34, John 3	I Genesis 39, John 9	I Genesis 44, John 15
II Genesis 27, Luke 16	II Genesis 31:1-21, Luke 22	II Genesis 35:1-15, John 4	II Genesis 40, John 10	II Genesis 45, John 16
III Genesis 28:1-9, Luke 17	III Genesis 31:22-55, Luke 23	III Genesis 35:15-29, John 5	III Genesis 41:1-40, John 11	III Genesis 46, John 17
IV Genesis 28:10-22, Luke 18	IV Genesis 32:1-21, Luke 24	IV Genesis 36, John 6	IV Genesis 41:41-56, John 12	IV Genesis 47, John 18
V Genesis 29, Luke 19	V Genesis 32:22-32, John 1	V Genesis 37, John 7	V Genesis 42, John 13	V Genesis 48, John 19
VI Genesis 30:1-24, Luke 20	VI Genesis 33, John 2	VI Genesis 38, John 8	VI Genesis 43, John 14	VI Genesis 49, John 20
VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Grace Day	VII Genesis 50, John 21

*Tips on Reading Genesis found in Gordon Fee's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*

LEADING GREAT DISCUSSIONS

We've all been in groups where the conversation just dies. Crickets. Maybe that group is also your core group. This happens to the best of us! That's where you come in: a great leader can really help facilitate a great discussion. We hope this study guide will help you do that!

GREAT CORE GROUPS HAVE GREAT CONVERSATIONS.

Sometimes people can be hesitant to engage. Maybe they are tired, confused, or just internal processors. While it can be tempting for core group to become a monologue, the key to a great discussion is 1) great simple, direct questions and 2) patient (even awkwardly patient) times of waiting for people to think and respond.

Before Core Group think through good questions to ask (we've included a few) that cover both context (what is happening in this passage?) and application (what does this mean for me?) Also, even though you may be spending time in the Old Testament, it's always good to ask the question: *what difference does the Gospel make here?*

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS!

As a leader, you can help make those connections between what your core group is learning and their lives as Jesus followers today. Sometimes that may lead your group down a few rabbit holes, but that's okay, just bring it back to scripture.

MAKE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS.

Remember, you don't need to have all the answers. Hopefully you can grow together in our roots of real devotion, community, and responsibility. And remember, our devotion to God and His word doesn't end when Core Group does. Consider ways your group can continue to apply what you've learned throughout the week, maybe through 1:1's, text messages, or times of prayer together.

LIVE IT OUT TOGETHER.

ELEMENTS OF THIS STUDY

Each week begins with an introduction that unpacks the theme and specific theological concepts for the week. You can send the people in your Core Group this entire study, the sections you work through each week, or even just the scripture passage. Up to you!

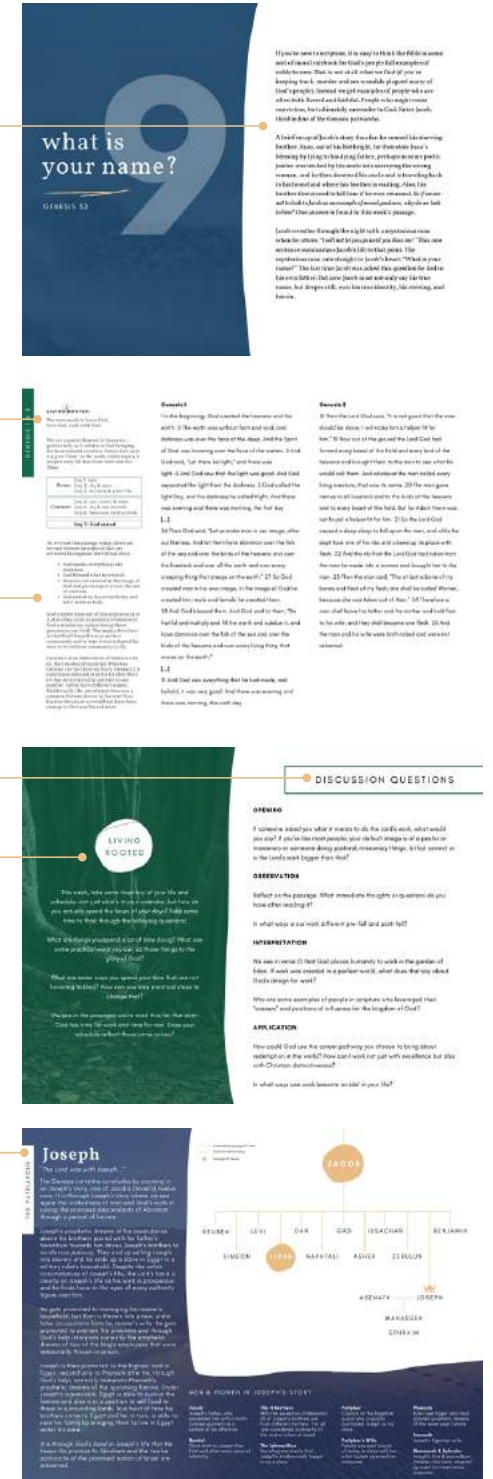
Throughout the study, we want to unpack what it means to "Live Rooted"—that is, to live according to our three roots of *Real Devotion, Real Community, and Real Responsibility*.

Alongside the passage of scripture for the week, we will include some commentary notes to help us understand the text's meaning.

We've included some starting questions to discuss for each week's passage.

Scripture teaches us in the Book of James that we should be doers of the Word and not simply hearers. We've included a spiritual discipline each week that we can work through both personally and in community—through our 1:1s and Core Groups.

This 10-week study is broken into five sections: creation, the fall, and a survey of the founding patriarchs through the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. We've provided theological overview pages to give extra context for each of these sections.



CREATION STORIES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The Genesis account of creation was originally told to the people of Israel who would have been familiar with the Ancient Near Eastern cultures surrounding them (ie: Egypt and Babylon). Understanding the creation accounts of the religions that the Israelite contemporaries (and even former rulers) believed in shows us how distinct the God of Israel—our God of the universe—really is.

The Genesis creation story shows a God that is distinctly separate from all creation, self-existent before all time and space. This differs from the Babylonian account of creation found in the *Enuma Elish* where creation was born out of a battle between gods. This also differs from the Egyptian creation story involving the god Atum who, before creating, first created himself by will of mind.

A common motif in these creation accounts is that of the "watery deep" (Gen 1:2). The primordial waters were often associated with being an insurmountable force. However, the Genesis account is distinct in how Creator God relates to this watery deep. In the Mesopotamian account the god, Marduk, ultimately creates the

world by defeating the formidable water goddess, Tiamat. Her torn carcass creates heaven and earth. In the Egyptian account, the god, Atum, is self-actualized by rising out of the waters. Yahweh, by contrast, hovers *over* the waters. By taking focus off the waters and putting God above unperturbed, the Genesis account effectively strips the "watery deep" of the power and formidable nature that is so often associated with it.

Whereas creation is born out of violence between gods in the Babylonian account and creation is born out of immaterial gods manifesting in material forms (ie: sky, ground and sun) in the Egyptian account, the Genesis account is clearly monotheistic where our one God, Yahweh, creates all by the word of His command.

Though the Egyptian accounts of creation hold remarkable similarities in the order of creation to Genesis, the pinnacle of creation for the Egyptian account is the creation of the sun (or the manifestation of god, Re) and authority is given to the sun to rule the world.

In comparison, the Genesis account has a marked de-emphasis on the creation of the sun. Instead the pinnacle of creation and appointed ruler of the world is mankind, bearing the *imago dei*—the image of God.

In the Babylonian account, though mankind is similarly fashioned out of earth, the intention behind creating mankind was so that man would serve the gods and do all of the work on earth that the gods did not want to do. By contrast, in Genesis the relationship between God and mankind is one of freedom and generosity. God bestows dignity, abundance in sustenance and authority to rule over creation to man.

Genesis was written originally because God wanted the Israelites of the time to know how much greater He was in power, in intent and in relationship to mankind than the other gods that were revered around them. As we read Genesis today may we also see God's unmatched power and goodness and truly see there is none like our God.

GENESIS CREATION STORY



God is self-existent

Monotheistic

Humanity created to rule the earth with God

Humanity made in the image of God

SIMILARITIES



Primordial Waters

Order of creation (Egypt)

Man formed out of earth (Babylon)

CREATION STORIES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



Pantheistic

Creation out of violence (Babylon)

Sun as ruler of earth (Egypt)

Humanity made to work for gods

real community

GENESIS 1 & 2

Translated from Greek as “*origin*,” Genesis sets the stage for the redemptive story of scripture.

Immediately, we get introduced to the first and most consequential character of the story and our lives—God. In the beginning God created. He is the protagonist of this story. Remember, Genesis is being told to the Israelites who are being led from slavery—they are hyper-aware of the fallenness of humanity, and are now learning their own origins. Thus, in Genesis, we see three distinct parts of God's dramatic story begin to unfold: creation, human disobedience, and divine redemption.

In this opening chapter of scripture we begin to discover that life is about something far greater than our own personal fulfillment, our peace of mind, or even our happiness. If we are going to understand “what we were made for” we must begin with God. All of creation was inspired by Him, made by Him and for His purposes.

We see that God brings order, blessing and flourishing out of chaos—which is good news for us. Sometimes our semester or our year doesn't turn out how we thought it might. But from the opening page of scripture to the conclusion, we see that what God does with the universe, He does in our own lives. He brings order and flourishing from the chaos.

This week we will see how God—already existing in triune community—invites us to participate in real community. It's what we are created for.

LIVING ROOTED:

We were made to know God, love God, walk with God.

We see a poetic element in Genesis 1—particularly as it relates to God bringing forth an ordered creation. Notice how days 1-3 give "form" to the earth, while days 4-6 respectively fill that form with content. Thus:

Form:	Day 1: light Day 2: sky & seas Day 3: dry land & plant life
Content:	Day 4: sun, moon, & stars Day 5: sky & sea animals Day 6: herbivore land animals
Day 7: God rested	

As we read this passage today, there are several themes introduced that are revisited throughout the biblical story:

- God speaks everything into existence.
- God blessed what he created.
- Humans are created in the image of God and given regency over the rest of creation.
- God rested on the seventh day and set it aside as holy.

God's mysterious use of plural pronouns in 1:26 is often cited as potential evidence of God's trinitarian nature (being three persons in one God). The implication here is that God Himself was in perfect community and in turn it was not good for man to be without community (2:18).

Genesis 2 is an elaboration of Genesis 1:26-28, the creation of mankind. Whereas Genesis 1 is the Creation Story, Genesis 2 is sometimes referred to as the Garden Story so they do not stand in contrast to one another, rather have different scopes. Additionally, the use of repetition was a common literary device in Ancient Near Eastern literature so would not have been strange to the Israelite audience.

Genesis 1

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God 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

[...]

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

[...]

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

Genesis 2

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

Practice the spiritual discipline of friendship this week. Grab lunch or coffee (or schedule a phone call) with someone from your core group. Hear their stories, ask questions, and invest in building new relationships centered around a common devotion to Jesus.

Do you have friends at Yale that can encourage you as you walk with Jesus? If not, how can you make deep friendship a priority this year? If yes, how will you invest in those relationships?

OBSERVATION

What is happening in this passage? What did God create each day? What does He say about His creation?

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

Looking at verse 1: If God made the material universe, what does this tell us about what He is like?

Looking at verse 25: Why were Adam and Eve not ashamed of their nakedness? What must it have been like to live in a world without shame?

Looking at verse 26: Scripture says people were made in the image of God. In what ways do you think God and humanity are alike? In what ways are they different? What does that mean for how you view yourself and others? What does that mean for how you live?

APPLICATION

God saw in Genesis 2:18 that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone. What does this mean for God's view of community? Do you live in community or do you live isolated?

work

GENESIS 1 & 2

2

Last week, we were introduced to this radical concept that we were made in the image of God. The Hebrew word for “image” (*tselem*) literally means “statue” and was typically used to refer to idols (as idols were physical representations of the gods). By contrast, God created a living humanity whom he bestowed authority and dignity to rule over creation. *What does this mean?*

In this second chapter of scripture, we get this picture that God has made us what is theologically called *vice-regents*—humanity as his image bearers are to take this creation and use it to glorify Him.

God always wanted humanity, you and I, to move creation forward, to create culture, and to cause His good creation—full of potential—to flourish in a way that glorified Him.

In doing so, God originally defines work far from a necessary evil, but as a generous gift to humanity in a sinless world. *Do we view work like that today?*

Maybe you find your work and studies at Yale always at odds with your devotion to God. *Would it surprise you that God not only created work, but He delights in it?* He created giraffes, peacocks, platypuses—animals that if nothing else reveal the extreme creativity of a God who created purpose in work. In Him, our work can be a delight too. We have been made stewards and co-laborers in creation. Our work is something we will spend most of our adult lives doing, and, fortunately for us, the Bible has something to say about this.

**LIVING ROOTED:**

As image bearers of God we are meant to steward God's creation and work.

Imago Dei: (Gen 1:26 - 27) The creation of man in comparison to all other creation is distinct in that humankind was created in the image of God. Being made in the image of God or the Latin, *imago dei*, is an important concept in theology. This concept has several implications such as providing justification for respecting all human life (Gen 9:6), implies partnership with God in stewarding creation, and gives authority to humankind over all of God's creation (Gen 1:26).

The Creation Mandate given to Mankind in Genesis 1:

- Procreation (fruitful & multiply)
- Stewardship of the earth (subdue)
- Rulership of living creatures (dominion)

The idyllic picture of creation we see here involves man working and tending the Garden of Eden. As God worked in His act of creating the universe, so as image bearers of God, man also works. Though we are still living in the reality of the Fall, with the redemption of Jesus and restored relationship with God, the work we do can be redeemed and honoring to God and His original Creation Mandate to mankind.

Genesis 1

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

[...]

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.



LIVING
ROOTED

This week, take some inventory of your life and schedule—not just what’s in your calendar, but how do you actually spend the hours of your days? Take some time to think through the following questions:

What are things you spend a lot of time doing? What are some practical ways you can do those things to the glory of God?

What are some ways you spend your time that are not honoring to God? How can you take practical steps to change that?

We see in the passages we’ve read thus far that even God has time for work and time for rest. *Does your schedule reflect those same values?* Practice taking a sabbath this week—set aside a period of time for rest and communion with God and others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING

If someone asked you what it means to do the Lord’s work, what would you say? If you’re like most people, your default image is of a pastor or missionary or someone doing pastoral, missionary things. Is that correct or is the Lord’s work bigger than that?

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

In what ways is our work different pre-fall and post-fall?

INTERPRETATION

We see in verse 15 that God places humanity to work in the garden of Eden. If work was created in a perfect world, what does that say about God’s design for work?

Who are some examples of people in scripture who leveraged their “careers” and positions of influence for the kingdom of God?

APPLICATION

How could God use the career pathway you choose to bring about redemption in the world? How can I work not just with excellence but also with Christian distinctiveness?





In what ways can work become an idol in your life?

THE STORY OF HUMANITY




Genesis 3 - 11 tells the beginnings of humanity's stumble into sin and destruction. Throughout these chapters we see a repetitive pattern of human sin (rebellion, murder, drunkenness, pride to name a few), the consequences of sin, and God's response of divine grace. Below is a chart that outlines a few of the larger moments of humanity's fallenness correlated with God's gracious response to sin.

HUMANITY'S SIN

GENESIS 3 GENESIS 11

 <p>Genesis 3:6 Eating of the forbidden tree (original sin)</p>	<p>Genesis 4:8 The first murder (Cain & Abel)</p>	<p>Genesis 6:5 Humanity's every thought inclined to evil</p> 	<p>Genesis 9:21 Noah's drunkenness</p> 	<p>Genesis 11:4 Tower of Babel</p> 
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CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

<p>Genesis 3:23 Adam & Eve are banished from the garden of Eden</p> 	<p>Genesis 6:6 Humanity's sin grieves God's heart</p>	<p>Genesis 7:6 God floods the world to wipe out humanity's wickedness</p> 	<p>Genesis 11:8 God scatters people across the world</p> 
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GOD'S GRACE & FAITHFULNESS

<p>Genesis 3:15 Promise of future salvation</p> 	<p>Genesis 3:21 God clothes Adam & Eve</p>	<p>Genesis 4:15 God gives protection to Cain</p>	<p>Genesis 6:18 God saves Noah & his family from the flood</p> 	<p>Genesis 9:11 God promises never to destroy life by flood</p> 
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shame

GENESIS 3

If we think of the metanarrative scripture through the lens of plot structure, Genesis 1 and 2 provide the exposition, and Genesis 3 introduces the chief conflict in the story of humanity. Humans trade the perfect peace and wisdom of God (shalom) for the false promise that life would be better if they defined good and evil for themselves.

Adam and Eve rebel, and sin enters into what was a good and perfect world. Instead of trusting God alone as the source of fulfillment, they decide to pursue fulfillment apart from God. And the consequences were disastrous as we see in our world and lives today. *But what is the very first consequence of sin that is mentioned?* Shame.

The moment they rebel against God, there's a loss: loss of their righteousness, their purity, and their acceptability. Suddenly, being seen and known is traumatic. Vulnerability becomes painful, and they can't stand to be known. In their nakedness they feel unacceptable, unworthy—shame has entered the world.

Humanity was designed to be known and loved—to commune with God Himself in the garden. Then sin entered the world. This week we see that shame is the residue of sin—it is now part of the human condition.

We will spend the next two weeks examining the consequences of this chapter with the sobriety that the world is not as it ought to be and the hope that redemption is both here now and still to come.

**LIVING ROOTED:**

Because Jesus stepped into our shame on the cross, we are both truly known and truly loved by God.

Though not explicitly stated here, tradition says that the serpent was the actual presence of Satan in the garden. Similar to how Satan tempted Jesus, he uses God's words for his own purposes, twisting meaning to tempt man to turn away from God. Pay attention to how both Satan and Eve recall God's command in Gen 3:1-3 and compare with how God originally commanded Adam in Gen 2:16-17:

"16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Scholars say that verse 21 actually was the first shedding of blood for the sake of humankind. In clothing them with the skins of an innocent animal, God demonstrated how it would be possible for us to one day be clothed with the royal splendor and righteousness that He had intended for humanity. This act in Genesis 3 points to Jesus.

Genesis 2

25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Genesis 3

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

[...]

21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

The world as we know it is a result of the passage we read this week. None of us are immune to the consequences of sin or the feeling of shame. We may not use fig leaves, but we too try to deal with our shame by covering ourselves.

This week, ask God to reveal areas in your life where sin and shame have taken over. Shame loves isolation. Confession is both a private and communal spiritual practice. Privately take time for self-examination, and with a mentor or friend practice confession in Christian community.

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

How did eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil open their eyes to their nakedness? Why did that cause Adam and Eve to feel shame?

APPLICATION

Do you live with shame? How does that affect how you live or interact with others?

What are your fig leaves? How are you trying to cover yourselves on your own? Is it accomplishments? Your busyness? Approval of others? Habits? Control? Social withdrawal? Anger?

What would it look like if we all lived as people who no longer covered ourselves with fig leaves—hiding from God and from each other? In a world plagued by shame, what could Chi Alpha look like as people set free from shame? Could this community look more like what God intended in creation in Genesis chapter 2?

broken shalom

GENESIS 3

Sin began with a distrust in God. Consider the core of the temptation of our passage today: the serpent brought into question the very goodness of God. *“God’s not for your good. He’s really just keeping good from you. You can’t really trust God. You need to take your life into your own hands to ensure your own happiness.”* Instead humans chose to redefine good and evil on our own terms, according to our own interest.

We were created to exist in perfect shalom—peace and wholeness. When we rejected God, shalom was shattered. Vandalized. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “sin” (*khata*) means: to fail, to miss the mark. We now miss the mark on what we were created to be. And like a disease, sin has broken shalom in every area of life. Sin breaks shalom:

- *with God*: though we still bear God’s image, our hearts are defiled—every word, deed, motive, thought of ours is polluted. We enslaved ourselves to sin and its power (John 8:34). And, God cannot be indifferent to sin because He is good; we now stand before God as people who are guilty.
- *with others*: shalom in every human relationship—family, romantic, friendships—is broken. We don’t have to look very far to see to see that. Have you ever been hurt in a friendship? Have you experienced brokenness in your family? Or have you felt lonely or unknown, unloved? This is a result of our rejection of God.
- *with ourselves*: we are no longer whole. As we saw last week, where God intended for us to live with no shame or insecurity, we cover and hide in shame.


LIVING ROOTED:

God enters into our world of broken shalom. He came to restore the world as it was meant to be, to bring a new heaven and a new earth.

Verse 15 is known as the Protevangelium—a compound word of two Greek words, *protos* meaning "first" and *evangelion* meaning "good news" or "gospel." This verse is commonly referred to as the first mention of the good news of salvation in the Bible.

So what we see is this: that immediately after the fall, in the midst of the brokenness of humanity, in the midst of suffering, God is not sitting idly by, but God is on the move. Not only is God's heart moved, but God's hand moves. We see God declare that one is going to come from the offspring of a woman who will crush the head of the serpent, but will in the process have his heel bruised. It is a powerful picture of victory that God will bring, but this victory will come at a great cost.

There is a really excellent Bible Project video on the Tree of Life ([Click through here to access it](#)).

Genesis 3

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

[...]

22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" 23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

The good news we learn from Genesis is that we know the next part of the story: God, in His infinite goodness sent His son to pay the price of our sin. That is the Gospel. *Do you believe that?*

Our exercise last week was confession of our sin. This week, take some time to write down or speak aloud your thanks to God for what He has done to restore broken shalom in your life. Perhaps think through these questions: *when did the gospel first become real in your life and how is it still real for you in your life at Yale?*

OBSERVATION

Why do you suppose God created a choice for humans by planting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Why does God judge Adam and Eve's actions so harshly? What was their sin rooted in?

Genesis 3:15 is known as the protevangelium—the first sign of the Gospel—in scripture. What does this verse mean?

Looking at verses 22 and 23: why did God not want humanity to eat from the Tree of Life? Was this an act of punishment? An act of grace? Both?

INTERPRETATION

Are you comfortable with the concept of sin? How do you feel identifying as a sinner?

APPLICATION

Is there a sin that you struggle with habitually? What would it take to break free of that sin?

Abraham

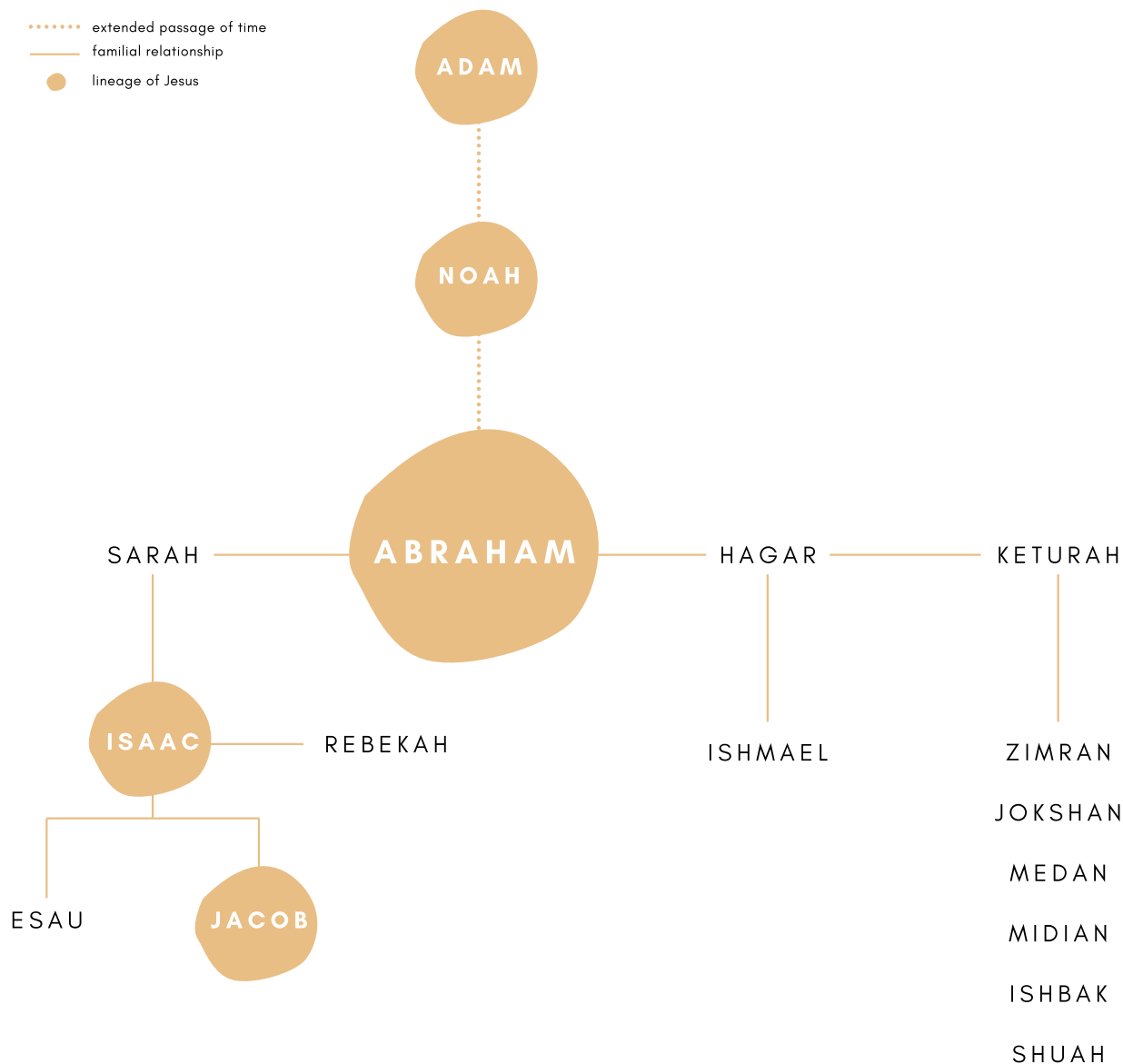
"You will be the father of many nations."

Following the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden, we see their descendants continue in patterns of wickedness and sin. Twenty generations (about 2000 years) after Adam and Eve, a righteous man named Abram is introduced to the biblical story. We see that God calls Abram to leave his home country with a promise from God to bless him with a land, a nation of people and that through him the whole world would be blessed. Through calling Abram, God is intervening in the world once again by setting aside a special person and special group of people to eventually bless all of mankind. The fulfillment of this promise of land, nation and world blessing is what we see throughout all of the rest of scripture.

Abram sets off with his wife, Sarai, and his nephew Lot in obedience to God's call to leave to an unknown land and we see along the way that he is blessed in wealth and protected from other national rulers. But as Abram remains childless, when his faith weakens, God continues to reassure him that he will indeed have direct descendants and then later after he has a child with Sarai's servant, Hagar, that he will indeed have direct descendants with his wife Sarai. Abram is credited as righteous because of his belief in God's promise to him and God helps Abram and His people remember His promises in multiple ways, through verbal reminders, participating in a covenant ritual, requiring circumcision, and renaming Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah to bear the name, *father of many nations* and *princess over all*.

For the next three weeks we will look at some of the stories surrounding Abram's life and how God is faithful to His promise, extends mercy to the overlooked, and refines Abram's faith.

- extended passage of time
- familial relationship
- lineage of Jesus



GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES DESPITE ABRAM'S FAMILY DYSFUNCTIONS

Abram (Abraham) endangers the promise of being a father of many nations by giving away his wife twice to other men.

Sarai (Sarah) tries to force God's hand into giving them a son by giving her female servant to Abram to bear a child.

Isaac also gives away his wife Rebekah.

Jacob is a thief and a liar who steals his birthright from his brother.

Joseph struggles with pride stemming from being his father's favorite.

Joseph's brothers try to kill Joseph.

What does this mean for God's covenant? Despite these flawed and dysfunctional people not trusting God (or attempting to manipulate Him), God is faithful to bring about what He has promised.

the valley of faith

GENESIS 15

This week we will look at what happens when we step out in faith and obedience to God only to have fear and doubt creep in. Earlier in Abram's story, we see him step out in faith to follow a God that he does not quite know—and shortly after, we see dramatic victories! Abram is on a spiritual high...and then fear and doubt creeps in.

Instead of hiding from God, we see Abram speak his raw, honest thoughts to God. He asks this God whom he is still learning to trust for some sort of assurance that what He has promised is true. God responds with a dramatic (and very strange to our modern context) display of His goodness by creating a covenant with Abram and his descendants.

In our passage this week, we are going to see Abram in the middle of the valley of faith. He has stepped out in obedience to God's command, and now finds himself full of fear and doubt, wondering if he's made a terrible mistake. *Have you ever found yourself in that place?* We are going to see how God responds to him in that moment and learn how to deal with the valleys of our faith when we find ourselves there. *How do we handle fear and doubt along the journey of faith?*


LIVING ROOTED:

We serve a God who would stop at nothing to redeem the world and prove his zealous love for you.

It is very significant that God would choose to create a covenant with Abram as opposed to a contract. What is the difference?

Contract:

a contract is null and void if both parties do not uphold their obligations (hint: humanity does not).

Covenant:

a covenant is a promise that is not dependant on both parties, but on God's faithfulness alone.

Verses 9-21 are pretty bizarre in our modern context. This is what in the Ancient Near East is referred to as a Covenant Ratification Ceremony.

Because they were not a written culture, they would act out the penalty for breaking the covenant. They would cut animals in half, assemble them in two lines, and walk through the pieces. By doing so they would be saying —*if I don't fulfill my end of the agreement may I be like one of these animals (cut in half).*

We see something counter-cultural in this passage: God (as a flaming torch) goes through the pieces, but He does *not* then have Abram get up and walk through the pieces. God is saying, *if I fail, I will pay the penalty. If you fail, I will pay the penalty. If I don't uphold my part may this happen to me. If you don't uphold your part of the covenant may this happen to me.*

God literally puts himself on the hook not just for His faithfulness, but for Abram's as well. In the most powerful way possible, God puts on display His tenacity and trustworthiness to fulfill His promises.

Genesis 15

1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

3 And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. 7 And he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old,

a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold,

dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."



LIVING
ROOTED

This week, take some time either by yourself or with a friend to go outside. Get in nature. Look up at the night sky and gaze on the stars. Try to get some distance from the immediate thoughts or worries that capture your mind and reflect on the vastness of God. If you stay inside, try listing out an attribute of God for every letter of the alphabet.

Remember, God's response to Abram's doubts was to show His power over them. Remind yourself that He is creator of the universe, He hung all the stars in the sky— that is who we follow!

Let that be your encouragement this week and when we may find ourselves in the valley. The God we serve is in control and we can trust Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

What is the difference between a covenant and a contract? What is the significance that God would make a covenant with humanity?

INTERPRETATION

Looking at verse 2: God has promised Abram a son, yet years have past since that initial promise (in fact, there would be 25 years between God's promise and the birth of Abram's son). How does Abram respond to God in this season of doubt? How do we have faith in the difficult seasons of life?

Looking at verse 12: Thousands of years later there would be another "thick and dreadful darkness" that would come. As Jesus hung on the cross, darkness came over the whole land where Jesus paid the price for our failure. Jesus took the covenant curse of our unfaithfulness upon himself so that we could be saved. What does God's faithfulness to keep His covenant say about Him?

APPLICATION

A.W. Tozer said *"most of our problems seem really big because our God seems really small."* Is there an area of your life right now, in the midst of fear and doubt/confusion that you need to change your perspective like Abram in verse 5, and recognize the glory, majesty and infinitude of God?

the God who sees me

GENESIS 15

This week, the Lord shows up along a desert road near an unnamed well, where a pregnant, abused, runaway slave flees in desperation. The very bottom of the social ladder, Hagar's situation seems bleak. In the midst of hopelessness and desperation, God sees Hagar—the runaway, the slave, the victim of abuse.

We see in this passage something remarkable: God meets Hagar in her suffering and gives her a new identity and perspective. She is no longer just a slave, but with the birth of her son Ishmael, an heir to God's promise. Though Hagar and Ishmael's life is marked by suffering inflicted on them by those in power, there is a story of a God who sees those who have no earthly hope, protects those who are forgotten by their community, and stops at nothing to keep His promise.

Amidst all the messiness, injustice, and hurt in life, we must remember that our God is the same God who saw Hagar in her pain. Ours is a God who sees.


LIVING ROOTED:

In the messiness of human sin and distrust, God is still faithful and full of grace in how He stays true to His promises.

In Ancient Near Eastern cultures, wives were able to offer up their servants as surrogates to bear their children. Husbands also had rights to take on a second wife if his wife remained barren. Some have also explained that after ten years of remaining barren a husband can divorce his wife. Instead of trusting in the promise of God to provide children, Sarai took matters into her own hands and followed the cultural norms and Abram passively complied. Out of this action, Sarai was resentful and still insecure about her status as wife resulting in the mistreatment of Hagar.

Genesis 16

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." 6 "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. 7 The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

11 The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

We serve a God who sees the needs of His creation. *How can we look to those around us with the eyes of God?* This week, practice the spiritual discipline of prayer walking—take a walk (either alone or with a friend) around campus and New Haven and quietly pray for the needs you see. As your physical environment reminds you of people and situations, pray for those things. Close your time of prayer walking by asking the questions:

Is there a need you saw that you have the resources to meet? Is there someone outside of your normal circle of friends or your sphere of influence that you can bless or encourage this week?

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

Whose voice does Abram listen to and does it lead Abram to deeper trust in God or self reliance?

Who does Hagar turn to in her distress and what name does she give God?

INTERPRETATION

Historians tell us Sarai's arrangement with Hagar was a culturally acceptable practice (though it was contrary to God's promise to Abram). How are followers of Jesus similarly tempted today to follow cultural norms over God today?

How does God demonstrate His love for those who are not seen? Why is this such an important part of God's character for followers of Jesus to realize?

APPLICATION

What are some ways this passage speaks to those of us who are in a position of waiting on God?

lay down your idols

GENESIS 22

Is there a good thing in your life that has become an ultimate thing? We are back this week in our patriarch's story with the arrival of his long-awaited child. Abram is now Abraham (renamed as a symbol of God's promise to be a "father of many nations.") He is 100 years old and Sarah is 90. There has probably never been a child more anticipated than baby Isaac. What must it be like to wait 25 years for the fulfillment of God's promise? Let that sink in.

The story picks up in Genesis 22. Roughly 15 years pass between chapters 21 and 22, and Isaac grows from an infant adored by his parents into a young man. It's been 40 years since the initial promise of God, and Abraham, for the most part, found his meaning and purpose in God. Over the past 15 years, however, God watched something happen in Abraham's life: his center has shifted—the source of his hope, the source of his identity, and the source of his security has moved away from God and towards Isaac. In short, the very good gift God had promised had become Abraham's ultimate dependence in his life.

The story we read today is not a story of attempted child sacrifice, but a story of a God who fights for us when we find our identity and our hope in things that can never hold the weight of our worship. *Would he choose the promises of God over the God of the promises? Would he value the blessings of the covenant over the God who made the covenant? Is Abraham willing to let go of his idol? Are we willing to do the same?*


LIVING ROOTED:

By placing our trust in God, we have a safe place to make the root of our identity, the source of our security, and the chief affection of our hearts.

This is a passage of God fighting for Abraham's heart. Unbeknownst to Abraham, his faith that God would provide the sacrifice foreshadows a future time when God would fight for the hearts of His people.

Similar to Abraham, God will have His only son, whom He loves, carry his own wood up that very same mountain to be sacrificed on it.

This time instead of a ram, Jesus would be the final sacrifice to free us from the idols of our hearts so that we can be brought back into relationship with God.

The repetition of "your son, your only son" emphasizes the importance of Isaac in Abraham's life and to the promise that God had made earlier. Though Isaac is not technically Abraham's only son, he is the only remaining son that is a potential heir to the blessing of Abraham by God as Ishmael had been banished earlier.

The charge to sacrifice a human is not to set a precedent in later books of the Old Testament. By contrast, it is frowned upon. This charge was rather a test of Abraham's faith in God (and His promises).

Genesis 22

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." 15 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

What are the idols of your heart? Write them down. Maybe there's nothing, that's a good place to be, but for a lot of us there is something in our lives that we have made an idol out of. (See Application questions to help you discern). Spend some time this week submitting these idols to God in prayer and confession.

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

In verse 1 the reader is told that the Lord intends for this to be a test. Why do you think the Lord put Abraham through this test?

Looking at verse 8: why do you think Abraham was confident that God would provide the sacrifice?

APPLICATION

We can't repent of our idols if we are ignorant to what they are. Take some time to work through these questions both privately and as a core group.

- What are you afraid of losing? Success? Reputation? Beauty? Relationships? Because the thing that scares you the most to lose might lead you closer to your idol.
- What dominates your thought life? The thing that dominates your mind is probably the chief affection of your heart.
- Where are you tempted to put conditions on your walk with God? "Okay I will follow you as long as you do this..."
- Where are you willing to sacrifice your convictions?

Jacob/Israel

"You have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

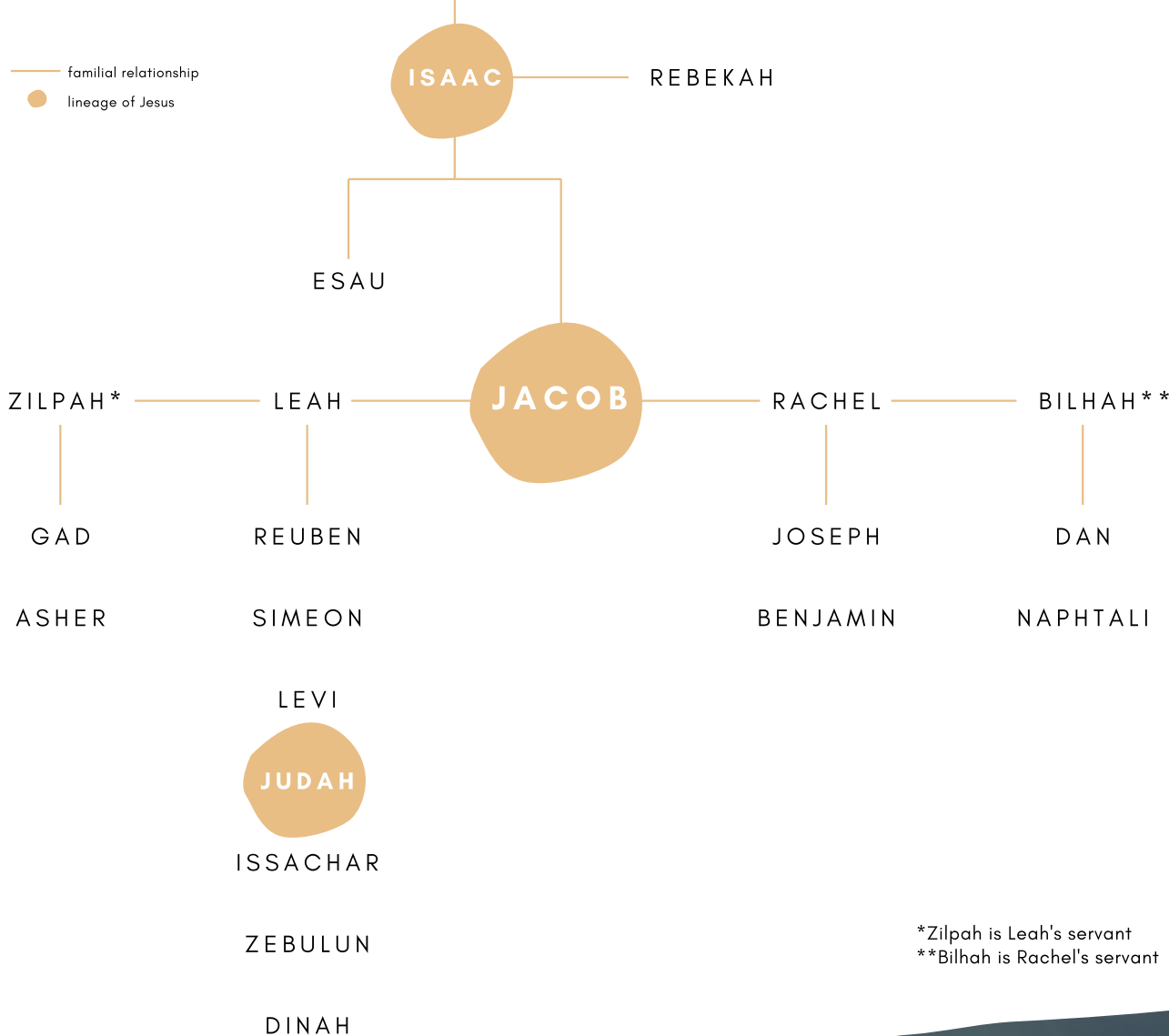
Isaac goes on to have twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Jacob, whose name means *He grasps the heel* (which is also a Hebrew idiom for *he takes advantage of or he deceives*) is aptly named as he goes on to take Esau's birthright as eldest son and the blessing Isaac intended to give to his eldest son through deceit. As Jacob flees the anger of his brother, God reaffirms His promise of land, people, and world blessing to Jacob like he had done with his father Isaac before him and his father's father, Abraham.

Jacob finds refuge with his uncle Laban and falls in love with his daughter, Rachel. In a twist of fate, Jacob works for seven years to marry Rachel and is deceived into marrying Leah, her less desirable older sister. In exchange for working seven more years he is able to also marry Rachel, and ends up fleeing from Laban with his wives and flocks to return home after more years of working for deceitful Laban.

Set in the backdrop of Jacob's favoritism of Rachel, the sisters Rachel and Leah struggle with one another and God as they bear children and struggle with infertility, offering up their slaves for additional children.

Jacob later mysteriously wrestles with God for a blessing before a surprisingly pleasant reunification with his brother, Esau. God gives Jacob the name, Israel which means, *wrestles with God*.

For the next two weeks, we will look at God's faithfulness not only to Jacob, but to his wives as well, and learn that if we are brave enough to confront our wounds, our striving, and our sin, God can do a great work in our souls.



THE TWELVE TRIBE LEADERS — BIRTH ORDER & NAME MEANING

1 – Reuben
"Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me."

2 – Simeon
"Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also."

3 – Levi
"Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."

4 – Judah
"This time I will praise the Lord."

5 – Dan
"God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son."

6 – Naphtali
"With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed."

7 – Gad
"Good fortune has come!"

8 – Asher
"Happy am I! For women have called me happy."

9 – Issachar
"God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband."

10 – Zebulun
"God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons."

11 – Joseph
"God has taken away my reproach."

12 – Benjamin
Originally named "son of my sorrow," but renamed by his father "son of my right hand."

deep wounds & disappointment

GENESIS 29, 30 & 35

On a surface level, this is a story about patriarchy, sex, deceit, and even aphrodisiacs (never say Scripture is boring). It is an odd backdrop to the beginnings of the family of Israel. This week, we will look at the stories of Rachel and Leah. Both women suffer from deep wounds. Simply put, Leah was unattractive (scripture uses the Hebrew euphemism “she had weak eyes”) and unloved by her husband and Rachel, while beautiful, was unable to conceive children—a deep stigma in her Ancient Near Eastern society.

While today’s passage only spans a couple of chapters for us, many years pass in the lives of Rachel and Leah. Pay attention this week to the names of Rachel and Leah’s children. Names in this culture were not simply trendy, but instead spoke to their hopes and dreams for their children.

Through this journey of building the family of Israel we see two paths taken: Leah, while deeply wounded by her husband’s lack of love for her, comes to trust in God for her sense of security. Rachel, on the other hand, dies bitterly in childbirth naming her son Ben-Oni “*son of my trouble.*” *Where do we turn when we are faced with the deep wounds and disappointments life brings? Are we willing to journey towards a trustful God or slowly towards a life of bitterness and envy?*


LIVING ROOTED:

As followers of Jesus we can place our hope and worth in God alone. There is heartbreak and disappointment when we turn to the things that the world defines as success.

Typically the suitor would present a betrothal gift for a woman's hand in marriage but because Jacob had no wealth to his name at the time he instead offered seven years of labor, a significant period of time which would have appealed to Laban.

In Ancient Near Eastern culture, the betrothed woman would wear a veil during the betrothal and into the wedding night. This custom may explain how Jacob was deceived into marrying Leah.

The recurring theme throughout this struggle between Leah and Rachel is the Lord seeing and hearing their prayers. God is faithful to Leah by giving her many sons and later looks on Rachel. Though God is faithful and listens to their prayers we also see the motivations and desires of both Leah and Rachel each time they name their child. Leah struggling for her husband's affection and Rachel envious and in competition with her sister.

Genesis 29

16 Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. 18 Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." 22 So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. 23 But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. 24 (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) 25 And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" 26 Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." 28 Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her

servant.) 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. Jacob's Children 31 When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 32 And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." 33 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. 34 Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. 35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Genesis 30

1 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" 2 Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 3 Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her."

It was common cultural practice for husbands to have the right to have sexual relations with slaves. Both Bilhah and Zilpah are considered Jacob's surrogate wives with Rachel and Leah laying full claim over the children that their respective slaves bear. It is also important to note God allowed, but did not condone multiple wives.

Why mandrakes? Referred to by the Greeks as "the love apple," mandrakes had the reputation of being an aphrodisiac. There was also a superstition that mandrakes would increase a woman's fertility.

God is still the one faithful to grant children to Rachel and Leah even despite their actions to take matters into their own hands. Both offer up their servants as surrogate wives and both engage in superstition by consuming mandrakes.

4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali. 9 When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad. 12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher. 14 In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15 But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes." 16 When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes."

So he lay with her that night. 17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun. 21 Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah. 22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!"

Genesis 35

16 Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. 17 And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." 18 And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), 20 and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb.



LIVING ROOTED

Leah is a beautiful example in scripture of how God can transform our souls over time into people of joy and peace despite the circumstances around us. The good news is that what God did in Leah's heart, He can do in ours as well.

This week, make a list of the kind of person you would like to be (*more patient? loving? slow to anger?*) Process that list with a friend or mentor and think about how we can train ourselves through prayer and spiritual disciplines to become people who operate in love, joy, peace, patience, etc. Consider memorizing Galatians 5:22-23 as a vision for the kinds of people we could be through the Holy Spirit's transformation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING

Do you have any siblings? What was your relationship like with them growing up?

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

What do we learn about Rachel and Leah in these passages? What are they like? What are words the author uses to describe them?

What do they name their children? What do these names mean? (Look at the lineage of Jacob for that information). Do we see a shift in meaning at any point in the story?

How does each woman deal with the circumstances in their lives?

APPLICATION

What are areas of disappointment for you that you struggle to navigate in a way that trusts God?

what is your name?

GENESIS 32

If you're new to scripture, it is easy to think the Bible is some sort of moral rulebook for God's people full of examples of noble heroes. That is not at all what we find (if you're keeping track, murder and sex scandals plagued many of God's people). Instead we get examples of people who are often both flawed and faithful. People who might resist conviction, but ultimately surrender to God. Enter Jacob, third in line of the Genesis patriarchs.

A brief recap of Jacob's story thus far: he conned his starving brother, Esau, out of his birthright, he then stole Esau's blessing by lying to his dying father, perhaps in some poetic justice was tricked by his uncle into marrying the wrong woman, and he then deceived his uncle and is traveling back to his homeland where his brother is waiting. Also, his brother threatened to kill him if he ever returned. *So if we are not to look to Jacob as an example of moral goodness, why do we look to him?* One answer is found in this week's passage.

Jacob wrestles through the night with a mysterious man when he utters: *"I will not let you go until you bless me!"* This one sentence summarizes Jacob's life to that point. The mysterious man cuts straight to Jacob's heart: "What is your name?" The last time Jacob was asked this question he lied to his own father. But now Jacob must not only say his true name, but deeper still, own his true identity, his striving, and his sin.

**LIVING ROOTED:**

As followers of Jesus, we must confess our helplessness, our unworthiness, our own selfish pursuits for meaning and value, to ultimately find a life of freedom and purpose that only God can offer.

What is your name?

Jacob's name means *he grasps the heel* which was a distinct circumstance of his birth where he grabbed at the heel of his twin older brother Esau. However, there was also a double meaning to his name since it is also a Hebrew idiom for *he takes advantage of or he deceives*.

Jacob lived up to his name by taking advantage of his brother Esau and he in turn was taken advantage of by his father-in-law. Now, he is getting ready to face the wrath of his brother Esau, facing the consequence of his original sin.

In this mysterious interaction with God, Jacob is renamed to Israel. Since names were to signify a person's unique personality it was not uncommon for people to be renamed accordingly (ie: rulers renaming servants, or teachers renaming pupils). Here, Jacob is named Israel which means *wrestles with God*. With this renaming it signifies the early beginnings of the people or nation that God had promised Abraham, a nation that will also live up to its name of Israel. Starting with Jacob, the people of Israel will wrestle with God throughout all of scripture. This is a good key moment to keep in mind when reading through the Old Testament!

Genesis 32

22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." 27 And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." 29 Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

We might be familiar with the common ice-breaker “describe yourself in 3 words.” We know the drill: driven, friendly, passionate, caring, and if you’re bold you say, funny. *While those words may be true, when was the last time we were honest about the shadow sides of our lives? When was the last time we thought to ourselves “I can actually be conniving, angry, selfish, and deceitful.”* We don’t often like to think of ourselves in those words, but what we see in this passage is that if we are willing to surrender the negative and sinful parts of ourselves God can redeem them.

Take some time to think through areas of sin this week. Surrender them to God and confess them to a friend who can hold you accountable.

OPENING

How did you get your name? What does it mean?

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

How has Jacob’s life been marked by a pursuit of blessing and why does he ask this “man” to bless him? (It may be helpful as a group to define blessing and think through what Jacob had been looking for throughout his life).

Why does God have Jacob own his identity by asking him his “name” in the text? This will be the first time in the Bible Jacob answers this question truthfully and says that his name is “Jacob.”

APPLICATION

In our cultural context, our names might not be a source of our identity or a description of our character, but imagine God were to speak a name over you as a vision for who you could become? What might He say? (Maybe the people in your Core Group could help answer this for you).

How does this narrative model what it looks like to place our faith and trust in Jesus? How does it speak to the need to daily surrender our lives and pursue humility in Christ?

Joseph

"The Lord was with Joseph..."

The Genesis narrative concludes by zooming in on Joseph's story, one of Jacob's (Israel's) twelve sons. It is through Joseph's story where we see again the wickedness of man and God's work in saving the promised descendants of Abraham through a period of famine.

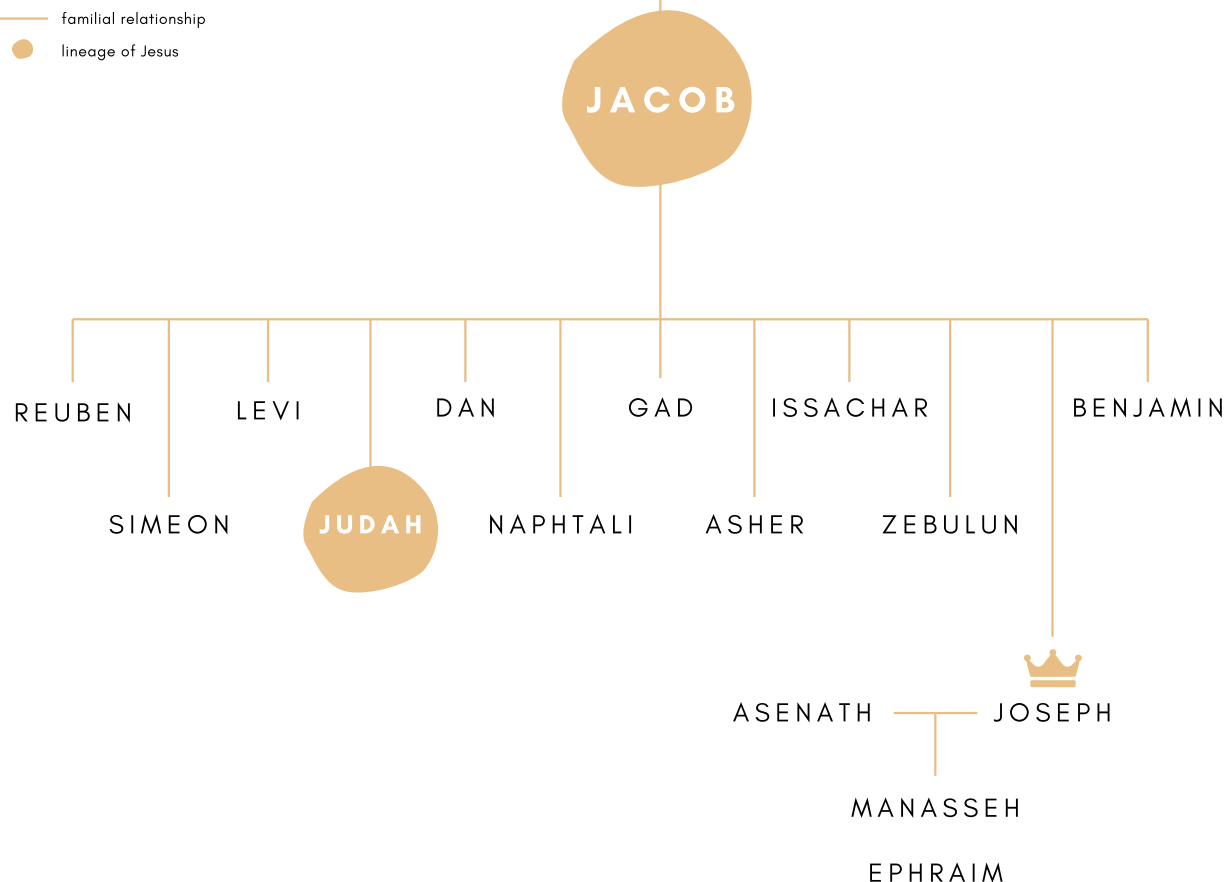
Joseph's prophetic dreams of his ascendance above his brothers paired with his father's favoritism towards him drives Joseph's brothers to murderous jealousy. They end up selling Joseph into slavery and he ends up a slave in Egypt in a military ruler's household. Despite the unfair circumstances of Joseph's life, the Lord's hand is clearly on Joseph's life as his work is prosperous and he finds favor in the eyes of every authority figure over him.

He gets promoted to managing his master's household, but then is thrown into prison under false accusations from his master's wife. He gets promoted to oversee the prisoners and through God's help interprets correctly the prophetic dreams of two of the king's employees that were temporarily thrown in prison.

Joseph is then promoted to the highest rank in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh after he, through God's help, correctly interprets Pharaoh's prophetic dreams of the upcoming famine. Under Joseph's supervision, Egypt is able to survive the famine and also is in a position to sell food to those in surrounding lands. In a twist of fate his brothers come to Egypt and he, in turn, is able to save his family by bringing them to live in Egypt under his care.

It is through God's hand in Joseph's life that He keeps His promise to Abraham and the twelve patriarchs of the promised nation of Israel are preserved.

— familial relationship
● lineage of Jesus



MEN & WOMEN IN JOSEPH'S STORY

Jacob

Joseph's father, who presented him with a multi-colored garment as a symbol of his affection.

Rachel

Gave birth to Joseph (her first son) after many years of infertility.

The 11 Brothers

With the exception of Benjamin, all of Joseph's brothers are from different mothers. Yet all are considered patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Ishmaelites

Traveling merchants that Joseph's brothers sold Joseph to as a slave.

Potiphar

Captain of the Egyptian guard who originally purchased Joseph as his slave.

Potiphar's Wife

Falsely accused Joseph of trying to sleep with her after Joseph rejected her advances.

Pharaoh

Ruler over Egypt who God granted prophetic dreams of the seven year famine.

Asenath

Joseph's Egyptian wife.

Manasseh & Ephraim

Joseph's first & secondborn children who were adopted by Israel for inheritance purposes.

10 trusting God in obscurity

GENESIS 39

We close our study with a week on Joseph. Interestingly enough, Joseph's story is given more time in Genesis than any other character— a pretty striking fact when you look at the line-up of men and women before him.

Joseph's story has a bit of everything: favoritism, jealousy, attempted murder, enslavement, entrapment, imprisonment, all culminating in a rise from obscurity to second-in-command of Egypt where Joseph would save the very family that once left him for dead.

Before Joseph saved Egypt and his family, he lived years in prison with no indication of release yet remained faithful to God when no one was watching. Despite the injustice that led to his imprisonment (in fact, it was his righteous resistance to sin that led to his arrest), Joseph's trust in God never wavered.

Perhaps as we near the end of the semester, the lesson Joseph's life can best teach us is *who are we when no one is watching? Who do we trust when we feel forgotten? Do we allow ourselves to be led by our emotions and feelings of loneliness and self-pity or do we trust in the sovereignty of God when it is difficult? Maybe harder, do we trust in the sovereignty of God when we are just going through the daily motions of life in obscurity?*


LIVING ROOTED:

As followers of Jesus we can follow Joseph's example of humility and approach to sin. Does our fervor to honor God lead us to flee from sin in our lives?

The repeated theme in Joseph's story is that "the Lord was with Joseph." With this repetition we see that the favor and success that Joseph found could all be attributed to God.

Despite the unfair circumstances that Joseph was placed in, in his interaction with the temptation of Potiphar's wife we see him honor God above all and literally flee from sin.

What Joseph's dialogue reveals in this passage and in his interactions with Pharaoh later on is that he worked diligently with the things placed under his care and maintained his faith in God. Neither the unfairness of being displaced from his home nor the success and favor he found in God's eyes pushed him to be resentful of God or draw away from God.

Genesis 39

2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" 10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand

and fled and got out of the house. 13 And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15 And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." 16 Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. 18 But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." 19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LIVING ROOTED

Joseph lived a devoted and faithful life to God regardless of his circumstances. This week in your devotional time, list out ways you've seen God's faithfulness in your life. Or another way to phrase it: *if the Gospel is always good news, how is it still good news in your life today?* If you're struggling to trust the faithfulness of God in your life, try to imagine your struggles as if God is physically in the scene. *What is He doing? How is He working?*

OBSERVATION

Reflect on the passage. What immediate thoughts or questions do you have after reading it?

INTERPRETATION

The passage of scripture for this week begins with listing out how God was with Joseph and it ends with how God was with Joseph even in prison.

Does Joseph's attitude towards God change with the changing circumstances? Why or why not?

In verse 12, we see Joseph literally running from temptation. How do we respond when faced with temptation?

APPLICATION

Joseph's life can feel like a roller-coaster of highs and lows, but he remains faithful to God. How do you feel like your faith is dependent on the circumstances of your life?