

ERIN DAVIS

# A Beautiful Story

MAKING GOD'S  
STORY YOURS

LifeWay | Girls

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LifeWay Press®  
Nashville, Tennessee

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**ERIN DAVIS** is a popular author, blogger, and speaker who loves to see women of all ages run to the deep well of God's Word. She is the author of many books and Bible studies including *Connected*, *True Princess*, *Beautiful Encounters*, and the *My Name Is Erin* series. When she's not writing, you can find Erin chasing chickens and children on her small farm in the Midwest.

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This book contains eight weekly group studies. Each session consists of a group guide followed by four days of personal study. There is also a leader guide in the back of this study with helpful tips to use during group time. As you close each session, encourage students to complete the homework days that follow. Once students have completed this study, they will have discovered New Testament truths through the lives of ten Old Testament women.

## HOW TO ANNOTATE

Throughout this study, I'll reference journaling and annotating. These are the methods I use most often during my personal Bible study. It's okay to write in your Bible. You can write out questions, prayers, lists, and even create drawings that relate to the text. Choose a writing tool that won't bleed through the pages such as colored pencils or felt tip markers. The goal isn't to preserve your Bible for use in a museum display some day. The goal is to get into God's Word and get God's Word into you.



# INTRODUCTION

Your life is the pen God is using to write *A Beautiful Story*.

Before you wrap yourself up in the warm fuzzy feelings of this sentiment, let me clarify. The main character of your story, and of mine, might surprise you. Who we are and how we live is the lower story. This study is an invitation to lift your eyes. Look up. See the higher arc of your story and the stories of those who have gone before you. When we widen the lens, we see how each of us joins a long line of rotating characters whose lives point to bigger, more significant truths. Ultimately, our stories are not about us, but about the author of every narrative—our stories are about God.

In this study, you'll dig deep into the lives of ten women. Some of them you've likely heard of (like Eve), and a few of them might be new to you (like Gomer), but set aside first impressions. They rarely reveal the whole story. I invite you to look closer. Assume the role of a journalist. Take a second look. Find the clues that point past how each woman lived and toward who God is.

Together, we'll peel back the layers of each woman's story to find how it is:

- less about what she accomplished on her own and more about what God accomplished through her.
- less about who liked her and more about who loved her with an everlasting, steadfast love.
- less about perfection and more about redemption.
- less about grabbing the spotlight for herself and more about using her life to show God's glory.

These women's lives span thousands of years on the timeline of humanity, yet they are stitched together with the same thread that weaves in and out of ours. God is the author of every pen stroke. He's the hero of every tale. As we sift through each story, I hope you'll often circle back to your own. How has God marked your story? How can you use your own life to point to something greater?

With those questions in mind, let's dig in. Our story begins like all the good ones do: Once upon a time.

## SESSION 1

# *God Speaks: A Beautiful Beginning*

*So God created man in his own image;  
he created him in the image of God;  
he created them male and female.*

**GENESIS 1:27**

### STRETCH

Maybe you didn't realize when you picked up this study that you were also enrolling in Journalism 101. Don't panic! This is a crash course and there will be no papers due, no tests to take, and no lectures to listen to. To ace this class you'll only need to learn one lesson: It's the journalism principle of the inverted pyramid.

I first learned about the inverted pyramid in journalism school. It works like this: When telling a story, share the most important information first. Usually, this involves the who, what, when, where, and why. Then, begin sharing information that's less important, things like commentary from witnesses, quotes, or minor details. Finally, the bottom of the pyramid (it's upside down, remember?) is reserved for the parts of the story that are non-essential. These are the details only really interested readers care about.

You'll get to practice answering questions about the lives of ten women throughout this study. As you read about them in God's Word, train yourself to look for the who, what, when, where, and why. You'll record your answers in the Story I.D. chart for each session. If charting God's Word is new to you, this may feel awkward at first—it will certainly take a bit more effort than simply reading through a passage once or twice. I want it to change how you think and respond to God.

As you investigate, remember that the people in the Bible aren't there to show us what perfect Christians look like. Their stories do show us that God loves and uses people of all kinds in every moment of history.

Train yourself to ask these questions:

- **Who:** Who is this about? (name, family, etc.)
- **What:** What defines her? (personality, characteristics, likes, dislikes, etc.)
- **When:** What is the historical and cultural context? What happened before and after this?
- **Where:** Where did she live?
- **Why:** Why is this important? Remember to invert the pyramid here. The most important detail of each story is what it reveals about God, not what it reveals about the woman we're investigating.

Alright, journalists! Let's begin with an easy one. Her story starts at the very beginning.

## STORY I.D.

Using the chart below, fill in what you already know about Eve. Then, check out Genesis 1-4. Use the information in the passage to fill in any details you missed.

*Who*      Eve

*What*

*When*

*Where*

*Why*

## DIGGING DEEPER

*Who am I?* This question seems to haunt every girl. We run anywhere and everywhere looking for answers, but this constant running often sends us spiraling down the wrong path.

Take a few minutes to list who each of these influences think you should be.

**The Culture.** Based on the messages you see in magazines, television shows, and through social media, who does the culture say you should be?

**Your family.** How do your parents and siblings define you?

**Yourself.** Who do you think you should be?

These are just three of the countless voices with an opinion about who you are. But those voices often contradict each other. The culture wants you to be/think/act/dream one way, and your parents have a totally different idea. You may define your identity one way, and your friends may want you to be someone else completely. Before long, you start to feel like the rope in a giant game of tug of war. When we look to the wrong sources to tell us who we are, we may even feel stretched to the point of breaking.

We need a new game plan. We must train ourselves to look to the right source.

## WHO GETS TO DECIDE?

Fast forward a few years, and imagine you are the creator of an invention that will change the world. Maybe it's a groundbreaking piece of technology that allows us to travel at light speed. Maybe you've developed a machine that can cure cancer with the push of a button. Maybe you've finally invented a way to keep from losing only one shoe. It doesn't really matter what the imaginary invention is, what matters is that *you* created it.

Now, imagine you've planned a big event to unveil your invention to the world. All of the major news networks are live streaming the launch. This is your moment!

- Who would you pick to explain your invention?
- Would you let the news crews who have never seen your product in action explain what it is?
- Would you ask some friends who like you but haven't spent months partnering with you in developing this product?
- How about the invention itself? Would you uncover it in front of your audience and hope it could speak for itself?

Of course not!

As the creator, you are the best person to define the invention. You are the expert on what it is and what it can do. Eve's story helps us see how the same principle applies to our own identities.

The creation story reminds us that God is the Creator of everything around us. God spoke *everything* into existence. Every fish in the sea, every bird in the air, and every zebra that wanders the African plains was designed and created by God.

John 1:3 says it this way:

*All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.*

### Who is the "him" in this passage?

If you guessed Jesus, you're spot on! You may think of Jesus as the God of the New Testament, but when we dig deeper into the Old Testament, we see Him *everywhere*. As we study God's Word, we discover that the Old Testament is like a gigantic neon arrow that points *forward* toward Christ's coming, and the New Testament is like a gigantic neon arrow that points *backward* toward His life, death, and resurrection. He is smack dab in the middle of the most important story ever written. This is a critical piece of the puzzle as you look for the higher story in the lives of the women we'll consider through this study.

Let me show you what I mean. As we take a deeper look, try thinking through the story like a journalist.

### Write out Genesis 1:26.

God doesn't have to plot, plan, and beta test His creations. But let's think back to our invention example and imagine this passage is like the brainstorming phase of creation.

**Keeping in mind that Adam had not been created yet, who was God talking to in this passage?**

God was talking to Himself. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all present at creation. As we comb back through Genesis 1 looking for clues, we see the Father creating and the Spirit hovering (v. 2). John 1:3 helps us see that Jesus was also present and that everything was made through Him.

Keep this in mind as we pivot from the creation of the world to the creation of Eve.

**Write out Genesis 1:27.**

**This passage seems to repeat the same thought three times. What is the main idea?**

In this verse, God used a teaching strategy with us. He repeated an important idea because He wants you to pay attention. It's as if He is saying, "Don't miss this! It's too important!" Theologians call this passage the *Imago Dei*. It simply means all men and women bear God's image. We'll take a closer look at the *Imago Dei* in your devotions this week, but for now lets zero in on two key ideas:

- 1. God created Eve.**
- 2. God created Eve in His own image.**

Since God created Eve in His own image, He defined her identity, just like an inventor gets to define the invention. We may have some ideas about who Eve was or who she should have been, but ultimately God is the one who assigned Eve's identity, and God is the one who assigns your identity.

**Look back through Eve's story. Who did God say she was in each of the following verses?**

Genesis 1:27

Genesis 1:31

Genesis 2:18

Go back to your Story I.D. for Eve. Fill in any new information you've uncovered.

## TALK ABOUT IT

Discuss the following questions with your group.

**How does the Imago Dei impact the way you view your own identity? How does it impact the way you see others?**

**Did you see anything in Eve's story you had not noticed before?**

**What did you learn about God's character through Eve's story?**

## THINK ABOUT IT

As we will discover in this week's devotions, when Eve allowed someone other than God to define her identity, she found herself in deep trouble. Her story sends up a warning flare for each of us. Like Eve, you were made in the image of God. You are a living, breathing portrait of the *Imago Dei*. From the beginning, God's plan was for you to tell the world about *Him*.

Since you were made by God and have been marked with the image of God, choose to turn up the volume on God's voice and turn down the volume of the other voices around you when it comes to defining who you are.

Take some time now to journal a prayer to God. Confess your tendency to define your identity based on your own perceptions or the influence of others. Since He is your Creator, ask Him to help you see yourself as He sees you.

## DAY 1

# Who? The Imago Dei

In addition to charting eight Old Testament women throughout this study, you will occasionally be asked to chart additional people including other characters from the Bible story we're investigating or individuals from church history. In this session, I'd like you to chart someone you know especially well: yourself.

Who

What

When

Where

Why

When most people think of Eve, they tend to define her with a list of firsts.

- She was the first woman to ever live.
- She was the first wife and mother.
- She was the first person to sin.

It's easy to boil down Eve's entire identity to that last bullet point. It's true that Adam and Eve sinned and in doing so, they sent a shock wave through history that we are still dealing with today. We'll look more closely at the impact of sin in tomorrow's devotion. For now, let's circle back to the *Imago Dei*. If you need a refresher, check out Genesis 1:27.

*Imago Dei* translates to "image of God." God created everything: planets, stars, oceans, continents, animals, plants, and so on. But the *Imago Dei* is unique to us as humans. In all of creation, we are the only ones made in the image of God.

While that should make us feel special (because we are), remember to look for the higher story. The point of the *Imago Dei* isn't to bolster our self-esteem. It's not about our outer beauty. The lower story is who we are. The higher story is who God is. We understand our identity by understanding who He is. We have value because we bear the image of the God of the universe.

Circle back to the chart you made about yourself. Reframe your identity with the *Imago Dei* at the forefront of your mind. Rework the chart with these questions in mind.

- Who does God say you are?
- What story does He want your life to tell?
- When did God give value to you?
- Where does your story fit in the higher story of who God is?
- Why did God create you?

Who

What

When

Where

Why

As we examine the women of the Old Testament, we will zero in on the *Imago Dei* over and over. Learning to see ourselves and the people around us as image bearers is a game changer. Eve isn't defined by her relationships or her mistakes; she is defined by her Creator. In the same way, you are not defined by *your* relationships, *your* mistakes, *your* gifts, *your* talents, *your* dreams, *your* beauty, *your* flaws. You are defined by your Creator.

A reporter's job is to uncover the truth. In this session, I challenge you to uncover the truth about your identity by digging deep into God's Word.

**Look up the following passages. Use the truth found in each verse to complete the "I am" statement.**

**Matthew 5:13-15 says I am...**

**John 15:15-16 says I am...**

**Galatians 3:26 says I am...**

**Ephesians 2:10 says I am...**

**1 Thessalonians 1:4 says I am...**

Read Genesis 2:8-25.

**What words would you use to describe Adam and Eve's reality in these verses?**

If you chose words like perfect, beautiful, or peaceful, you've got the right picture.

Adam and Eve were created by God with tender care. There was no suffering or strain to be found in a single corner of Eden. Everything about their existence was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

**Take a moment to scroll through today's top headlines. Do you see any remnants of Eden? Or does it feel more like paradise has been lost?**

**Think about your own life. Does it seem filled with purpose, blessings, and a God-given mission? Or are your days jammed with pressure, stress, and mundane tasks?**

The same God who created Eve in His own image, created you in His image. The God who spoke our planet into perfect existence is the same God who rules and reigns over our broken world. God hasn't changed, but it seems everything else has. Eve's story is critical to helping us understand why.

In the beginning, Eve's life was perfect. If we fast-forward, we see that it didn't stay that way for long. In just a few chapters, Adam and Eve's stories took a dramatic and devastating turn. They were evicted from their home in paradise and forced to live a harsh life outside the gates of Eden. Their oldest son, Cain, murdered their younger son, Abel. Life went from "very good" to very bad for Adam and Eve with a single bite of forbidden fruit.



You likely already know the story, but let's revisit it while digging deep. Read Genesis 3. Be on the lookout for clues to the higher story. Here are some questions to get you thinking:

- Where was God when Eve was tempted?
- What was the serpent trying to convince Eve about God?
- How might Eve have responded differently to the serpent if she remembered she was made in God's image?
- How did God respond to Eve's sin?

**What words would you use to describe Adam and Eve's reality after the fall?**

It's tough to describe how devastating sin is. Since we've never known the sin-free life Adam and Eve temporarily enjoyed in Eden, our hearts and minds can barely comprehend the peace, joy, and unity they experienced before the fall. We see the world through sin-tainted glasses.

**Read the curse handed down by God in Genesis 3:14-19. Rewrite this passage in your own words, noting how you've felt the impact of sin in your own life.**

As we read Eve's story, it is tempting to see her sin as the end of all that is good. But that's not the whole story. Like us, Eve's story is marked by two key themes: sin and redemption. We'll explore the meaning of redemption throughout the pages of this study. Eve's identity is not defined by who she was but by whose image she bears. The theme of her story is not the fall but God's merciful redemption.

Jesus is a direct descendant of Adam. It's true that Adam and Eve's sin has impacted every generation since the Garden, but it's also true that a Redeemer has been born in their family line to rescue us from the impact of sin.

Jesus was present at Eve's creation. He marked her with His image. Thousands of years later, He paid the price for Eve's sin (and ours) through His death on the cross, making a way for us to be set free from the curse of sin.

Right after God passed down the curse, Eve got a new name. It seems like a strange response to all that just happened, but it's a beautiful reminder to look for the higher story. If we zero in on Eve's sin, we get stuck in the lower story. Look up. See how her life points to God's goodness and grace.

### **What name did Adam give his wife in Genesis 3:20?**

Eve's name means "life-giver." Adam gave her this name because "she was the mother of all the living." Yes, Eve sinned. Sin always leads to death. But even in the shadow of sin and death, Eve's story is about life. Her name tells the story of the Life-giver. Does yours?

## When? The Beginning and the End

Great stories have great beginnings. See if you can match these famous first lines with the right story.

“It’s a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

Charlotte’s Web  
by E.B. White

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

The Voyage of the Dawn  
Treader by C.S. Lewis

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”

A Tale of Two Cities  
by Charles Dickens

“Where’s Papa going with that ax?”

Pride and Prejudice  
by Jane Austen

### Write out Genesis 1:1.

This is the beginning of Eve’s story. It is the beginning of yours too. It’s such a simple truth, but one we are prone to forget. The first verse of the first book of the Bible doesn’t start with “In the beginning, Eve ...” or “In the beginning, Adam ...” Eve’s story begins with God. Your story begins with God. This truth is more important than you may realize. Let’s dig a little deeper.

Fill in the blanks to summarize the following verses.

Jesus is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ “from the dead.” He has “\_\_\_\_\_ in everything.” **COLOSSIANS 1:18**

“I am the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_,” says the Lord God, “the one who \_\_\_\_\_, who \_\_\_\_\_, and who is \_\_\_\_\_, the Almighty.” **REVELATION 1:8**

“I am the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_,  
the first and the last, the \_\_\_\_\_ and the  
\_\_\_\_\_.” **REVELATION 22:13**

God describes Himself as the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the *beginning* and the *end*. Every story begins and ends with Him. If Eve’s life began with her birth and ended forever with her death, it would be a sad and simple story. The same is true for you. If the life you live between your first cry and your last was the only story you ever got to tell, it would feel more like a footnote than a great novel. This truth can lead to two reactions in our hearts.

1. It can make us feel insignificant, like our stories don’t matter.
2. It can make us feel significant because we are a part of something huge.

I hope you will choose to see God’s truth through the lens of the second option. When we see ourselves as a part of the bigger story—the story of God and His work among His people—our story starts to take on real significance. He invites us to be a part of something so much bigger than what we can accomplish in the days He gives us on Earth. We are a part of a story that goes on into eternity.

**God’s story is as complex and beautiful as He is, but it is possible to boil it down to the big idea. Look up the first verse of the Bible (Gen. 1:1) and the last two verses of the Bible (Rev. 22:20-21). Record them as a single paragraph.**

Consider this the Twitter version of God’s truth. The story of humanity began when God created us, and it ends when He returns for us. All of us are somewhere between that great beginning and the best ending ever written. God holds and controls the beginning of your days and the end. What a comforting truth!

Psalms 139:5 is a favorite passage of Scripture for me. It promises that God has “encircled me” and “placed [His] hand on me.” He is all around me. There is no me without Him.

As you close today’s lesson, spend some time praying through Psalm 139. Thank God for His promises. Worship Him for who He is: the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Ask Him to help you live out the bigger story of who He is instead of focusing on the smaller story of who you are.



## The Bigger Story

*Gospel* is a word you will read often on the pages of this study. If you grew up in the church, it's likely a word you've heard many times before. But what is the gospel, exactly? That's something we need to clear up before we go much further.

I'll let you go first. Use the space below to define the gospel. (No Googling or asking for help.) It's okay to struggle with this. The gospel is an idea of cosmic significance. It's not easy to sum it up in a few sentences. Let's try anyway.

### The Gospel is:

**Before we dig too much deeper, let's anchor ourselves with another important truth. Summarize Galatians 1:6-9.**

It seems that misunderstanding the basics of the gospel is not a new problem. Paul wrote these words to the church in Galatia. These were Christians who seemed to be struggling to understand the gospel. Paul's prayer for these believers was that they would have a clear understanding of the gospel. I am praying the same thing for you.

**What clues do we find about the definition of the gospel from this passage?**

**According to verse 7, how many versions of the gospel exist?**

Paul corrected the Galatians because they were wrongly believing other gospels, then he stopped in his tracks and wrote, "not that there is another gospel" (v. 7). There is only one gospel. If we keep reading this verse we discover it is "the gospel of Christ."

Pastor Tim Keller defines the gospel this way:

*The “gospel” is the good news that through Christ the power of God’s kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. When we believe and rely on Jesus’ work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God, that kingdom power comes upon us and begins to work through us.<sup>1</sup>*

And pastor John Piper sums the gospel up in a single sentence.

*The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy.<sup>2</sup>*

### **What do these two definitions have in common? How do they line up with Paul’s words in Galatians 2?**

Just like Jesus is the theme of every story, He is the hero of the gospel. While the gospel is certainly huge in its significance, its definition is surprisingly simple.

1. We are sinners.
2. Christ is our Savior.
3. Only through Him are we released from the punishment of sin and free to spend eternity with our Creator.

Where does the story of the gospel begin? Let’s retrace our steps to Eve and the garden for the answer.

Jesus is essential to the gospel, but the gospel didn’t start when Jesus came to earth as a baby. Remember from the Digging Deeper section of this week that Jesus was present at the beginning of creation. He has always been included in this story. The truth of the gospel arrived on the scene shortly after He spoke the world into existence.

Review Genesis 3:1-7.

The first *tenet*, or *principle*, of the gospel is that we are sinners. Here we see that truth on full display. Eve sinned by taking the forbidden fruit and disobeying God's law. As daughters of Eve, we repeat her mistakes through the generations. But the gospel gives us hope.

### **What did God do for Eve in Genesis 3:21?**

He clothed her. This is actually a beautiful picture of the gospel.

### **Read Isaiah 61:10. What does God clothe His people in?**

As His children we wear “garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness.” Eve's story is our story. She sinned and God clothed and cared for her. We sin and He still gives us clean garments that we don't deserve and welcomes us into His kingdom.

**End this week's lesson by writing out a prayer to God, thanking Him for transforming your story into a gospel story.**