

THE STORY

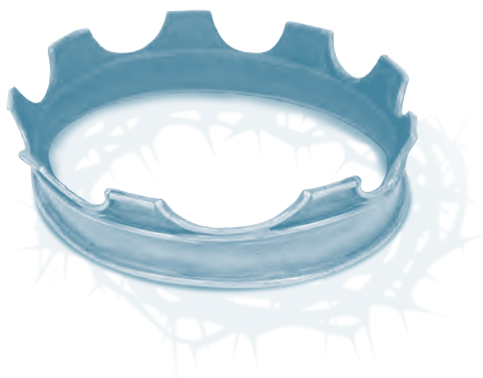
365 DEVOTIONS



DISCOVER YOUR ROLE IN GOD'S STORY

THE STORY

DEVOTIONAL



 ZONDERVAN®

ZONDERVAN

The Story Devotional

Copyright © 2014 by Zondervan

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

ISBN 978-0-310-08475-4

Excerpts taken from *The Story*. Copyright © 2005, 2008, 2011 by Zondervan. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation. © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design: Greg Jackson, *Thinkpen*

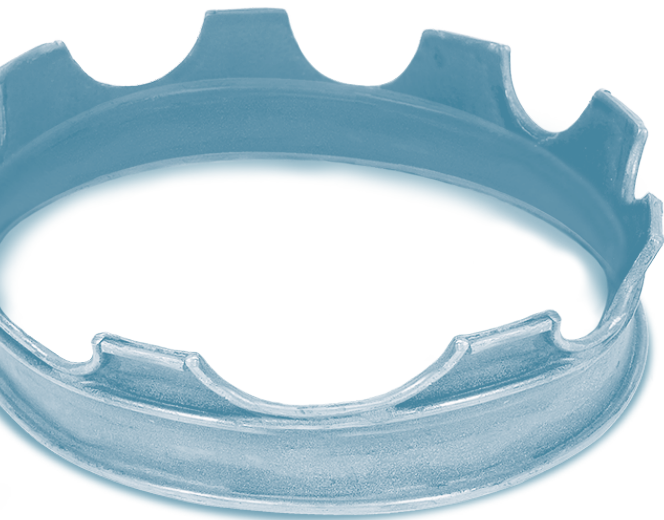
Crown of thorns photograph: Oksana Bratanova, *Shutterstock.com*

Interior design: Walter Petrie

Printed in the United States

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 /RRD/ 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

THE OLD TESTAMENT



DAY 1

OUT OF NOTHING, SOMETHING

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep. . . . And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

GENESIS 1:1–3

We all know the power of words. You may remember what the bully said to you on the kindergarten playground, or what one of your parents said to you in a moment of utter frustration.

On the other hand, maybe you remember as if it were yesterday what the coach said to let you know he believed in you. Or when your sixth-grade teacher helped you recognize in yourself an area of giftedness.

Human words are powerful—powerful to tear down and powerful to build up. And God’s words are infinitely more powerful. “God said”—and things happened! Where nothing had been, there was now something!

Consider what words God has spoken over you: you are his chosen (Colossians 3:12), loved (Ephesians 5:25), provided for (Matthew 6:32–33), protected (Psalm 18:2), and his child (1 John 3:1). What God speaks, happens; so live in the reality of what he says about you!

LET THE CREATIVE POWER OF GOD’S WORDS
RE-CREATE YOU IN CHRIST’S IMAGE.

DAY 2

"LET . . ."

God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so.

GENESIS 1:11

The simple statement "Let the land produce vegetation" belies the almost unimaginable complexity needed for the task.

Plants need water and the God-designed water cycle—evaporation, condensation, precipitation. Plants need sunlight, and God had placed the earth the perfect distance from the sun so that this planet could sustain life. God created different plants for warm and wet and cool and dry climates. Plants need a constant source of carbon dioxide—and the animals God was planning needed a constant source of oxygen. The perfect symbiotic relationship—per God's design.

God also saw that each plant had the right nutrients, the ideal temperature, and the necessary protection from the elements. "Let the land produce vegetation"—those simple words hardly suggest the intricacy, the complexity, of God's creation, and they don't begin to explain the mystery of the spark of life existing in every seed.

WHAT KIND OF POWER ARE YOU SPEAKING
INTO PEOPLE'S LIVES WITH YOUR WORDS—
CREATIVE POWER OR DESTRUCTIVE?

DAY 3

A GLIMPSE OF GOD'S GLORY

God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. . . And God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:16, 18

As Psalm 19:1 says, the heavens truly do declare the glory of God, and those glorious heavens are mind-bogglingly vast.

If Earth were the size of a grape, Jupiter would be a large grapefruit; Saturn, an orange; Uranus and Neptune, lemons; and the sun's diameter, five feet.

Now imagine the grape-sized Earth on the corner of a city block. The moon would be about a foot from the grape-Earth. The sun would be about a city block away—and Jupiter, five blocks away from the sun. Saturn, ten blocks; Uranus, twenty blocks; and Neptune, thirty. And you'd be the size of an atom.¹ And there's the massive star Betelgeuse, the red supergiant Mu Cephei, and VY Canis Majoris with its 1.7-billion-mile diameter.²

God's heavens declare his glory—his size, his magnificence, his grandeur, his majesty, his power, his order, his wonder. When you look at the stars, let them prompt you to worship their maker—and yours!

YOUR GOD HOLDS THE PLANETS
IN THEIR ORBITS AND NUMBERS
THE HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD.

DAY 4

AN INTELLIGENT DESIGN

God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:21

If a pocket watch washed up on shore and was discovered by people who had never seen one before, what might their reactions be after they inspected the moving second hand and its inner workings? Would anyone consider it an amazing result of pure chance? Would anyone suggest that all the materials coincidentally came together in the perfect size, shape, and organization and, once all was in place, the watch started to work? Doubtful, isn't it? The very existence of the pocket watch suggests the existence of a Creator.

Individuals today look around at God's amazing creation and don't see (or don't let themselves see) that there must be a Creator behind it all. Each one of the variety of creatures living in the skies and in the oceans eats, breathes, and reproduces . . . by chance?

We human beings are without excuse: every aspect of creation points to our Creator-God!

MAY GOD'S AMAZING CREATION
PROMPT US TO PRAISE HIM!

DAY 5

WHAT A MENAGERIE!

God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.

GENESIS 1:24

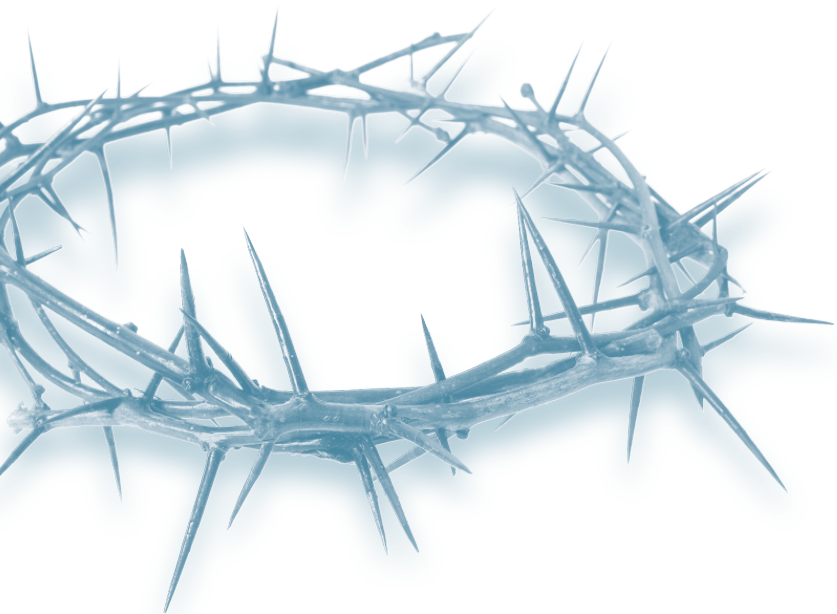
What critters come to mind when you hear the word *livestock*? Cows and horses and pigs? What about Brahman bulls and water buffalo and donkeys and llamas? And did you know over eight hundred breeds of cattle are recognized around the world?

What do you think of when you hear the words *wild animals*? Don't limit yourself to lions and tigers and bears. What about manatees, platypi, and anteaters?

Then there are those members of the animal world you've probably never met: the blobfish, the aye-aye, the star-nosed mole, the three-foot, coconut-eating coconut crab, and the list goes on. The creativity God used in designing the animal kingdom is only a fraction of the energy he used in making you.

THE CARE GOD EXERCISED IN CRAFTING
YOU IS THE PINNACLE OF GOD'S CREATIVE
CRAFTSMANSHIP, CARE, AND JOY!

THE NEW TESTAMENT



DAY 244

"IN THE BEGINNING"

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

JOHN 1:1–4

Some people like riddles; others don't. Some like biographies; others don't. Some like to analyze literature; others just want to read it. And what do those statements have to do with the first four verses of John's gospel?

First, where else in God's Word have you read "In the beginning"? Yes, Genesis 1:1. As we learned in elementary school, biographies are nonfiction, and these four biographies of Jesus—the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—whatever your opinion of the genre, cannot be ignored. Finally, this passage can sound something like a riddle, but here comes the *ah-ha!* moment.

The Old Testament opens with "In the beginning God"; the gospel of John, with "In the beginning was the Word." In John's gospel, "the Word" is God who came in the flesh to dwell on this earth. Of course that statement raises all kinds of questions—when, how, and, most importantly, why. Keep reading!

AS FAMILIAR AS JOHN 1:1–4 MAY BE, TRY TO
HEAR THIS TRUTH AFRESH—AND BE AWED.

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. . . . His kingdom will never end.”

LUKE 1:30–33

Don’t worry!” triggers worry. “Don’t laugh” can prompt the giggles. And “Don’t be afraid” means you have good reason to be afraid. Such was the case here as the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, a young virgin pledged to marry a man named Joseph, yet chosen by God to play a unique and crucial role in history.

The angel began with, “Greetings, you who are highly favored!” (Luke 1:28). The account says that Mary was “greatly troubled” (v. 29), which is hardly synonymous with feeling “highly favored”! And those troubled feelings undoubtedly increased as this bride-to-be learned that she was to give birth to the Son of the Most High.

How would she begin to explain this to Joseph—or her mom? What about her engagement? And what would the neighbors think? “Don’t be afraid”? How could Mary be anything *but* afraid? The angel’s message turned her world upside down.

GABRIEL’S ANNOUNCEMENT CHANGED
NOT ONLY MARY’S WORLD BUT ALSO
THE COURSE OF WORLD HISTORY.

A WILLING SERVANT

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. . . .

*“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. . . .
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.”*

LUKE 1:38, 46–49

How well do you change gears? “But I just made dinner, and now you want to go out?” “I had an outfit planned, and now it’s raining.”

The news the angel Gabriel brought Mary didn’t mean a mere change of gears. It meant a complete change of expectations for the entire course of her life. And her reaction was remarkable: “I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.”

What an example to those of us who prefer familiarity to spontaneity! Mary humbly accepted this radical change of direction in her life. In trust, she yielded herself—her dreams, her plans, her very body—to the Lord. And then she celebrated in song the privilege of being used by him in his kingdom plan.

**LORD, TEACH US TO YIELD WITH GRACE
AND WITH FAITH TO YOUR PLANS FOR US.**

DAY 247

KUDOS TO JOSEPH

An angel of the Lord appeared [to Joseph] in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

MATTHEW 1:20–21

You are absolutely glowing!” “We want to throw you a shower!” “Where are you registered?” A pregnancy tends to be much more about Mom than Dad, more about Mary than Joseph.

But let’s consider Joseph’s situation. He probably wanted to believe Mary, but he was in the difficult situation of being engaged to a woman whom his family and friends would now despise. And staying with Mary would definitely cost him his standing in the community, his success as a carpenter, and his future role in the synagogue. Certainly breaking off the engagement was the best option. But then Joseph had a visitor. And Joseph chose to do “what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife” (Matthew 1:24).

JOSEPH’S ROLE DURING MARY’S PREGNANCY
INDICATES THE FAITH AND GODLY
CHARACTER OF THIS REMARKABLE MAN.

DAY 248

AUTHOR OF HISTORY, PROMISE MAKER, PROMISE KEEPER

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. . . . And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

LUKE 2:1, 3–4

The Lord works in mysterious ways. Some of that mystery lies in the fact that he is sovereign. He must always be at work to accomplish his good and perfect purpose for the world and, simultaneously, for individuals. Three verses from Luke 2 offer a clear illustration of God moving.

First, Caesar Augustus decreed that a census should be taken. Whatever his purposes were, a much bigger purpose was being accomplished. God was moving Joseph and his pregnant wife to Bethlehem—and he was doing so very near her due date!

Second, that the Baby would be born in Bethlehem had been prophesied approximately seven hundred years earlier (see Micah 5:2) and was now being fulfilled. And that the Son was born to a virgin fulfilled another prophecy, Isaiah 7:14.

Nothing that happens in God's universe is random.

CHRISTIANITY IS ROOTED IN
CONFIRMED HISTORICAL EVENTS.

APPENDIX: THE STORY CONTINUES

To go deeper in *The Story*, use this chart to reference the complete text that is excerpted in this book. Each devotion is listed by the chapter in which it appears in *The Story*, and the page numbers listed in ***bold italic*** refer to the page numbers used in *The Story*.

Creation: The Beginning of Life As We Know It

1. Out of Nothing, Something *see page 1*
2. "Let . . ." *see page 1–2*
3. A Glimpse of God's Glory *see page 2*
4. An Intelligent Design *see page 2*
5. What a Menagerie! *see page 2*
6. God's Handiwork *see page 3*
7. The Best for Last *see page 3*
8. Counterintuitive *see page 4*
9. Knowing Our Needs—and Meeting Them *see page 4*
10. "Really?" *see page 5*
11. Just Don't Do It! *see page 5*
12. Before They Ate—and After *see page 5*

13. "Because You Have Done This" *see page 6*
14. Our Compassionate and Gracious God *see page 6–7*
15. Crouching Sin *see page 7*
16. Heartbroken Yet Faithful *see page 8*
17. Lord, Did I Hear You Right? *see page 8–9*
18. Life in the Ark—and You Are There! *see page 9–10*
19. Whew! I Mean, Thank You! *see page 10*
20. "Never Again!" *see page 11*

God Builds a Nation

21. Could You Please Be More Specific? *see page 13*
22. By Definition *see page 14*
23. The Best Answer to Prayer *see page 15*
24. An Unlikely Cast of Characters *see page 15–16*
25. Helping God *see page 16*
26. A Sign of the Covenant *see page 17*
27. Grace That's Worth the Wait *see page 17–18*
28. Laughter in Her Old Age *see page 18*
29. Our Unpredictable God *see page 19*
30. Giving Our Best *see page 19–20*
31. Actions Speak Loudly *see page 20*
32. Perfect Timing! *see page 20*
33. Dark Deceit *see page 22*
34. Your Part, God's Part *see page 22*
35. Wrestling with God *see page 23–24*
36. A 180-Degree Turn *see page 25*