

inscribed
• BIBLE STUDIES FOR WOMEN •

EXODUS

STOP WALKING
IN CIRCLES

REBECCA BENDER



EXODUS

STOP WALKING IN CIRCLES

BIBLE STUDY | 6 LESSONS

REBECCA BENDER

Exodus

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*To my Nannie Phyllis, you have prayed me through and
are a constant reminder of what is good and true.
I am here because of the promises God made you.*

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A MESSAGE FROM REBECCA

I WASN'T RAISED IN CHURCH, quite the contrary, I grew up in a broken home riddled with substance abuse and mental health issues, absent of much hope. I found myself a full-blown addict at the age of 21 standing outside a rehab days before Christmas in 2002, smoking menthols, high as a kite, listening to a former gang member lead me through the “sinner’s prayer” so I could go inside and get sober. I’d intentionally avoided faith-based rehabs because of the judgments and dismissals I’d experienced from people in the church.

Yet, somehow, it was in that rehab, full of drug addicts, people in prostitution and gang members, where the string of moments when I’d almost died in life, were all highlighted as second chances. Where I just knew I was being given another shot—from something or someone way bigger than this world.

I was given the Bible in rehab, and I started learning how to contextualize what I read so it made sense to me and *my* life. I fell in the love with the first five books of the Bible because the people were just as messed up as I was, and I could relate to their struggles. But please note, my experience still tells me to be careful of religiosity—it didn’t go so well for some people in the Bible either.

After I got a taste of freedom in the words and stories I read, I still

went back to a violent man who I thought I could change with my new “bippity boppity boo” idea of how God answers prayer. What a misguided understanding I still carried. I had no clue what exploitation and human trafficking was back then, and I underestimated what it looked like to break out of true mental chains and cycles of abuse modeled through generations before me. I just thought I was in domestic violence and that prostitution was “our hustle.” I knew of freedom; it just wasn’t fully mine yet.

See, no matter what bondage any of us has ever experienced—super extreme, TV-mini-series worthy, within our mind of comparison and devaluation, or literally anywhere in between—we are still walking in circles until we stop and make the choice to focus, change our habits, and accept the help we are offered. Not one of us can claim a day or week without a nasty thought or angry feeling, so let’s not pretend.

We can ALL relate to the feeling of being trapped. Trapped in toxic habits, in dead-end jobs, ugly pasts, uglier presents, in unfulfilling relationships, in mental chains of envy, bitterness, anger, pride, or selfish ambition. It’s *all* stopping us from reaching our true destinies.

Whatever past you come from; you have promises waiting for you in Christ. You are not alone—I want to reach the promises that God has for me also. I keep walking in circles, too, friend, failing test after test, trial after trial. Truth is there is nothing any of us can do that hasn’t been done, and God guarantees He is *still* for us and won’t let us go until we believe it. So, let’s dig in together, breaking habits that maybe we don’t even know we have, and reach our promised land.

—Rebecca Bender

INTRODUCTION

EACH OF US HAS HABITS and hang-ups that can sometimes stop us from getting a promotion, hurt our relationships with those closest to us, or stunt our growth toward deeper levels of intimacy.

You know who God is calling you to be but sometimes wonder how you are ever going to get there. If you knew what was holding you back, then you'd fix it and be there already, right? This journey through Exodus is designed to give you some tools to help you break those bad habits and move you into your promised land, the place God is calling you to.

Exodus has 40 chapters we could explore, and I encourage you to do that. But this is a study on purpose and destiny, so we will be focusing more specifically on the beginning five chapters, and then twelve through thirty-two. Believe me when I say we could do an entire Bible study just on Moses, or just on the burning bush, or any other of the many gold nuggets in this fabulous book. For our journey together, we're going to stay focused. Take your time and read each suggested passage to give yourself a clear understanding of the context that we will further explore.

Remember this: The God that freed you from addiction can free you from gossip. The God that moved you away from abuse can move you away from a critical spirit. The God that brought you back to life can bring you into your destiny. The God who seems to be silent, or is not where you thought he'd be, is working and leading you still. You don't have to walk in circles hoping for more, longing for deeper connections

with purpose and passion. He has a plan for your life and intends to see you reach it just like He intended the children of Israel to reach Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. Just like them, we have to break some habits along the way in order to develop our character so we can sustain the calling we are moving into.



REMEMBER THE PROMISE

STEAM ROSE from the Manhattan sidewalk as Crystal heaved her red suitcase from the back seat of the taxi. The car lurched forward. “Wait!” she called, as she snatched her purse from the back seat. The driver hit the gas and the heavy door slammed shut. Mud and bits of gravel flew past as Crystal backed up, her stiletto heel teetering near a grate in the sidewalk. She could already feel rain streaking down the back of her neck and soaking her shirt. She pulled her newest copy of the *Perinatal Journal* from her purse and held it over her head while she searched for numbers on the building that would tell her she was in the right place. As the newest doctor at the city’s top labor and delivery hospital, she was desperate to make a good impression.

She needed to clean up and drop her suitcase in her new apartment before she headed to the office. She recognized the address above a gleaming glass door in the building behind her and made a run for it. Ducking inside, she glanced over at the doorman, wiping a drip from her chin and fumbling for her keys. “Hi,” she smiled breathlessly. “I’m Dr. Smith, the new tenant in 802. Nice weather y’all are having.” He scowled at the puddle forming under her feet and went back to scrolling on his phone. Not quite the southern charm Crystal was used to. “This should be fun,” she mumbled as she pushed the elevator button for the eighth floor.

Now, let me paint this picture for you another way:

Rain splattered through the opening of the dirty canvas on the covered wagon, but Crystal was too tired to tie it shut again. She squished her toes around inside her drenched leather shoes and hugged her bag close to her chest. Hopefully at least some of her books and instruments wouldn't be damaged beyond repair. She leaned forward and peeked out at the main street of Denver, Colorado. It was lined with wagon tracks and slick with steaming mud. Rough wooden sidewalks tottered on each side of the crowded street. The sun peeked from behind the clouds, glaring off the dirty glass windows of the local saloon. Crystal tried to remind herself why she was at it again, relocating her one-woman show to Denver to follow her passion for midwifery. A woman helping women deliver babies: Why was this such a hard concept for people? She wiped her face and tried to smooth her hair as the wagon lurched to a stop. "This should be fun," Crystal mumbled as she gathered her skirt and stepped over the side of the wagon.

SETTING MATTERS

A seminary professor once said that if you do not have the context—the setting—you're trying to understand a conversation by reading only one side of a text message.

Setting paints a picture that unlocks clues about a character and what they want. Subtle descriptions about environment or appearance can lead us to important points of the story that we could miss without understanding the setting.

If you're anything like me, you probably pictured every step Crystal Smith took as I described them. Each tiny detail offers clues as to who the woman is, what her interests are, and a bit of her background. With these nuggets, we might be able to anticipate what lies ahead for her. What did you imagine differently about Crystal's character when we switched from modern-day Manhattan to the early nineteenth century of the American West? What types of problems might she have encountered in muddy

Colorado versus New York City? How do we think of options and opportunities available to her when we compare these two time periods?

Time periods, eras, surroundings, buildings, roads, and characters all play a major role in helping us better understand a storyline. This is especially true when we are studying the Bible. Setting and context can help us interpret what the writers are telling us in this ancient and still living God-breathed text.

THE CONTEXT OF EXODUS

I would be remiss to start our study without diving into the setting of Exodus. We are going to use the inductive study method—a fancy way to say Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How—which will help us to better interpret what is happening, where our lives collide with the text, and how we can apply the same lessons learned by those thousands of years ago today.

“In our modern world, we have cultural nuances that we have come to know and understand. These consist of various ideas and ways of thinking such as natural rights, freedom, capitalism, democracy, individualism, globalism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, market economy, scientific naturalism, an expanding universe, empiricism, and natural laws, just to name a few. Though many of these are seen in the United States, these concepts are known and flow around the globe and affect many cultures. In the ancient world, we saw varying community groups: Egyptians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Canaanites, Armenians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Israelites. And despite the variations among cultures and across the centuries certain elements remained static. Some of these cultural nuances include community identity, the comprehensive and ubiquitous control of the gods, the role of kingship, divination, the centrality of the temple, the mediatory role of images, the reality of the spirit world and magic, and the movement of the celestial bodies is the communication of the gods. If we want to understand what the Bible is teaching, we have to know what the ancient cognitive environment was, in the same way

that if we want to know what the Bible is saying we have to be able to read Hebrew. This is what we mean when we say the cultural cognitive environment must be translated.”¹

The children of Israel were enslaved for 400 years—20 generations of people. Think about that for a moment. Do you have any knowledge of your own lineage 20 generations back? These people had not only forgotten the promises God made to their forefathers, but their circumstances and culture were inherently ignorant of the character of God, how good He was and how much He had in store for them. This is not far off from us today. Sometimes we need a reminder of the promises of God while we are living in a culture that can muddy and cloud our understanding. As we do a deeper dive into Exodus, I trust that the Holy Spirit will help you recognize your own setting, your own history, and your own forgotten promises. May you learn to lean in and hear Him so you can prepare for what is ahead.

Several years ago, I was speaking at a local church in my hometown. A girl I had gotten in trouble with during high school was in the audience. She had been suspended for fighting a few times, and we both had babies out of high school. I knew her brother was in jail for selling drugs. After I shared my testimony that Sunday, we started talking in the lobby.

“I didn’t know you had been through all of that after school,” she said, raising her eyebrows.

“Ya, pretty crazy!” I laughed.

“I’m glad I came today.” She nodded, focusing her eyes intently on her feet.

“I show up at church every now and then . . .” she said softly, her attention now shifting around the room. “I hear the pastor from the stage and it’s not bad—it’s fine. But I know he doesn’t get it.”

Her eyes finally looked into mine.

“He doesn’t understand the struggle of lives like ours,” she said. I could see the heartache in her eyes.

She was right. Many people, myself included, sit in Sunday morning chairs and we hear what can come across like cliché Scriptures being thrown around like coffee mug mantras. Or maybe under all the

performative displays we still aren't getting a heart encounter with the creator of the universe. Either way, we go home and believe we're the only ones not getting it because we "*don't hear Him like that*" or "*we come with too much baggage to sort through.*"

But the reality is none of that is true. You have a promise and a call from God regardless of your past. You DO hear from God—we all do. How you hear from Him might be different from someone else and different in each season, but we all hear Him. When we press in, when we put it on the calendar to seek Him, when we wade through our endless to-do lists and racing thoughts, we will find more direction and purpose than we could ever hope for or imagine. Our "hearing," like all muscles when being exercised, gets stronger.

I promise you, friend, when you have a true encounter with God, you cannot help but be transformed. This week, may you simply be open to whatever He has for you.

MONDAY

Inheritance

Have you ever sat and wondered, *How did I get here?* Or better yet, *Where am I going next?*

I sat in my bedroom early one morning trying to focus on prayer. While my kids and husband got ready downstairs, I was determined to make this my new "war room" where I did spiritual battle for my family, but I was getting nothing. I tried to journal; I read parts of the Bible; I turned on worship music. I tried standing, then sitting, then laying down. Still nothing. What once was easy—ushering in the presence of God—seemed harder and harder. Thoughts, anxiety, and to-do lists crowded my mind. I felt lost without a map.

This went on for a few weeks. Some days I'd just sit and weep with no real words. I was discouraged and emotionally exhausted and needed God's direction more than ever.

It was an incredibly challenging time in my life for many reasons



and my frustration was piqued by how the absence of God in the way I thought I needed him felt. It was a season. A hard, lonely, difficult season. You know the one? It feels more like a Grand Canyon-sized chasm, and you wonder how you'll ever move on. When in the past you've sensed gentle nods from the Lord or highlights from the Holy Spirit in prayer, now you hear nothing but echoes of your own questions .

How about the seasons without any real “destination,” with no idea of the future or what God has in store? In the midst of these seasons, our culture seems to shout self-focused motivational sayings. Social media influencers pitch us tweetable lines, and every day there just seems to be less to admire or imitate and more to question. Our world is more advanced than ever before, more dazzling than it has ever been. We have more technology, more buildings, more money, more population, more glitz . . . more, more, more. And yet in every season we have fewer answers, less direction, and a growing sense of emptiness.

This is not so different from the Egyptian culture where we find the children of Israel when God starts calling them into their next season. When our story picks up, the great pyramid of Giza and the iconic sphynx were already twenty-five-hundred years old! Egypt was a dazzling, iconic civilization that flourished with professions and beauty and travel. It was New York meets Los Angeles meets Las Vegas—a metropolitan mecca. The center for trade and commerce, art, and education of its time.

The children of Israel were completely removed from the promises of their forefathers. They were enveloped in the rituals, social behavior, beliefs, laws, customs, and habits of the Egyptian culture. And maybe like you, they needed a little reminder of the promises received from God generations prior. Maybe they needed a reminder of that promise from their twenties that they thought they got wrong. Or maybe they needed to be reminded of that thing, when they were little, that they used to daydream about and play about before life settled in and daily items piled up so high that those dreams were dismissed as “child’s play.” Maybe they needed a reminder of what God had promised their parents or their grandparents as inheritance and what they were leaving their kids.

The Beginning of a Great Nation

READ EXODUS 1:1-7

¹ “These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ² Ruben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naftali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ All the descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷ but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.”

We pick up in Exodus 1:1, 400 years after the end of Genesis. Joseph has died after serving as Pharaoh’s second-in-command and the Hebrew civilization is fully settled in Egypt. Let’s take a quick recap of what happened to get us to this moment:

- Abraham is the father of the faith, through whom God has chosen to bring forth the Messiah. In Genesis 12:2–3, we are introduced to the plan of salvation through the Abrahamic Covenant. Through Abraham and Sarah, the Chaldeans emerge in modern-day southern Iraq. They move to Canaan, and God makes His promise: He is going to make Abraham into a great nation, blessing him, and making his name great. He will bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse him.
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob carry the promise. Eventually, Jacob’s son Joseph and his entire family are living in Egypt with Joseph working as second only to Pharaoh. They are given the land of Goshen, and 73 people live there. After 400 years, about 20 generations, the Hebrews in Goshen have multiplied and filled the land.

Before we continue, let me address the Pharaohs. There are more than eleven Pharaohs who ruled during the oppression of the Hebrews



and the period of Exodus. However, throughout this study, you will see at least three Pharaohs who are central to our story: one who ruled while Joseph served, one who ruled over the childhood of Moses, and a third who ruled throughout the plagues and the return of Moses. Scholars are unclear about which Pharaoh may have been in charge during each specific timeframe, but we have some guesses. Regardless, it is helpful to recognize that we are dealing with at least three different demigod Pharaohs as we consider the context of our story.

Also, the exact time period of the Exodus is under constant debate by scholars due to a variety of evidence found that aligns with varying parts of the narrative text. But for this study we're going to stick to the years between 1300–1250 BC which puts Rameses II as the Pharaoh at the time.

Keep that in mind as you read, because not only does the setting matter, but our context is crucial as well. I have a friend who posted a beautiful picture of him and his wife and their four children on Instagram. I wept. I wept because I know that several years prior, his first wife, the biological mother of those children, died a tragic death. The wife in this picture had stepped in, not to replace, but to love and support. This photo takes on a whole new meaning when you have the backstory.

Exodus is one of the most fundamental books of Christianity and Judeo belief systems. It is THE entire book on which our spiritual heritage rests. It contains the Ten Commandments and the basis for how God creates His own people into a holy nation. The children of Israel, from whom Jewish heritage comes, is birthed out of this moment in Exodus when Hebrew slaves are delivered and formed into a nation. It is the foundation for so many of the additional stories we find in the Bible: Rahab, judges, kings, and priests who come from the tribe of Levi. These details depict how the children of Israel went from Hebrews to Israelites and developed systems of law and monarchy and census and more. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are prequels to Exodus. All are birthed from this book and the story of how they build a nation of people.

Also known as the Torah, these first five books of the Hebrew Bible

(the Pentateuch), are based on the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, 400 years of slavery, and how Moses was used by God to deliver His people; the night of Passover is the night before they left. Many of the customs we see today come out of this one book of the Bible: Exodus. Jesus was Jewish. Jesus's brother, James, is the author of the book of James in the New Testament. It reads differently when you know that James was a devout Jew writing to other Jewish leaders—those who followed the Torah with zeal. You will read that book differently than the books written by Paul (who wrote to Gentiles) when you see the culture that James came from and the history of the people he is speaking to. There is so much about our spiritual culture that is based on these moments in Exodus. When we have this context, it changes the way we read and digest the Word of God.

God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would birth a nation of holy people and be as many as the sand and stars. But holding onto promises when times are hard is not as easy as it seems. It's not easy to hold onto hope and allow it to build your faith, but we are about to learn how the Israelites do exactly that.

Where Our Story Begins

READ GENESIS 50:24-26

²⁴ "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' ²⁵ And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.' ²⁶ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt."

Joseph believed in the promise of God to his ancestors. He remembered that Abraham was to become the father of a nation, and although

he would not live to see it, he knew he could hold onto hope that his bones would enter into the land of promise.

This is where our story begins. Abraham's descendants ended up in Egypt and (in part because of the testimony of Joseph) found favor with Pharaoh, receiving a blessing of the most fertile land in Egypt—Goshen.

They multiplied as promised, and before long they grew to a nation of over two million (we find this count during the census performed in Numbers). Moses arrived on the scene and as he led them out of slavery, their identity shifted from Hebrew to Israelite. They became their own nation, much like other nations at that time: Egyptians, Canaanites, Amalekites, Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians, Arameans, Amorites, Perizzites, etc. From Hebrews to Israelites.

Mistreatment and Misidentification

The word *Hebrew* only occurs a couple of dozen times in the Old Testament and it usually is found in context and connected to an enslaved person. The word is often used in a dismissive, insulting way by Egyptians and Philistines. It appears to reflect not so much an ethnic group as a lower class of people.

READ GENESIS 43:32

"They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians."

Notice anything about the way Joseph was treated in comparison to the Egyptians? He was set aside—not included. Despite being in a position of authority, Joseph was still degraded and disrespected.

Hebrews were not yet known as "Israelites." They weren't even a nation yet. We know that they were set apart and God had great promises

in store for them, but at that time they were slaves living in a foreign land. How often do we find ourselves living more like Hebrews than Israelites? Waiting on our promise, waiting on something to happen—doors shut, feeling dismissed, fighting to see if there is more out there in this big world called life for us?

Can you relate?

Maybe like the Hebrews, you have forgotten the promises before you.

Maybe you have a vague recollection of the inheritance of your lineage, or you are in a place right now that looks very different from the dreams you had as a child.

Life has happened, time has passed, and you wake up one morning and think, *Wasn't I supposed to be an Israelite? Why am I still a Hebrew?*

Exodus carries the promise to move these two million Hebrew descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, out of slavery and oppression into their own land and establish themselves as a holy nation.

This is that story.

Without that rich history, albeit a very high level look chronologically, some may miss that this entire story is birthed out of a promise.

Look up the promises of God in these passages and make note of what was promised:

Gen. 1:28 _____

Gen. 9:1 _____

Gen. 12:1–20 _____

Gen. 17:2,6; 22:17 _____

Gen. 26:4; 28:14 _____

Gen. 35:11; 48:4 _____

A Prayer

God, thank You for the promises You've made to Your people. Thank You that You are a trusted promise keeper, and that You are going to keep Your word to me in the same way You've kept your word to Abraham and his descendants. Amen.

- » Do you see any connection between childhood dreams and the promise you're walking in now or waiting on?
- » Have you ever felt dismissed in your life? What do you need to hear God say to you about that?
- » Consider making a genogram—a spiritual family tree—and look into what you have inherited, good and bad, and pray over it either way.

Journal

Think about a time you had a promise develop differently than you imagined. How did it make you feel when you realized your plans or expectations were different from what God had in store? How did you respond? Journal for a few minutes in full honesty and let your own experience of being led by God come to life on these pages.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

TUESDAY

Like Jacob, He's Changed Your Name

I followed the tour guide through the halls of the Capitol building, in awe of the works of art that filled the halls with beauty. Giant murals lined the walls, and I was fascinated by the stories of American history that each of them told. Around one corner I stopped and stared at a beautiful painting that sat on an easel. It depicted a woman in a long white dress standing on the steps of an altar. The tour guide said her name: Pocahontas. I gasped.

When I lived a life of crime pre-Jesus, I was given the street name *Poca* (short for Pocahontas). I was called Poca for years. As a matter of fact, in a life of crime no one should know your real name for obvious reasons. After I turned my life around, I remember a woman telling me how she saw me in the store and called me by my real name (Rebecca), but I never turned around to greet her. I hadn't been called by my real name for years.

I continued staring at the painting, thinking about my past life and the name I hadn't thought of in years. I listened as the tour guide talked about Pocahontas.

"Then Pocahontas was baptized," said the man. "She was given the Christian name Rebecca."

I was undone.

Right there in the front of that painting I began to weep. No one else knew why I was crying. No one else knew that my old name was Poca. No one knew that the Lord was giving me back the name I was meant for. I realized, looking at that painting, that often what God calls us out of, he calls us to.

The History and the Promise

READ GENESIS 47:1-11

Jacob and his sons are coming from Canaan to settle in the land of Goshen, as a result of the famine in the land. The Pharaoh told Joseph

that any able-bodied men in the family of Jacob could be directed to tend to the Pharaoh's livestock.

By settling in some of the finest land in Egypt (thanks to the blessing from Pharaoh), Jacob was looking toward a promise that was made to his father's father, Abraham. Maybe this was the land God had promised to Abraham. Maybe here, the children of God would eventually become a nation.

At the time of the promise, it seemed impossible because he and his wife Sarah were old. But Abraham believed God's promise, and eventually Isaac (Jacob's father) was born. So, this promise of becoming a great nation was a promise that was passed down from father to son, and then to grandson. And what a promise! Can you imagine how Abraham felt when God told him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar? (If you're not familiar with this story, read Genesis 22.)

This is an important moment of development that I don't want you to miss as you too go after your promise. I picture the moment when God told Abraham to lay Isaac on the altar as a test to see if he would choose obedience or the promise (as he understood it.) Dr. Bill Creasy, on his podcast "Scripture Uncovered," describes the moment of Abraham's strong fatherly hands tightening around his son as he pinned him down. Take a minute to think about this, picture it, process it. The haunting fear in Isaac's eyes staring at his dad who is pinning him down. We can imagine his strained, tearful, angry voice, "Father what are you doing? Stop it . . . You're hurting me." Did Abraham look Isaac in the eyes as he raised his blade, or did he look away with tears? Isaac was grown; this had to be a physical struggle between two grown men. The heartbreak Isaac was feeling in that moment. If you have grown up in an abusive home, you know all too well this look and the fear that rocks you to your core.

This traumatic moment had to impact Abraham and Isaac's relationship because after Genesis 22, there is not one further documentation of Abraham and Isaac interacting or speaking to each other. Nothing.

As a matter of fact, in Genesis 24:1–6, Abraham calls for *his servant* to find Isaac a wife from his lineage, and he does not even talk to his son about it. The transaction goes totally through the servant. As the storyline continues into Genesis chapter 25, after Sarah dies, Abraham takes a new wife and has six more children. But have you ever noticed what happens in verse 5?

“Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac.”

Abraham left *everything* to Isaac. Six additional children, plus Ishmael from Hagar. Eight children in total and he left it all to one? Did he feel remorse? Regret? Did he die feeling tension with the son of his promise? It is always valuable when we can relate Scripture to a circumstance or situation.

- » Strained relationships can be hard. Do you have a strained relationship in your own life?
- » Do you worship your purpose, your promise, and your calling more than obedience?
- » Are you willing to lay your promise down if God asked you to?
- » Has anything in your life become an altar above God?

This story can be a catalyst in our own lives as we take stock of relationships and expectations and learn to lean into obedience and trust in God.

When we think of Bible characters like Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, we tend to picture people in a story from long ago whom we can't necessarily relate to. We sweep by the incredibly relatable traumatic moments of familial struggle and relationship tension. We forget how often we pass on to our children what has been modeled to us. Science has proven in the last few years that unresolved trauma can be passed on genetically in the same way we pass on our hair and eye color.



Wrestling Through Conflict

Regardless of a possible strain in the relationship between his father and grandfather, Jacob held on to the promise that God would make his family into a great nation. He believed that someday they would be more than they were, more than simple Hebrews. I can imagine our shepherd friends sitting around a fire at night, looking up at the stars, wondering what *more* looks like. Wondering if God has something special in store for them. Have you ever daydreamed about a promise? Have you ever thought about it and then decided it wasn't for you? Maybe you thought you were too poor, came from too small of a town, didn't have connections, didn't have the experience or the know-how?

Walking with a Limp into Maturity

In Genesis 32:22 we find Jacob still waiting on this promise of a nation—a people group and a land that they can call their own. And in his desire to understand, he wrestles with an angel; some translations say it is with God Himself. In his struggle he is renamed Israel, which means “to contend with God,” and he comes out with a limp from his hip being put out of joint.

Wrestling, questioning, fighting your way out of hard seasons will cause your walk to look a little different, friend. This can be the maturing that happens when you've lived through hard seasons and learn that it comes with a cost. We all want to be mature—to be able to stand firm and lean on God and do all the things we are told—but those Scriptures can be fleeting if we don't put them into practice when hard seasons come.

Wrestling it out in prayer with God instead of walking away is what we're called to do. The hardships you have endured in your lifetime will challenge you and they will change you. Like Jacob, you may have a new maturity and wisdom, but you'll walk with a limp.

As you continue, consider your own macro-level journey. Do you see any moments in your history that call for talking to God and wrestling it out with him? *Why me? Why did that door shut? Why did that pivot in my promise occur?* Write down what you need to hear Him say to you if you

don't "feel" like you are hearing Him. Remember, it's these moments that shape our destiny because they shift our eyes off bitterness and to Him, the author and finisher of our faith, instead.

A Prayer

God, thank You for being the Father of new beginnings. You have seen the beginnings, the endings, and the in-betweens of my story, and You still believe I am worthy of Your promises. You are renaming me on this journey toward my promised land, and I am grateful to stir my thoughts toward the memories of Your faithfulness. Guide my heart back toward Your words and the work of Your hands in my life. Let me remember the moments You have engaged my story and be encouraged! Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- » Do you have strained relationships from past trauma?

- » Have you ever parented out of regret and, if so, are there things you want to change so that you can stop the unhealthy trauma responses?

- » Have you considered that there have been times when people, things, or promises have been put in a position above God?



- » Are there things your heart is longing for in this season?

- » Are there things you want to list that need some time in lament, wrestling with God over your why?

- » Ask God in prayer if He has a new name for you in this season. Don't use logic. Pick the first name that popped in your head and then research what it means.

WEDNESDAY

Choose Courage Over Fear

Growing up in a small logging town in Oregon, I never could have pictured what it would be like to live in a big city like Las Vegas. But it was interesting how quickly I became accustomed to the lights and sounds of the city once I got there. I became someone who could navigate heavy traffic and expansive casinos like a Las Vegas native. I had been assimilated into the culture before I knew it.

When I think of Egypt at its peak, I often picture scenes from movies like *Gladiator* and *300*. I envision the giant pillars, carvings, systems, and structures that Egypt encapsulated. While that was part of the

Roman Empire, Rome invaded Egypt and much of their empire reflects this landscape.

The Rich Culture of Egypt

It was a flourishing culture with agriculture, artisans, buildings, and a robust writing and mathematical system. Even with this vibrant, colorful culture, we know that groups of people did not mix within social castes in antiquity.

Our study finds itself in the historical time period of 1500–1200 BC, when the Egyptian Empire was at its absolute peak. It dominated the ancient world, one of the most powerful and iconic civilizations in history. The pyramids were over a thousand years old before Moses even came on the scene.

Egyptians wore kohl-rimmed eyes—a combination of coal and animal fat that had been mixed together along with other makeup—not only for decoration and status, but to help protect their faces from the harsh climate conditions in Egypt (hot sun and lots of dust and sand when the wind picked up). Most women wore elaborate wigs both for fashion and to protect themselves from the blazing desert sun.

Their art was exquisite, and there were detailed meanings behind specific colors, gems, and stones. They were the mecca of their day, with the Nile River bringing a huge number of resources to the region. Due to the reliance on artistic culture, artisan cities were common areas in Egypt. Their customs are well depicted through their hieroglyphics and tablets, showing varying artisans: scribes, wine pressers, blanket weavers, musicians, bakers, potters, carpenters, fishers, hunters, embalmers, professional wailers (yep, you heard that right, for funerals), ropemakers, and those involved in different stages of agriculture.

Their ancient formal writing system was hieroglyphics and consisted of over 1,000 distinct characters as well as syllables, cursive fonts, and more. Few civilizations were as advanced as Egypt and fewer still can claim their original discoveries are in use today. Their extremely advanced mathematics system, combined with astronomy, created the

framework for our measurement system of 365 days around the sun as well as 24 hours in a day. It is said that Nefertiti's tomb had a design so intricate, the sun shone through on both her birthday and coronation. Even when recreated recently, scientists could only get the sun to shine through on her birthday, but not both. Their remarkable geometric precision created the cubit (foundational for building the pyramids) as well as the first method of measuring and surveying land. This created the most advanced civil engineering process of canal systems to move water from the Nile to all neighboring fields and cities, allowing life to flourish. Their advanced language of 700–1,000 characters and cursive hieratic, and the invention of papyrus paper with ink allowed their scribes to create an administration structure like never before seen! Their culture spread quickly and flourished!

Enslavement in the Land of Goshen

More than 400 years after Jacob received his new name, the Hebrews find themselves in the land of Goshen on the outskirts of the thriving Egyptian metropolis. But they aren't really "neighbors." They have become slaves.

During the last 400 years, in the most fertile land of the Nile, Goshen, they had grown from 73 people to two million. Think about it, in this era, most girls were getting married and having children at sixteen or seventeen years old and on average had seven children. Run the numbers over 400 years and we actually see in Numbers that they are organized by tribe, counting 603,550 men of fighting age (20–50). Usually around 50 percent of a population is male and female so that would put the population at 1.2 million. Include anyone younger than twenty and over fifty, and we could easily count the population of Hebrews at two million.

Let's revisit the big picture. Abraham was promised that his descendants would be a nation. Isaac is born and later has Jacob. Isaac has trauma and Jacob wrestles through his trauma with God, receiving a new name: Israel. It is Jacob's sons that became *the* twelve tribes of Israel. This is the story of how the Hebrew people became the Israelites.

READ EXODUS 1:8-10

⁸“Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹‘Look,’ he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.’”

We will get into which new Pharaoh of the eighteenth-century BC stepped on the scene later but first we need to camp here for a minute.

The favor that we all remember Joseph receiving in Genesis is gone. Now a new Pharaoh is anxious to rule with his own mind and desires. And he is not keen to start mixing the social castes, because the structure is what provided the stable authority for Pharaoh in the first place. Generally, in Egypt the varying social castes are categorized into three sections: royal, free, and slave.

Protecting the Lineage of Egypt

The Hebrews were living as slaves in Goshen. But why would the Egyptians want to make life miserable for the Jews? Israel was a source of blessing in the land, as Joseph had been before them (Gen. 39:1–6), and they weren’t causing trouble. So, what reason could this Pharaoh have to remove the favor on Jacob and his people? For the answer, we can look to Exodus 1:10:

“Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies and fight against us and leave the country.”

Fear. Pharaoh’s stated reason was that the presence of so many Jews was a security risk. Since the Jews were outsiders—and mistreated ones

at that—in the event of an invasion, they would no doubt ally themselves with the enemy. Goshen is along the international trade route of Via Maris that approaches from the north. Two million mistreated slaves would be the greeting party to any invaders, and Pharaoh knew this was a real concern for Egypt: Winning a war does not begin with an initial encounter between your enemy and the oppressed, enslaved people in your country.

History shows us there were three primary periods during ancient Egypt's lifespan known as the first, second, and third kingdoms. The time between these eras are known as Intermediate periods when Egypt was divided among itself due to rulership. The third period is known as the new kingdom, when Egypt finally reaches its peak and Moses steps onto the scene. The pharaohs during this third period are military driven. They do not want to end up like the first two kingdoms and so become more strategic and advanced in their tactics. They are unprecedented with their invasion tactics, so it makes sense why suddenly, the interest has shifted culturally to invasion and protection.

The name *Pharaoh* actually means “great house” and was a position believed to be passed through birth as god-like beings. His many wives not only assisted in ensuring that his legacy was established, but also helped in the afterlife and were used as a social contract with other countries.

Egyptian court in the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties was known to employ large numbers of state slaves (hence the story of Joseph) as well as for building projects. Wars between Egypt, Asia, Syria, the Arameans, the Hittites, and the Canaanites had taken place, and boundary lines and treaties for trade were established.

Egyptian royal customs were specific, such as eating in order of birthright, but they also had very specific bathing customs, as cleanliness was to be kept up for the afterlife. This is opposite from many slaves and even the free caste in Egypt, where bathing was done in the Nile. The Pharaoh was the deity-like ruler who was equal to a god in their

pantheon. A pantheon is a group of gods in a specific religion. A more known example is Greek mythology and gods and goddesses such as Zeus and Aphrodite. Egyptian religion had their own entire pantheon with stories of creation and what each god represented. The Pharaoh was believed to deliver the messages to the gods. He acted as a divine liaison between humanity and the hundreds of gods.

Egyptians were forced to work part-time as a method of taxation to build pyramids. However, as armies, store cities, and temples grew, they needed more manpower. The Hebrews were the perfect caste system to enslave to assist in this building frenzy.

Specifically, two new store cities were important to this strategic military push. Circle the names of the store cities mentioned in verse 11:

READ EXODUS 1:11-16

¹¹ "So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so, the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³ and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶ "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."

How does this Pharaoh solve the problem of the growing population and fear that the slaves will join their enemies if invaded? Boys grow up and become warriors. Girls grow up and become servants. And because this killing of males would force Hebrew girls to intermarry, soon the Hebrew genealogy would be no more.

READ EXODUS 1:17-22

¹⁷ *"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸ Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?'*

¹⁹ *"The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.'*

²⁰ *"So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.*

²² *"Then Pharaoh gave this order to **all** his people: 'Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'" [emphasis added]*

The midwives describe the Hebrew women giving birth as vigorous. Sounds complementary, or almost brave, right? The words *vigorous* or *lively* or *strong* may sound strong and full of life, but the phrase here in Hebrew, *haye*, is actually derogatory. It could be better translated as "like barbarians" or "like animals." The midwives described these Hebrew mothers with disdain, disrespect, and disgust even though they were protecting them from Pharaoh's decree.

Choosing the Higher Way

Pharaoh failed to account for a group of God-fearing midwives who feared God more than they feared man. They were willing to face fear with courage and not give in to Pharaoh's decree, instead choosing obedience to God.

Have you ever felt the social pressure to do something you knew was wrong? Think about a time you felt like you chose integrity and righteousness over social pressure or maybe wrestled with God about times you may have fallen short.

Baby after baby was thrown into the river to drown, and the wails from the Hebrew mothers reached the heavens. The mighty Nile—the very thing that was lifegiving for this region—was used to take life away from these families. The seasonal waterway that brought prosperity to the Egyptians was used to bring a season of despair to the Hebrew slaves.

If you're anything like me, you may wonder why God has allowed His people to be oppressed. Why does He allow death? I have often cried out to God wondering the same thing about people I love and situations of evil all around us. I hate that evil entered this world, but I trust God will use any situation and bring some resolve, purpose, and strength through it.

A Prayer

God, Your plans are better than ours. Your ways are higher than our ways. Your thoughts are greater than our thoughts. Though we may find ourselves confused and facing an uncertain future, You are intending everything we encounter as a stepping-stone on the path to bring glory to Your name. Thank You for always listening to my cries for safety, security, and clarity. I trust that You are over all I will face. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- » Have you ever experienced a situation as desolate as the one Israel faced?

- » Take a moment to write out a few things that you've seen that demonstrate how God hears your cries! Ask Him to show you where He was listening.



» Have you been in situations that end up forcing you out of a comfort zone?

» What oppressions have you endured in the last year or season of your life?
Do you believe that God will come through for you just like He did for Israel?
Why or why not?

» What are some ways you can hold to God's promises in the midst of really hard times?

THURSDAY

It All Revolves Around the Pantheon

I can remember the Vegas skyline like it was yesterday. Every time I think of it, I get a bit of a pit in my stomach. It's the bondage I remember. The familiar smell of a casino. The drunk men who gawk and make cat calls at any girl within eyeshot. The memories contort my face; my jaw gets a sick twinge in the back even as I write about it now. I can

remember nights where I walked Ellis Boulevard looking for a phone and drugs with my baby wrapped in a blanket, thrown over my shoulder. I was stuck in my addiction with bondage so extreme I didn't even recognize my chains. I thought I was fine. We were fine. I'd figure it out. I'd make it happen. I'd turn a trick or catch a date and things would be fine. At least that's the denial I was living in.

That's the crazy thing about bondage: You don't realize you're trapped until you hit rock bottom. You justify and excuse or normalize all the behaviors. Even if it is not outright "bondage" that feels extreme, we all have habits, characteristics, and thought patterns that very well may have been mirrored for us as children, that we think are fine.

I want to take another look at Exodus 1:11. American author and theologian John N. Oswalt says it best:

The plan was simple enough. They would enslave the Israelites, not merely limiting their freedom to develop military skills, but also limiting their power to pick up and move out. But there was a further intent, and that was to break their spirits or "wear them down." The very "anah" [TH6031] can be translated in several ways including "afflict" and "humble" but the underlying sense is "to put down." God had dramatically exalted the people and now the Egyptians were setting out to reverse that. They believed that a thoroughly subjugated people would lose the will to resist.

Isn't that how sin works? It weasels into our lives to burden, afflict, and wear us down until we would lose the will to resist.

Remaining Set Apart

We read earlier that the children of Israel had not assimilated into Egyptian culture. They lived in Goshen, working as slaves and free labor to build the pyramids. But they knew of God from their forefathers. They knew the fear of the Lord, which is why the midwives would not assist in the demands of Pharaoh. And how did God respond to their obedience?

READ EXODUS 1:20-21

²⁰ "So God was kind to the midwives and the number of people increased and became even more numerous.²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own."

But that's not all! Pharaoh misunderstood the loyalty of the midwives to God, but he also failed to account for the fact that regardless of his influence or power, he was not going toe to toe with another human or even a demigod, but with the God of the universe who had committed long to elevating the descendants of Abraham into a great nation.

READ EXODUS 2:23-25 (ESV)

²³ "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.²⁴ And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.²⁵ God saw the people of Israel—and God knew."

There is nothing as crucial in Egyptian culture as their religion; it was completely integrated into every aspect of daily life. The Egyptian religion incorporated practices and beliefs that combined mythology, herbology, science, magic, spirituality, and psychiatry.

Temples were the center of economic and political life and of course religion in ancient Egypt. Temples were considered the home of the gods and goddesses that the priests and priestesses were assigned. They required immense care, accomplished through elaborate rituals. Every person participated in three daily prayers as a ritual of daily ceremony.

They included very specific steps: opening a door to awaken the god, washing the idol, and sweeping away any footprints to ward off evil from coming around it.

Economically, much like other professions, priests and priestesses were passed on hereditarily, including a high priest per god or goddess. Everyone tithed to the temple, and the educated class would divide up the goods equally which led to a lot of corruption where Pharaohs would offer higher positions if the temple priests would give them larger portions of land and surplus.

Festivals throughout the year were dedicated to worshiping and thanking gods which created a social climate for many Egyptians.

The Pantheon

More than anything the pantheon consisted of hundreds (if not thousands) of deities. Some were regional or over a city while others represented nature and events. Each family got to choose who and how they worshiped their specific gods, but all worshiped nine main gods that we'll explore more deeply in lesson 3. Regardless of what caste system you were born into, the afterlife was thought to be real. Egyptians believed that your social status would determine your burial ritual, but you couldn't escape the afterlife.

The main belief (regardless of class or location) was that out of a watery abyss, a mound appeared, and a lotus flower blossomed. From the lotus flower birthed Ra-Atum, later shortened to simply Ra, but seen in hieroglyphics interchangeably. Ra is the guide of Pharaoh and god of the sun. Shu, the god of air and wind, married Tefnut, the goddess of moisture; they had Geb and Nut, a husband and wife who are often shown together in hieroglyphs and represented earth and sky together.

They gave birth to four children: Set (god of chaos), Osiris (god of Egypt), Isis (goddess of motherhood and magic), and Nephthys (goddess of protecting families). The myth is that in a jealous rage, Set dismembered Osiris and his wife/sister Isis roamed the land collecting all his pieces, except his manhood that was eaten by a fish. Once she collected

all his body, she and Nephthys joined forces, and put Osiris back together. His virality came back but only long enough to impregnate Isis and pass on his lineage before dying again. Anubis and Horus were born and became god of the afterworld because he set off to find Set and avenge his father's death.²

It was believed that whatever you did on earth was carried to the afterlife. When you passed away, your heart would be weighed and if it was heavier than a feather, it was believed to be full of sin and you were eaten by a god named Sebek in the afterlife. If it was lighter than the feather, your soul passed into the Field of Reeds where no harm or sadness resided. Here, you would be reanimated and continue to live in harmony doing the same profession as before. Mummification was an integral part of the afterlife, ensuring your heart and head were intact to assist in reanimating you; therefore, much care went into preservation of the body. Whatever you drew or wrote on your sarcophagus (the Egyptian's coffin that held persons who had gone through a very ritualistic mummification process), would follow you into the afterlife and by it you would be remembered. This is why Pharaoh and his wife's tombs were so important and why the Valley of Kings is still such an incredible landmark today.

A Culture of Myths

Among many other rituals and behaviors, religious seers would inscribe prayers on elephant tusks to ward off evil spirits in a nursery. Egyptians also believed that Ra the sun god died every night and passed through the afterlife—during that time Set could use his chaos for good, helping Ra to conquer the snake and reemerge each morning. The Apis Bull, a highly respected deity, was greatly revered. Even Alexander the Great paid respects to his temple when he visited Memphis.

Egyptologists spend their entire life's work understanding the intricate details of this culture, assisting universities and museums that feature Pharaohs, their queens, and their tombs. My brief study will not do the complexity and beauty of their culture the justice it deserves.

But I wanted to paint enough of a picture for you of the deep, rich, and structured religion of Egypt. Life in Egypt was nothing without their belief system.

What I love about investigating the surroundings of our story is that it allows us to picture daily life for our characters. I know it may seem like we are focusing a lot on the deities and pantheon of Egyptian culture, but again, context is crucial! We need to learn how to visualize these details in order to understand how significantly they will impact our characters as we journey through the rest of the book of Exodus. And in studying about their lives, we may even learn something about our own journeys.

A Prayer

God, thank You for calling us to put our dreams on the altar before You. You are worth the trouble and time it takes to look at our hearts and consider our motives. Give us mercy for ourselves as we become introspective and self-aware. Holy Spirit, reveal to us anything we've placed ahead of God in our lives. We want to lay down our idols and pursue that which brings true life to us and those around us. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- » Make some notes of promises God gives when we trust His plan and not our own:



- » What are some of the promises God offers you when you trust His plan and not your own? Make a list; start with these Scriptures if you need a jumping-off point.
- Romans 8: 28–30
 - Proverbs 3:5–6
 - Genesis 50:20

FRIDAY

The Nile: The Lifeline of Egypt

READ EXODUS 1:8–22

In southern Oregon, the Rogue River is the center of outdoor activity and tourism. People come from all over to float or fish, and there's even a jet boat race in the center of my hometown every year. Local farmers use the mighty Rogue to irrigate and water their crops, and the region flourishes because of the steady flow of life-giving water that faithfully makes its way to the Pacific Ocean. I am sure any of you who live near bodies of water can make a list of ways that your community relies on varying trades or resources that come from this fresh source.

On a grander scale, the Nile River was a lifeline to Egypt and was the center of this dazzling culture.

Because our story takes place in the land of Goshen, where Joseph's extended family was given the best land by Pharaoh, we must take some time to explore where Goshen was on the Nile Delta, the northeastern portion right on the Via Maris. Not only was this some of the most fertile land due to irrigation and location, but it was the hub of the trade route connecting King's Highway with the Via Maris.

“Via Maris is one modern name for an ancient trade route, dating from the early Bronze Age, linking Egypt with the northern empires of Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia—along the Mediterranean coast of modern-day Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. It is a historic road that runs in part along the Israeli Mediterranean coast. It was the most important route from Egypt to Syria.

“One earlier name was ‘Way of the Philistines,’ a reference to a passageway through the Philistine Plain (which today consists of Israel’s southern coastal plain and the Gaza Strip). Academic researchers prefer other names, for instance ‘International Trunk Road’ or ‘International Coastal Highway.’

“Together with the King’s Highway, the Via Maris was one of the major trade routes connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Via Maris was crossed by other trading routes, so that one could travel from Africa to Europe or from Asia to Africa.”³

Life on the Nile

The Nile is the longest river in the world. It has three unique predictable seasons that cities in ancient Egypt built and planned around all year. In contrast, the nations around them were at a constant battle for better conditions. Their water supplies were sporadic and had no predictable seasons, bringing floods out of nowhere and decimating their communities. This is one of the main reasons Egypt remained as one of the most stable nations for thousands of years. The goddess Ma’at, for example, was thought to represent harmony.

The Nile had three predictable seasons: Akhet (inundation), Peret (emergence), and Shemu (harvest). The Akhet season was typically flooding and created silt that was incredibly fertile and allowed a huge, lush agriculture area in the midst of the Arab desert.

Egyptian culture was so advanced mathematically that their measurement system created one of the most advanced irrigation canals that flowed throughout all the cities around the Nile. School was only for the wealthy upper class and most children adopted whatever their fathers



taught them as their family trade. House of Life was what this elite school was referred to. It was reserved for Physicians, Scribes, Astronomers, Architects, Diplomats, and more. It would be considered similar to a Harvard or other Ivy League school today.

Hieroglyphics and cursive known as hieratic are still some of the most admired of all times. Their organized administration system, thriving scribe profession and invention of papyrus paper allowed their writing system to spread quickly.

Most inhabitants, albeit within a strong social caste system, were regular working-class people and had their own family specialty: fish, wheat, barley, figs, etc. Whatever your family did is what was passed onto you. The idea of money and coins was not yet introduced until the Roman Empire, so bartering and trading your goods was what everyone relied on. If your family—a husband and wife with two kids—were barley growers, then they typically had a small crop around their home, a silo to store it, cats to keep mice away, an ox to help with soil and threshing. And their lives revolved around the seasons of the Nile.

Since industrial mechanisms for plowing or fishing or creating pottery had yet to be invented, the Egyptians are known to have created a Shaduf and other special irrigation tools that ensured consistent access to canals. No crops meant no food and nothing to trade. All the family helped out during these three seasons a year. Life without the Nile was impossible.

During Aket, the flood season, one could expect to have their area inundated with silt, and this time was often spent repairing the canals that helped their livelihood. During Peret, it was time to sow seed, and Shemu was time to gather the crops and trade.

Ultimate Survival

The Nile was a true lifeline for everything else—bathing, using the restroom, etc. It was sickening to drink so most families drank wine, which is often depicted in hieroglyphics. Also since there was no freezing or refrigeration system, items spoiled easily and so milk and meat were

very rare for the commoner in Egypt. Besides, most of their livestock was used to help toil land, thresh wheat, and pull hoes. What's more, the Nile was full of deadly crocodiles and hippos. Without quality medical care and hard labor mixed with harsh conditions, most people outside of the palace had a life expectancy of around 50–60 years old.

Cities flourished all along the shores of this lifegiving river: Heliopolis, Memphis, Abydos, Thebes, Nekhen, and more. This area was broken into two regions: Upper and Lower and went in accordance with the direction of the flow of the Nile, meaning that the upper Nile was actually further south and the lower region was in the north of Egypt where the Nile dumped into the Mediterranean Sea.

All up and down the Nile, we see the way the mighty river nourished the land and its people. We can imagine children growing up along its banks, learning to worship the gods to ensure the water will continue to flow. Children followed the footsteps of their parents, maintaining rituals, wealth, and crediting their flourishing land to their ability to continue pleasing the gods of the land and sky.

Holding Back Your Bitterness

Imagine you are a neighboring country to Egypt. It would be simple to assume the Egyptians were correct; things seemed easier for them because of the predictable nature of the Nile. Were they more blessed? It probably felt that way. Our Western church world can often seem this way as well. If we are the people with the most money, access, followers, contracts, homes, cars, etc., then we **MUST** have the favor of God in our lives and decisions, right? That attitude will destroy our hope and promise faster than locusts destroying the crops.

If we keep the perspective that someone's outside wealth or status equates to the favor of God, we are on a fast track to disappointment, envy, covetousness, and pride. We have to check those thoughts before they take root in our hearts.

If we saw outward success as the only sign of favor in someone's life, then we would completely miss the stories about Job and Jesus Himself!



The Bible says it rains on the just and the unjust alike. Working to obtain God's blessing is the last thing He wants. He desires the investment of our hearts; otherwise we'd obey His laws to create an exchange, not to enter into a true relationship. He wants family, not robots.

What counts as success? James 4:17 states, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." Success can be defined as achieving objectives or personal fulfillment. We know as believers that this depends greatly on our faithfulness to God, to do what we know we ought to do. Success without that can lead to dependence on one's own strength instead of God.

JOSHUA 1:7 STATES:

"Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go." (ESV)

What is so fitting about this verse is that this command is in direct response to the children of Israel taking over their promised land, but it takes courage and maybe from places least expected.

A Prayer

God, I confess I have felt the unfair nature of financial and physical gifts in this life. I have harbored resentment, bitterness, and jealousy at the advancement of others. I have grown weary, waiting for my promise and rejected the truth of a life spent trusting and focusing on You. You have a better method and plan for my story than I can even imagine; bring my heart and intention back to Your Word and Your call for my life. Show me how You are using my story, even now, while I am waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. Show me when to step in courageously to the arenas You are calling me to step into. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

- » What similarities between Egyptian culture and your own do you see today?

- » Have you ever considered your background, your family line, your city, and thought, "*God can never use me . . .*"? If yes, write that lie down here.

Then cross it out and write the word "LIE" next to it. Good therapy.

- » Have you ever assumed that someone received a greater measure of favor than you because of the physical "fruit" or "blessing" you saw in their lives? How did that comparison effect your ability to receive your own measure of "fruit" or "blessing"?

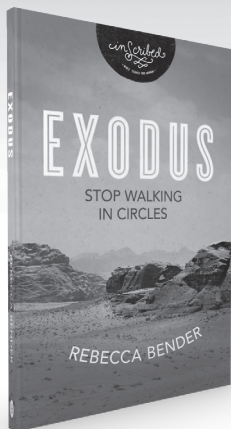
- » Read Matthew 5:45: It rains on the _____ and the _____ alike. Wrestle with God around how that makes you feel.

- » What is God asking you to step into courageously in this season?



InScribed

• BIBLE STUDIES FOR WOMEN •

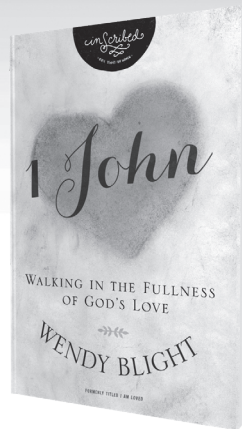


EXODUS new

Stop Walking in Circles and Reach
God's Destination for Your Life

Rebecca Bender

In this study, Rebecca takes you straight into the book of Exodus where the Israelites are wandering after their own tracks immediately after escaping from bondage and oppression at the hands of Pharaoh. God is trying to get them to the land of his promise, but they, like many of us, are frustrated by doubts, fears, and self-destructive habits.

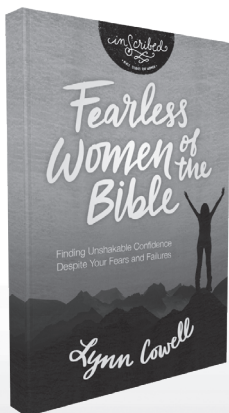


1 JOHN new

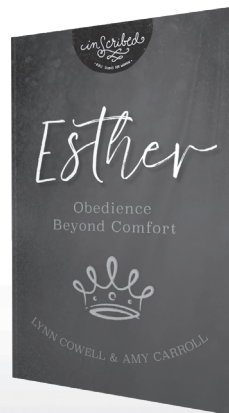
Walking in the Fullness
of God's Love

Wendy Blight

In this in-depth study of the book of 1 John, Wendy shares the unique insights and wisdom of the last disciple to walk with Jesus. Wendy wrote this book for every woman longing to live out God's unconditional love.



**Coming
Soon**



Stop walking in circles and go after your dreams.

I have always loved the book of Exodus. It has so many relatable stories about escaping bondage and oppression and working to find something new that God was promising. The more I learned about cultural contextualization and Egyptian civilization, the more nuggets of Exodus came alive. I realized that we are all a lot more alike than we are different and I want all women who have lived in any form of bondage to see that their promises are within reach, and they don't have to stay stuck in habits that their past confined them to.

—Rebecca Bender

This six-lesson Bible study will help you:

- Get back on track after experiencing a major setback in life or enduring a traumatic event.
- Walk away with tips and ideas on how to shift habits that are stopping you from reaching your goals.
- To doubt less in God and trust Him more.
- Answer the question, “does God really keep promises?”

Includes biblical and historical background insights, practical application, group discussion questions, and a memory verse for each chapter.

InScribed is a collection of studies that lead women to not just survive but thrive by encouraging them to immerse themselves in the Word of God.



REBECCA BENDER is the CEO of the Rebecca Bender Initiative and founder of Elevate Academy, the largest online school for survivors of human trafficking in the world. An award-winning thought leader, published author, and public figure, Rebecca is also a highly sought-after keynote speaker and professional consultant. With a dash of humor and a solid understanding of business and social constructs, she is at the forefront of where faith and culture intersect.