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THE HEART OF GOD'S  
**STORY**

Know His Face. Thrive in His Space.  
Extend His Grace.

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**GEORGE H. GUTHRIE**

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Nashville, Tennessee

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...son, and has a... last day. He ha... Him. The S... sustaining; all things b... ing purification, for sin... he sat down at th... high. So... e inherited is superior... for to which of the angels did He ever say, "My Son; today I have become Your Father," or again, "I will be His Father, He will be My son? When He again brings His firstborn into the world, He says, A

# The Author

Dr. George H. Guthrie serves as the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. He is the author of numerous articles and has written a dozen books, including *2 Corinthians* in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, and the Hebrews section of *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.



As the architect of the Read the Bible for Life biblical-literacy initiative, Guthrie has written or edited five tools, including this Bible study (LifeWay, 2016), *Read the Bible for Life* Bible study (LifeWay, 2010), *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God's Word* (B&H, 2011), *A Reader's Guide to the Bible* (LifeWay, 2011), and *Reading God's Story: A Chronological Daily Bible* (B&H, 2011). Guthrie has participated in translation projects, such as the revision of the New Living Translation, and has served as a consultant on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Version, and the English Standard Version.

Guthrie holds PhD and MDiv degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. At Union University he led in the establishment of and serves as Senior Fellow in the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, which is committed to promoting sound Bible reading, study, and interpretation in local churches.

Dr. Guthrie has been married to the incomparable Pat Guthrie for more than a quarter of a century, and they have two grown children, Joshua and Anna. Dr. and Mrs. Guthrie attend Northbrook Church, which they helped plant more than 20 years ago.

# Introduction

Welcome to *The Heart of God's Story*. Think of this Bible study's title from two vantage points.

1. In this study we'll identify central themes (the heart) that shape the story of Scripture from the beginning to the end. We'll focus especially on—
  - the intersection of God's face—the emphasis on God's presence as a key to the biblical narrative;
  - God's space—the fact that God always creates places for people to walk with and know Him;
  - the extension of God's grace in the world.
2. *The Heart of God's Story* also points us to God's heart—His desire or passion—revealed in the story of Scripture. As we learn to read and study Scripture in greater depth, we rightly engage our minds in fresh ways. In fact, we're to love God with our mind, as Jesus Himself reminds us in Mark 12:29-30. But those verses also say we're to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. In other words, God wants us to love Him with all we are, investing our whole lives in a relationship with Him. Working out such a meaningful, intimate, life-grounding relationship constitutes the beat of God's heart, which becomes the purpose of our lives and the driving force behind God's mission revealed in Scripture.

As we work our way through this study, we'll unpack these central, life-orienting topics in a way that has the potential to change us forever. God's Word, after all, doesn't come back to Him empty (see Isa. 55:11). But to see life-changing results, we'll need to engage with this Bible study in ways that will open our lives to the work of the Spirit of God.

# How to Use This Bible Study

This Bible study is divided into six weeks of study with both group-study and personal-study components.

## Weekly Group Sessions

Each week begins with suggestions for a small-group session, divided into three sections.

1. “Start: Sharing Your Heart” presents questions that can be used to open the small-group discussion. In week 1 these questions help members get to know one another and prepare members to watch the first video. In weeks 2–6 these opening discussion questions provide a review of the video from the previous group session and enable members to process their personal study since the previous group session. This introductory discussion time will work most effectively when members of the group have completed the personal study for the week. If you’re completing this study alone, consider talking through the discussion questions with a friend and sharing your insights on what you’re learning.
2. “Watch: Hearing God’s Heart” provides key statements from the video to be shown during the session, along with lines for taking notes.
3. “Discuss: Responding to God’s Heart” suggests questions for discussing the video session the group has watched. Group members will be encouraged to discern the truths of God’s Word, to connect the teachings of God’s Word in meaningful ways, and to engage personally with the story of Scripture.

## Weekly Personal Study

Each week's personal study is divided into three parts.

1. "Rhythms of the Heart: Meeting God in the Story" is for everyone. Whether or not you record answers to all the questions, they'll stimulate your thinking about the passages of Scripture you're reading each day.
2. "Depths of the Heart: Going Deeper" is optional. It's provided for participants who have the time and energy to dig deeper into the Word each week. Specifically, this section will teach you the basics of inductive Bible study.

Inductive Bible study is an approach to Bible study that explores what the original author intended to communicate through writing and its significance for us today. In this approach to Bible study, we'll consider issues of context, word meanings, the type of literature, important theological concepts, and ways to apply the text appropriately.

3. "Journaling: Expressions of the Heart" provides pages at the end of each week's personal study and at the back of this book for you to use in whatever way you find helpful. If you run out of space in the space under a daily reading, allow your notes to overflow here. This is also a good place to record key insights from the week's personal study or questions you want to ask in the next small-group session.

## Online Tools

Tools designed to equip you for more effective Bible reading and study are provided at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory). There you will find video interviews on how to understand various portions of the Bible, overviews of theological contexts, instructions for completing word studies, and a template for Bible study.

# Call to a Joyful Commitment

If God's Word and God's ways are to have a great impact on our lives, we'll have to be open to God's instruction and committed to making space in our lives for God to work. Thankfully, such a commitment is a joy, not a burden. Think of the excitement you feel when you spend focused time with your spouse or a close friend. Setting aside space for a date or a dinner, rather than being burdensome, brings renewal in the midst of very busy, sometimes draining lives.

Here are some ways you can work with your facilitator, your group, and the Holy Spirit as you complete this study.

1. Make a commitment now to attend every group session. Because *The Heart of God's Story* deals with the central themes of the Bible and thus the very purpose of our lives, we need to devote time to think through those themes and their implications.
2. Plan ahead to make specific time each day to complete "Rhythms of the Heart: Meeting God in the Story" in each week's personal study. Life space (the actual minutes in our day) and heart space (the emotional and spiritual attention we give God and/or other people or things) are precious commodities in life. We have to make a conscious decision to commit both to build our relationship with the Lord. A great place to begin is simply to set aside a predetermined time and place to meet with God each day. Where and when will you have your time with the Lord to complete the reading and learning activities in this study?
3. Enlist an encouragement partner. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says, "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts." Plan to pray for your partner each day and perhaps to meet with your partner once a week. Share with each other the things the Lord is teaching you. Encourage each other to stick with the study to the end.

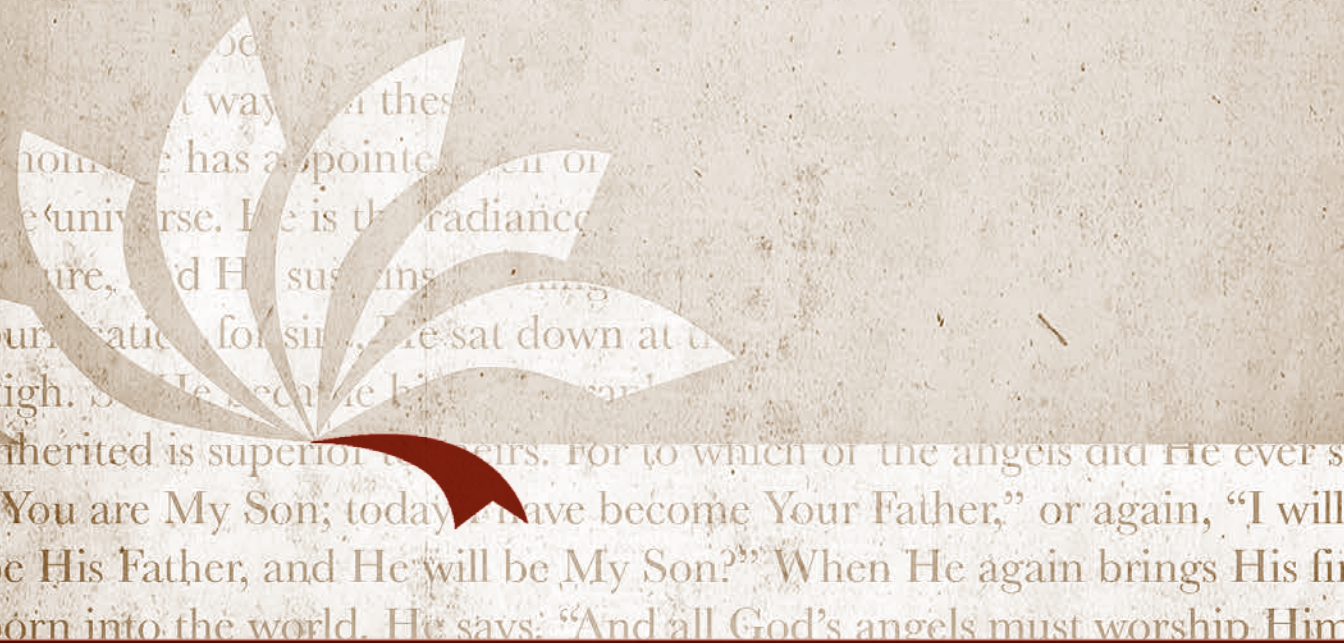


4. We're all at various places in our relationships with the Lord. Feel free to live at the level where God has you at present. If you decide to complete only "Rhythms of the Heart" in your personal study each week, that's great. But aim to complete those daily readings with depth of thought and prayer. If you want to dig deeper by completing "Depths of the Heart" inductive Bible study, that's also great. Enjoy the process of learning. Maybe some weeks you won't have time to complete all the personal study. That's OK. If you struggle a bit one week, go ahead and attend the group session and learn from the group. We can all support and learn from one another.
  
5. At the same time, stretch yourself to grow in your reading and study of God's good Word. Reading the personal study each week is good, but you'll grow a lot more by completing the suggested activities. As you consistently spend time in the Word, your spiritual muscles will get stronger. As that happens during this study, feel free to dip into "Depths of the Heart," even if you take only very small steps. Do this for joy, not under compulsion, but don't rule out your ability to learn at the higher levels of the study.
  
6. Apply what you're learning. *The Heart of God's Story* emphasizes that mere head knowledge isn't the endgame for Bible reading and study. God is after nothing less than the transformation of your life. Therefore, you need to apply what you learn in Bible study. Each week seek to put something you learn into action. The suggested learning activities will help you live out this commitment.
  
7. Pray every day for yourself and the others in your group. Engaging with God's good Word is a spiritual dynamic, so spiritual forces are at work as you seek to grow in Bible reading and study. Therefore, you and your group need to pray for one another. Prayer will really make a difference in your group's understanding and application of God's Word.

Welcome to the study. Let's have a great time together as we probe *The Heart of God's Story*.

## WEEK 1

# You Are Made for God's Story



# START

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## **SHARING YOUR HEART**

**Introduce yourself. Ask everyone to share what they hope to gain from this study.**

**Take a moment to answer the following questions. Then discuss your answers as a group.**

1. Apart from the Bible, what's your favorite story and why?
2. What makes a story great?
3. What are keys to understanding the heart or main point of any story?
4. Why do you think so much of the Bible is in story form?
5. How are the stories of the Bible the same as and different from your favorite stories?
6. How can we read Bible stories in ways that will change us?

### **Study with your group.**

- In this group session you'll watch video session 1. As you watch, complete the viewer guide on the next page.
- During the following week each person should complete the personal studies in week 1 of this workbook. These lessons will expand on the video teaching you've watched.
- In group session 2 you'll discuss the material you've studied during week 1. Then you'll watch video session 2 before completing week 2 in this Bible study book during the following week. Each subsequent group session follows this pattern.
- At the end of the six weeks, an optional session is provided on page 134 for groups that want to review personal notes, ask questions, or share journal entries from *The Heart of God's Story*.

# WATCH

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## **HEARING GOD'S HEART**

### What Makes a Great Story?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Vivid \_\_\_\_\_
3. Great \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Big \_\_\_\_\_
6. Familiarity or \_\_\_\_\_
7. Connection to \_\_\_\_\_
8. A powerful \_\_\_\_\_

# Our Love of Stories Is Not an Accident

Stories are at the heart of what God is up to in the \_\_\_\_\_.

Stories affect our \_\_\_\_\_ in a way that other forms of communication do not.

God has given us much of His \_\_\_\_\_ in the form of stories.

We can't understand the \_\_\_\_\_ in its beauty and its fullness if we don't understand the whole of the story.

## Why God Has Made Us Story People

1. To \_\_\_\_\_ us into the story

2. To \_\_\_\_\_ us by the story

3. To \_\_\_\_\_ us for the story

### **Purposes of the Lord's Supper**

1. To \_\_\_\_\_ this part of the story

2. To \_\_\_\_\_ the story to others

### **PERSONAL NOTES**

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Video sessions available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory)  
or for streaming with a subscription to [smallgroup.com](http://smallgroup.com)

# DISCUSS

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## RESPONDING TO GOD'S HEART

1. What's one main point that arrested your attention in the video session? How could that insight make a difference in your life?
2. Robert McKee has written, "Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today."<sup>1</sup> Do you agree? Can you think of an example?
3. The research Dr. Guthrie shared about the brain is interesting. What are the various ways stories move us? Is being moved by a story always a good thing?
4. What are some ways we can grow in having a grasp on the story of Scripture as a whole?

1. Robert McKee, as quoted in Shahnaz Bahman and Helen Maffini, *Developing Children's Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Continuum International, 2008), 56.

# MEETING GOD IN THE STORY

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## RHYTHMS OF THE HEART

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### DAY 1 • GENESIS 37

This week we'll begin our journey by reading one of the great stories in Scripture, which forms a very special hinge in the grand story of the Bible. Its importance is seen in the amount of space given to it in Genesis, the Bible's book of beginnings. The story picks up as the sons of Jacob (named Israel, for whom the nation is named) were having a squabble, and the story focuses on Joseph, who was destined to have a very important role in the history of his family.

How does the story draw you in?

What's your first impression of Joseph?

What do you learn about Joseph from the author?

What are key turning points in the story?

A video interview that explains how to understand story literature in the Old Testament can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).

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## **DAY 2 • GENESIS 39**

The scene shifts to Egypt, where Joseph was sold to Pharaoh's captain of the guard, Potiphar. You may have noticed that a key phrase is repeated several times (hint: it has to do with "the Lord"). Underline that phrase. This is the heart of the chapter.

In what ways was God working behind the scenes as the hero of this story?

Stories in the Bible often move ahead on the basis of a crisis. What was the crisis here, and what was its outcome?

How did Joseph respond to the crisis? How was he being shaped to be used in the grander story?

What crisis in your life needs perspective today?



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## **DAY 3 • GENESIS 40:1–41:45**

Dreams are significant in biblical culture, and this theme is prominent in this part of Joseph's story.

In what way are we drawn in to the story within a story in chapter 40?

Did you pick up on the play on words in 40:20?

What are the two meanings of "lifted up the heads"?

How does the time frame shift in chapter 41?

How did God use Joseph to extend grace in the world?

How can you extend God's blessing to someone around you today?

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## DAY 4 • GENESIS 41:46–42:38

As the story develops, Joseph has been moved to a place of power and authority, while his family in the land of Canaan has been forced to action by the famine. The story is tension-filled, especially in relation to the way Joseph dealt with his brothers.

What are the satisfying elements of the story at this point?

Why do you think Joseph waited to reveal himself? You may see hints in the narrative. (Think, *Where was the rest of the family, including his younger brother?*)

What act of kindness—the extending of grace—in chapter 42 caused a crisis?

How does Joseph's story thus far illustrate this quotation?

*Stories have power. They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, and challenge. They help us understand. They imprint a picture on our minds. Want to make a point or raise an issue? Tell a story.<sup>1</sup>*

JANET LITHERLAND

Is there a crisis in your life at present that might actually be a way God is working in your life?

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## **DAY 5 • GENESIS 43–44**

Caught in a difficult situation, the brothers were forced to return to Egypt. The story moves in two directions. Joseph took the brothers to his home, inviting them closer to him (eating a meal together was a high form of hospitality). But he also created a bigger crisis for them when they left.

What was that crisis?

Why do you think Joseph did this?

Can you think of a redemptive purpose?

Are there times when grace backs us into a corner  
as we're confronted with our own sin?

How can God change you through this part of the story?

Praise God today that He lovingly confronts us with sin  
to heal us of it.

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## **DAY 6 • GENESIS 45:1-15; 50:15-26**

We now come to the climax of the story of Joseph, when he revealed his identity to his brothers.

**What's deeply satisfying about this part of the story?**

As the story progresses, Joseph sent for his father and the rest of the family, moving them to Egypt (our reading skips a good bit of this, but feel free to read it).

**In what ways is the story of Joseph a wonderful embodiment of grace?**

**How does the end of the story in chapter 50 underscore the nature of God's grace?**

**There's an important pattern here. Can you think of someone else who was rejected by His people and became the source of their salvation and the salvation of other nations as well?**

**In what ways is Joseph's story an important part of our story—our history—as believers?**

As we've already seen, Robert McKee has written, "Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today."<sup>2</sup> What ideas do you believe God intends to put into the world through the story of Joseph?

How can God use the story of Joseph to prepare us to live God's story more effectively in the world?

Take a moment to thank God for the ways grace has been expressed in your life. Thank Him for drawing you into His story. How does God want to use you to share the story of His grace today?

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY

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### HIDING HIS WORD IN YOUR HEART

*Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good."*

GENESIS 50:19-20

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1. Janet Litherland, *Storytelling from the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Meriwether, 1991), 3.
2. Robert McKee, as quoted in Shahnaz Bahman and Helen Maffini, *Developing Children's Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Continuum International, 2008), 56.

# GOING DEEPER

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## DEPTHS OF THE HEART

**Genesis 50:15-26**

**NOTE:** Although the “Depths of the Heart” study comes at the end of the week’s readings, you can complete it throughout the week alongside the daily readings in “Rhythms of the Heart” if you prefer.

This section will lead you step-by-step through an inductive study of the passage, using tools such as a study Bible, a Bible dictionary, and word-study helps. A template for Bible study can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).

### **1. Gather your tools, beginning with a good study Bible and a Bible dictionary.**

#### STUDY BIBLES TO CONSIDER

Choose a study Bible that uses the primary translation you use for reading and study.

HCSB Study Bible  
NIV Zondervan Study Bible  
ESV Study Bible  
NLT Study Bible

#### BIBLE DICTIONARIES TO CONSIDER

Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary  
Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary  
Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary

### **2. Thoughtfully read the passage in at least three different translations, noting any differences in the translations.**

A video on comparing Bible translations can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).

### **3. What's the broader literary context of the passage, both in relation to Genesis and in relation to the books that follow?**

You may want to read Genesis 37–50 for context as you begin.

One way to discern the broader context of a Scripture passage is to look at an outline of the whole book, which you can find in your study Bible or Bible dictionary. Look up Genesis in one of those tools and write your insights here.

Where does this passage fit? That is, what comes before it and after it?

How does the passage function as a bridge between what comes before it and what follows it (the Book of Exodus)?

### **4. Read Genesis 50:15-26 again very closely, answering the following questions.**

What's the setting of the passage, both in terms of time and place?

What's the nature of the relationships among the main characters?

What are the most significant actions in the passage, and what's the effect of those actions?

If you had to identify the main theme of the passage, what would it be and why, based on the text itself?

How would you divide the passage into three main movements?



- 5. Choose two or three words from the passage to study. Choose words that seem theologically significant, those that are repeated, or those that are found at a turning point in the story.**

An overview of how to do word studies can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).

What words have you selected for study?

What's the range of possible meanings for the Hebrew words?

Identify three to five other passages for each term in which this same Hebrew word is used in a similar way.

Based on the context of the passage, what do you think are the best translations of the words as they're used in this passage?

## 6. Read the notes in your study Bible.

If you also have access to commentaries, use them now.  
Here are a few commentaries to consider for further study:

Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 11:27–50:26. The New American Commentary*. Nashville: B&H, 2005.

Waltke, Bruce K. *Genesis: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderan, 2001.

Walton, John H. *Genesis. The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 2, *Genesis 16–50*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015. (Advanced)

What are your key insights into the passage?

## 7. How does this passage contribute to broader theological themes in the Bible? Provide examples of cross-references to other Scripture passages.

An overview of how to study the broader theological context in the Bible can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).

Theme 1:

Theme 2:

## 8. Apply the passage.

What would the passage have meant to the original readers of Genesis? What was the main point for them?

In what ways are we similar to the original audience?  
How are we different?

To what various aspects of our lives might the truth of this passage apply?

What's a specific application for your life?

Further insights on studying and reading Scripture more effectively can be found at [LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory](http://LifeWay.com/HeartofGodsStory).



