

Genesis: Small Stories of a Big God

Small Group Study Guide

1 Once Upon a Time

(Genesis 1-2:3)

In the Beginning. God tells us in amazing detail, considering this was written thousands of years ago, the order of Creation, and the first responsibilities of mankind.

Question 1: What do you think about God creating the concept of time? Do you think this is an important part of creation and our world? Why?

Question 2: What do you think God meant when He said, "Let us make man in our image, in *our likeness*?" How do we reflect God? 1:26-27

Question 3: What do you think the command of 1:26 of 'dominion' or 'rule over' means? How do you live that out?

Question 4: Does the 7th day look any different for you than other days? Do you think it would be a good thing for you to have a day that was set apart as Holy? What would that look like?

2 Introducing God and His Goodness

(Genesis 2:4-25)

Introducing the Garden, the details of creating man, and the naming of the animals. With the creation of woman, relationships are defined.

Question 1: We are given details of God creating man; how does the idea of God breathing 'into his nostrils the breath of life' (2:7) affect you? Does it change the way you see God in terms of a God of intimacy or a God of distance?

Question 2: What does this early picture of creation tell you about the character of the Creator?

Question 3: Carefully read 2:16-17. Eden held unlimited goodness, yet here God places a boundary. Do you think it is good to have boundaries?

Question 4: Describe the relationship between man and woman through the lens of the woman's creation (2:20-25). How does this compare or contrast with our culture's view of their relationship today? Do you think the fall changed this relationship?

Question 5: What does this story tell you about our relationship with others? With God? Have you ever considered that God cares about us not feeling alone? Do you think God desires us to be part of a community?

3 Introducing Satan and His Lies

(Genesis 3)

Satan, in the form of a serpent, lies to the woman. She accepts his lie and rejects God's truth. Everything changes. God explains the slow death they have brought upon themselves and escorts them out of the Garden.

Question 1: Have you ever thought about how Satan tempts us? Does he have an approach that works well on you?

Question 2: Once man and woman eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, everything changes. They attempt to cover themselves (their sin), they become fearful, they hide from God, they blame each other. How do these actions represent death and our separation from God?

Question 3: The serpent and the woman's offspring would have 'enmity' (hostility/mutual hatred) against each other moving forward. What do you think this statement, spoken to the serpent, means: "He (woman's offspring) shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel?" (3:15) There would be another temptation in another garden between woman's offspring and the serpent. See Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46, John 18:1-6. How do you think these two garden temptations are related?

Question 4: Discuss the clothing issue: the man and woman made clothing of leaves; God made them clothes of skins. What was the difference? What does this mean? Why is it important to us?

Question 5: Our separation from God has affected all creation; humankind, as well as the earth itself. Pain entered into our world. Do you think we, like Eve, still have the opportunity to choose between the serpent's lies or God's truths?

4 Sin Crouches at Your Door

(Genesis 4-6:8)

Blood drops to the ground in this familiar story of Cain and Abel. Cain's pride condemns him and he is separated from the community. Seth's descendants are traced forward to Noah where God despairs of His creation.

Question 1: From the very beginning we are bringing our offerings to God. Do you offer God your best and your finest? What do you hold back from God? What do you think this says about your trust of Him?

Question 2: Cain does not seem to show remorse for what he has done. His attitudes are passed forward to his sons. What do you think is the value of acknowledging sin and bowing in repentance? Do you think this is important to model for children?

Question 3: Compare Genesis 5:3 with Genesis 1:26 (also stated here in 5:1). God is Spirit and it is His desire for us to be born of His Spirit. We are born of flesh and cling to those desires. Look at the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. How do the passages of Genesis clarify what Jesus is saying?

Question 4: Was it disturbing to read that God regretted that he had made mankind? Do you think our sin and our evil intentions grieve God's heart today?

5 Trusting The Shipbuilder

(Genesis 6-9:17)

The violence of man fills the earth; God regrets creating man and determines to destroy every living thing. He commands Noah to build an ark, fills it with animals and the rain begins to fall. God is our judge, yet He provides a way of escape from His judgment.

Question 1: Our modern culture easily dismisses this story as fantasy. What do you think about the fact that many people groups around the world have a 'great flood story'? What do you think about the exact dimensions of the ark and the very detailed account of the story?

Question 2: How do you think you would have reacted if God commanded you to build an ark on dry land? Do you have trouble trusting and obeying God when He asks you to do things that seem 'unreasonable' to you?

Question 3: Is it difficult for you to think of our loving God as a powerful judge and of judgment that destroys? Do you think our culture has dismissed this aspect of God?

Question 4: God put His 'bow' in the sky as a promise that He would never again destroy the world by water. Water became God's symbol of deliverance and salvation. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples with the explanation; 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' (John 13:3-8) In his last instructions to his disciples he commanded them to 'baptize disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' (Matthew 28:18-20) What do you think about the symbolism of water?

6 Noah And Names

(Genesis 9-11)

There is a strange little incident of Noah and too much wine. We follow the family lines descending from the three sons of Noah; Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Question 1: Sometimes God includes stories that seem to have little relevance to us. The story of Noah lying naked in his tent after too much wine is one of those. The genealogy of Jesus stretches back through Noah. Is it helpful to think of Jesus as a 'garment to cover our shame' just as Shem and Japheth covered the shame of Noah? Should we 'cover the shame' of others or expose it?

Question 2: Do you have a better understanding of why God includes the details of names and descendants? Have you ever thought about how important your name is to God? What do you think about your name being listed in a "book of life"? (Psalm 69:28, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5)

7 God And Words

(Genesis 11:1-9)

... And in the middle of all the genealogy, God puts a stop to a little building project.

Question 1: Why was building a great city with a great tower so offensive to God? Do you ever ignore God's commands for your own 'better plans'?

Question 2: How do we seek to glorify ourselves? Have you ever had a plan to lift yourself up backfire?

Question 3: Have you ever thought about the importance of your words? How do you use them to elevate and honor yourself? How do you use them to elevate and honor God?

8 Traveling with the Lord of the Universe

(Genesis 12-13)

God calls a descendant of Shem, Abram, to follow Him to a different land. God makes multiple promises to Abram, who takes a left turn and ends up in Egypt instead.

Question 1: Has God ever called you away from where you were comfortable and asked you to go into 'unknown territory'? Were you able to follow Him and trust Him? Or did you have your doubts?

Question 2: What do you think about Abram going into Egypt and asking his wife to lie to protect him? Do you find God's patience with Abram's sin surprising? Has God ever been more patient and more forgiving with your sin than you expected?

Question 3: Abram shows strong leadership skills in the situation with his nephew Lot. What could you learn from the way Abram handled this conflict? What could you learn about making peace with neighbors or family?

Question 4: Abram seems to have an ongoing practice of altar-building and "calling on the name of the Lord". Notice the number of times he does this in Chapters 12 and 13. Why do you think this is important? What do you do to seek God's counsel?

Question 5: God made extreme promises to Abram. Do you think God still makes these kinds of extreme promises to us today? If so, what are they?

9 | Pledge Allegiance to the Lord

(Genesis 14)

Tribal alliances and wars. Lot is taken captive. Abram and his 318 trained men rescue him. King Melchizedek shows up to bless Abram. Abram refuses to make an alliance with the King of Sodom.

Question 1: This is a very confusing passage of warring tribes and alliances. What are the defining differences between Lot and Abram at this point in their lives? Do you think our priorities and the decisions we make affect how we approach life as either warriors or victims?

Question 2: Think about this mysterious king and priest Melchizedek. He will show up again in the New Testament. What elements in his description do you find interesting?

Question 3: Why do you think Abram refused the spoils of war from the King of Sodom? Do you think there is wisdom in this that you could apply in your own life?

10 Waiting for a Child

(Genesis 15-16)

God seems to be slow in keeping His promise of descendants for Abram. To reassure him, God 'cuts a covenant' with him. Sarai tries her own version of playing God, and Hagar meets God in the desert.

Question 1: Do you ever wonder why God takes so long to provide a son for Abram? Do you ever wonder why God takes so long to provide good things for you?

Question 2: When you look at the covenant God made with Abram here it was God who 'walked the path' promising to keep the covenant; requiring nothing of Abram. How do you think this relates to Jesus 'walking the path', keeping the covenant - while nothing is required of us?

Question 3: Have you ever taken matters into your own hands, like Sarai did, because God was too slow? How did that work out?

Question 4: What do you think of this outsider Hagar? Perhaps you have thought of her as an enemy; someone not chosen by God. Are you surprised at how God saw her? Are you surprised at how she saw God?

11 God Is an Extrovert and He Is Always on Time

(Genesis 17)

Abram's son by Hagar, Ishmael, is born. God shows up for a little conversation about the son of the covenant to come - Isaac. God does a lot of talking and puts dates on upcoming events.

Question 1: When you read this scripture, notice that God does most of the talking. Take note of Abram's interaction with Him; he falls on his face before Him, he laughs, he voices his desires, he obeys immediately. Do you have a relationship like this with God? Do you think it is possible?

Question 2: This scripture is full of specific references to time. Do you think time is important to God? Why? What is the advantage for God of waiting until it is 'too late'?

12 An Intimate Relationship With the King

(Genesis 17 again!)

God has been making promises to Abram on this journey; it is time to make their relationship official! God's covenant involves names changing, vows are confirmed, and the sign of circumcision is established.

Question 1: What relationship in your life is your highest priority? How does that relationship affect every other relationship in your life?

Question 2: God speaks of an everlasting covenant. Do you think this covenant is still in effect? Have you ever thought of your relationship with God continuing forward generation after generation?

Question 3: The outward sign of the covenant was circumcision. Do you think this was important in the way it 'set apart' the descendants of Abraham from other tribes? What 'sets us apart' today?

13 God Speaks

(Genesis 18)

The Lord shows up at the tents of Abraham as ‘three men’. After an impromptu lunch, the Lord foretells the birth of a son, argues with Sarah and bargains with Abraham over the fate of Sodom.

Question 1: Isn't this amazing that God shows up as three men to Abraham? How do you think this connects with the way we understand God as the Triune God; one God existing in three persons? (See John 14:16-17)

Question 2: Sarah laughs when she overhears that she will have a son by the same time next year. Have you ever had a similar reaction with a directive from God? What do you think of God's question; "Is anything too hard (or wonderful) for the Lord?"?

Question 3: What do you think of God sharing His plans with Abraham? What do you think of Abraham's negotiations with the Lord? Do you think it was daring of Abraham to 'remind' God of His own character?

Question 4: The brother of Jesus, James, called Abraham 'God's friend' (James 2:23). Jesus called his disciples his 'friends' (John 15:15-16). Does this idea of friendship with God seem outrageous to you? What do you think about the idea of 'exchanging confidences' with the Lord?

14 Reluctant to be Rescued

(Genesis 19)

Angels arrive in Sodom to rescue Lot and his family. They aren't very interested in being rescued. We all know what happens to Lot's wife. Lot and his daughters chose a smaller town and a sad future.

Question 1: When you read the details of the men trying to break Lot's door down, are you perplexed that Lot has chosen this as his home? Have you ever thought about where you live or work or a situation you are in and asked the same question; "What am I holding onto here?"

Question 2: What do you think about the opportunity Lot was given to offer an escape to others? Do you see that in your own life? Has God given you concern for salvation for others in your influence?

Question 3: Longing. Lot longed for prestige. Lot's wife longed for what she was leaving behind. Lot's daughters longed for children. Do you have a deep longing that holds you captive? Does it blind you to where God would have you go?

Question 4: What do you think of the angels being both means of protection and destruction? Compare this to Jesus being a cornerstone; a firm foundation or a stumbling block. How do you think this will play out on The Final Day?

15 Fearless

(Genesis 20-21)

Abraham deceives King Abimelech about Sarah. God reveals the truth in a dream. Isaac is born. Hagar and Ishmael are sent away. A treaty is made, a well is secured and a tree is planted.

Question 1: Has the emotion of fear ever prompted you to make unwise decisions?

Question 2: What do you think about Abimelech's reaction to the lies of Abraham? Have you ever been put in a dangerous situation by the lies of another? What can you learn from this?

Question 3: The story of Hagar and Ishmael being sent out into the desert seems heartless and cruel. Does it surprise you that God protects Abraham's son Ishmael even though it looks like the opposite is happening at the time? Are you able to trust God when you have made a mess of things?

Question 4: Even though these stories are little known and seem to be unconnected, do you see a connection to the future; the birth of a long-awaited son, the God who hears our cries and opens our eyes to living water, the peace treaty that allows us to drink from the well and flourish under the tree of life? Could God possibly be preparing us for a promised land where there will be no more tears, no more fear?

16 Five Conversations

(Genesis 22)

This is the story we all know of God telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on a mountaintop. God provides a ram at the last moment and their covenant is renewed.

Question 1: Most of us easily accept this story as part of our Judeo-Christian history. Have you ever thought of the anguish Abraham felt? Has God ever asked you to give up something dear to you?

Question 2: Have you ever thought about how this story connects to God sacrificing His Son for us? Do you think God felt the pain of a father in that action? Have you ever thought about God feeling emotions?

Question 3: We often speak of Jesus as the Sacrificial Lamb. How would you explain that concept? Think about the night before his arrest; we are told Jesus sweated blood. What do you think Jesus was thinking and feeling that evening?

Question 4: Read Genesis 22:15-18. This is a huge blessing based on a trusting relationship and obedience. How do you see this blessing being fulfilled?

17 Signing the Deed

(Genesis 23)

Sarah dies and Abraham negotiates with the Hittites to buy land to bury her. The cave in the field of Machpelah, where he lays her body, will become the family burial plot and the only land Abraham will ever own.

Question 1: The Hittites gave permission to bury Sarah there, yet Abraham insisted on buying the land. Why was this so important to him? How would this make a difference for his descendants?

Question 2: The name Hebron means 'friend'. Abraham was a stranger in a foreign land. How do you think others around you – especially those who are very different from you, view you?

Question 3: God made enormous promises to Abraham, yet here near the end of his life it seems that very few of these promises have been fulfilled. Do you think that made it hard for Abraham to trust God? Have you ever considered that God's promises to you may affect your descendants more than they affect you?

18 Servant

(Genesis 24)

Abraham sends his servant to search for a godly wife for his son from among his own people. The servant is led by God to find Rebekah, who agrees to leave her home and family to become the wife of Isaac.

Question 1: This is a very detailed story of a servant going out to find a good wife for the son of Abraham. The relationship between Abraham and his servant was obviously based on complete trust. What qualities of the servant were meaningful to you? Did you see an attitude or an action that you would like to imitate?

Question 2: When we meet Rebekah, she has the attitude of a willing servant. How would your life look if you had that kind of approach to each opportunity?

Question 3: Think about how you represent God. Have you ever considered that you have access to all His power and authority and resources? How would that make a difference in your life? Or in the life of those you serve?

19 The Stars in the Sky have Names

(Genesis 25-26)

Abraham remarries and has more sons. He dies and is buried by Isaac and Ishmael. Rebekah gives birth to twins. The oldest, Esau, sells his birthright to the youngest, Jacob. History repeats itself: Isaac lies that Rebekah is only his sister, there is a problem with wells, and Abimelech knocks on his door to make peace.

Question 1: Ishmael's wife has 12 sons. Isaac's wife Rebekah struggles with infertility for 20 years. Within every marriage there are difficulties. If you are married, how do you handle these hard times? Have you ever prayed with each other? For each other?

Question 2: The twins are born. Family dynamics change. Do you see these types of struggles within your own family? How do you make peace between extremely different personalities?

Question 3: Both Abraham and Isaac lied that their wife was really their sister. It is easy to judge them and condemn them for such a lie. Do you easily slip into 'little white lies' to protect yourself? Have those 'little lies' gotten you into trouble?

Question 4: These small stories speak softly of difficult relationships. Do you ever feel like a family member or a neighbor is keeping you from having peace in your life? How often do you pray for them? How often do you pray for the future of your family? Can you trust God with your difficult relationships?

20 Blessings, Blessings, Blessings

(Genesis 27-28)

Isaac intends to bless Esau, his oldest son, but through the trickery of Rebekah and Jacob, he gives the 'favored' blessing to the youngest son instead. Jacob leaves for Haran before Esau can kill him. On the way, he dreams of a stairway to heaven as God blesses him with the blessing of Abraham.

Question 1: It may be surprising to you how dysfunctional this family of Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob are. This story is filled with the details of dishonest actions and heartbreaking conversations. Why do you think God portrays each person so clearly? Do you think God shies away from the messy relationships that take place within our families?

Question 2: Have you always thought you need to be 'good' and 'obedient' or God will not bless you? Why do you think God chose Jacob for the favored blessing? How do you think Jacob's bad behavior can work into God's plan of blessings?

Question 3: Jacob's vision of the Stairway to Heaven is a very well-known story. Do you see anything new here that is meaningful to you?

Question 4: God came to Jacob with the same promises He made to Jacob's grandfather Abraham. Jacob sounds like he doesn't completely trust God. Do you find it difficult to believe that God has blessings for your life – especially when things look like a mess?

21 Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire

(Genesis 29-30)

Jacob falls in love with Rachael, daughter of his uncle Laban. Her sister Leah is secretly substituted on the wedding night and Jacob ends up with two wives, 11 sons and a daughter born of 4 different mothers. As if that isn't trouble enough, there is a confusing problem with speckled and spotted sheep.

Question 1: Jacob falls in love with Rachael but is tricked into marrying Leah. Do you think this has any connection with what Jacob just left behind? Do you think God allows us to be in circumstances to correct us and refine us?

Question 2: Both Rachael and Leah are placed in heartbreaking circumstances beyond their control. Have you ever been in a situation that you did not cause, yet are suffering because of it? How do you cope with unfair circumstances that you have no control over?

Question 3: Laban says one thing and then does another. If you are in a relationship with a dishonest person, do you feel powerless to leave? Who do you trust in times like these; yourself, the people around you, or God? How do you think God can provide for you, direct you and bless you within hard situations?

22 Building Walls

(Genesis 31)

Jacob, Rachael, and Leah agree to leave Laban's land (under God's direction) but flee secretly and steal idols to add insult to injury. Laban pursues them but is warned by God to cause no trouble. After a search and everyone has their say, they pile stones up as a reminder of their agreement.

Question 1: God directs Jacob to leave under His protection, yet Jacob flees under secrecy and fear. God often counsels us, "Do not fear!" How do you cope with fear? Why do you think God is concerned with our fearfulness?

Question 2: Laban and Jacob had been hiding for years behind walls built of lies and deception. Anger and resentment had made the walls almost impenetrable. Do you have any secrets in your life where things that have been done in darkness need to be brought out into the light? Is there a way to do this within the context of 1 Corinthians 13:4-8?

Question 3: Laban missed the power of God speaking to him, holding onto his anger and pride instead. What rocks are you carrying around that keep you from hearing God's voice?

23 Struggling with God: A Makeover

(Genesis 32-33)

Jacob prepares to meet his estranged brother Esau. He sends gifts ahead. He organizes his family into two camps. He prays. He wrestles with God. He has his name changed to Israel. He makes amends with Esau.

Question 1: As Jacob returns home, he is very aware of what God has been doing in his life. Read the beginning of his prayer in Genesis 32:10. He admits he is not worthy of God's "steadfast love and faithfulness". Can you look back over your life and see where God has been steadfast and faithful to you? What did that look like?

Question 2: The most striking change in Jacob is his desire to give to another instead of taking for himself. Do you think this is significant? I have heard it said, 'The measure of wealth is not how much you have but how much you give away.' Do you think this is an important aspect of following God?

Question 3: Jacob was not afraid to wrestle with God. It was intimate. It was messy. Is this idea of God pushing against you to teach you and change you something you have ever thought of before? Have you had times of wrestling with God? Did He expose a weakness in you? Did you move forward with a 'new name?'

24 Dirty Hands

(Genesis 34)

Dinah goes into town and is 'raped' by the prince Shechem. He begs Israel for her hand in marriage. Her brothers deceitfully negotiate a bride price that is way too high, and all of the men of the city are murdered, their families captured, their belongings plundered.

Question 1: Don't you want to hear from Dinah here? Obviously, we have two very different cultures clashing in this story: the Hivites who seem to think they are acting honorably and the family of Israel who are outraged and insulted. What do you think is the heart of the problem?

Question 2: The brothers use a sacred sign of God's covenant as the 'bride price'. Do you think this was offensive to God? Do we ever use 'things of God' to our own advantage?

Question 3: The city of Shechem was destroyed by the sons of Israel. Their hands were covered with the blood of the innocent. Do you think they regretted what they had done? Do you think God could forgive them? Are you surprised that God didn't just walk away?

25 Turning Point

(Genesis 35-36)

God calls Jacob to return to Him at Bethel. The people of his household bury their foreign gods and purify themselves. Jacob builds an altar and worships. Rachael dies after birthing Benjamin. Isaac dies and his sons bury him. Esau's descendants are listed.

Question 1: Jacob has been struggling and running for most of his life. We see a different attitude emerging in 35:3. He calls on all in his household to purify themselves as they go to seek God at Bethel. Like Jacob, have you had a turning point where you run to God as your refuge? Is there a place you go to, or ceremonial actions you take to 'meet' with God; to renew your spirit?

Question 2: Benjamin is born to Rachel near Bethlehem. Israel (Jacob) now has twelve sons who will become the twelve tribes of Israel. We have heard some of the stories of their sins. Is it surprising to you that these people will become 'God's chosen people'? What do you think this says about God and His promises? God and His mercy?

Question 3: The descendants of Esau (Edom) make very different choices from the descendants of Jacob (Israel). They both fall down from the sin in their lives, but Israel's sons follow the example of their father; they return to God and He washes them clean. Do you think it would be just as effective to fix things yourself? Do you think a repentant heart makes a difference? Do you see this idea anywhere else in God's word?

26 Disappointing Heroes

(Genesis 37-38)

We meet Joseph, hear his dreams and see the disturbing family dynamics within Jacob's family. The brothers sell their younger brother to traders, smear his coat with blood and lie to their father. The daughter-in-law of Judah takes matters into her own hands when she is destined to remain a childless-widow.

Question 1: We see the jealousy within Jacob's family. What have his sons learned from him by observation? (Manipulation? Mistrust? Favoritism?) How did your family of origin influence you? How do you think you are influencing those who will continue after you?

Question 2: Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. Do you see a parallel between Joseph and another favored son, Jesus? List the similarities.

Question 3: The story of Judah and Tamar is inserted here. It seems Judah has leaned hard into the pagan culture around him. What do you think of him? What do you think about Tamar and her actions?

Question 4: We have explored three storylines here; the favored son and his dreams, brothers who plot murder, sell their brother and lie to their father, and a desperate Canaanite woman who deceives to conceive. How do you think God will weave these three stories into the future of the nation that will become Israel?

27 Joseph and a New Attitude

(Genesis 39-40)

Joseph ends up in Egypt in a position of power in Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him. He is thrown into prison, but again, gains a position of power. Joseph interprets the dreams of the Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker.

Question 1: Joseph trusted God and God gave Joseph success in whatever he did. Look at the responsibilities and opportunities Joseph was given. From his training in Potiphar's household to his duties in the prison, how do you think God was preparing Joseph for greater responsibility?

Question 2: We depart from these stories with Joseph, innocent of wrongdoing, still in prison. Where was justice? Should he still trust God? Do you think his attitude was that of the psalmist in Psalm 16:8?

Question 3: Do you trust God when your world seems unfair and there appears to be no way out? Are you focused on what you can see or who you can trust? Read 1 Peter 2:13-25 for perspective.

Question 4: What do you think of the idea that God allows difficult situations in your life to refine you and create a new heart, a new attitude in you? Have you experienced God using difficult times to build your character?

28 Extreme Changes

(Genesis 41-44)

Joseph (through God!) interprets the Pharaoh's dreams of cows and of grain as seven years of coming bounty and famine. He recommends a plan of action and is promoted to 2nd in command. Joseph's brothers come to Egypt for grain and are tested. Judah lays down his life for Benjamin.

Question 1: Suddenly, with no warning, Joseph is called to appear before Pharaoh. What do you think he was feeling? List the ways God had perfectly prepared him for this moment. Are you surprised at how bold he was?

Question 2: 'All the earth came to Egypt' for life-giving grain (41:47). Egypt alone is prepared to feed the world due to the intervention of God through an imprisoned slave. Do you think God can use you to reach out into a starved and hurting world? How has He equipped you?

Question 3: Jacob's sons (excluding Benjamin first time around) come to buy grain. Joseph tests them to assess their character and see if they have been changed as he has. What do you think of this? Does it seem mean or wise? Why is it important?

Question 4: We hear the conversations of Jacob's fear of losing his sons. Reuben declares his commitment of protection. Judah offers his life for Benjamin's to his father and then to Joseph (43:8-9, 44:16-34). "I cannot go back to my father without my brother," Judah cries. Do you see a similarity in what Jesus did for us?

29 ... But God

(Genesis 45-46)

Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers. He points to God as the One who sent him to Egypt to preserve life during the time of famine. Joseph and the Pharaoh insist that Jacob's entire family come to live in the land of Goshen.

Question 1: Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, assuring them that he is not angry and pointing to the bigger and better plans of God. Have you ever been in the place of the brothers and been confronted with extreme forgiveness for something you did wrong? How did you feel? Have you ever been in the place of Joseph and been able to forgive a great wrong done to you? How do you see God at work in Joseph's heart?

Question 2: Pharaoh is extremely generous with the gifts he sends to Joseph's father Israel. Do you ever think of our God as being generous? Think of the generosity of Jesus when He walked this earth: In what ways do you think Jesus reflected his Father in heaven?

Question 3: What does the phrase, 'God is sovereign' mean to you? Do you believe God is actively involved in your life? If you believed that completely, how would it make a difference?

30 Jacob's Story: A Pilgrim in a Foreign Land

(Genesis 47-48)

Israel and his sons are introduced to the Pharaoh. They are given choice land and settle their families in the land of Egypt. Israel blesses the sons of Joseph as his own. (And blesses the younger over the oldest!)

Question 1: God not only provided for Egypt during the famine, but He also brought the family of Israel into Egypt and settled them in a new land. They would be united here geographically and culturally; as well as separated from the rest of the world. Why do you think this will be important for future generations?

Question 2: We have traveled with Jacob through many experiences. What changes have you seen in him? What do you think was the most difficult for him? What do you think will influence his family and their descendants the most?

Question 3: Have you experienced a time in your life when God has taken you away from everything familiar and into a 'foreign land'? Can you see what God was accomplishing or do you think it may be something that may not be understood until the future? Do you think God can use it for good?

31 Lavish Blessings

(Genesis 49:1-28)

Jacob gathers his sons around him, lays his hands on each son's head and blesses them. Son by son, he describes their character and their future.

Question 1: What characteristics, traits, and values did you inherit from your family of origin? What do you think of the idea that the people who came before you pour out their blessings on those who come after?

Question 2: The scene in the bedchambers of Israel is a reminder that there will come a Day when we too will stand before our Father and receive His assessment of our lives. What do you imagine you will hear on That Day?

Question 3: Read the blessing placed on Judah (Genesis 49:8-12). There are many powerful images here: your brothers shall praise you and bow down to you, you are a lion, the scepter and ruler's staff will come to you, the obedience of the people, a donkey's colt, a choice vine, garments washed in the blood of grapes. How do you see these 'blessings' fulfilled in the life of Judah's future descendant Jesus?

Question 4: Look at the blessings of Joseph (Genesis 49:22-26). How did the life of Joseph fulfill God's plan of everlasting provision for His people?

Question 5: Have you accepted God's invitation to be part of His family? What are the privileges you have been given as His child? What are your responsibilities? How do you think He intends for you to share His blessings with others?

32 Heading Home

(Genesis 49:29-33; 50)

Jacob dies, is embalmed in the Egyptian tradition, and his body is buried in the cave of Machpelah. There is great mourning. Joseph's brothers ask for forgiveness again. Joseph dies with the request to be buried in Canaan when God comes for His people to return them to the Promised Land.

Question 1: In this world death is the end of everyone's story. What do you think of the preparations and ceremony we do to honor someone's life? Do you think it is a reminder of the value of life? Have you ever thought about the idea that God created us for life – not death?

Question 2: Where is 'home' for you? Jesus told his followers that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:1-4, 23). How does this promise make you feel?

Question 3: Forgiveness is such an elusive thing. Joseph's brothers still had much guilt and fear over what they had done by selling their brother to slave traders. Are you holding onto guilt over something you have done? Do you think Jesus has this ability to forgive you? Does God still have this power to turn our wrongs into right?

Question 4: Judah's descendant Jesus taught his followers to pray these words; "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12 *my paraphrase*) and continued to explain that if we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15). How do you think it was possible for Joseph to forgive his brothers? Are you having a hard time forgiving someone in your life? What are the consequences of unforgiveness?

Question 5: As we come to the end of Genesis, what do you find most surprising about God? What do you find most comforting? Why do you think God wanted us to know these stories?