



People in the Word:

Great Chapters of the Bible

Weeks 1–6 | January 1–February 11, 2012

Welcome to *Great Chapters of the Bible*! Please pull out this section from the *Community Connections* to use as a supplemental resource for Sunday's sermon. It can be tailored to your lifestyle, being done all at once or in pieces throughout the week. Do not get discouraged if your first plan does not work, try again. The family activities are intended to include the entire family. We encourage you to allow your family members to read the Bible passages from their favorite Bible and search for the answers.

ADULT STUDY—WEEK 1

JANUARY 1–7, 2012

FAMILY STUDY

A Year in the Word?

Read Psalm 1

"Sometimes we just don't know what to do..."

—Paul Newman, in *The Verdict*.

In one way or another we have all experienced moments of indecision. What do I do... in this relationship?... With my educational future?... In the midst of this moral decision?... In this issue of discipline? With my retirement plan?... The decisions of life are not always easy or clear.

Even Christians struggle with what to do. We wonder, *"What do I say to my neighbor who doesn't go to church? How do I get my teenager to connect to Christ and His Church? How do I become more generous? How do I pray?"* Answers are not always black and white. There can be blessings simply in asking questions and struggling to find answers.

Despite uncertainty and questioning, there are only two paths during our lifetime. The Bible is clear that life can be lived either with God or without God—righteous or wicked. We don't always like things black and white. Our culture loves "gray" with multiple options and multiple truths. This sounds very closed-minded and possibly over simplified, but this is what the Bible says: There are only two ways.

Living life "with God" is spent in Christ with a Biblical view (*delighting in the law of the Lord, and on it meditating day and night*). A life with God is fresh, dynamic, and renewing (*planted by streams of water*). When we are with God, we apply the appropriate Fruit of the Spirit (*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control*) at the right time, in the right way, with the right motivation (*which yields its fruit in season*), and experience the blessing of the right outcome (*whatever he does prospers*). God is the creator of all that is good. When everything went awry because of sin, God, in Jesus Christ, saved us. The Holy Spirit blesses us with faith every day. When we live with God, we experience God's creation in all of its goodness, forgiveness when we fail, and victory over death.

To live "without God" is death. God is life, purpose, hope and love. Living 70, 80 or 90 years without ever really knowing God would mean

Did you know...

- That the Bible was written over the course of nearly 1,500 years?
- That the Bible was written on three different continents?
- That the Bible was written by more than 40 authors?

Review:

Go to the Table of Contents in your Bible.

- How many testaments are in the Bible? _____
- How many books are in the Old Testament? _____
- How many books are in the New Testament? _____
- In which testament is the book of Psalms found? _____

Martin Luther said, *"The Psalms ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible"*.

—Concordia Self-Study Bible NIV

WEEK 1 (continued from front page)

never truly understanding life. God calls those who head down that path “wicked”. They simply take up space on the planet (*They are like chaff that the wind blows away*) because they do not join in God’s plan to bring healing to a world struggling for hope and love. When we live without God, we risk spending eternity without Him in hell. (*The wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*)

Two ways: with God or without God; life or death; righteous or wicked. Rarely is it so clear. God continually calls and invites us into life with Him. He makes living with Him possible. During this next year, will you let Him walk with you or will you stand in His way?

Lord God, it is so clear when you describe the two ways of living in Psalm 1. Please give me obedience and discipline this year, so that I can be consistent in worship, study, prayer, and devotions. Let me be planted by streams of water, yield fruit in season, and be like a leaf that does not wither, so that all I do will prosper You and Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ powerful name I pray, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (try being very specific)

- What will keep me from walking with God this year?
- What one thing can I do to stay more in step with God this year?
- What can I do to stay faithful in worship?
- What is the best way (time, place, etc.) for me to stay faithful in this weekly devotion?

In the Word

As a family read Psalm 1. What can we do as a family this year to read, study, pray and be in His Word?

Family Activity

PSALM SCAVENGER HUNT:

- How many Psalms are there? _____
- Psalm 118 is in the middle of the entire Bible, with Psalm 118:8 at the center. Read it together.
- Find the longest Psalm. _____
(Hint: It’s close to Psalm 118.)
- How many verses are in the longest Psalm in the Bible?

- Find the shortest Psalm in the Bible. _____
(Hint: It’s close to Psalm 118.)
- Isn’t it amazing that the very center of the Bible points us to Christ being the center of our lives!

WEEK 2

JANUARY 8–14, 2012

The Way it is Supposed to Be

Read Genesis 1

Death is not the way it is supposed to be. Broken relationships—not the way it is supposed to be. War and Crime—not the way it is supposed to be. Pain—not the way it is supposed to be.

At some level, we all understand this. In fact, Genesis 1 makes it clear that when God created the universe, His intent was life, community, joy, and goodness and His plan was that it would last forever.

God in Genesis 1 reveals:

- The Trinity was present—Father (God), Son (The Word), and Holy Spirit. God was totally engaged in creating the heavens and the earth.
- Everything created was good.
- Human beings were the crown of creation. God intended us for relationship with Him. God created us to join Him in managing His creation. God created us to be in relationship with other people and His world.

Did you know...

- That Genesis is the first book in the Pentateuch? (pronounced pen-ta-too-k) The Pentateuch is the first five books of the Old Testament. It is a story of a family that grew, by God’s grace, into His people.
- That Genesis is the Greek word meaning ‘Origins’? Genesis tells us of the origins of the world and God’s people—the Israelites.
- That Genesis covers 2,446 years of history? Many scholars believe more history is covered

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WEEK 2 (continued from page 2)

Suffering is inevitable. Many people give up and give in. They think that God does not care and won't get involved in their problems. They adopt a philosophy of living that forgets the uniqueness and wonder of human beings; replacing it with disregard for the sanctity of human life. They push God away, not considering Him or conversing with Him, as though He simply did not exist. They make their lives all about themselves, instead of being good stewards of their environment and resources. They live as if other people and their gifts are to be consumed rather than loved.

The creation account returns us to the magnificence of God, His love for us, and our purpose for living. We are grounded again in truths about God and us. We are moved immediately to the cross where Jesus' sacrifice paid the price for sin's destructiveness. We are saved through that sacrifice, not just to exist, but to make a positive difference. We are lifted from meaningless monotony to a flourishing relationship with God.

Father, Son, and Spirit, how easy it is to lose sight of You. I confuse the Creator and creation, elevating myself to a position that leaves me empty. As I contemplate this universe, remind me again of Your awesome power and my value to You. Remind me of the salvation won for me, and encourage me to be a servant to others and witness of Your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does the creation account teach me about nature?
- What does the creation account teach me about caring for the environment?
- Make a list of the repeated phrases found in Genesis 1. (*And God said...*) What does each of these phrases teach you about creation?
- Based on Genesis 1, how would you describe our intended relationship with God? With other people?
- Read John 1 and compare it to Genesis 1. How does John help us understand Genesis?

in Genesis than in the rest of the Bible combined.

Family Activity

Here are some of the people in Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy. Share with each other what you know about their story:

- Adam & Eve
- Cain & Abel
- Noah
- Abraham & Sarah
- Isaac
- Jacob & Esau
- Moses
- Pharaoh

In the Word

As a family, read Genesis 1 (Creation) out loud. How many days did it take God to create the world? _____

Family Activity

For each letter in the alphabet, starting with the letter "A", name something that God has created.

WEEK 3

JANUARY 15–21, 2012

Who went wrong? Who set it right?

Read Genesis 3

A recent internet posting stated that there is no such thing as "cold". Cold is simply a word to describe the lack of heat. Likewise, it stated that there is no such thing as "darkness". Darkness is a word to describe a lack of light. The reasoning followed that "evil" is a word to describe the absence of God. What do you think about that thought?

Genesis 3 begins with a creation that is perfectly "good". Creation is functioning the way God wanted it. He is in perfect partnership with humans—walking in relationship with them in the garden. God had

Did you know...

- That the Pentateuch is a set of history books? They describe events from the creation of the world until the time God's chosen people began to enter the Promised Land—the land of Israel.
- That the Bible is comprised of many types of writing including

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WEEK 3 (continued from page 3)

done the amazing work of creating and then inviting humankind into managing creation with Him...for good. There is perfect peace—shalom. The world is as it should be—the way God wants it.

Meanwhile, God doesn't inform us that one of his angels has decided to rebel against Him and His ways. This begins to define what we call evil—God not being the source of goodness with superficial promises of satisfaction if I do "my thing" rather than God's. Adam and Eve fell for this lie—a quick-fix and easy way. They chose to move away from God's plan, His love, and His goodness. They joined the rebel, turned devil. Would we do any different?

The best part is the solution, which appears as God reveals himself. God called Adam and Eve out of their hiding and invited them back into His plan. He loved them. Though their rebellion still had dire consequences.

God's promise was mind-boggling. His own Son would overcome the consequence of sin. Jesus would face the blame, fear, guilt, and death. In one final cosmic battle on the cross, God would fix things. He would again invite humankind into partnership to bring peace and goodness back into His creation. We could have relationship with God again. We could live with Him on earth, but even more, in a return to the garden (heaven). Perfection is restored.

Lord Jesus, when all was lost You found me. You brought me into relationship at Baptism. My sin was forgiven. Death was defeated. As I consider the fall, I am overwhelmed that You continue to call, continue to love, continue to care. I am amazed that You consider me a worthy partner in restoring peace and goodness to your creation. Thank you. Help me never to lose sight of your gift of life. In Your name I pray, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- In what ways might you be hiding from God or keeping Him from restoring your faith relationship?
- What are you doing to partner with God, to bring about shalom to creation? What evil are you helping to set right by bringing Jesus Christ into the situation, relationship, or community?
- After sin came into the world, Adam and Eve had some new experiences (hiding from God, etc.). Make a list of how the world had changed? How do those same devastating experiences show themselves in your life? Think through the ripple effect of sin.
- Notice that God "covered" the nakedness (vulnerability) of Adam and Eve with something permanent; something that required an innocent death and the shedding of blood. What does this tell you about God and what He has done for you?

(Did you know...)

historical records, genealogies, poetry, letters, wisdom, prophecies, and eye witness accounts?

- That the name of each of the five books in the Pentateuch indicates something about the topic of that book? For example, Genesis is about beginnings—the beginning of the world and the beginning of the nation of Israel.

In the Word

As a family, read Genesis 3 (the fall of man) out loud.

Family Activity

- Who tempted Eve?
- Why did they hide (verse 10)?
- What are some bad choices we make?
- What did God do about Adam and Eve sinning?

Martin Luther said, "*In Genesis, we are taught how all creatures were created, and where sin and death came. But immediately thereafter, we find out where help comes from, not by the law or men's own works, but by 'the seed of the woman,' Christ promised to Adam.*"

How to Fix the World?

Read Genesis 6

Have you ever wanted God just to “take out” someone who is mean and uncaring, someone who hurts you and doesn’t care? James and John, two of Jesus’ disciples did. Sometimes, we want justice and we believe that our definition of justice is the best. We think, “If this hurtful, self-focused person was not in my life, my life would be so much better.”

In Genesis 6, God sees the corruption of people who live to be hundreds of years old. They are full of pride and selfishness. They have taken God’s creation and the life that He has given them, and made it all about themselves. They have sinned. *“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain.”* (vs. 5 & 6) His response was to send a great flood. *“I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...”* (vs. 7) He will destroy all of mankind, with the exception of a righteous man named Noah and his family, and start over.

Why did God do this? He must have known what would happen if sin came into the world. Is “taking out” humankind a solution for sin and selfishness? Is this how the world gets “fixed”?

Awhile back, I had a conversation with a man who had been hurt by his brother. The relationship had become difficult and he said that he wished his brother was dead. That would make life easier. He had chosen not to talk to his brother. That way, he could feel as though his brother was “wiped out” of his life. I asked him if he thought that would really fix things. After an initial, “Of course it does, he’s out of my life!” I probed a little deeper and we talked about the flood.

Did the flood fix the sin problem? Are people always looking out for each other? No, of course not. I often wonder whether the flood is God’s way of showing us that “taking people out” isn’t the answer. Cutting people off and severing our relationships isn’t a fix.

The Gospel in this story is God’s relationship with Noah. Verse 9 states that Noah was righteous, blameless and he walked with God. We can only be righteous and blameless by faith in God. Hebrews “Hall of Faith” (chapter 11) states again and again that Abraham, Enoch, Abel, all lived by faith and it was credited to them as righteousness. Hebrews 11:7 states, *“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith, he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”*

The only real way to fix the world was for God to re-enter the world “in person”, to live without sin and selfishness, to die for sin, and then to overcome death by rising. Faith in Jesus Christ “fixes” our world. Our only hope is a relationship with Jesus. The best news of all is that through the Holy Spirit we have Him, salvation, healing, and hope.

It is clear when we read about the flood, that God judges evil in the world. Don’t think for a moment that He is going to ignore evil and not deal with it. However, “taking people out” is not the way He chooses to fix the world. It is through the salvation that comes to us by faith.

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Did you know...

- That Moses is the writer of the Pentateuch?
- That Genesis is a book of relationships; between God and nature, God and man, and man and man?
- That the first 11 chapters of Genesis cover approximately 1,700 years of history?

In the Word

As a family, read Genesis 6 (the flood) out loud.

Family Activity

- Why did God choose Noah to build the ark (verse 8)?
- Discuss how big the ark was and what it looked like (verses 15 & 16). The ark was approximately 1½ football fields long and three-stories high.
- Do some math in verse 18. How many people were on the ark?
- What did Noah do after God gave him the command in verse 22?

WEEK 4 (continued from page 5)

Lord Jesus, many times I feel as though you are not paying attention to the injustice and evil that I confront every day. I feel as though I need to take matters into my own hands, to solve problems myself, to “fix” things. But You have already fixed things. I have to put my hope in Jesus. I have to let Him anchor my soul, desires and future. Make me like Noah, righteous, blameless, and a person who walks with You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How are you trying to “fix” things yourself instead of trusting God? What is standing in the way of your faith in God and walking with Him?
- What do Hebrews 11:7 and 2 Peter 2:4-5 tell you about Noah?
- How was Noah saved? How does that compare to the way that you and I are saved?
- How can salvation through Jesus’ victory help you in the challenges that you face right now?

WEEK 5

JANUARY 29–FEBRUARY 4, 2012

Blessed to be a Blessing

Read Genesis 12

Social networking critics are deeply concerned that Facebook, Twitter, and the like are making users narcissistic. One expert commented that our favorite website for sports, entertainment, information, and news is “me.com”. “Look what I’m doing right now.” “Here’s a picture of me and my latest experience.” “I think this... about...” This same expert called social networking “the unsocial networking craze” because it keeps us living in a bubble, with “friends” who agree with everything we say and think. We rarely have real conversations where we are challenged to think beyond our own thoughts and experiences. Social networking can isolate us in a fantasy world.

While you may or may not agree with this assessment, human beings have the capacity to take anything good and build it around themselves. Sin does that to us. Life is “all about me”, which can destroy God’s plan for our salvation.

God had a plan to fix a world broken by sin. He would bless the world with the Messiah, the Christ, who would live without sin, die for sin, and win victory over sin. God’s plan would be carried out over many years through His people. Genesis 12 records that God used Abram in this plan. Abram became the father of a great nation from which Christ was born. Notice God’s words: “I will bless you...” God also says, “...All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God was saying, “You, Abram, are blessed to be a blessing! Great things will happen to you, but it is for the good of others. It’s not about you.”

Abram, like us, struggled with that message. He took God’s good promise and made it about himself. The last part of the chapter found Abram risking God’s plan to start a “great nation” through his wife,

Did you know...

- That one of the key themes of the Pentateuch is salvation?
- That the key events of Abraham and Moses lives, the plagues, the exodus, etc. show Yahweh’s (Lord in Hebrew; God’s personal name) continual love and grace for his people?
- That God’s original blessing (“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it...’ Genesis 1:28) on all mankind would be restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring?

In the Word

As a family, read Genesis 12 (The Call of Abram) out loud.

Family Activity

- Find the map section in your Bible. The first map for the

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WEEK 5 (continued from page 6)

Sarai. He took matters into his own hands and tried to protect himself. God came to the rescue and set things right again.

God has blessed all of us. We have many great things in life—relationships, possessions, plans, and most of all faith in Him. Do we hear His call to be a blessing? Do we consider how we might use what we have been given to help others? Jesus said, *“Whatever you do for the least of these... you do for me?”* Ultimately, it’s not about me. It’s about Christ.

Lord Jesus, too often I have made my credo, “It’s all about me.” I don’t like to admit it and try to cover it up. Sin has made me selfish and self-centered. Forgive me. Help me to realize that You are what I am about. Help me to keep my eyes on You. Change me so that I see the blessings that You freely bestow on me as gifts to be used to bless the world. Then, I will know that it is more blessed to give than to receive. In Your name I pray, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What things have I made “all about me”?
How is that keeping me from blessing others?
- How does Romans 12 reinforce the message of Genesis 12?
Notice how many times Paul tells the Romans not to get conceited.
Why is this important in order to be a blessing to others?
- How can God’s power help me to overcome selfishness?

Old Testament is typically named “World of the Patriarchs” or, visit www.bible.org/maps. Scroll down and click on “Old Testament Map 1—The World of the Patriarchs”. Follow Abram’s journey. Name three of cities that he passed through.

- What was the blessing from the Lord to Abram (verse 2)?
- Who went with Abram when he left Haran (verse 4)?
- What was the promise the Lord gave to Abram (verse 7)?

WEEK 6

FEBRUARY 5–11, 2012

A Father Sacrifices His Son

Read Genesis 22

“God, what are you doing?”

Have you ever made that cry to God? I remember attending the funeral of a young boy who had been hit by a car as he crossed the street. His mother was an emotional wreck. A few years earlier, her seventeen year old son lost his long battle with leukemia. Furthermore, she had just gone through a messy divorce with an alcoholic husband. She understandably cried out to God, “What are you doing?” It’s not easy to understand why horrible things happen.

Abraham must have had similar thoughts. God had uprooted Abraham and his family to move to a new land so that he and his wife Sarah could have *“as many descendants as there are sands on the seashore.”* But Sarah couldn’t have children until God miraculously blessed her and Abraham, at the ages of 90 and 100, with Isaac. Then God told Abraham to take his only child and sacrifice him on a mountain. “God, what are you doing?”

The story is captivating. God takes Abraham to the brink of sacrificing (killing) his own son to determine if Abraham loves Isaac more. God commends Abraham, *“Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”* (verse 12) Did you

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Did you know...

- That numerous times throughout the Pentateuch we see a glimpse of the salvation Jesus will give us by dying on the cross? That Genesis 22 is an example of this.
- Did you know that Moriah (where Isaac was to be sacrificed) was the same place where Jerusalem and the temple would later be built?

In the Word

As a family, read Genesis 22 out loud.

WEEK 6 (continued from page 7)

notice that phrase "...your son, your only son..." keeps repeating?

As we notice this phrase, we realize that this story is more than a test. This story is about another Father and His only Son. This is God's story and our story of salvation. Isaac is like Jesus. He carried the wood for his sacrifice as Jesus carried the cross to become the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. For Isaac, a ram is killed. For us, Jesus, the Lamb of God, is crucified. Through Jesus' death we are promised life everlasting. Faith is at the heart of it all. *"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."* John 3:16

We don't always know what God is doing, but we can trust that it is out of love and for our good.

Lord Jesus, I struggle with my faith sometimes. There are so many things that I don't understand. Help me to see you as the loving God that you are. Help me to realize that you will not put me through more than I can bear. Keep my eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith. In His name I pray, Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What happened in my life that caused me to ask: "God, what are you doing?"
- How did God work good in that situation? Did my faith grow? How can that experience help me during future struggles?
- What do I lean on during these times? Begin a list of meaningful Bible verses and commit to memorizing them.
- How might my experiences help me to help others who go through difficult times? Is there someone I could help right now?

Family Activity

BIBLE SCAVENGER HUNT:

Have one person read the Genesis passages and the rest of the family read the New Testament passages.

- Genesis 22:2 points us to John 3:16 & Matthew 3:17. What do those verses say?
- Genesis 22:4 points us to Luke 24:7. What is happening in Luke 24:7?
- Genesis 22:6 points us to Luke 23:26. What is happening in Luke 23:26?
- In Genesis 22:8, Isaac surrenders. This verse points us to John 19:30. What does Jesus say in verse 30?
- Genesis 22:13 points us to Mark 10:45. Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for whom? Why did He do that? Re-read John 3:16.

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