

# IN THE BEGINNING

## *A Study of Genesis*

Small Group  
Leader's Guide

### SESSION ONE

## Beginnings

#### Lesson Summary

The book of Genesis begins with a story of beginnings: the beginning of creation, the beginning of life, the beginning of human persons and work and relationships, etc. But this account isn't written so that we can know where things came from. It's written so that we can know the truth of what things are and what they're for. For instance, who is God and what is he really like? What should we make of this world around us? Is it good? Is it bad? And what is its purpose? And finally, who are we and what are we for? These are some of the most basic questions that we can ask, and the way that we answer them has a profound impact on the way we live. And that is exactly what Genesis is trying to do: tell us the truth about beginnings so that we might live well.

#### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 1:26-31** as a group.

#### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What is the most interesting thing to you about Genesis 1 and 2? What is the most difficult thing about these opening chapters?
3. According to some modern thinkers, such as the atheistic scientist Lawrence Krauss, the fact that the world exists and that human life has evolved is ultimately the product of nothing more than a "cosmic accident." If that is true, what difference might it make for the way we think about ourselves, the world around us, and the purpose of our lives? If Genesis is true, what difference does it make to these questions?
4. Read Psalm 8 and compare what it says about human nature to Genesis 1:26-28. What might Psalm 8 teach us about the attitude we should have to the gift of our creation?
5. How would you explain Genesis's claim that human beings are made "in the image of God." What does it mean for you to be in God's image? What difference does this make to the way you think about the purpose of your life? What difference does it make to the way that you treat your friends, family, and coworkers, knowing that they too are made in God's image?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

#### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 3-5**.

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## SESSION TWO

# The Great Rupture

### Lesson Summary

Genesis chapter 3 tells the famous story of the sin of Adam and Eve, what Christians have long referred to as the “Fall” of humanity or, alternatively, as the “Great Rupture.” In this session, we’ll discuss some of the details of this original transgression: what brought it about, what it teaches us about the nature of sin in our own lives, and where we can find hope, even in the midst of this moment of failure.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 3** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week’s teaching that stood out to you?
2. What do you think of the phrase “the Great Rupture”? How can it help convey the significance of human sin and its effects? What are some ways in which sin continues to cause rupture within human relationships?
3. Read Matthew 4:1-11 and compare Jesus’ engagement with the devil to Eve’s enagement with the serpent. How does Jesus’ knowledge of the word of God compare with Eve’s? How about his trust in what God has said? What might these two stories have to say to us about the purpose of reading and studying and memorizing Scripture? How can we do that?
4. Genesis 3 constitutes the first appearance of shame in human history. How did shame affect Adam and Eve? Why does shame continue to play such a powerful role in our lives? How does Jesus’ death and resurrection address the problem of our shame?
5. What do you make of the “good news” given to the woman in Genesis 3:15? What other causes for hope can you find in Genesis 3 and 4?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 6-11**.

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### SESSION THREE

## Ruin and Redemption

### Lesson Summary

Everybody knows the story of Noah and the flood. But did you know that it isn't the only such story? In fact, during the time when Genesis was written, there were multiple other versions of this story, of a time when deities flooded the earth and a man and his family survived in an ark. But the story of Noah differs from these other stories in multiple ways. And, as we'll discover in this session, it is precisely those differences that make this story so wonderful.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 6:1-8** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What do you find to be most difficult about the story of Noah and the flood? What about it most intrigues you? How does comparing the story of Noah to other ancient flood stories change your opinion of it?
3. If someone were to ask you why God would flood the earth like he did and bring "ruin" to his own creatures, what would you say? How is the answer that Genesis gives different from the answers of those other ancient stories?
4. Discuss the following quote: "In a world of violence, it would not be worthy of God not to wield the sword; if God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence God would not be worthy of our worship." Do you agree? Why or why not? How might this affect our interpretation of the flood?
5. Where do you see redemption in the story of the flood? What do you make of the connection that the New Testament and later Christian writers make between the flood and Christian baptism?
6. Discuss the following quote: *"In the days of Noah, even God doesn't try to repair things. He extinguishes all flesh and turns the globe into a graveyard. There's a message there: sinners need something more radical than reform. We 'need to die.' That may sound heartlessly stern, but it's our only hope. In moments of desperate clarity, we want to end it all and start over. Baptism says we're right to seek death."*
7. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 12-15**.

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### SESSION FOUR

## The Call of Abraham

### Lesson Summary

Abraham has long been regarded by both Jews and Christians alike as one of the greatest biblical heroes of faith, and the large majority of the book of Genesis is focused on this one man and his family. In this session, we'll examine "father" Abraham as a model of discipleship and discuss what we can learn from his experience of being called by God to leave his family and homeland and go to an unknown country.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 12:1-9** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Why do you think Abraham has been so long admired by Jews and Christians? What do you most admire about him? What are some ways that you see parallels between Abraham's life and your own experience of being in relationship with God?
3. Just as Abraham was called out of idolatry (Joshua 24:2), so every person who wants to follow Jesus is, at their baptism, called to leave behind and renounce three things: (1) the devil and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God, (2) the "empty promises" and "deadly deceits" of this world, and (3) the sinful desires of the flesh that draw us from the love of God. How would you compare these renunciations to Abraham's need to leave behind his old way of life? How can you actively renounce the abovementioned three things in your own life?
4. Read Hebrews 11:8-16. How does this description of Abraham and Sarah affect your understanding of what it means to live "by faith"? In what way are you a "stranger" and "exile" on the earth? In what way are you "seeking a homeland"? What obstacles keep you from being more like Abraham?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 16-20**.

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### SESSION FIVE

## Abraham's Doubt

### Lesson Summary

For as admirable as he was, Abraham was not without faults. For as great and heroic as his faith was, he was not without moments of doubt and disbelief. Like all saints and disciples before and after him, Abraham was a man of faults and failures whose story was defined less by his personal triumphs than by the patience and grace of God shown toward him. In this session, we look at Abraham's doubt and what it can teach us about our own struggles to believe.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 17:15-21** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Talk about a time when you first realized that someone you looked up to or admired had a character flaw or moral failing. How did that affect your opinion of the person? How did it change the way that you think about spiritual maturity? What should we make of the fact that even the greatest saints have moments of failure?
3. Both Abraham and Sarah struggled to believe the promise that God would grant them a son. Both of them found it difficult to remain hopeful after years of seeing their dream unfulfilled. Are there any particular promises of God that you struggle to believe? Are there areas of your life or relationship with God about which it is difficult to be hopeful? Can you think of times when God has renewed your hope?
4. When Abraham and Sarah begin to doubt the promises of God, they respond by trying to take control of things themselves. How do you see this pattern in your own life? How can we be responsible to the tasks that God has given us without falling into the temptation to simply take control?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 21-25**.



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### SESSION SIX

## The Obedience of Faith

### Lesson Summary

Christians often make a distinction between faith and good works and sometimes put these two into direct contrast: faith vs. works and works vs. faith. The New Testament writers appeal to Abraham as an example of both. For Paul, Abraham is the great model of faith (Romans 4), and for the apostle James, he is the preeminent example of the importance of obedience and good works (James 2). In this session, we discuss how Abraham embodies both faith and obedience in his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 22:1-14** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How would you explain the relationship between faith and obedience (or faith and good works)? What would you say to someone who says that what you do isn't important and that all that matters is whether you have faith? How would you respond if someone told you that what matters is what you do and not what you believe?
3. Read and compare James 2:18-23 and Hebrews 11:17-19. Why do you think James chooses the story of Abraham offering up Isaac as an example of works (active obedience)? Why would the author of Hebrews choose the same story to illustrate the strength of Abraham's faith?
4. Abraham was asked by God to do something without understanding God's reason or purposes. What is something that God has asked of you that you find difficult to understand? Can you think of a time when you have trusted God enough to obey Him even when you don't understand His reasoning or purposes?
5. How has reflecting on Abraham's life helped you understand what it means to live by faith? What do you find most inspiring about Abraham? In what way would you like to become more like Abraham?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 26-29**.

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### SESSION SEVEN

## Jacob the Everyman

### Lesson Summary

Next to Abraham, there is no single person whose life story receives more attention in the book of Genesis than Jacob, the son of Isaac. He is one of the three great patriarchs of the people of Israel. But Jacob is no polished saint. He is a man of many faults and flaws. In many ways, Jacob is just like us. In this session, we'll discuss Jacob's flawed character, focusing especially on his difficulty in trusting others and his tendency to try to control his life at every turn.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 28:10-22** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What do you find most relatable about the person of Jacob? In what ways does he remind you of yourself? In what ways does he differ from you?
3. The German sociologist Hartmut Rosa says that one of the things that distinguishes modern life is just how much we try to control our lives. Think about your normal daily routine. What are some of the ways that you are trying to control things throughout the day? How would your daily routine (or your attitude during the day) change if you went about your day with a stronger awareness of God's promises and provision?
4. Why do you think that God chose to give Jacob a vision in Genesis 28? Why did he reiterate the promises to Jacob that he had made to Abraham and Isaac? Why do you think God chose this moment in Jacob's life (fleeing from Esau's anger) to appear to him in this way?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 30-33**.

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### SESSION EIGHT

## Struck By Mercy

#### Lesson Summary

The story of Jacob is a story of grace. God is gracious to Jacob in choosing him as the recipient of blessing and in graciously promising to be with him wherever he goes. God is also gracious in the way he changed and transformed who Jacob was, from a heel-grabbing, self-reliant trickster to the humbled patriarch of the people of Israel. And yet, what we find in Jacob's story is not just grace, but severe grace, for in order to change Jacob, God must overpower him. Jacob must be "struck by mercy."

#### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 32** as a group.

#### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. God works in a variety of ways to transform Jacob over the years. Sometimes he comforts him. Sometimes he makes promises to him and encourages him. At other times, he brings hardship into Jacob's life and forces him to learn humility and dependence. What are some different ways that God has worked in your life to form you? Can you think of times when he has provided comfort, when he has encouraged, and when he has used hardship?
3. When Jacob experienced a crisis, his natural instinct was to depend on his own cleverness and come up with his own strategy to overcome it. Do you see this same instinct in your own life? How do you respond to crisis or uncertainty? How could you respond in a way that better acknowledges your dependence on God?
4. In Genesis 32:31, we are told that Jacob walks with a limp from what God did to his hip. This limp would forever remind him of his vulnerability and need for God. Is there anything in your life that helps you relate to Jacob's limp? Is there anything that regularly reminds you that you are limited and vulnerable and that you rely entirely on the grace of God?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

#### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 34-36**.



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### SESSION NINE

## They Did What?!

### Lesson Summary

Sometimes the moral lesson of Bible stories is clear. But sometimes, they are strange, disturbing, and morally ambiguous. The story of the assault of Dinah and her brothers' revenge in Genesis 34 clearly falls into that latter category. Who is in the right in this tale of abuse, deception, and violence? Whom are we supposed to admire? How are we supposed to benefit from reading this story? In this session, we'll seek answers for these questions.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 34** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Genesis 34 is a very difficult and a rather troubling biblical story. What other stories of the Bible do you find difficult? How do you reconcile those hard passages in the Bible with St. Paul's comment that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16)? How might a difficult passage like Genesis 34 be "useful" for us?
3. There are multiple leading male characters in Genesis 34 (Shechem, Hamor, Jacob, and Simeon and Levi). Of these, whose behavior do you find the most tragic? Why?
4. Simeon and Levi are rightly angered over the assault against their sister, but somehow their righteous anger turns into unrighteous vengeance. What is there to admire in Simeon and Levi's response? Why and how do they go wrong? What do they have to teach us about our own feelings of anger?
5. What do you think of the behavior of Hamor and Jacob in their roles as fathers? What do the failures of Hamor and Jacob teach us about the purpose of fatherhood and how fathers *should* act?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 37-41**.

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## SESSION TEN

# The Not-Quite-So-Blameless Joseph

### Lesson Summary

On multiple occasions in Joseph's life, he is the victim of the slander and abuse of others, and he is often regarded as a morally innocent and entirely blameless man who does nothing to merit this mistreatment. But as with every character of Genesis, Joseph has his own faults, and a closer reading of his story will show that he is, perhaps, not quite as blameless as often thought. In this session, we seek what we can learn from both Joseph's righteous and not-so-righteous behaviors.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 37:1-11** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Joseph's conflict with his brothers is only one in a long series of conflicts and rivalries among siblings in the book of Genesis. Why do you think sibling rivalry (or rivalry among various family members) is so prominent in Genesis? What do you think it says about the effects of sin on family life?
3. What do you make of Joseph's behavior with his brothers and his father? What character flaws does Joseph exhibit? What can we learn from Joseph's flaws?
4. Regardless of his own mistakes, Joseph's refusal to give in to the seductive words of Potiphar's wife is very admirable and remind us of the words of the apostle Paul: "Flee sexual immorality." What do you think Joseph can teach you about fleeing or resisting sin in your own life? What might it look like in your life to flee from sin?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 42-46**.

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### SESSION ELEVEN

## Hidden Providence

### Lesson Summary

Joseph's brothers do something terrible to him—they attack him, throw him in a pit, and sell him as a slave. And yet, years later, Joseph tells these same brothers that their actions were guided by God's own hand and intentions, that what they intended for evil, God intended for good. Joseph's story is an extraordinary one, but the providential care he identifies in his own life is not unique to him. For, as the apostle Paul tells us, the same God who worked through the hardships of Joseph's life works all things together for our good as well.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 45:1-8** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Read Romans 8:28-29. How do you understand these verses? How would you relate them to Joseph's perspective on God's providential direction of his own life?
3. As you look back on your own life, where do you see evidence of God's providence and care? How has God worked through events in your life to bring about the "good" of making you more like Jesus? How has He used you to bless the lives of others?
4. Talk about an experience from this past year that felt unexceptional but, in hindsight, proved to be very significant for you. Or, talk about an experience that was very difficult but ended up being a source of good for you or others. How might God have been at work in that experience?
5. How could you become more attentive to God's presence and providence in your life? Are there any practices (keeping a journal, writing prayers of thanksgiving, etc.) that might help you better recognize the ways that God is at work in your life?
6. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **Genesis 47-50**.

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### SESSION TWELVE

## As He Was With Our Fathers

### Lesson Summary

The book of Genesis ends with a very familiar theme: the relationship between fathers and sons and the handing on of faith from one generation to the next. In Genesis 48, Joseph blesses the two sons of Joseph. As we'll see, this blessing isn't just for them, but for the many generations that will follow, as a perpetual reminder to them that Egypt is not their true home and that they are a family whose lives are defined by hope in the future promises of God.

### Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **Genesis 48:1-16** as a group.

### Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. In blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob is training them in the faith that he has received. This is a common theme in the Bible—one generation handing down the faith to another. How has God used older Christians to train or disciple you in your own faith? What kind of opportunities has God given you to hand down the faith to a younger generation?
3. Jacob encourages Ephraim and Manasseh to trust in God by reminding them of how God has been faithful to him in the past. What are some ways that you have witnessed God's faithfulness in the past? How do these memories affect your own trust or faith in God in the present?
4. Jacob's promise to Ephraim and Manasseh in Genesis 48:21 (and elsewhere) of God's promise to "bring you again to the land of your fathers" is a reminder to them that Egypt is not their home. Hebrews 11:14-16 teaches us that this is true for all people of faith. How is this true for us today? How can we avoid the danger of forgetting that we too are strangers and exiles on the earth who should be looking forward to a "better homeland"?
5. What do you think is the greatest challenge to you living out this teaching? What is one practical step that you can take in the coming week to overcome this challenge?

### Pray

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.