

## Read Genesis 1

### **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Gen 1:1**

Scientists often discover “earth-like” planets, such as the planet Gliese 581d.

Astronomers believe it has liquid oceans, an atmosphere, and would be habitable. The problem with these assumptions is that astronomers haven’t actually seen the surface of Gliese 581d through a telescope. The planet is 120 trillion miles away and scientists can only prove its existence by watching it pass as a shadow in front of stars or by watching wobbles in the gravity of other objects as it passes near.

I love star trek as much as the next person, but the Bible is clear that the earth and humans are special and that aliens are pure fiction. The purpose of God in creating the vastness of space, including other planets and stars, is to get our attention. Earth is God's masterpiece and He filled it alone with life. The idea of intelligent life out in space is certainly an exciting one, but the reality is, humans have the universe all to themselves. If we were to build star trek type ships and fly around in space, we would never be attacked or meet anyone new. Next time you hear about evolution or the big bang, just remember this: those are ways that unbelievers try to put all of creation into one box. The Bible says there were two: God unpacked the heavens, and separately God unpacked the earth. We are not here by accident, but by purpose. **Are you living a life of purpose for God, or wandering like an aimless accident? Look at your calendar. Do you see any kingdom-building tasks on it for the day? If not, you’re wandering. God has a plan with your name on it, which He laid out before the first rock of earth was ever formed. Ask God today to remind you of your purposes for Him, and ask Him to help you fulfill His plans for your life.**

## Read Genesis 2

### **The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. Gen 2:20**

We often hear that humans are no different and no better than animals. However, after God made all the animals and the first man, it became apparent that man was different. Adam saw and named all the animals. He may have liked the dog or the horse, but they couldn’t speak with him and certainly didn’t understand him. He needed a helper, a companion, who could listen and be listened to. So God made Eve, forming her from a rib from the man. God didn’t make her out of a foot, because she is not a slave to the man. He made her from a rib, indicating that the woman stands right alongside the man in a covenant (a word meaning “promise”) marriage relationship.

The world has a perverted view of how we came into existence; so to say that the woman is a helper to the man is viewed by people as an outdated teaching of the Bible. The word suitable helper means "corresponding helper". This was the first marriage, as God united Adam and Eve in a one-on-one relationship. A man cannot marry another man, because he is not suitable for the relationship. He doesn't correspond to, or compliment the man, because he already is one. God has provided a wonderful plan, and the world would like to see Christians willingly relax the rules of marriage. However, marriage doesn't belong

to us, but to God who created it. We are to respect it, and recognize two things: it's a relationship between a man and a woman, and it's a relationship of side-by-sideness with the wife being a suitable helper for the man and the man being a suitable helper for the woman. **If you are married, are you being a helper to your spouse? Are you engaging him/her in regular conversation? Do you pray with and for them? And if you're hoping to marry someday, what are you looking for in a spouse? Are you looking for a servant, or someone you can serve? Recognize now that marriage is a partnership, in which love and service are shared.**

### **Read Genesis 3**

**The man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Genesis 3:12-13**

I love being a father for a variety of reasons. One of them is because God likes to use my kids to give me something to talk about! I've learned that children all have one instinct in common: when punishment is coming, blame someone else. When Kaitlyn was younger, she often tried to tell me that she had taken one of her brother's toys because he wouldn't give it to her. Do you hear it? She's saying, "It's not my fault, my brother made me steal that toy from him." When we spank one of our children we usually ask "Whose fault is it that you're getting a spanking?" They say it's theirs, because we've taught them we're only punishing them because their choice required it.

Adam and Eve played the blame game here, but their situation does teach us an important truth: One day we'll all have to give an account to God for our sins. They were hiding, trying to avoid punishment and God found them. David wrote of this in Psalm 139:7 saying, "where can I flee from Your presence?" God presents them with their sin, and they present Him with excuses. Was Adam correct that Eve influenced him to sin? Yes. Was Eve correct that the serpent, namely Satan, influenced her to sin? Yes. Does God care? No. Ultimately you have a responsibility for your own actions. God's not looking for excuses, but he's looking for payment of the sin debt you owe. A lost person standing before God after death, will probably play the blame game and tell God why someone made them do it. As a saved person, I admit readily that I am a sinner. However, I accepted Jesus who paid the penalty for my sins, and I will not stand before God condemned to Hell, but admitted to Heaven. **If you're blaming others for your poor decisions, stop it! No one made you get mad. No one made you choose immorality. You chose it on your own. You'll never grow as a Christian until you learn to admit you are a sinner on a regular basis, and ask God to make you more like Christ. And you can never do that until you give your life to Jesus and allow Him to be the Savior and Lord of each of your days.**

### **Read Genesis 4**

**Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> "If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." Gen 4:6-7**

I read a disturbing story about a young Christian couple. The man seemed so loving and committed to Jesus, but after their marriage, he began drinking and abusing his wife regularly (sidenote: She must have ignored some warning signs. This is an unnatural change for a believer). She went to her pastor and told him she just couldn't believe how this guy had changed and she felt like God led her to marry this man. The pastor told her not to blame God, because He didn't know this guy would make these choices and hurt their marriage. God didn't know!? This is a really low view of God, placing Him no more in the loop than the average gossip hound.

God knows the future, and He gives Christians opportunities to avoid sin and consequences by convicting us of our sin right away. That's what He did with Cain. Cain was very upset that Abel's offering was considered better than his. God knew what the results of that attitude would be, and He warned Cain of his attitude and that the attitude would lead to further sin. Instead of admitting his sin, he holds onto his hatred and kills his brother. As a result of that sin, Cain lived in fear of his life, and had to move away from his family. God knows you, and when you feel conviction from God regarding an area of your life, listen to him. He's not only trying to help you avoid the sin, but the consequences of the sin. God is fully aware of everything at all times, so listen when He speaks. Don't buy the Devil's lie that this sin won't hurt anything. **Today, ask God to forgive you for the times you ignored His conviction. Ask Him to reveal your sin to you, so that you may turn from it and avoid the consequences. At the very moment that something pops into your mind, no matter how trivial the sin may seem (like the time I yelled at the school bus that was making too many stops in front of me...a real lack of patience), repent and commit to a different course of action for next time.**

**This chapter is tough, so here is some help. As you read, watch for the oldest person to ever live and for one of only two people in the entire Bible to be taken to Heaven without dying. Now that you're ready, Read Genesis 5.**

**Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Gen 5:24**

**So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died. Gen 5:27**

When I was saved at 12, my church gave me a King James Bible as a gift. I immediately began trying to read it and learn more about being a Christian. That Bible included a plan to read the Bible in a year, but I quickly gave it up. I don't think the Bible was intended to be read in a year, because you are more likely to read it as a chore and not to actually learn anything. So I simply started at the beginning and soon reached this chapter. It said that this person "begat" that person and I didn't know what begat even meant. I warn you though, to not just gloss over lists of names in the Bible. You may miss important details of their lives as I did when I read this for the first time, long ago.

The first person to stand out in this list of people is Enoch. He is only one of two people who the Bible says were taken to Heaven without dying (the other is Elijah). The Bible says all the others men mentioned in the list died, but that Enoch was taken by God in verse 24. The Hebrew means that God "carried him away." Enoch walked with God in an

unusual way, and relied on Him for every decision and circumstance that came into his life. Apparently this was God's gift back to Enoch. The other person of note is Methuselah. The Bible indicates that he lived longer than any other person, living to the age of 969. That may sound far-fetched, until you realize Methuselah lived just 8 generations from Adam and Eve, who were created to live forever. As a result, the human body didn't age at the rate that it does today, which accounts for his long life. **What can we learn from these two men? First, Methuselah is just about the most common Bible trivia in the world, so if you're ever asked, now you know. As for Enoch, can you imagine what your life would look like if you truly "walked with God"? I think many of us walk with God when it's convenient or when we remember to. For instance, don't let your prayer life be an afterthought. Set aside a time that you will spend in prayer, just as you would schedule an important meeting. Today, ask God to bring you in a closer relationship with Him, so that your walk with God will be evident to those around you.**

[Read Genesis 6](#)

**Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Gen 6:1-2**

About the time I hit high school, I really started thinking about finding a girlfriend. My youth minister had taught us that we weren't supposed to marry a non-Christian, so I assumed that applied to a dating relationship too. There was a girl I knew who was clearly interested in me, so I asked her if she was a Christian. She gave an answer about where she went to church, and that was good enough for me. There were no follow-up questions from me, because I thought I had done all that I needed to do. My problem was that I had no personal convictions on how to pursue a relationship at that time, I hadn't prayed about it, and thought that obeying a snippet of a bible study I remembered counted as obeying God.

Some teach that Genesis 6 is an account of angels marrying human women and having babies, which is ridiculous. That idea comes more from Greek myth than biblical texts, not to mention that Jesus tells us that angels neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matt 22:30). After Cain killed Abel, he is sent off and builds a city for himself and has a family there, with a wife that was married to him before the murder of his brother. Adam and Eve later "begat" another son, Seth, who was a godly man (I'll bet you understand that word now). So Genesis 6 is describing Seth's sons as "sons of God" and Cain's daughters as "daughters of men". Seth's kids belonged to God, and Cain's did not. However, Seth's sons chose to ignore the spiritual truths their father had taught them, and they compromised by marrying these heathen women, which in turn caused their children to be godless instead of godly. **The lesson for us is clear. Often times, I hear of Christians who attempt to wield influence among non-believers, perhaps a friend or even a potential spouse. Do you know why these Christians often fail to influence non-believers? Because those believers didn't have their convictions set, and instead of influencing others they became influenced by others. They didn't draw boundaries for themselves before the situations arose. If you're avoiding decisions**

**because your pastor said to, you won't avoid them for long. Ask God to help you set boundaries in your life. Every day you live without a conviction on relationships, money, and integrity is another day you flirt with compromise and disaster.**

### **Read Genesis 7**

**Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you *alone* I have seen to be righteous before Me in this time. Gen 7:1**

When I was in basic training, we had training on how to react in the event of chemical, biological, or nuclear attack. I understood our procedures for chemical and biological, but I was curious to see what would happen in the case of a nuclear bomb going off. The drill sergeant had a shotgun, and told us that when we heard the shotgun from a particular direction, we were to react as if that were the sound of a nuclear bomb. The instructions? Look in the direction of the blast and fall flat to the ground. We were told that after a few moments we would feel the shockwave pass over us, and to remain still because the shockwave and force are then drawn back into the original blast area. I remember thinking, "I don't think this is going to save me from a nuclear bomb."

When God sent the flood, it brought worldwide devastation. There was nowhere that someone could hide from it, except on the ark. God chose Noah because he was a righteous man and walked with God. The fact that verse 1 tells us that Noah's sons and their wives went in, proves they believed God and trusted in Him for salvation from this flood as well. At this point, it had never rained on the earth. The vegetation of the earth was watered by a mist, like dew on the ground, and by a large amount of water located under the ground. People saw Noah building this boat, and thought he was crazy to build a boat in the middle of dry land. But, when the waters came, some probably ran for the ark only to find the door was shut. The bomb had gone off and there was nothing they could do about it. The judgment that was now raining down on them was not going to be escaped by anyone outside of the ark, no matter what they did. While the story of the flood is a true one, it's also one of the many pictures of Christ that God paints throughout Old Testament history. Noah and his family believed God for salvation from the judgment. They rested inside the ark, while undoubtedly they heard more than a few knocks on the outside of people begging to be let in. **Just as the door was shut then, it will be shut at your death. Either you are saved and safe in Jesus for eternity, or you are facing judgment in Hell. There is no second appeal to Christ at the judgment seat. Are you safe and secure in His salvation? If not, you can become so today by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you are saved, are you telling others about the salvation that Jesus provides in 2010? Or are you content to let them beat uselessly on the door after it's too late?**

### **Read Genesis 8**

**The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. Gen 8:21**

You're just awful. I really mean it. You're a terrible person. Of course, I am too. We often have a hard time admitting the truth about who we really are. When we think about ourselves, we like to think about the good things. Maybe you've had a good week of prayer time with the Lord. Maybe you had a chance to talk to someone you know about Jesus. These things are good, but you're still naturally evil. There are many people in the church who would see the above verse and say "Amen! Youth are evil!" But, that's not what God is saying. We don't learn to become evil as adults. Sin and selfishness are the direction that our heart pulls most often.

When God promised to never again destroy all living things, it was not because we learned our lesson. I'm sure if Noah came back to earth today, it would look different physically (I'll bet he'd like the boats better), but spiritually and morally he would surely recognize the place. You need to understand something very clearly today. You are a sinner. Even as a Christian you are a sinner. Don't believe your Sunday clothes and church attendance have cleaned you up. Your righteousness still only comes through Jesus and His amazing sacrifice for us on the cross. **You have the ability to make choices that please God, but they require effort. When you lack effort for Christ, you will return to your natural inclinations, which have been evil since you were very young. Will you choose effort and godliness today, or laziness and evil? It's a choice we can make every day, including today. Ask God to show you your sin, so that you can be aware and repentant of it, and deepen your relationship with Jesus.**

### **Read Genesis 9**

**"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. Gen 9:6**

There are many well-intentioned people in this country who hold midnight candlelight vigils in an attempt to have the life of a death row inmate spared. Rarely does it work, but there they are in state capitals all over the country, pleading to the governor for a man they often don't know. I believe the stand against the death penalty comes as a result of the extended time frame between execution and the crime. Our country entitles citizens to an appeal, but not 10 of them. Eventually, people no longer understand the purpose of executing a man in 2010 for murdering a police officer in 1981.

Those against the death penalty say it can't bring the person back and does nothing to stop future murders. However, the death penalty does serve a purpose. It's one of the three times that God justifies the taking of another human life: 1) State Executions 2) Just wars 3) Self-defense. God says that if a man murders another man, then he is to have his life taken as well. Why? Because every person is created in the image of God. Even when you insult someone at work or school, you are insulting the Creator who made that person. There ultimately has to be a standard of punishment for the taking of human life. I have heard Christians argue against the death penalty because Jesus told us if someone slaps us on the cheek, to offer the other one. This doesn't apply to the death penalty. A slap in the face is hardly life threatening. **If you have issues with the death penalty, I respect that. However, you need to understand that our lack of regard for God's laws and human life have turned us into a country where murders can receive**

**numerous appeals, but the unborn of this country are exterminated at the first go ahead of the mother. Pray for our country and for leaders to stand for moral decisions, even if they are unpopular. Pray that the country that appeals for murders and silences the most innocent of lives will come under conviction and revival will cross our country.**

**This can be another tough chapter. To help you, write down any cities whose names you recognize from other parts of the Bible. Take notice of who started the cities you may recognize. Now, Read Genesis 10**

**From that land he went forth into Assyria, and built *Nineveh* (emphasis mine) and Rehoboth-Ir and Calah, Gen 10:11**

When I was in middle school, I began to get interested in collecting baseball cards after someone gave me about 15 1988 Topps baseball cards. I read them over and over and decided I really wanted to collect them. My favorite player was the shortstop for the St. Louis Cardinals, Ozzie Smith. A "friend" of mine knew this, and said he'd trade me an Ozzie Smith card for one of mine he wanted, which I later learned was pretty valuable. I didn't have any Ozzie's so I jumped at it. It was a 1987 Ozzie Smith All-Star card, and it looked like it had been run through the washer. It had all sorts of creases and bends in it. I still took it, because he was my favorite player. To this day, that card still sits in the protected pages along with the cards of monetary value. That card wouldn't bring a penny from anyone else, but it means a lot to me.

This chapter of Genesis is a great example of the need to read closely in the midst of a list of names. Genesis 10 tells us of Nimrod who was the first mighty man on earth. Think of him as the first real life action hero. He began to establish his own kingdom, and he built a city called Nineveh. I've often wondered why God cared enough later to send Jonah to the city of Nineveh, which was full of ungodly people. The reason is that the city and its inhabitants were descendants of a godly person of Noah's family. That's why the city was valuable to God, even though Jonah wouldn't have given a penny for it. **You need to evaluate today what is important to God and what is important to you. Are there some people or issues that God finds important that you don't really care about? Come up with a list of people you don't like personally, and I assure you God sees them as important. Take today and ask God to show you your heart. If there is anyone that you consider unimportant, ask God to change your heart so you will reach anyone for Jesus. Think about what took up big chunks of your time yesterday. Did any of those time chunks belong to God, or did He just get a sliver from you?**

**Read Genesis 11**

**The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Gen 11:6**

When I was in a very small rural school during Jr. High, they decided to offer Spanish. I was interested in learning Spanish, so some friends and I signed up. But it became

quickly apparent that the teacher didn't know Spanish herself. So we learned the alphabet from a video and a few words she knew. Then she began ordering Spanish magazines for teenagers. The purpose was to try to figure out what the magazines said in English. Some Spanish words are similar to English and the magazine had pictures, so I could usually figure it out somewhat. The teacher had no idea what the stories said, so the best guessers received the best grades! I've studied 5 languages in my life, and I would say that of all my academic pursuits, the languages have been the toughest.

Have you ever wondered why God mixed up all the languages anyway? We read here in Genesis 11 that God saw these people were working together, but there was a problem with it. The sin that plagued the world before the flood was individuals ignoring God. Now the sin was to ignore God by coming together and achieving great success in technology and education (sounds a lot like America today). They used new ways to build and truly thought they were fantastic as the tower went up in Babel. Then all of a sudden, one worker couldn't understand another. They probably started shouting, and those who could understand each other, grouped up and left. Even today, we have interpreters in many languages, but the differences between the languages still cause an inability to completely work together. **What is the lesson for us in this? You may have come through a time of sin and rebellion against God. Perhaps you have recently been saved, or perhaps the rebellion came after your salvation. Don't simply trade one rebellion for another. Make sure that your life plans are authorized by God and blessed by Him, or you may find yourself in a state of confusion. When those times come: stop, drop, and pray! Seek the Lord and allow Him to have leadership of your life. If you're a Christian, it's part of the promise you made to Him anyway.**

### **Read Genesis 12**

**And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Gen 12:3**

When I was a child in Vacation Bible School, I loved the song "Father Abraham." It says, "Father Abraham, had many sons. And many sons had Father Abraham. And I am one of them, and so are you. So let's just praise the Lord..." and then you get to swing your arms, and legs, and head, and it's just fun! I didn't realize the simple truth in this children's song until years later. As I read the Bible I realized the promises God made to Abraham, apply to me as a Christian today. Yay for VBS!

God knows what we need, and he loves to provide for His children. As much as I like to think I give good gifts to my children, the Bible is clear that God is the ultimate gift-giver and Father. When He promised a nation for Abraham, it was not just the Jewish people, but all people who would accept the Messiah. That's how I am one of the children of Abraham. God knew that I needed salvation, and He provided it through the line of Abraham that eventually brought us Jesus. God has provided salvation as a blessing, not a burden. Some outside of our faith see the life of Christians as something they don't want to waste their time with. But, a blessing is never a waste of time, and the ultimate blessings are forgiveness of sins and Heaven for the believer. **It may seem simple, but let's thank God for our salvation today! He sacrificed His perfect son for imperfect**

**people. And as a result, we receive the blessings simply based on our willingness to follow Jesus Christ. Why don't you take time to share the blessing with someone today, since we know salvation is available to everyone and there are so many who just don't know about it. Ask God to give you a divine appointment, and then be ready to keep it when it comes.**

### **Read Genesis 13**

**Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. Gen 13:12**

I remember a youth choir in one of my previous churches. They sang a song called "No Turning Back" and it talked about how they had decided to never turn back from following Jesus. The disturbing thing to me was that I knew that some of those students were turning back. They were singing the song because they liked singing on stage, but they had turned back or still had yet to make a personal decision for Jesus. So many times people sing songs in church and miss the words that are coming from their lips.

Abram and his nephew Lot had a choice to make regarding where they would settle when they came to the land God led Abram to. There was a valley where the city of Sodom sat or there was a large area of fertile land opposite of Sodom. Abram gives Lot the first choice, probably to let the younger man have an opportunity to settle in the fertile area. But, Lot chooses to stay close to the city. Perhaps one option looked like more work than the other: plant your fields or shop at the store. We don't know, but for some reason he makes a very bad choice. It's unlikely that the wickedness of Sodom was completely unknown. **You and I are very much like Lot. We often have two choices: one that we know God will bless and one that is our selfish desire. When we pick the selfish desire, we always miss out on God's blessings. Think of sin as a missed opportunity. We had an opportunity to grow in obedience and receive blessings from that obedience. When we miss a blessing, it should grieve us. It should drive us to repentance. If it doesn't, then we need to examine our relationship with Jesus. Is it genuine? Have you even started the journey? Or are you simply taking lordship back from Him when it's convenient for you. What selfish choices do you need to give up?**

### **Read Genesis 14**

**And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all. Gen 14:20**

Abram was probably taking a backseat to the fighting that was going on between these kings in this chapter. Just because a power struggle is going on, doesn't always mean that you have to take sides. But, once his nephew Lot is taken, Abram takes his small force out to defeat those who were now counted as his enemies. Afterwards, Abram meets Melchizedek who was a priest of God (the fact he was from Salem, leads some scholars to think Salem later became Jerusalem). Abram receives a blessing from this priest, and in turn gives a tenth back to him of his possessions. We know that Abram gave it, not Melchizedek, based on Hebrews 7:4)

The relationship of giving between God and His people is an important one, because it is a proof of trust. In the verse the priest clearly acknowledges that God gave Abram something, in this case victory. In return, Abram gave God something. However, note that what was given by Abram was not physically received by God. When you give your offerings to the church, it is not literally going to Heaven, but to fund the work of God's kingdom in your local church. Your money is never the greatest gift you can give the church. Your dedication to the Lord is, but in that dedication, your willingness to give of what God has entrusted you, is an outpouring of your obedience. **Do you understand why we have offering times in our church? It's our opportunity to say thank you to God in a way that is very tangible for us...by letting go of our possessions. A passion for missions isn't proven by talk, but by giving and going. And a passion for God is not proven by talk, but by giving and going as well. Remember Abel's sacrifice. It was one of effort and thankfulness. If you wait uncomfortably for the offering time to be over in church, I'm telling you that you're missing out. We are not paying a tithe, but giving an offering. Use it as an opportunity to say "Thank you" to God for what He has done. And while our financial gifts are not on par with God's heavenly ones, they are proof of our willingness to place nothing in priority above the Lord Jesus.**

### **Read Genesis 15**

**God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. Gen 15:13**

Which do you prefer first: good news or bad news? When I'm faced with this choice, I always say, "Give me the bad news first." I've always been this way. Even if I'm having spaghetti and broccoli, I always eat the broccoli first so I can enjoy the spaghetti. It's just an odd trait I suppose, but I prefer to deal with the unpleasant situations in life first, so the pleasant ones can soften the blow. With God however, the good news and the bad news can often be the same piece of information.

God tells Abram that he will have children and descendants. This was good news to Abram, because his wife Sarai could not have children. However, in this news about Abram's descendants, God gives Him the bad news in verse 13; Abram's people would be enslaved for 400 years. This is a foreshadowing of the time that the Jews will spend as slaves of Egypt. But, even in the midst of that oppression, God says the oppression will be used to judge the country that enslaves God's people and will give Abram's descendants many possessions as a result. **Abram's good news/bad news reminds me of a statement I heard years ago in a sermon. "God is more concerned with your holiness than your happiness." It doesn't mean He doesn't care about our happiness, but if our unhappiness is an opportunity to bring us into a closer relationship with Him, He will allow it. My days without a job didn't make me happy, but they certainly grew me in holiness as I grew in my faith by trusting God. The Christian life is not always easy, but it's important to remember that in the**

**good and the bad, God's concern is still for you. If you're going through a difficult circumstance right now, ask God to show you what the lesson is. You might as well learn it now, instead of repeating this lesson down the road. I believe God keeps us on the same lesson until we learn it. He doesn't skip in His lesson plan for our life, simply because we're hardheaded.**

Read Genesis 16

**"He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; and he will live to the east of all his brothers."  
Gen 16:12**

How many U.S. Presidents have talked about establishing peace in the Middle East? For many years there have been attempts to bring about peaceful relations between Israel and the Arab countries that surround it. And while so many of our Presidents claim to be Christians, if they really were and read their Bible, they would realize that the conflict that goes on between Israel and nations like Iran is not easily resolved. It is a conflict that was established as soon as Abram tried to fulfill God's plans for his life in an ungodly way. There will be no peace in the Middle East until the Antichrist appears and the tribulation begins.

Do you realize that the conflict between Israel and Arab nations is the continuing consequence of one sin of Abraham? As you walk with God, He will make His plans known to you for your life. I never have believed that God plays hide-and-seek with plans for His children. Our disobedience may come from a lack of diligence in seeking God's will, or as with Abraham, from our impatience to wait on it. God will accomplish His plans for your life in His time. **What parts of your life have you retaken control of? Finances, job, and family are areas that we know God should be in control, but we're afraid He may not get the job done. The real fear should be what the consequences will be as a result of our inability to wait. Will they be as drastic as what happened to Abram? It would be hard to imagine, but when you miss God's plans for you, it's never going to be a high point in your life.**

Read Genesis 17

**"A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant."  
Gen 17:13**

When I was in elementary school, I saw a movie about a group of boys who were best friends. To show how close their friendship was, they all decided to take a blood oath to prove their friendship. It consisted of them cutting themselves a little on the hand and letting their blood drip on a table where they then stirred it together. My friends and I thought this was a cool idea, and so we all said we'd do it too. But, none of us had a knife, which was our excuse for why we wouldn't cut ourselves. If we really wanted to get one, we could have. The truth was, none of us were willing to take on that kind of pain to be friends. You can always find new friends!

God called for Abraham to be willing to show His devotion to follow God. You might think that Abraham moving to a new country was proof enough. But, God wanted a permanent physical action to back up the words of his mouth. Baptism is our sign of the covenant today. When Abraham underwent circumcision, he already possessed a relationship with God. The circumcision didn't bring it about, but was physical evidence. Baptism is the same way. When you are baptized, you already believe in Jesus as your Savior, and baptism is a way to show it through your actions and not just your words. **If you are a Christian and have never been baptized, you are not in danger of going to Hell. But, baptism is the first command given by Christ for new believers. Either His commands are important, or they aren't. A friend of mine was baptized before his salvation, and then after he was saved, he chose to be rebaptized. He knew that his previous baptism wasn't real because he wasn't saved. Take a moment to evaluate in your life if you've obeyed this simple command of Christ.**

Read Genesis 18

**"Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Gen 18:14**

When I worked at SEARS we used to try to sell "big ticket" items. A screwdriver is small ticket and you sell one everyday. A 64-inch plasma LCD is big ticket, and you rarely see one sold. Well over the course of the past year, I had a couple of "big ticket" prayers. These were prayers I wanted to see God answer, and I acknowledged to Him that I saw absolutely no way either one was possible in my current circumstance. The two main ones I prayed in 2009? That God would provide our family with health insurance and that He would allow us to purchase a house. Here I am in 2010, with both of these prayers answered, telling you this for one reason: God is so good to us and nothing is too big for Him!

Despite the old age of Abraham and Sarah, God was still fully able to fulfill His promise of a son being born to them, and it should be a great encouragement to us as His people. There are many things God will lay on your heart that may seem impossible at times. Perhaps God is calling you to the mission field, to adopt a child, or to start your own business. When tasks seem impossible to you, remember that God is the God of the impossible. The word impossible only means something to humans who have so many limitations. But, impossible means nothing to the One who has no limitations and created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them. **What are you calling impossible in your life today? Maybe a big task you have. Perhaps a personal struggle in your spiritual life. Don't hold back your "big ticket" prayers. Let God show you the possible that you have incorrectly defined as impossible.**

Read Genesis 19

**Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; and they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them." Gen 19:4-5**

There are many disturbing parts of this story. The fact that Lot offered these men his daughters, and that he had to be literally pushed out of the city by the angels is crazy enough. But, these men of Sodom showed the reason for their destruction. They were so consumed by sex, even sex with one another, that strangers in the town were preyed upon within hours of their arrival. Their immorality primarily in the form of homosexuality, and possibly other areas, was the reason for God's judgment calling on this city.

Some homosexual churches (don't get me started on that one) say they love Jesus, but their membership is remaining homosexual. One such church in San Francisco produced a Bible study on this story in Genesis 19. The writer said that God didn't judge Sodom for homosexuality, but for a lack of hospitality to these guests. I don't care how many times you read it, but one would never make that conclusion is impossible to make. The Bible is clear that God will judge wickedness. Not just homosexuality, but any form of wickedness that we claim to hold onto despite our salvation. If a bank robber said that he loved Jesus, but loved robbing banks too, I'd believe only the second part. **You can't choose Jesus and willingly choose sin that you are going to carry over with you into your "new" life. Jesus came to save us from our sins, and to rid us of the old life. But, He never intended for us to carry our sins over to the new life for us continue in them. Is there something you have carried into the new life that should have been junked with the old? You need to ask Jesus for His forgiveness, and ask Him to change your heart in that area. He has the power, but you must have the willingness.**

Read Genesis 20

**"Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." Gen 20:7**

I've often been able to tell when my children have broken a rule. There is nothing more pitiful than a child who thinks they can trick you, when you already know the truth. There have been times I've asked one of my children if they did something. They'll say no, but with hesitation. Gotcha! I'll ask again, and slowly they'll realize that Daddy knows what's up, so they attempt to tell the truth, knowing the consequences are coming. Maybe I'm getting soft in my old age, and calling it spirituality, but I don't give them the normal punishment for lying every time. On occasion, after they admit they lied I say, "God always wants us to admit when we sin, so He can show us mercy. Today, I am showing you mercy by not punishing you." My hope is that mercy can be a reminder.

What do you do when you're confronted with sin? Do you attempt to hide it in hopes that it will stay buried? The king in the verse above is confronted by God regarding the taking of another man's wife. He was not judged for what he did in ignorance, since he did not know Sarah was Abraham's wife. But, he would be judged if he chose to continue to keep her. **The Bible says that when we know the right thing to do, and don't do it, it is sin. When you're confronted with your wrong choice, own up to it. Forgiveness and healing come much quicker when you're willing to be honest about your mistakes. Go to someone that you've wronged, who may not even know it, and ask them to**

**forgive you. You'll lose your guilt, and gain their respect. What are the right things you know to be doing in your life, but instead you are delaying obedience?**

### Read Genesis 21

**Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised Gen 21:1**

When I was in 4th grade, I had a good friend named Zenith. We really hit it off, and soon made plans to try to stay the night at each other's house. I asked my parents if Zenith could spend the night at our house, and they said yes. The next day, I told Zenith to pack his bags and come to school the following day ready to spend the night at my house. After school my mom came to pick me up and she seemed quite shocked to see Zenith with me. I told her that she said I could have him over, but she told me that we hadn't agreed on him coming over that night, and we had other plans. I was so embarrassed as my mom drove me home, and my dad drove Zenith home. Later I realized that my parents had made a promise to me, but not the exact promise I was trusting in. He could come over, but not just whenever 4th grade Heath decided it was ok.

A lot of people are like that with God. They know that Jesus has said whatever you ask in my name shall be done for you (John 14:3), but miss that the same author writes in 1 John 5:14, that we must ask according to His will. God makes promises that we cannot and should not attempt to manipulate. **Do you even know what the promises of God are from His Word for believers? God even reveals promises to individual believers as we seek His will. He called me to the ministry, and I viewed that as a promise. I will not worry about my inabilities and shortcomings, because that which He has called me to, He has equipped me for. I count that as a promise. What promises has God made on your life that you need to hold fast to?**

### Read Genesis 22

**Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided." Gen 22:14**

When the Lord led my wife and I to leave our friends a family to go to seminary, it was exciting and difficult all at once. After we sold the house, we received a check for several hundred dollars from our mortgage company, even though we had already received money for the sale of our house. I decided not to cash it and called the company trying to determine the mistake. After several phone calls I heard the same thing "That's your money, and you can do whatever you want with it." I'll never forget getting off the phone and telling Nikki and she began singing "Showers of Blessings"! Little did we know that we would spend nearly every penny from the sale of our house and investment accounts on school and living during the five months I was unable to find a job in the Memphis area. It was a blessing from God, but it was His provision before we even knew we needed it.

I think Abraham suspected that God would provide a sacrifice to substitute for his son. He knew of God's promises to make a nation for him, and to have another child in old age would seem unlikely. And even though he didn't understand it, he was faithful and counting on God's promises. **God wasn't testing Abraham to see what he would do, because God already knew. These events in the lives of believers are always to show US what we would do, and understand how devoted we really are. How's your devotion? Is there something you've made clear to God you will not do? When we set limits on our service to Him, it's not true devotion and we miss out on all that God has for us.**

Read Genesis 23

**Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard. Gen 23:16**

In this account, Abraham wants to bury his wife. The sons of Heth are a group of local descendants in the region. They're telling Abraham to pick any field he wants, and no one will refuse him. Abraham knows of a cave and field owned by a guy named Ephron, and he asks these people to talk to Ephron for him. Abraham had possibly never met him, because the guy is already in the crowd and generously offers to donate the land and cave to Abraham. Abraham tries to make sure that the guy is really willing to give it up. Ephron essentially says, "What's four hundred shekels between friends." Then the above verse says that Abraham *listened* to Ephron, and paid him 400 shekels. But why?

As believers we really need to make sure we are good listeners. I never want to take advantage of a person, and sometimes that requires listening. I don't think this guy wanted to give up his field, but in this crowd of generous people, perhaps he felt pressured to do so. You wouldn't mention the price of the land unless you were disappointed in not getting it. While Abraham could have taken the land, he listened to what the man was really saying. **Now listen to what I'm saying; don't be too prideful to receive a blessing from someone who really wants to bless you. But, listen to their words so that you don't receive something that the giver felt pressured into. I never asked people to loan me money if I was short at lunch. I kept my mouth shut. But, if they offered, I received it and promptly paid them back. As believers, let's listen. Realize that being a poor listener and taking advantage of people can tarnish your outward testimony of Christ. Who do you need to listen to more? Your spouse? Your children? Your neighbors?**

Read Genesis 24

**now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown loving kindness to my master." Gen 24:14**

I've learned to not just pray "God take care of my family", but specifically "God help me eliminate this debt", or "Help me in this ministry area." Those specific prayers have

changed my life as I've seen God work in those areas I asked about. Genesis 24:14 is a good picture of a specific prayer. In fact, the next verse says that before this servant finished praying, the prayer already began to be fulfilled. He didn't just say "God, show me some women." He made specific statements about what should happen so he would know the exact one.

People do not pray specific prayers, because they are afraid to pray out of God's will. Some wonder if they should pray for a specific healing or simply "God's will be done"? We can sometimes worry so much about praying God's will, that our prayers become watered down and meaningless. It's ok to pray and ask for God's will to be accomplished. But, if you're being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, I don't believe you can pray out of His will. **Asking for God's wisdom on something He eventually says "no" to doesn't mean you were out of His will. You have to seek Him in order to know what He would have for you to do. Don't just pray "God give me a job." Pray for the specific kind of job you want. Don't just pray "God take care of my needs." Pray and elaborate on the specific needs that are important to you. He already knows, but don't talk to Him in some generic way. Make your prayers, your very own. Where do you need to be more specific in your prayers?**

### Read Genesis 25

**Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people. Gen 25:8**

College was a strenuous time for me. I was married for much of it, working three jobs, and trying to be a decent husband and father. They say you get out of college what you put into it. The final years when I was just desperate to graduate, those college days were not fun. Others around me seemed to be more satisfied with the college life than I was. I've determined I was dissatisfied because I was looking past college. Others were satisfied because they were living out each day, instead of trying to live out days that hadn't come yet.

People rarely seem satisfied in our day and age. It's ok to look ahead and make plans, but don't lose the joy of life, while trying to move on the next life stage. A friend in college used to talk about seasons of life: seasons of singleness, marriage, etc. She felt that we miss out on the "now" because we're always thinking of the "when". You can't speed up winter, so you might as well enjoy it while it's around (and around, and around, and around)! If you are seeking satisfaction in life, the first question is this: What relationship satisfies you the most? If it's not a relationship with Jesus, then I can already guarantee that when your life is ending, you will not be able to claim the satisfaction that Abraham claimed at his. **It's ok to work hard in your job and attempt to succeed. But, realize that your financial holdings, possessions and stature will mean nothing 20 years after you're gone. But, a satisfied life will impact your children, family, and friends to realize that the only pursuit that should continue in life is a pursuit of God, and not of possessions that will pass away. Are you expecting more out of yourself than a 24-hour day can accomplish? God isn't looking for busyness. He's looking for availability at a moment's notice. What is keeping you from living a satisfied life?**

## Read Genesis 26

**So Isaac lived in Gerar. When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say, "my wife," thinking, "the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." Gen 26:6-7**

Parents can sometimes refuse to take responsibility for the poor lessons they pass on to their children. There are many times parents have to tell their children "Do as I say, not as I did." Because of Isaac's decision in a situation similar to that of his father's, I really think that Abraham had never shared that story. I don't think that parents have to share all the sins of their past with their children, but being honest about your failures can encourage your children to avoid the same mistakes. Don't believe the lie that since you sinned as a teen, you cannot instruct your child to live differently.

It sure seems like I've read this story before. We find Isaac making exactly the same mistake as his father Abraham did. As parents, we should pass along the wisdom we have gained from good and bad decisions, to our children. The reality is we cannot live lives of sin and believe that it will not affect those around us, especially our families. We may in fact be starting a pattern of sin in the chain of our children. **What sin are you concerned could pass to your children? Ask God to free you of that stronghold, and to give you the motivation to stay from it. The future of your children is as much at stake as your personal future is. And if you don't have children, how can you encourage parents who are struggling with their children? Something as simple as taking Mom or Dad out for coffee and letting them talk can be a great help. Often parents are afraid to talk about their struggles, because some view those struggles as failures. If they knew someone would love them and pray for them, it could be a huge encouragement. You don't have to be a parent to encourage a parent.**

## Read Genesis 27

**Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. Gen 27:15**

As a parent it was a very special day when our first child was born. We took pictures of everything, made sure he never had a reason to cry, and just loved him. Our second child was our daughter. We later realized that we hadn't taken the same amount of pictures, and hope that as she grows up, she doesn't notice! In all honesty, I love all three of my children the same. They each have something unique that makes them who they are. I can't imagine my life without any of the children that God has blessed me with.

Favoritism is always a bad idea. Favoritism of one child over another breeds contempt. Favoring certain co-workers over others causes people to resent us. You may think that God showed favoritism by choosing Abraham and building a nation from Him. But the salvation of Jesus shows us that God is open to every person who is open to Him. He doesn't play favorites, but loves us all with an equal and perfect love. **Who is tough for you to love? Are they well aware of your contempt for them? As believers we are called to live the example of Jesus Christ. There wasn't a person that Jesus was**

**unwilling to love, right down to the men who put Him on the cross. Are you showing favoritism in your family? Do you praise one child in public, while ignoring the other? What about in your church? Having friends is fine, as long as that doesn't lead to willingly excluding others from your life.**

Read Genesis 28

**Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." Gen 28:16**

How can we miss the presence of God? People so quickly forget that God is omnipresent, and therefore, you can never be in a place that God is absent. It's not the new age idea of everything in the world, including us, being God. Instead, it's the truth of God's existence and presence which are inescapable. I heard a sermon to teenagers on the music they listened to. The pastor asked, "Imagine that Jesus is sitting in the passenger seat of your car. Now would you listen to the same music?" Those teens needed to understand the scenario was not an imaginary one, but the reality.

When we ignore the presence of God, we open ourselves up to the attacks of Satan. We don't have to acknowledge the presence of the devil for him to be at work in our lives. But God desires that acknowledgement. He desires for us to admit that there is someone to credit in our lives other than ourselves. Yet some people attempt to ignore God when they are in their homes. Some while they are at work. Others try to ignore God at school. What are the reasons? Really there is only one...sin. **What is the place you are attempting to eliminate God from? Would you prefer He weren't around as you watch TV, drive in your car, or talk to people at work? Today, confess to God the times you've acted ignorant of His presence in your quest for sin and selfishness. Ask Him to provide you a constant reminder of His presence at all times in your life. Where is God being ignored in your life?**

Read Genesis 29

**So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years. Gen 29:30**

Dr. Skinner was my Old Testament professor in seminary. When I met him, he had recently turned 80, which he considered to be a great blessing. Dr. Skinner said, "Now that I'm 80, people expect me to say dumb stuff. So I just say whatever I want!" One of his favorite points of discussion in the Old Testament was the practice of many Jewish men to take on more than one wife. "I don't understand why men want more than one wife. Most of them can't handle the one they've got." So true. And this account is just the beginning of Israel's leaders taking on multiple wives. After a long string of crazy circumstances, Jacob finds himself married to a girl he love (Rachel) and a girl he didn't (Leah). But when Rachel can't have children, Jacob simply switches to the wife that could give him children. I'm sure Jacob's "love" for Rachel seemed very cheap to her.

It hurts my heart to see people living in our society in America, so willing to flirt with people that aren't their spouse, in order to feel out the possibility of a relationship. There

is such a willingness to divorce and have a new marriage that surely would have to be better. I'd rather married couples learned to love each other deeper instead of turning their attention to the shallow love of another. **If you are married, and have moments of wavering commitment, ask God to solidify your commitment to your spouse. There will be times of difficulty, but God will be honored when you put your best effort into your marriage. Marriage isn't good feelings all the time, but that will be the case in a new marriage as well. If you are wavering in your marriage, make it the priority of your prayer today! What effort could you make today to make your spouse feel loved? And if you're unmarried, just hold onto this lesson for future reference!**

### **Read Genesis 30**

**She named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son." Gen 30:24**  
MRE's (Meals Read to Eat) are rough. They are prepackaged meals for the Army on the go, and sometimes when we were out in the field they were our only option. Now there is a pretty simple method for distributing MRE's. Get in line, take what you get, keep moving. There were always so many guys, there wasn't time to stand around and pick through until you found something you liked. Whenever I broke the rules, and tried to pick through, I still never came out with anything better than the vegetarian meal. When I just followed the rules and went through line, I always seemed to get the good meal... Frankfurters with M&M's for desert! I'm not saying that divine providence gave me better meals. It just seems that when my intentions were selfish, it rarely worked out for me.

Jacob's relationship to Rachel and Leah would be a good plot for any daytime soap opera. In Genesis 30:24, Rachel makes a declaration about Joseph, who would be the most important offspring of Jacob, being the one who takes Israel down to Egypt. But, did he come by Jacob's wives giving their maids for Jacob to have relations with? No, he came by God blessing Jacob's wife. **Think about something in your life that you are trying to accomplish outside of the normal procedures. Maybe there is something at work you're attempting to get away with. Perhaps you are not being honest with a spouse about how you are spending some of your free time. You need to realize the selfish choices rarely give us everything we're hoping for. But, when we do things in a God-honoring way, we will get the result He desires, and without the guilt of selfishness. How are you attempting to bring about God's will? Is it by prayer-led efforts, or prayer-less efforts?**

### **Read Genesis 31**

**Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent but did not find them. Gen 31:34**

This is a really curious situation. We're never really told why Rachel takes the idols in the first place, and then she works hard to conceal them during the search when Jacob says the thief shall die. It's clear that Laban regarded Jehovah God as the God of Jacob, and

not himself. Apparently Rachel may have not looked upon God as her own either. She certainly saw His hand move in her childbearing, but was still willing to turn back to these idols. A missionary once told me you have to be careful when witnessing to a Hindu. They believe that all religious paths will get you to God. You can share the gospel with them, and they may pray to receive Christ. But, they will then get a statue of Jesus and put it on their god-shelf and pray to Him along with all the other idols they have.

When we share Jesus with someone, especially someone who is of another religion, we must be clear that following Jesus is a complete departure from the old life. Rachel didn't depart completely from the old life, and attempted to blend God with other false gods. This will be a problem throughout Israel's history. Perhaps new believers don't leave the old life behind, because they see current believers living without much change in their lives. **What are you attempting to blend with your faith in Christ? Are you trying to justify sin, hoping that God says it's ok for you? Do you read your horoscope everyday and find yourself giving it consideration (despite every newspaper having something different)? God made you to be a brand new creation, so ask Him to help you let go of the old life that dishonors God and robs you of spiritual blessings that come from obedience. God's forgiveness doesn't make sin any less wrong.**

### **Read Genesis 32**

**He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Gen 32:28**

When I was growing up, I hated doing the dishes. I was complaining one night about doing them, and my step-dad said "Let's wrestle, and if you get me close to being on my back, I'll do the dishes." He had been a state wrestling champ in high school, but I figured I could take this 40 year old man. He got down exactly like I told him, and he let me get any hold I wanted. Then we said go and I was straining trying to get him turned over. It seemed like I might be winning, but he was just waiting. Suddenly, he used my momentum against me, flipped me over, and put me in a position called the Boston Crab. Needless to say, it was painful and I quickly surrendered to my fate with the dishes.

In Genesis 32, when it says that Jacob wrestled with a man, it appears that this is the pre-incarnate (before he was born permanently in flesh) Jesus. If it was an angel, then Jacob couldn't have been said to have wrestled or struggled with God. Jesus was not unaware of Jacob's name when He asked it. He wanted Jacob to understand his name was now different. The very name of the nation Israel means "to struggle with God." **I think that all believers struggle with God in a way. As sinful actions are revealed in our lives, we struggle to bring those actions under the submission of Jesus.. I had a Christian friend tell me how awful he was, because it seemed he struggled with sin a lot. I told him the very fact the he recognizes his struggles, indicates he cares about his relationship to Jesus. I'm more worried about the Christians who never seem to think they struggle with sin. So how about you? Do you struggle? It's not a matter of if you do, but if you admit it and allow Jesus to work on those areas of your life. Struggling with sin brings growth; surrendering to sin brings guilt.**

### Read Genesis 33

**Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. Gen 33:4**

This always seems strange when I read it. Jacob is obviously worried about seeing his brother again, because he knows his brother meant to kill him. Jacob tries to split up his family to take gifts ahead of him to Esau. When Jacob finally comes within sight of Esau, Esau comes running to him as a brother, and not as an enemy. During the length of their conversation, Esau never reveals any bitterness. The wounds were not healed by time. I believe he had seen the foolishness he displayed when he sold his birthright for a bowl of chili, and he had since forgiven his brother for the robbery of his blessing.

What about you? Are people afraid of you after an argument, because they know you will hold a long term grudge? We should work to stay on good terms with people we don't agree with. I've learned that once a relationship goes south, it often stays there, which is why Esau is such a great example of forgiveness. He clearly realized he was just as responsible as Jacob was for the situation they were in. **Eph. 4:32 tells us that Christ forgives us regarding everything as a believer, so if I'm unwilling to forgive, I'm claiming to be better than Jesus. Are you claiming to be better than Jesus? Ask God to show you the people you need to repair relationships with. Confess it to the Lord, and then confess it to those people.**

### Read Genesis 34

**"Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us." Gen 34:23**

While I lived in Missouri, a St. Louis church was undergoing scrutiny for some of their outreach tactics. They rented out a microbrewery and invited people to come drink beer and hear the gospel. While the desire to share the gospel is a good one, the "bait" that was being used in luring them was not. Many Christians throughout the state felt that the tactic promoted compromise with the world.

In this chapter, the men of the land were not really excited about undergoing the painful process of circumcision (normally done in infancy...enough said!). But, they knew in doing so, that they would be able to take possession of Jacob's family property through intermarriage and trade. The world wants Christians to compromise on issues of divorce, alcohol use, and basic issues of truth in order that they might live more easily with us. The Bible warns us about conforming to the world's image (Romans 12:2). I do not believe this refers to building Christ colonies in areas that no lost people can reach us. Jesus is clear that we are the light of the world, and the only ones on the planet making His truth known. So while we are to be separate from the world, we cannot completely cut ourselves off from it either. So where is the balance? Simply this: Don't compromise. As you interact with lost people, they will not be pleased to see a life that calls many of their actions wrong. So they will accuse you of being a goody-two shoes, or holier-than-

thou. There are times you just have to accept the names and hold on to your integrity. **How comfortable are you with the world? Do you keep the things of the world separate from your life? Or do you keep the people of the world separate from your life? You do not have to accept the sins of worldliness to reach lost people, but you do have to accept people for who they are. We do so in order to tell them about Jesus even when their lives may seem awful to us. Remember, you were once as they are. None of us were born as saved people.**

### **Read Genesis 35**

**So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; Gen 35:2**

Angie was a girl in my high school youth group. And man could that girl sing. She sang in our high school and was amazing. She always got the best parts in our youth musicals, and sang a lot of solos in our church worship services. She had told us that she was going to be singing a song the following week at church, and our group made it a habit of giving our fellow teens a standing ovation after singing in the service. But when Angie showed up the next week at church, her outfit would have made a hooker blush. I couldn't believe her parents allowed her to show up in that, let alone get up in front of the entire church and sing about her love for Jesus while she was half-naked. Even as a teenage guy, I found it very uncomfortable (as did some of the other guys), and while we politely clapped after her song, it stopped short of our normal enthusiasm.

Some people have become so used to certain aspects of worldliness, that they don't even realize how it shows up at church. I think Jacob was in a similar boat. I don't think that he was worshipping any of the foreign gods among his servants and family, but he knew it was going on. He was practicing tolerance until God showed up and reminded Jacob there is no room for divided attention. Angie would have benefited if an older lady had pulled her aside and instructed her towards godliness instead of practicing tolerance leaving Angie in her sin. **How do you react when you come under conviction in a worship service? Most married people realize they should be better to their children or spouse. Some realize that they don't ever reach out to lost people. Others come to the conclusion that they were never saved. And yet so often our invitation becomes an uncomfortable time when people attempt to wait God out. Maybe they're worried about what other people think. But what if we concerned ourselves with what God thinks? What if we responded immediately to conviction and offered up repentance. Planning for repentance and revival will take us further than any plans our church could ever dream of.**

### **Read Genesis 36**

**Then Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor became king in his place. Gen 36:38**

When you begin to have interaction with people that are not like you, it's amazing how the larger group seems to cause the smaller ones to compromise. Esau's descendants are

the Edomites, but the land they live in is ruled by someone else. In the line of these foreign kings is king who goes by the name Baal-hanan, which means "Baal is gracious". This is a foreign king, advocating a foreign god, and it seems that certain children of Israel found themselves living under this king's rule. Yet, they continued to live there and be influenced by the culture and authority that was conflicting with what they knew to be true.

There are many areas in which you can compromise, and many groups that are looking for you to do so. It may be your friends, who constantly hammer you on an issue that they want to see you change your ways on. It may be that they want you to do something with them, so they can have a clearer conscience to know a Christian is rolling around in the same mud as them. Perhaps other Christians who don't truly believe as you do are encouraging you to compromise. Maybe they hold a low view of Scripture in order to justify their actions. **What areas have you already compromised in? I know we've crossed this bridge recently, but I think it's a huge issue for Christians. Compromise is a difficult thing to come back from, because once you've justified the sin, it's easier for you to do it again. Esau didn't step in to protect younger generations in his family from compromise, and that should be the lesson for us. Really ask God to show you places you need to stand firm in your life, and how you can teach younger generations to stand firm.**

### **Read Genesis 37**

**"Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, 'A wild beast devoured him.' Then let us see what will become of his dreams!"  
Gen 37:20**

My parents usual punishment for me was to take away my TV time. During one of these times, my parents left the house for a few hours, and of course I turned on the TV. When I saw them coming up the driveway, I turned it off and went to my room. My mom soon called me into the living room, and put her hand on the back of the TV, which was quite warm since I had watched it for a while. So the next time I lost my TV privileges, I remembered her trick. This time when I saw her coming up the driveway, I got a gallon of milk from the fridge and rubbed it on the back of the TV. Then I used a towel to wipe up the condensation, put the milk back, and sat on the couch. My mom came in and asked if I had been watching TV, and I said no. She felt the back of the TV, which was now at room temperature, and she believed me. That's a pretty involved plot just to get away with something.

The plot that Joseph's brothers came up with, instead of killing him, shows us they knew their actions were wrong and needed covered up. When we make a quick mistake, we don't always cover it up, because we don't realize what we've done. But, if we are planning wrongdoing, it always requires some thought. As Christians, that planning period is our last chance. There have been times I've schemed my way into sin, and knew that it was wrong as I put it together. But I ignored the voice of the Holy Spirit, and went forward with my selfish plans. **How are you ignoring the voice of the Holy Spirit? Is there something in your life that is requiring a lot of planning and energy, and is not**

**glorifying to God? Perhaps something you're doing at work or at home. Stop your schemes, confess your sin, and ask God to hold you accountable. Don't put yourself in the situation where you can plan your way into sin.**

Read Genesis 38

**Now it was about three months later that Judah was informed, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she is also with child by harlotry." Then Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!" Gen 38:24**

I really love being a parent. I've learned more about human behavior from watching my children than in any other context. We certainly do our best to teach our kids right from wrong, and to enforce the rules for choosing the wrong. Nikki eventually came up with the idea of spraying vinegar from a spray bottle in the mouths of our children when they lied. Yucky words, yucky mouth is the idea. I have never seen a time that one of our kids was caught in a lie and said "Mommy, I need the yucky stuff", but they always try to police each other on the issue. One will come up quickly to tell us that another was lying. They know the consequences and will even tell us that so-and-so needs the yucky stuff! It's always easier to raise your arm and point a finger outward, then to bend your arm and point the finger at yourself.

In this account of Genesis 38, Judah certainly makes that case without even trying. We often try to justify our wrongs, but the moment that another person commits the same sin, we can really get righteous about it! This is why we must live lives that obey and honor God, so that when we see a fellow believer in sin, we can help them. If we're guilty of the same things, we won't deal with them in a loving way, or may even ignore their situation altogether. **Are there people you condemn for carrying out the very same acts you're guilty of? It doesn't mean that everyone should just keep silent in their sin. The Bible calls Christians to confront one another, for the purpose of restoring the believer, and removing sin. Ask God to help you define the sin issues in your life (if you don't already know), and seek to remove them. Your life will be better, and you'll be able to better the lives of your brothers and sisters in Christ as you lead them to lives of godliness, and not into merciless judgment.**

Read Genesis 39

**The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper. Gen 39:23**

When I was in college, I worked for several years in the call center of an insurance company, handling auto accidents and policy holder questions. During that time, I also served part-time as a youth minister. My department eventually got Internet access, and we were told we could use it for mainly business, and some personal. I used it all day, often checking emails from my youth group. After finishing my paperwork and between calls, I would work on Bible studies or other items for church. During my annual review, my boss told me I had the highest Internet usage in the department. He then said he didn't care, because I handled more calls and claims than the full-time employees. He often passed by my desk and saw me working on church items, and I never heard an ill word

about it because of my work ethic. This was important to me because people knew I was a Christian, often calling me “Preacher” more than “Heath”.

Everywhere Joseph went, his bosses loved him, because his of his work ethic. Potiphar was certainly soured on him after the allegations from his wife, but until that time, he had trusted Joseph fully. And ultimately, Joseph knew that his work ethic reflected both on himself and his God. **How does your boss view you? Do people in your workplace know that you're a Christian? If they do, what impression does your work ethic give of Christians? Maybe you're self-employed or stay at home, but you can still examine your work ethic. Do you find yourself accomplishing your to-do list or having an undone list? These are all parts of your Christian witness. Lost people constantly look for faults in Christians to make themselves feel better. Let's examine our lives and seal up those cracks.**

### Read Genesis 40

**Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him. Gen 40:23**

I've learned to be very careful in what I tell people I will do. There have been times I have failed to fulfill promises to my children. And then I feel badly when they bring it up because they think I purposely broke a promise. So I've stopped trying to make everyone happy, and to reserve definite statements only when I fully intend to keep them. For instance, have you ever told some you'll pray for them, but you didn't? I used to say it all the time, and then was embarrassed when someone would come and thank me for praying for them. So I refocused my prayer time to always remember those people that I promised to lift up, and I lift them up before my own requests.

Joseph interprets the dream of this cupbearer, and then simply asks that the man to not forget Joseph when he gets out of prison. The man gets out, and does not make mention of Joseph to Pharaoh. Maybe he really forgot. Maybe he was worried about asking the Pharaoh for any favors, since he might be sent back to prison. In either case, he failed to honor his word. **Do you tend to let people down by not following through on promises? Maybe it's an accidental thing, and you really just forget. Whether you really didn't care, or just forgot, it's still a matter of integrity. Maybe you'll just say anything to get someone to leave you alone. Don't be this way, but let your yes be yes, and your no be no. People will respect you more, and you won't let people down so often. What promises are you failing to keep to God? To your family?**

### Read Genesis 41

**Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." Gen 41:16**

There is a small platform in front of the Bass Pro Shop Headquarters store in Springfield, Missouri. On the front of the platform is a fake fish and a sign on the top that says "Liars Club". It isn't too hard to discern that this is the place that fisherman tell the stories of the one that got away. And this practice isn't just reserved for fisherman. People often dress up the stories of their daily lives. A police officer who pulled someone over, may

embellish his story to friends by adding in a high speed chase. Or a player on a sports team might tell about how he made a pivotal play in a game, when in reality he sat on the bench the whole season.

If there was ever someone who could have tried to justify an embellishment, it was Joseph. They call him out of the prison that he's been in for over two years. He's brought before the Pharaoh and told "we hear you can interpret dreams." I'm sure the temptation would be there to say "Yes I can." But, he risks his new found freedom by telling them that he cannot interpret dreams, but that he simply communicates the message that God shows him. Even in choosing the humble description of himself, he is made a ruler in Egypt, answering only to Pharaoh. Perhaps if he had chosen a more prideful answer, the Pharaoh wouldn't have been so willing to give him authority, worried he may try to grab more power. **What events in your life have you tried to "dress up"? Is there something in your past that you try to turn into something it wasn't. Maybe even today you tell stories about your job or recreation activities that simply aren't true. Or maybe you are telling stories in order to put others in a bad light. You need to learn to just deal straight with people. If you continue to blow every story up in proportion, people are going to get wise, and cease to trust you regarding the simple things you tell them. This includes not just your friends, but your family as well.**

Read Genesis 42

**Then he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned, and behold, it is even in my sack." And their hearts sank, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?" Gen 42:28**

When tragedy happens you hear a question often posed: "Where was God?" When the tsunami hit Indonesia or 9/11 occurred, people suddenly became very aware of God. But, I've noticed a time that no one seems to think of God...when things are going well. Christians and non-Christians alike see prosperity, and do not thank God, but simply live their lives as if He's not even there. Unfortunately for lost people, when they ask these questions, there aren't enough believers in Jesus Christ helping to answer those questions. I'm not saying that we know why God does everything that He does, but we can help people see the bigger picture. A tragedy is awful, but if people turn to Christ then the tragedy becomes a positive. People failing to be repentant before God in these times is the greatest tragedy of all.

Joseph's brothers begin looking at the situation and placed the blame on God. Why would they mention God at that moment? My guess is that they felt that He was repaying them for the evil they had shown their brother all those years earlier. But even in that moment, instead of accepting the blame themselves, they placed the blame for their situation on God. They certainly hadn't considered God when the moment came for them to sell their brother off like an old used couch. **When do you turn your thoughts to God? When times or good, bad or both? Do you look at God as vindictive and uncaring, or do you understand there is a great and eternal purpose behind His plans? Today ask God to show you His work in the big and small, good and difficult**

**things of life. Perhaps opening yourself up to His perspective will change your personal walk with Jesus. Think of a difficulty in your life that God used for good.**

### Read Genesis 43

**Joseph hurried out for he was deeply stirred over his brother, and he sought a place to weep; and he entered his chamber and wept there. Gen 43:30**

Have you heard of coach speak? For some reason, political correctness has entered the arenas of our country and coaches are afraid to say what they really think of another team. When the Missouri Tigers take on some podunk school in basketball the coach always says, "They're a good team. They've got a great coach, and we need to be ready." What he means is, "We're gonna smoke these little midgets, but I can't tell the truth because other people will think I'm a jerk for telling you that we're probably going to win by 50!"

I've always wondered about this game that Joseph played with his brothers. He certainly has all the power to enact judgment on them. I think he was just so shocked to see them, he didn't know what to do. He wasn't afraid of them, but unsure of how to go about talking to them regarding what they had done. As a result, both sides experience great heartache until Joseph finally reveals the truth of his identity to them. The situation improved when everything just comes out into the open. **Is there someone you need to have an honest conversation with? Perhaps you have a conflict with them, but neither side has been willing to honestly discuss it. There is nothing wrong with honest words. You have to admit, worrying about a conversation is usually worse than the conversation itself. Remember to ask yourself if your words are "true, kind, and necessary." So let's stop beating around the bush, and just say what needs to be said. It's a matter of integrity. Say what you mean, because the world doesn't need more coach speak.**

### Read Genesis 44

**"Now, therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. Gen 44:33**

Have you ever been bothered by random questions? When I was younger two of my favorites were: "I wonder if the furniture at my house comes alive when none of us are home?", and "What does it look like on Mars right now?" One day while watching TV I came up with a new question after watching a father say he would die for his kids, "Would I ever do that?" And at the age of 10, I concluded if it was me or them, I chose them. But now I am a father, and the question isn't so abstract. And I can tell you, I would trade myself for any of my children to allow them to avoid endless torture or death.

I'm sure that Joseph was pleased to see his brothers thinking about someone else, especially since he remembered how they hung him out to dry. But now Judah is offering his own life in exchange for that of his younger brother. He is willing to pay the ultimate price...punishment for someone else's guilt. **Do you think about the fact, that Jesus did**

**this for you? Not that He simply died on the cross, but that you deserved to die? He lived a perfect, sinless life and taught people what it meant to be a child of God. But, when the time came, and it was either us or Him, He chose self-sacrifice on our behalf. Maybe that's why people don't really believe the story of Christ. No one would be that selfless. I've learned that a Christian's main goal of sanctification (becoming more like Jesus after you're saved) is really growing from selfishness to selflessness. Just take some time today, thinking about what your salvation cost Jesus, and thank Him for paying a price that you could only satisfy in Hell. Can you think of anyone this week that you need to share this message with?**

Read Genesis 45

**"Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Gen 45:8**

Mack is a good friend from my last church. When my last church was a nightmare, he was an encouragement. We talked on the phone a few months back and he always asks, "So what is God doing with you?" I told him about Nikki's trip to Peru, and my responsibilities at the church and how many genuine friends we have already made in a little over a year. I told him that in spite of all this, I still had some heartache over my short tenure at our last church. Mack said, "If you hadn't come here for those nine months, you wouldn't be where you are now. Nikki's trip, your love of your job, and the friendships you made all came out of God bringing you to that old church for that short time." Praise the Lord for godly, Spirit-filled friends!

Joseph shares some interesting news with his brothers. Even though they sold him into slavery, God used it for good. His brothers wanted to kill him, but one brother held them back. And at that moment a caravan comes by on their way to Egypt. Do you think these things just happen? Joseph kept a godly attitude despite all that had happened, and recognized that his personal difficulties were used by God to save many. Joseph considered it worth the cost. **What do you do when things are difficult? When difficulty comes in your life, do not ask God "Why are you doing this to me?", but ask "What do you want me to learn from this?" The Bible is clear in James 1:2-3 that trials and difficulties are designed to strengthen our faith. If difficult times have come upon you, realize you are in the middle of a life lesson from your Lord. Are you in a difficult time now, but have been missing the lesson? Whatever He's trying to teach you, will serve a purpose in your life.**

Read Genesis 46

**"I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes." Gen 46:4**

Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary is my alma mater and a place of deep importance to me. The school was started during a time when Baptists were fighting about whether the Bible was trustworthy. Dr. Gray Allison started Mid-America to give

an option for those who trusted the Bible, and were committed to evangelism. He and his wife, Voncille, saw many days that they didn't know where the money would come to keep the school going, but God always provided. Every year, Voncille sang the old hymn "God Will Take Care of You" during one of our chapel services. Even though her voice was frail and sometimes cracked, it meant so much because we knew that she was singing from experience.

When Israel went down to Egypt, God promised them that He would not leave them there. His promise to Abraham was for a nation, not just a big family. A nation requires a land of their own to live in. During the 400 years that Israel would be in Egypt, with many of those years serving as slaves, people probably began to think that God had forgotten them. God did not forget, but God allowed them to multiply in number, and have an experience they could look back to and remember that God had chosen them. **Are you doubting something that you know God led you to? Sometimes we're so sure of God's leading, until difficulties make us doubt. If God made a promise, He will keep it. Be obedient, and seek Him out. And do so for those around you. Pray that God will show others in your family, circle of friends, and your church to trust in the promises God has made to them. God has not forgotten you, so don't forget Him in your daily life.**

### Read Genesis 47

**"Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate." Gen 47:19**

I've always loved shoes. When I was growing up, we didn't have much money and so I rarely had shoes that were of any quality. As shoes became more expensive, they became a status symbol and I hated being made fun of because my shoes were so cheap and torn up. When I was in 9<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> grade, someone gave me \$100 so I could buy a very expensive pair of shoes, and I went to the store ready to purchase them. But when I got there, I just couldn't do it. Maybe I finally realized the value of a dollar, but I saw no wisdom in paying \$100 when I could get a good pair for \$50. So I paid \$50 and used the other half for a school trip later in the month. I decided not to act so desperate about something that wasn't that important.

People often get too desperate too quickly. That's why we make impulse purchases or use our credit cards instead of saving towards something. These people came to Egypt too desperate. They could have negotiated a better price, but were willing to give up their lands and their very lives to Egypt as slaves in order to get food. They could have sold some of their land to get food, but in a crisis, common sense can often go out the window. **Do you tend to get too desperate? Do you tend to move too quickly and get yourself into a bigger mess? Maybe you do nothing, and as a result, find yourself in even worse shape. We cannot let fear be a motivator, because it is a terrible motivator. We cease to think clearly, but instead make quick decisions. When a crisis happens, we should turn over the decision making to God. But, you must do this before the crisis happens. Ask God to prepare you for the difficulties that lie**

**ahead. I often pray that God will give me wisdom for questions and people that I will encounter during the day. Seek wisdom for situations that you have no idea of yet.**

#### Read Genesis 48

**He blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, Gen 48:15**

Blessings were huge in the lives of these early people of God. These early patriarchs (fathers of the faith) were essentially the prophets and messengers of God's Word very early on. So when Jacob gave this blessing to his son, it wasn't empty words. He was calling on God to do something because of his special relationship to God. Parents blessing their children by prayers and actions is an important aspect of our faith relationship

While this prayer of Jacob was a special one, I think that Joseph received another blessing as his father lay dying. Jacob said that God had been his shepherd all his life to that day. He didn't just suddenly start thinking of God as death approached, like so many in our world. He understood that a life with God is not just about eternal promises, but earthly ones for our lives here as well. The testimony of his father's life must have been a great encouragement to Joseph. **What will your testimony look like? When you pass away, what will they say about you? Will people say "There was a person who lived every day for Jesus"? Or will people say "He/she was a member of \_\_\_\_\_ church"? One of these statements is a testimony of faith, and one is grasping for hope. Ask God to give you the faith and motivation to live a life of testimony. It's the only lasting thing you can pass on to the ones you leave behind in death.**

#### Read Genesis 49

**"For Your salvation I wait, O LORD. Gen 49:18**

There has been a debate in legal circles regarding the responsibility parents should bear for their children's illegal actions. Some believe that children should be held totally accountable for their actions, with no consequences to their parents. Some believe that parents should serve sentences for their kids' crimes. I think both of these are wrong. Obviously our court system in America holds kids as "juvenile" offenders, without punishment (besides emotional) for the parents. However, too many parents give the line "I told them not to do that." There is more to parenting than just a few do's and don'ts and then letting your kids hang themselves with the rope you gave them. We should protect our children, even from themselves if necessary.

As Israel (Jacob) is giving these blessings on his sons, some are not wonderful blessings. Some of his sons are violent men, and receive what becomes of all violent men. Some of his sons care for the Lord, and their blessings are easy. But, we find an important statement, perhaps even muttered in his grief over the lives lived by some of his sons, that he is waiting on the salvation of the Lord. He knows that sin and rebellion towards God will not be defeated without the Messiah to come. **If you have children, what do you**

**think is the cause of their rebellion? Do you think it's their friends, activities or hangouts? Then do something about it! Stand up to your kids and bring about some unpopular decisions in order to protect them now. If you don't have kids, you may think this is not difficult to do. But, parents want their kids to love them, and not hate them. But, don't allow yourself to believe that letting kids do whatever they want shows them love. Making tough decisions, to spare them and lead them to the Lord, shows the greatest love you could ever show. Find ways to encourage parents who have rebellious children.**

### **Read Genesis 50**

**'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Gen 50:17**

There are few things worse than fake forgiveness. One man said when he and his wife argue she gets historical. "Don't you mean hysterical?" his friend asked. "No, I mean historical. She brings up every bad thing I've ever done in the time she's known me!" It's easy to say that you've forgiven someone, but it must go beyond words. You must actively choose to purge the issue from your mind as the forgiver, so that you do not keep an attitude of unforgiveness that dishonors Christ's example. And if someone has forgiven you, believe them. Maybe you suspect that they have not fully done so, but if they say they have, you have no option but to believe them. Allow God to do the work of bringing them to honor their forgiveness.

Joseph's brothers heard everything that he had said about God using the situation, but now that their father was gone, they worried that Joseph might have changed his mind. But, Joseph was a man of God and there is a difference between the forgiveness of believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers can easily go back on the forgiveness they offered, because they've probably never experienced any forgiveness even close to what Christ offers. But, when you're a Christian, you realize that you must forgive as Christ forgave you. **Are people afraid to get on your bad side? Perhaps they know that you will hold a grudge and refuse to release them from their wrong. Remember that you are not God, and anytime you choose to withhold forgiveness, and or bring up the past that you said you let go of, you dishonor God by doing the opposite of what He would do.**