

365 DEVOTIONS
FROM GENESIS THROUGH REVELATION



Encountering

GOD'S HEART



for YOU

DIANE STORTZ

**Encountering
GOD'S HEART
for YOU**

Encountering GOD'S HEART for YOU

365 DEVOTIONS
FROM GENESIS THROUGH REVELATION

DIANE STORTZ



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2019 by Diane Stortz

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2019019121
ISBN 978-0-7642-3218-3

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified AMP are from the Amplified® Bible, copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations identified ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016

Scripture quotations identified GNT are from the Good News Translation—Second Edition. Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified GW are from GOD’S WORD, a copyrighted work of God’s Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright © 1995 by God’s Word to the Nations. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified ICB are from the International Children’s Bible®. Copyright © 1986, 1988, 1999 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified NIV are 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 identified NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Author is represented by Books & Such Literary Agency

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



*For every woman
of the Word.*

DS

As You Begin . . .

The Bible tells a big story . . .

about the creation of the universe and the first human beings,
about the disobedience of those humans and the consequences they
unleashed,
about a special nation and a Redeemer for the world,
about a day of restoration when all will be put right again.

But mostly the Bible tells us about a big God with a big heart . . .

a powerful God who spoke the universe into being out of nothing,
a loving God who would not abandon His fallen humans to
themselves,
a just God who sent His Son to be the Savior of the world He loves so
much,
a sovereign God whose kingdom of love and righteousness will never
end.

May you be blessed as you follow this little guide to the Bible's big story
and encounter God's heart for you. And in response may you also discover
a heart of love for Him!

Diane Stortz

All Scripture is God-breathed.
—2 Timothy 3:16 NIV

Encountering
GOD'S HEART
for YOU
in the
OLD TESTAMENT



The Books
of Law

In His Image

GENESIS 1-2

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.—Genesis 1:27 NIV

Right from the start, God’s written Word, the Bible, invites us to know our Creator.

The Hebrew word for God in Genesis 1:1 is *Elohim*, which has the sense of “the highest, no one better.” The first two chapters of Genesis tell us God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them, in six days, out of nothing, by His mighty power. Creation culminated with the first human beings—a man and a woman, Adam and Eve.

God formed Adam with His hands, and Adam took in his first breath directly from God. God formed Eve from Adam’s rib! Individually and together, male and female bear God’s image: we think and feel, plan and work, protect and nurture, imagine and create. We desire relationship. We love.

Do you sometimes feel “less than,” or doubt your worth? Remember that God—who hung the stars and carved the mountains—created you to bear His image. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to know your Creator better? He wants you to know Him, and He has much to tell you about himself in His Word, right from the very beginning!

Heavenly Father, I do long to know you, my Creator, so much better. Thank you for showing me who you are in your written Word. Amen.

Thinking of You

GENESIS 3

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”—Genesis 3:15 *ESV*

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in Eden. Yet when Satan came on the scene in the form of a serpent, they chose to listen to him instead. Satan got them thinking God was holding out on them. Rejecting the authority of what God had said, Eve and then Adam ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Suddenly they knew they had made a terrible mistake. For the first time, they felt fear and shame and the need to blame someone else.

Their sin had consequences. Eve would know physical pain during childbirth and struggle in her relationship to her husband. Adam would work longer and harder to grow food in ground affected by a curse. Then . . . they would die, as God had warned. Sin had entered the world and all humanity would be affected.

But God also expressed compassion toward Adam and Eve. Satan’s scheming wouldn’t be allowed to prevail forever. One of the most amazing verses in the Bible tells us that God planned “from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Even before creation began, God knew what would happen and planned to send Jesus. He was thinking of you and me! He knew we would need a Savior.

Father God, your goodness astounds me! Thank you for planning to send our Savior, Jesus, even before you made the world. You know me so well. Thank you for your love. Amen.

Beginning Again

GENESIS 6-9

The LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. . . . But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.—
Genesis 6:6, 8 ESV

Humanity’s evil grew and filled the earth with violence. God felt great sorrow and planned to begin again, with Noah, the one man on earth who walked closely with Him.

Can you imagine receiving Noah’s instructions? To escape the flood that was coming in judgment, he was to build a box-shaped boat—longer than a football field, about half as wide, and more than four stories tall. Inside, the ark would house Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives, a zoo-sized menagerie representing all the animal kinds God had created, and food for everyone.

Crazy, right? But “Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him” (Genesis 6:22).

When everyone was inside the ark, God closed the door and the rain began. Noah’s cooperation with God’s plan—his obedience to God’s commands—saved his family and allowed humanity a fresh start.

Does beginning again sound good to you? Do you need a fresh start? Today and every day, you can reap the rewards of cooperating with God’s plan: “Now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him” (Acts 17:30).

*Dear Lord, your ways are good and right! Thank you for Jesus.
Thank you for your offer and your command to turn to Him,
to begin again, to be saved from sin. Amen.*

Planning with Purpose

GENESIS 11

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”—
Genesis 11:4 NIV

Are you a planner? A list maker? Do you scour websites and Facebook groups for the best deals in town? Do you rely on a network of sitters and mothers’ helpers to keep your family’s busy life on track? Do you choose a word for the year or create a five-year life plan?

The Bible approves wise planning, with the understanding that our focus should be on God’s will for our lives. And that’s exactly where Noah’s descendants went wrong after the flood. God had told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth.” Multiply? Fine. Fill the earth? Not so much. The descendants of Noah’s sons thought staying put and building a ziggurat—a multistoried tower with a shrine on top—was a much better idea.

But it wasn’t God’s plan. They didn’t know best. He did, and He took action to point them in His direction again by giving them different languages instead of one.

So make your plans, but be sure to line them up with God’s. Ask for His wisdom and seek out His will.

Dear God, you’ve given me the ability to dream, plan, and achieve. But help me keep my eyes on you and your will for my life, today and every day. Amen.

Faith Is What Matters

GENESIS 12, 15

Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.—Genesis 15:6

When you were a girl, did you fill a sash with Girl Scout badges or bring home a report card with straight A's? Or maybe you struggled to earn just a badge or two and never saw an A. In Abraham's life, God shows us that neither our accomplishments nor our failures make any difference when it comes to our relationship with Him.

More than two thousand years before Jesus was born, God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation and that his family would bless the entire world. Abraham and his wife, though old and childless, would have a son to kick things off, and Abraham's descendants would be as innumerable as the stars. Incredible, right? But Abraham believed God would do what He said, "and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith."

God has made promises to us too. We can't earn ourselves a place in heaven and our sin won't keep us out—if we have responded to God with faith. God says we're counted as righteous when we believe His Son, Jesus, is the Savior He has sent. We can't earn the status that says we're right with God. It's His gift.

Have you been counted as righteous?

Heavenly Father, forgive me for striving to earn your love. Faith is what you've always wanted. Thank you, thank you, for Jesus! Amen.

The God Who Sees Me

GENESIS 16

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”—
Genesis 16:13 NIV

If you’ve ever felt invisible or cried out to God in frustration over circumstances that seemed unbearable, then you need to know Hagar.

God had promised Abraham and Sarah a son, but when year after childless year went by, Sarah devised a plan of her own—Abraham could father a child for her through her Egyptian servant, Hagar (a common practice in those days). But when Hagar became pregnant, she began to treat Sarah with contempt. Perhaps she felt elevated, not voiceless, and more than a slave.

Sarah blamed Abraham, who took Sarah’s side and reinforced Hagar’s slave status. Sarah then began to treat Hagar harshly and she ran away, maybe to try to make it back to Egypt.

But God found Hagar near a spring in the wilderness and spoke with her. He told her to return to Sarah and to name the son she carried Ishmael, which means “God hears,” because He had heard her cries of distress. He gave her promises about her future.

Hagar’s circumstances didn’t change, but her view of God did. Her son’s name would be a constant reminder that God hears us in our need. And Hagar began to call God “the god who sees me.”

Whatever you’re dealing with today, remember this: He hears and sees you too.

Father God, let me learn from Hagar today! You do indeed hear and see me in the situation causing me distress. Help me trust you to care for me and show me what to do. Amen.

Laughing with God

GENESIS 18, 21

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”—Genesis 21:6 NIV

Sarah couldn’t believe it when she heard God telling Abraham that she would bear a son within a year. She and Abraham hadn’t gotten any younger waiting all this time for God to fulfill His promise. Abraham would soon be one hundred, and she was nearly ninety. Finally, a baby? How could it be? Sarah laughed, silently she thought, but the Lord heard her.

God kept His word, of course. Sarah conceived and gave Abraham a son. Abraham named him Isaac, which means “he laughs,” perhaps because, as Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter.” After all, who *doesn’t* smile and coo and giggle at a baby? And the story of this baby made everyone laugh with delight, right along with Sarah.

What about you? What impossible possibility has you silently laughing with disbelief? If God is in it, you just might find yourself laughing out loud soon. He is, as He told Abraham, *El-Shaddai*—“God Almighty” (Genesis 17:1)—and nothing is too hard for Him.

Dear Lord, I want to laugh out loud at your goodness over and over again. Help me see and believe! Amen.

Salt

GENESIS 19

When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.—Genesis 19:16 NIV

Abraham's nephew Lot had settled with his family in Sodom. At Abraham's prodding, God promised He would change His plans to destroy Sodom if just ten righteous people could be found there. Sadly, there were not.

The behavior of the men of the city toward Lot's guests (who were actually angels) tells us much about the city's immorality, as does the reaction Lot received when he tried to warn the men his daughters were betrothed to marry. Lot himself elevated hospitality over the safety of his daughters. Without the angels' intervention, the scene would have turned even more ugly.

Lot delayed leaving the city until the angels finally led him and his family out by the hand and instructed them to run and not look back. Lot's wife turned to look, however, and she became a pillar of salt.

Why were Lot and his family so reluctant to leave Sodom? Perhaps they had grown accustomed to the sin all around them and viewed it as normal, and I have to wonder how much we might be like them today. Jesus calls us to be salt to the world around us—not salt like Lot's wife, but salt that preserves the good. What kind of salt are you?

Dear God, where I am complacent about the sin plaguing my city, my state, my country, wake me up and show me how to respond as good salt. Amen.

Totally Trusting

GENESIS 22

“Now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”—Genesis 22:12

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering; that’s a fact. But God always acts consistently with His own character, and Scripture tells us in other places He abhors human sacrifice. So why did God make this strange request?

Think about someone, or something, you hold most dear. Maybe you waited years for that relationship, that child, that home, that bank account, that position. Now, tie it up and place it on an altar. Prepare to give it over to God forever, just because He told you to.

Would you do it?

Abraham obeyed the strange command, trusting God. He didn’t need to know the reason because he trusted God’s promises. God would provide a lamb for the sacrifice instead of Isaac, or God would bring Isaac back to life (Hebrews 11:19), but He wouldn’t break the promises He had made.

A ram appeared in a thicket. Abraham called the place of the sacrifice *Yahweh Yireh*, which means “The LORD will provide.” And many years later, God provided a Lamb for another sacrifice, on a cross outside Jerusalem. That time, it was God himself who didn’t hold back His only Son.

Heavenly Father, Abraham’s trust in you astounds me. May I trust you as my Yahweh Yireh to provide for me in every way, all the days of my life. Amen.

Family Matters

GENESIS 24-35

“Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.”—Genesis 35:10

Isaac and Rebekah’s story began beautifully but veered off into conflict, as our own family situations often do.

Abraham had sent a trusted servant to find a wife for Isaac from among his relatives. God led him to Rebekah, who agreed to journey to Canaan to marry Isaac. Rebekah eventually gave birth to twins, Jacob and Esau.

They should have been a happy family. But as the brothers grew, Isaac favored Esau, and Rebekah favored Jacob. Esau acted rashly; Jacob acted with deceit. Rebekah schemed for what she wanted, and Isaac allowed himself to be manipulated.

With his brother threatening to kill him, Jacob left home and traveled to Haran, hoping to find a wife among Abraham’s relatives as his father had done. And he did—two wives and two concubines. A new family chapter of favoritism, trickery, and jealousy began.

When Jacob returned to Canaan years later as the wealthy patriarch of a large family, God appeared to him and repeated the promises He had given Abraham and Isaac. He also changed Jacob’s name to Israel. Eventually Jacob’s descendants would be known as the Israelites.

Despite all the family turmoil and trouble, God had a plan. There was hope for the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, just as there is hope for your family and mine.

*Father God, you care about my family even more than I do.
Restore us wherever we have need of your mercy and forgiveness.
Lead us so your plans can prevail. Amen.*