



32 DAYS WITH GOD'S STORY

Mark R. Etter

By Rev. Mark R. Etter

Author of "32 days with Abraham"

"32 days with Christ's Passion"

"32 days with God's Story"

(All available on Amazon.com)

Www.32daysdevotions.com

pastoretter@hotmail.com

Bethany Lutheran Church

3501 Turkeyfoot Road, Erlanger, KY 41018

Church Office (859) 331-3501

God's Story Introduction

The Bible is an extraordinary book of ordinary people and a loving God that most people barely know. Let's play a game. Put the following Bible characters in historical order from earliest to latest: A David, B Abraham, C Isaiah, D Paul, E Peter, and F Moses. The correct order is BFACED. If you didn't get them all right, don't feel bad. Many Christians I know can't put them in the exact order either. That is a shame. The Bible is filled with wonderful stories to tell and lessons to teach about each one of those people.

This series of devotions will take you on a ride through much of the history of the Bible with the ups and downs of its people. Around every corner, you will meet individuals who can teach you lessons about how to live a fruitful life or how to avoid destructive habits. You will meet leaders like Joshua and Daniel as well as faithful women like Ruth and Esther. As you get to know them, you will learn lessons that can shape the rest of your life.

Woven in the lives of all these people is the story of a loving God. He will promise extraordinary gifts to some of them. He will teach and mentor these ordinary men and women so that their lives become miraculous. He will even discipline some of them so that they learn how to be great and be a blessing to others. Throughout the ages, the Bible is a diary of God's love for these people and us.

Feel free to work through the devotions over 32 days to get a quick flavor of the Bible in a few weeks. God back if you want and look at the three or four Bible passage sections in each devotion if you want a deeper perspective about that person or era of Bible history. Finally, use the Bible studies at the back to share some of the highlights of your journey with others. Let others have a small sample of what you have learned.

You are on a great adventure. Dig in and learn about the people you will meet one day in heaven. Through the stories of their lives, you will gain new insights into the depth of God's love for you and the blessings that He wants to give you everyday of your life. May this book be as much of a blessing for you as it has been for me.

Study Introduction

This series of books is designed to be a tool that brings you closer to Christ. The book has 32 devotions designed to have depth so that you dig below the surface and understand the context. Each devotion is based on a single story and lays out the events in an organized way to help you comprehend the deeper meanings in the passage and then apply them to your life. The book also includes twelve bible studies that are meant to be shared. You have my permission to copy the student guides for your church or small group bible studies. In order to make that easier for your church or small group, the student guides are formatted here for easy reproduction. Each Bible study is connected to one of the devotions and to a leader's guide so that you can feel confident leading others to understand God's word. My hope is that you enjoy the book with its devotions and studies and let the Holy Spirit change your life through them. God is ready to sit down with you through these studies and change your life.

To God be the glory—May the Holy Spirit open up your hearts that you may share His love.

This study is meant to help you grow so you can share. Revival in our lives and in our church can happen only if the power of God enters our heart and mind through the study of God's word.—Pastor Mark

Work through this sample and pass it on to someone else. If you like the devotions and study, you can find the book on Amazon. If you have suggestions on improving the material, let me know at the phone or email on the front of the booklet.

3. Put Down the Selfie Stick

Genesis 37-50

Joseph 1915-1805 BC

Context: The descendants of Abraham have grown into a family of 70. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, has 12 sons. Joseph's story is the account of how one of those sons grew from selfish beginnings to become a leader in a foreign land and save God's people in a time of a great famine.

Athletes have them. Politicians have them. Even high school graduates sometimes have them. They have dreams for the future. It may be to win the World Series or to make lots of money as a doctor. The problem with many of those images is that they are all about the dreamer. Great dreams include others. It is the person who longs to have children to love and mentor. It is the individual who wants to find a cure for cancer or feed the hungry in a third-world country. These are the dreams that are bigger than we are. Joseph's first dreams are self-portraits taken with a selfish "selfie stick." God will transform Joseph's dream into a dream to save the world around him. His life is a lesson in why we need to change our desires into God's vision for us.

The first portrait of Joseph shows the arrogant seventeen-year-old son of Jacob. He is not afraid to snitch on his brothers because he is the all-knowing teenager who thinks he is better than his brothers. His self-centered dreams picture his family bowing down to him as if he is the king. *"Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.'"* Gen. 37:9 An immature Joseph rubs his brother's faces in this self-portrait rather than wisely keeping the dreams to himself. His pride shows that he is not yet ready to be a leader of the family. His dreams will come true, but only after God has transformed this young man into a humble leader.

The second portrait of Joseph is a prison photo. His selfish dreams have earned his brother's hatred. When visiting his brothers on his father's behalf, Joseph's brothers bind him and sell him as a slave to traders in a caravan bound for Egypt. *"Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood."* His brothers agreed." Gen. 37:27 So much for the self-proclaimed king. In Egypt, he is falsely accused, thrown into prison and forgotten. His conceit has taken him from prince to prisoner. God is working behind the scenes to prepare Joseph for leadership. His selfish dreams have to be drummed out of him. Thirteen years of hardship will mold him and refine him into a useful tool for the Lord.

The next portrait is one of God's sovereignty. God sends Pharaoh a dream of warning which defies interpretation. Seven sick cows eat seven healthy cows. Finally, someone remembers Joseph. A humble Joseph gives God credit and offers to give God's message to Pharaoh. *"Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.'"* Gen. 41:25 He tells the Pharaoh that there will be seven bountiful years followed by seven years of famine. God's warning will save the Egyptian people from starvation. Pharaoh senses God's wisdom in Joseph and appoints Joseph to lead the people through the years of famine. Joseph's work will be to carry out God's dream of helping others.

Finally, we see a family portrait. For seven years, the harvest is abundant, but then the years of famine arrive. Jacob sends his sons to Egypt for food. Fifteen years after they last saw Joseph, the brothers bow before him in their quest for food. On the first visit, Joseph tests his brothers to see if they have changed. On the second visit, Joseph reveals himself and forgives them. Hardship has changed Joseph into a humble servant. *"But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."* Gen. 45:7 Joseph has given up his dream in exchange for God's dream. The self-centered boy has become a generous and caring leader. He has become God's tool of deliverance for His people.

Joseph's first dreams were "selfie stick" photos taken at the expense of others. God used hardship to refine Joseph so that the arrogant young man matured into a humble servant and savior of his people. Joseph became God's tool to transform this family into a nation hundreds of thousands strong. God will break into our dreams of self-glory. He may let those dreams crumble and blow like dust in the wind. He replaces selfish goals with a vision of humble service. Those who listen to the Lord can become people whom the Lord can use for greater dreams. Put down your selfie stick so God may give something better. God will make us part of His big picture. Swap your dreams for His, so you can see a brighter picture develop around you.

- What dreams do you have for your life that would make the world a better place? What dreams about yourself may you have to let go if God is going to use you as a tool to change the world?

13 Laughing, Crying, Cursing, Sighing

Psalms

The Psalms span from Moses (Ps.90) to after the Exile (Ps.137)

Context: The book of Psalms is often thought of as the Treasury of David with 73 psalms ascribed to him. The Psalms is a hymn book of the ages expressing the emotions and faith of the people of God from the Old Testament up to today.

God created man and woman to have feelings, and they often express those feelings in song. Celebrations are announced with trumpets lifting our hearts. Sadness is often voiced by saxophones playing the blues in a minor key. The ups and downs in the story of life are often expressed in music. It may be for that reason that many Christians claim the psalms as their favorite book. It is real life expressed from the heart. It paints a variety of emotions in such a way that we feel the author's triumph and tragedy with our hearts. Sometimes, the mood is happy as the author praises the Lord for what He has done. Other times, the mood is sad as the author expresses his pain and begs the Lord for help and deliverance. At other times, we find the psalmist cursing their enemies or sighing as they confess their sins. We find them pondering God's work or praising God as a community in worship. The variety among the 150 psalms is incredible. As we understand the moods of the psalms, we can pray with them in worship to our God.

There are times that we want to laugh with God in our prayers. The psalms of thanksgiving express the variety of situations in which our God helps us. We may thank God for His care (Psalm 23), His deliverance (Psalm 30), His forgiveness (Psalm 32) or His kindness (Psalm 118). Sometimes the praise to the Lord details an individual experience. Other times the psalm paints a broad picture of the loving and gracious character of our God. Our hearts reach out and announce to all what God has done. These are psalms help you rejoice and tell everyone what God has done in your life. You can use these psalms to celebrate in your prayers what God has done for you and others.

At times, life has caused us pain and tears streak down our face. Forty-three personal laments and six community laments are scattered across the pages of the Psalms. The laments can be a cry for help (Psalm 70), a longing to be with God (Psalm 42), or a remembrance of God's power in the midst of our pain (Psalm 77). Such psalms often tell the story of a person's pain, express confidence that God can help and ask for God's grace in their time of need. Many of the laments in the Psalms end with praise because the author is confident that the Lord has heard them and that the Lord will help them in their need. These psalms help us when we hurt so that we pray focusing on God and not just our pain.

Sometimes people hurt us so much that we want revenge. The Psalms have a better idea. Six Psalms consider the enemies of Israel to be enemies of God. They ask the Lord to deal with people who have caused them pain. Such psalms may ask for payback when people seek their life (Psalm 35), rule unjustly (Psalm 58), or treated Israel harshly during the captivity (Psalm 137). These psalms may seem harsh when we think of Jesus' appeal to love our enemies (Matt. 5:38-44), but are just a call for God's justice. They ask the Lord to judge and to deal with evil instead of the people of God bringing vengeance. God's people do not want to become as evil as the people who have hurt them. These are psalms you can pray when you have been deeply hurt and seek answers from God.

Finally, every person sins and needs the forgiveness of God. When your sin leaves your heart sighing under the weight of sin, seven psalms can help you approach God. These psalms are built on the bedrock of God's forgiveness and mercy. We can lay our sin before God confident that our God will forgive us. We may be asking for help when our sins cause us agony (Psalm 6), appeal with King David for cleansing (Psalm 51), or request God for restoration (Psalm 102). The psalmists know the real cost of sin in their relationship with God and their well-being. These psalms can be prayed when life has been shattered by sin.

God's people have sung the Psalms over the ages. The messages have a lyric quality that often rolls off the tongue and echoes the deep yearnings of the heart. I have found that the Psalms have tremendous value in my prayers. As I page through the Psalms, I often find the psalmist expressing feelings that I have deep in my soul. As I speak my emotions in the words of the psalm, the psalmist directs me to new understandings and healing as his faith speaks to mine. I find direction for my prayers as I learn about the nature of my God and His help for my life. More than anywhere else, the Psalms speak to my inner being and bring my soul closer to God.

What are you feeling right now? Which of the four types of psalms above match your feeling and could help you express your joy or your pain and hurts?

28 Never Underestimate Jesus
Matt. 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21
Easter 30 AD

Context: On the Sunday after Good Friday, the disciples were hopeless and hid in the upper room. The enemies of Jesus were gloating about finally getting rid of this rabbi who did miracles. No one expected a miracle that would change the world that day.

Expectations are everything. We often have high expectations for a Lexus or a Cadillac. However, I would not expect much excitement from a golf or tennis competition since I play neither game. What you expect colors your feelings. As you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, how would you rate Easter compared to Christmas, Thanksgiving or even the Fourth of July? Sadly, a lot of people would prefer just to skip Easter. There are no football games, presents, or even fireworks on this holiday. Easter is a time of bunnies, colored eggs, and pastel dresses. Boring! Wait, don't write Easter off yet. I would submit that you have to understand Easter to see its value. What you expect of Easter often determines the blessings that you receive.

If you have low expectations of Easter, take heart. Both the friends and enemies of Jesus were not expecting much. His friends hid in the upper room trying to figure out how life without Jesus was going to look. Their hearts felt empty because the good times were over. His enemies thought they had beaten him, but feared a deception. *"So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead."* Matt. 27:64 Jesus' enemies never thought He would rise from the dead as He had said, but they wanted to prevent a hoax from happening. Resurrection was the last thing on their minds.

On Easter, everyone saw how great He is. The women came expecting to finish embalming a dead body. Jesus had told them that He would rise again, but no one believed it. With sad and heavy hearts they came to finish the burial. To their surprise, they saw angels who had a message. *"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."* Matt. 28:6 Jesus was not their dead friend, but a living Savior. He had risen just as He said He would. He is the Almighty Son of God who had come to save the world from sin. God had higher expectations of Easter than anyone else. Jesus is bigger than we think.

Two disciples heard the news that Jesus had risen but just couldn't believe it. It didn't make sense. Leaving Jerusalem, their minds were confused when they met a stranger. They told him how they had hoped that Jesus would change their life, but their hopes were shattered. The stranger replied, *"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"* Luke 24:26. The stranger with them was Jesus Himself, and He began to explain to them how the Messiah had to suffer if the promises of salvation were going to be true. It was a moment that changed their expectations of the cross. They rushed back to Jerusalem to share the news with the others. Jesus was alive.

The resurrection was just the beginning. Jesus had higher expectations for the future. *"You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised."* Luke 24:48-49 The disciples had seen something special, and they were to share their witness about what Jesus had done. Jesus wanted to change the world and give them the gift of salvation. The resurrection was just the beginning. Easter would transform the world. It would bring mercy to those weighed down with sin. It would bring eternal life and spare those who believe from the pain of hell. It was truly a day to celebrate and tell the world about what Jesus had done.

The disciples came to this day with heartache. They didn't expect anything special to happen. You and I don't have to make that same mistake. We come to Easter each year knowing that we will celebrate His gift of life for us. Easter has changed everything. Just ponder for a moment what life would be like without Easter. There would be no forgiveness, and you and I would be bound for hell. Realize that millions of people across the earth are in that predicament. Easter doesn't exist for them because no one has shared the story of Easter with them. They still don't expect much from Easter.

You can change their future just like the disciples did. On Easter Day, there was only a handful who knew what Jesus had done. That was soon to change. It is estimated that a million people believed in the resurrection by the year 100 AD and that by 350 AD, Christianity had conquered the Roman Empire. The message did change lives, and it can transform the lives of the people around you if you tell them. Let their expectations be high. Look beyond the bunnies and the Easter Eggs to what Jesus has done. Easter is all about expectations. If you expect much, it will be the greatest day of the year.

Who do you know who is not impressed with Easter? What impresses you enough about the resurrection that you will take the time to share it with them?

03 Joseph Reveals Himself

Gen. 45:1-28

The story of Joseph is the story of God taking a selfish man and developing a patriarch who would save his people. Along the way, he was betrayed and deserted by his family, exposed to sexual temptation, punished for doing the right thing, imprisoned, and forgotten by those he helped. As Joseph took each step, he grew into the leader that God was calling him to be. His attitudes were transformed, and people began to see the hand of God in him. Finally, he was ready to be the leader that God envisioned.

In Genesis 25, we see how completely Joseph had changed as he greets his brothers after many years. While they expected punishment for their crimes against him, he embraces them and weeps at the reunion with his family. He understands that God had sent him ahead to preserve the family. Joseph tells his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people" (Genesis 50:20). The brother who had boasted to others about dreams had exchanged his dreams for the dreams God had for his family and the future.

1. What are family reunions or holidays like with your family? Is there someone that has been missing that you would like to see?
2. Judah has just offered his life for the life of Benjamin to save his father Jacob tremendous pain (Gen. 44:18-34). How does this show of mercy affect Joseph? (45:1-2)
3. When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, what is their response? (45:3) What would it take for you to believe that someone was a lost relative who you thought was long dead?
4. How did God transform the evil that they had done into a blessing for the family (45:4-7)
5. How does God sometimes help us by allowing us to go through adverse circumstances?
6. What are Josephs' plans for his family? (45:9-13) Who does Joseph want to see?
7. Has Joseph truly forgiven his brothers? What leads you to think so?
8. As Joseph reveals himself, what does his message expose about the character of God?
9. What could you tell people about God from the story of your life? Why would that be a powerful witness?
10. Compare the young Joseph who mocked his brothers (Gen 37) to the Joseph in chapter 45. What has Joseph learned at the hand of God?
11. What adversities are you facing in your life? What lessons do you think God may be trying to teach you?

03 Joseph Reveals Himself

Gen. 45:1-28

The story of Joseph is the story of God taking a selfish man and developing a patriarch who would save his people. Along the way, he was betrayed and deserted by his family, exposed to sexual temptation, punished for doing the right thing, imprisoned, and forgotten by those he helped. As Joseph took each step, he grew into the leader that God was calling him to be. His attitudes were transformed, and people began to see the hand of God in him. Finally, he was ready to be the leader that God envisioned.

In Genesis 25, we see how completely Joseph had changed as he greets his brothers after many years. While they expected punishment for their crimes against him, he embraces them and weeps at the reunion with his family. He understands that God had sent him ahead to preserve the family. Joseph tells his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people" (Genesis 50:20). The brother who had boasted to others about dreams had exchanged his dreams for the dreams God had for his family and the future.

1. What are family reunions or holidays like with your family? Is there someone that has been missing that you would like to see?

Answers will vary. Let the group focus on the joys and discomfort that families gathering can bring. If someone has a story that they want to share, let them do so. Make sure that you limit the stories so that the lesson can continue.

2. Judah has just offered his life for the life of Benjamin to save his father Jacob tremendous pain (Gen. 44:18-34). How does this show of mercy affect Joseph? (45:1-2)

Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery because of their jealousy over Jacob's greater love for Joseph than his love for them. Judah knows that Benjamin is loved more by their father than any of the rest of his sons. Instead of being jealous once again, he is willing to sacrifice his own life for the family. The great change in his brothers and their willingness to put others first causes Joseph to cry intensely. He sends the Egyptians out of the room so that he can reveal himself to his brothers in private. The meeting was a family matter, and he did not want others to witness the reaction of his brothers or see his heartfelt expression of love.

3. When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, what is their response? (45:3) What would it take for you to believe that someone was a lost relative who you thought was long dead?

The simple statement "I am Joseph" exploded like thunder in their ears and brought terror to their hearts. Confusion and memories must have cascaded through their minds. Was it really their brother? As the details of the past rolled off the lips of this stranger, fear began to grab hold of them. If it truly is Joseph, what punishment will he inflict on them for their past treatment of him? They were totally under his control, and they were speechless as they stood before him and felt judged for their sins. Two things should have stood out for them. Egyptians did not come close to Hebrews (Gen. 43:32), but Joseph asked them to come near. He wanted to be near them. Second, Joseph wept uncontrollably and with deep passion. These were not the actions of one who wanted to hurt them.

It would also be hard for us to believe that someone was a lost relative. We might require proof either in stories that they can share or the witness of someone that you believe.

4. How did God transform the evil that they had done into a blessing for the family (45:4-7)

Remind the class of the story of Joseph. He was here in Egypt because his brothers had sold him into slavery (37:12f), but God had used this wicked act to provide for the family. The family is only in year two of a seven-year famine. God will use Joseph to feed and clothe the family during the rest of the famine and beyond. His brothers were responsible for Joseph's suffering, but God had used the incident to humble a proud Joseph and provide for the future of Abraham's family.

5. How does God sometimes help us by allowing us to go through adverse circumstances?

Joseph's story reminds us that God is still in charge. We need to trust Him with our life and our future. We can't control the future, but we know that God has the power and the wisdom to bring blessings to His people. Don't forget that Joseph was, in many ways, also responsible for his slavery. He was a proud boy who consistently taunted his brothers with dreams of his superiority to his family and with boasts of his father's love. God used the slavery and other adversities to transform a proud young man into a servant of God.

6. What are Joseph's plans for his family? (45:9-13) Who does Joseph want to see?

Since Joseph is a powerful ruler of Egypt, he sees no reason for his family to live without food in Canaan. There are five

more years of famine, and there is no reason for them to continue to make trips to Egypt for food. Joseph wants them to hurry home, let Jacob know that Joseph is alive, and pack their belongings so that they can live in the fertile area of Goshen. Joseph longs to see his father. Jacob is already 130 years old (Gen. 47:9) and it has been more than twenty years since Joseph has seen his father, Jacob.

7. Has Joseph truly forgiven his brothers? What leads you to think so?

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers is shown in many ways. He embraces them all and kisses them. He offers them all a place to live with plenty of food and land for their cattle. The sin of Joseph's slavery is not hidden but is openly discussed and Joseph shares what he believes was God's divine plan. This Joseph is radically different from the Joseph that we saw in chapter 37. The strained fellowship between brothers from twenty years ago has become intense and intimate (45:15).

8. As Joseph reveals himself, what does his message expose about the character of God?

Answers will vary but should include a discussion of God's control over even difficult situations. God's love for the family of Abraham is evident, and His control over the events of history is complete. God had a plan for His people and the young man Joseph.

9. What could you tell people about God from the story of your life? Why would that be a powerful witness?

Encourage the class to share times when the Lord helped them through a crisis or helped them to grow. Our lives are a powerful story because they are our story and demonstrate what God can do. The story of a man 3800 years ago is often not as persuasive as the story of someone who is like them and who lives in their world.

10. Compare the young Joseph who mocked his brothers (Gen 37) to the Joseph in chapter 45. What has Joseph learned at the hand of God?

Joseph has learned humility and to be the servant of his family. He is generous to his brothers giving them provisions, clothes, and silver (to Benjamin). Joseph also tells them not to quarrel along the way (45:20). There was no reason to argue about what had happened in the past. All was forgiven. The 17-year-old Joseph was never a leader in his family. The 39-year-old Joseph would be the head of this family and a nation because he was willing to be a servant to both.

11. What adversities are you facing in your life? What lessons do you think God may be trying to teach you?

Answers will vary, but encourage the class to think about how they might apply the lessons that Joseph learned in the text. Do they trust the Lord enough that they will give him the crisis in their life? Can they be generous with others because they know that God will provide for them? Are they willing to see the plan of God and His ability to use their life for the benefit of others?

Look for the other
two books in this
series. Both are
available at
Amazon. Com.

