

NOT WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR

Nicole Unice



STUDY GUIDE

A SIX-WEEK SERIES

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Not What I Signed Up For Study Guide: A Six-Week Series

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FIRST THINGS FIRST: A WORD TO READERS

Hello, friend, and welcome to the journey!

My guess is that you are here because you've found yourself in a season you never expected, feeling things you never thought you'd feel, and maybe even navigating the unsettling experience of questioning ideas and people you never doubted in the past.

Life can throw you off-kilter, whether that's happened because of an earthquake-sized demolition to your story or a few subtle cracks in your foundation that have slowly caused your outlook to shift. Even if you aren't currently in a "not what I signed up for" season, chances are good that you have been in one before—and that you might be in one again.

Over these six sessions, whether you gather with a group or work through this study on your own, I invite you to grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness even through your trials, know His love right in the middle of your suffering, and stand firm in trust even when things remain paralyzingly uncertain.

Though the characters and the plot of your unexpected season are unique, I offer a few suggestions that should be helpful as you prepare for the journey:

First, allow yourself (and if in a group, everyone else) permission to be in a confusing space. Rather than trying to explain your circumstances, fix them, or numb them away, you will discover that healing and growth start when you simply acknowledge where you are and look for God to meet you there.

Second, begin cultivating a deep compassion for your own soul. Entering into your story with the lens of redemption is an act of will, and it takes time, courage, and patience.

When I started running again after knee surgery, I would repeat a mantra to myself to the cadence of my feet: *Take it easy, take it light, take it slow.*

Easy, light, and slow is the pace of the healing, uprooting, and replanting that God can do within you right now. Soul work is slow work. You can move only at the pace of your soul, and if you push it to go fast, it will hide. You will begin to just go through the motions, showing up for your study or group or reading but not actually being present. As author Parker Palmer said,

Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, and self-sufficient. . . . If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, and fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly and only out of the corner of an eye—but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.¹

Over the course of our journey together, your soul is invited to show up and meet with God. My job is to help set up the conversation between you and the Lord by bringing you Scripture and questions that will allow you to find your story within God's great story. It's a chance for your soul to speak about what you have experienced, the cares you need to bring to God's throne of grace, and the wounds and losses that you need God to redeem. To facilitate this relationship, you'll find

daily exercises. Some days allow more time for quiet listening, not just responding to questions. That may be uncomfortable if you prefer to have clear direction, but discomfort is sometimes what's needed to make enough space to be honest with yourself and God about where you are and what you need. I promise, though, always to give you prompts and words to help you along the way!

SESSION RHYTHMS

Each group session includes:

- **Weekly Reading**
- **Main Point**
- **Video Notes**
- **Opening Group Conversation**
- **To the Word Together**
- **Application**
- **A Closing Prayer**

Because I've found that the only way to experience God every day is to spend intentional time with Him, the individual study is broken up into five days for each week. This gives you time for your own practice with God and time in worship to round out your week. If you fall behind or get stuck on any homework, don't let it derail your progress. Our souls move at different speeds and require different amounts of input, so you may find that responding to just a question or two each day draws you close to God, while someone else may choose to complete every single prompt. Your journey is your journey, no matter how long it takes you to get to the end.

Finally, you can either work through this study on your own or ask a few friends to join you. You might even consider bringing this study to your church. God has designed us to live out our stories with other people. The psalmist David offers us this invitation: "Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3). Sometimes the only thing that sustains us in our own struggles is knowing that someone else has felt God's comfort or experienced God's love in their life that week. We can borrow another

person's faith when our own feels weak. And if you are brave enough to lead a group (especially for the first time!), please check out the leader's guide in the back of this study.

To recap, here's a quick list of what you'll need to get started:

Group:

You can work through this content individually or in a group. A smaller group of five to eight people allows for good conversation time. Larger groups can view the video together and then break into smaller units for discussion. To increase vulnerability and build trust, it's best for the same groups to meet over the six sessions.

Materials:

Each participant will need a copy of the *Not What I Signed Up For* book and this study guide. You can also access the streaming video series, which contains my companion video teaching for each session, at rightnowmedia.org.

Readings:

Because this study guide is a companion to *Not What I Signed Up For*, each session corresponds to chapters in that book. At the start of each group session, you'll find a list of the chapters to read that week. You can do so at any time; however, you'll be prompted to read particular chapters on specific days. If you haven't already done so, that is the ideal time to read them.

Time:

Each session is structured to take between seventy-five and ninety minutes, including time for additional connection before or after the teaching. If you do this study over a lunch break or in a virtual group, you could save time by focusing on the study only. The personal studies are designed to take about twenty minutes each day.

Personal Study:

Each week includes five personal study days, with time spent both studying Scripture and reading assigned sections from *Not What I Signed Up For*. The group discussion each week will be based on this reflection time.

I am so encouraged that you are taking this journey. I don't know how you arrived here or what condition your soul is in, but what I do know is that the source of life—true life, abundant life, healed and redeemed life—is Jesus Christ. And when we bring ourselves to God, we will never be forsaken or forgotten. We are never failures, and we are never too far gone to know true relationship with Jesus, the very One who stretched out His arms in sacrifice on a cross. Your journey of restoration begins as soon as you open your heart to God's love and allow Him to shape the great story of your life.

SESSION 1

THE JOSEPH BLESSING

*Real and redeemed people are re-created people,
made in the image of God and moving toward the holiness of Christ.*

NOT WHAT I SIGNED UP FOR, PAGE 12

What do we do when we don't know what to do?

All of us face times when life doesn't go as planned. In those seasons, our trust in God's goodness is tested. We need a resilient faith to not just survive these times but to come through them with a deeper relationship with God and a stronger love for people. The story of Joseph paints a compelling picture of a life centered in that kind of faith. Within the story, you'll discover how tests and trials can lead you toward forgiveness, redemption, and hope. This week, let's learn about Joseph's triumph—the ending of the story that will frame the rest of our study together.



MAIN POINT

Unexpected seasons are always an invitation to develop a deeper trust in God's love for you.

Tune in to video session 1: “The Joseph Blessing”



VIDEO NOTES

1. Unexpected seasons demand a response.
2. God uses stories to give us a framework of understanding and response.
3. We have the gift of the beautiful ending through which we can interpret the rest of our stories.



OPENING GROUP CONVERSATION

1. An unexpected season is a period of life with an unknown timeline and an unsure outcome. In dealing with uncertainty and waiting, we may respond in several ways. **Do you tend to: a. skip and stuff; b. dive and dwell; or c. swing between the two?**

2. God uses stories to give us a framework for meaning, and one of the most powerful ways we experience life is through narrative. **Name a few books or movies that you love. Are there any common themes in those stories?**

3. We have the benefit of knowing the end of Joseph's story, as poignantly captured in Joseph's words of redemption to his brothers:



Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

GENESIS 50:19-20

Joseph makes this statement at the end of his ordeal when he can look back and clearly see God at work. It can be challenging to have this perspective when you're in the middle of a trying season. **When your circumstances are difficult, which of the following descriptions are most true of you? Circle all that apply, or adjust the statement(s) to be accurate for you.**

- a. I find myself anxious about the future.
- b. I second-guess my decisions and blame my past choices for this pain.
- c. I often find myself blaming others or my circumstances for my pain.
- d. I feel like I'm being punished.
- e. I have a hard time trusting God's intentions, and I wonder if He has forgotten about me.
- f. I feel angry about what's happened.
- g. I feel resigned that nothing can change.

**TO THE WORD TOGETHER**

Let's go to a few passages that illuminate how we tend to respond to God in uncertainty, as well as how He responds to us.

1. **Read aloud together the passage below.** Pay attention to Peter's response:



Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

MATTHEW 14:25-32

- a. How do the disciples respond when they first see Jesus' figure walking on the water?

- b. What does Peter do after Jesus identifies Himself?

c. How does Jesus respond?

d. Why do you think this moment is so significant to the disciples?

2. Now read this Old Testament passage together. Consider “Israel” and “Jacob” as synonyms for God’s people and then reflect on how this passage’s principles apply to us:



“To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

Why do you complain, Jacob?

Why do you say, Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD;

my cause is disregarded by my God”?

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

3. In Scripture, the word *heart* is best translated as the inner place where our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs intersect. **What beliefs or thoughts might be influencing your feelings around the situation you've been imagining?**

This is the heart of the matter—when we turn toward Christ in uncertainty, we experience the deepest growth in our faith.



YOUR ONE THING

As the group closes, take two minutes to record one key takeaway from this session.

What words or ideas do you want to hang on to as you go into this week?

A CLOSING PRAYER

God, give us faith to believe You're at work in our stories.

God, give us faith to believe Your intentions are good.

God, give us faith to believe . . . You.

ON YOUR OWN

DAILY STUDY

SESSION 1

DAY 1

THE HEART OF THE MATTER



READ

Introduction and chapter 1, *Not What I Signed Up For*

Use this space to capture any key phrases or takeaways from the chapter that you want to remember:

No matter how long we've been following Jesus, there is one question we must continue to ask ourselves, especially as we face trials of all kinds. The question is, *What does being a person of faith mean to me?*

Seasons of life and the inevitable trials that come will force us to move—either toward a joy and peace beyond our circumstances or toward a more superficial, more anxious, and less secure life. The difficult thing about this choice is that it's *not* determined by the quantity of religious activity on our calendars but by the quality of interaction with Christ in our hearts. And unexpected seasons always test and refine the heart.

In today's passage, we read the resolution of Joseph's story in his own words. More than thirty years after his brothers sold the teenage Joseph into slavery, they are still fearful of his revenge. But Joseph has a different interpretation of his own suffering—based not on circumstances but on faith. The way he views his responsibility and God's sovereignty determines Joseph's clarity, peace, and ability to forgive.

Today we are going to address the heart of the matter when it comes to our own uncertain seasons—understanding the state of our faith.



REFLECT

In this week's video session and reading, we experience a living picture of what faith looked like for Joseph, found in this redemptive ending: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives* (Genesis 50:19-20, emphasis added).

1. As you consider times when you struggle to see God at work in your life or when you feel disconnected from Him, which of these three promises from the passage is the hardest for you to believe?
 - a. Do not be afraid (be at peace).
 - b. God is here (rest in God's sovereignty).
 - c. God has plans to accomplish good for you and through you (experience blessing and purpose).

Take a few moments to write down any questions or objections that come to mind concerning that promise:

Uncertain seasons in our lives are always an invitation. We are encouraged to consider whether we may have accidentally relocated our faith from the certainty of our unseen God to the certainty of our known circumstances. When we are shaken, we will be disturbed! When we feel shaken in circumstances, it is natural that we also feel shaken in faith. But in this season, we have the chance to rightfully reposition our earthly circumstances and relationships so that the supremacy and sovereignty of God become our greatest source of joy.

This process moves us:

- from uncertainty to God's clarity
- from turmoil to peace
- from being troubled in spirit to having joy in Christ

And it always starts with the heart of the matter: faith. This week, let's start by defining what faith is and what it can be in our lives, and then move through each promise during our time with God.

2. Hebrews 11:1 offers us a definition of faith. Review the verse in the following translations, underlining the words or phrases that stand out to you.



Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

NIV

Now faith is the assurance (title deed, confirmation) of things hoped for (divinely guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen [the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses].

AMP

Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see.

CEB

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see.

MSG

- a. Record a definition of faith based on these translations:



CLOSING MEDITATION

It's so easy to believe that a blessed life means a life free of pain, strife, or suffering, but that is *not* how God defines blessing (more on that later in the study). **For now, let's look at what the Bible clearly says about what we should expect in our earthly lives:**



God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

PSALM 46:1-3

I know the LORD is always with me.
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

PSALM 16:8, NLT

As you close your time with God, reflect on what He says about Himself in these passages. Take a moment or two to consider God as “refuge,” God as “strength,” or God as “with me.” Jot down a prayer in which you tell Him what one (or all three!) of these promises means to you right now.

To get you started writing out your prayers, here’s an example from my own devotion time:

Father, You being my refuge means that I always have a safe place to go. When the world feels overwhelming or I feel like I'm going to be swallowed up by the emotions and struggles of today, I thank You that You always invite me to dwell with You in this safe and protected space of Your love.

In a 2022 survey of Americans, almost nine out of ten reported daily anxiety about inflation, with more than 60 percent reporting daily anxiety over everything from health to relationships to global events.¹

Our recent history is full of trials that tempt us toward fear, whether it presents itself as a low rumble of worry in the background of our minds or a crippling anxiety that controls our every decision. When it comes to fear, the Bible has good news and bad news for us. First, the bad news: Fear is as present a reality today as it was when the Bible was written, and there is no promise that circumstances will improve in a way that would give us reason *not* to fear.

But the good news? What God promises is not deliverance from fearful circumstances but deliverance from fearful hearts. In Genesis 50, Joseph's first words for his brothers were *do not be afraid*. The good news Joseph gave to his brothers pales in comparison to the good news we find in Jesus, who repeatedly affirms that we do not need to be afraid. In Christ, we can live in uncertainty and still have peace.²



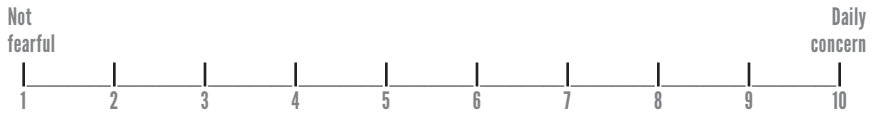
REFLECT

1. Mark the following scales as your assessment of how much fear you experience in each area:

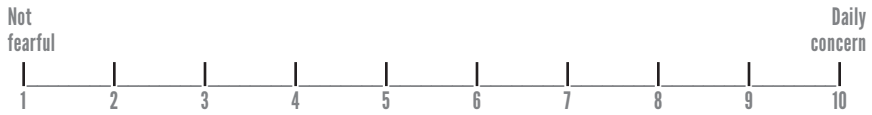


DO NOT FEAR

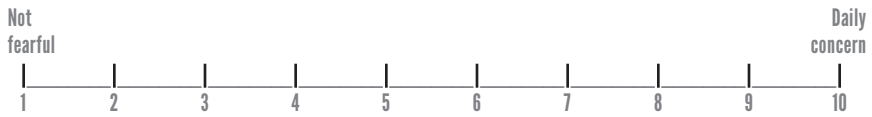
Difficult/uncertain relationships



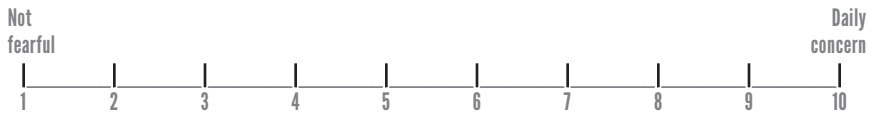
Uncertain future



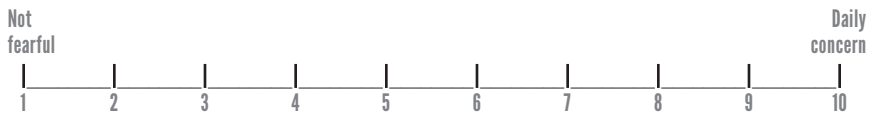
Lack of purpose/significance



Global concerns/uncertainty



Loneliness



If other categories or specifics come to mind, list them here:

2. Now, let's turn to God's Word together. Read the following passages:



“So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, “Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

DEUTERONOMY 31:6-8, NLT

Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said,

“I will never fail you.

I will never abandon you.”

So we can say with confidence,

“The LORD is my helper,

so I will have no fear.

What can mere people do to me?”

Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.

HEBREWS 13:5-7, NLT

- a. Make a short list of the instructions given within these passages:

sounds like you, my prayer is that you would put your faith on the line, beginning with releasing your fears. Let this unexpected season draw you closer to God. Dare Him to show up in your life by helping you change the way you think, starting today.



CLOSING MEDITATION

Look back over your list of concerns and place them before the Father today. Use the Scriptures you've read to shape a prayer. Write your own, or follow this rhythm:

Lord,

I confess my worries about _____ [be specific].

I know You say in Your Word _____ [repeat His promises].

I want to believe these promises for me today. I long to experience Your peace in my thoughts, feelings, and actions. Whenever anxiety rises up today, let me become more aware of Your presence. I thank You for this gift and receive it from You even now.

Spend a few moments breathing in deeply the peace of Christ. Let yourself focus on the idea of receiving this incredible gift and the feelings that being the recipient of God's great love brings.

In our group work for week 1, we looked at a passage in which Jesus calls out to Peter through the storm. In today's passage, we encounter another storm—and an opportunity to understand the true source of peace even in the most fearful circumstances. **Below, read the story in Mark 4 and picture yourself in the scene.**



As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water.

Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!”

MARK 4:35-41, NLT



REFLECT

1. In the passage above, two different experiences cause the disciples to fear. First, they are frightened by the storm. But once Jesus calms the wind and waves, “the disciples were absolutely terrified. ‘Who is this man?’ they asked each other.

‘Even the wind and waves obey him!’” (verse 41, NLT). **According to this verse, what scared them?**

Fear is a part of the human experience. But there are different kinds of fear: the fear that comes from our own constructed assumptions about how life is supposed to be or what will make us happy, and a healthy fear, or reverence, of the One who controls all circumstances.

We’ll be taking a deep dive into the story of Joseph during the upcoming sessions of this study, but this week we continue to focus on the end of the story. When Joseph looks back over his own experiences and suffering, his succinct reflection is: “Am I in the place of God?” (Genesis 50:19).

In other words, Joseph was able to trust in the power and sovereignty of God moving through his circumstances, even difficult ones. We don’t often use *fear* this way in our vocabulary; but in the Bible, this kind of fear is like respect on turbo setting: It’s the kind of respect for who God is that allows us to settle into our lives with security.

In today’s story, we see that Christ has sovereignty, or power, over the wind and waves.

2. Read the following passage from John’s Gospel:



As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

JOHN 9:1-7

a. What does Christ have power over in this passage?

3. Read the passage below from the Gospel of Luke:



Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

LUKE 7:11-17

a. What does Christ have power over in this passage?



CLOSING MEDITATION

These passages show that Jesus Christ came to manifest both the power of God over the world and our circumstances and the love of God to meet us in the reality and difficulty of life. Faith is believing that God *does* have power over our circumstances, even if facing that reality makes us confused or angry about what He allows in our lives. But our faith grows only when we face that reality, making that truth our starting point in the pursuit of a deeper life of trust and peace in God.

With that in mind, take a few moments to confess what you need to hand over to God's control today. **You might want to journal a prayer following this prompt:**

Jesus, You control the wind and the waves, and You control _____ [name a challenging circumstance, relationship, or situation]. Jesus, You have power over sight and over life, so I confess Your power over _____. Give me faith to believe that even in these circumstances that I cannot control and do not like, You meet me with Your comfort and Your confidence.

Sustain me with Your loving hand today. I ask for Your help with _____. Amen.

GOD HAS PLANS

Trusting that God has plans for us is key to moving from uncertainty to clarity and from turmoil to peace. Nothing is more powerful than recognizing God's sovereignty—the truth that He *is* in control, even in the most difficult of circumstances. So many of us struggle with this truth because there is so much we *can't* understand and *don't know how* to reconcile, whether it be the wars in the world or the wars we've fought in our own lives. We grow in trust as we step into this gap, no matter how dark it seems, and ask God to show us His plans for good, even in the worst of our troubles.

We can begin by using God's Word to build a foundation that goes beyond our experience. Joseph's blessing to his brothers is one example. It reveals his understanding that even in the worst experience—one meant for evil—God had intentions for good. In the midst of a difficult season, it may feel hard to believe that God has good plans, but His Word, His actions, and the sacrifice of His Son all point to a God of love who will redeem and restore.

To begin today's study, read Ephesians 1:3-14. It's a dense passage, so take it slowly. As you read, underline the verbs—the action words. For example, in the first two verses, you'll see *blessed*, *loved*, and *chose*. These are all actions God takes toward His people.



All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.

EPHESIANS 1:3-14, NLT



REFLECT

1. Read the Ephesians 1 passage again, paying special attention to the verbs you’ve underlined. In the columns below, record each action God takes and each action we take.

ACTIONS GOD TAKES	ACTIONS WE TAKE

2. These lists reveal God's great plan for us. Verse 12 explains the purpose of this plan: "God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God" (NLT). **Put this plan in your own words:**

3. In the English Standard Version, verse 12 ends with the phrase "to the praise of his glory." I've provided a few definitions to help with this tricky but important phrase:

Praise is "an expression of approval."³

Glory is "greatness," "splendor," an "external manifestation of his [God's] being."⁴

When you consider those definitions, how would you use your own words to describe God's life plan for you as for "the praise of his glory"?

Friend, we could never out-dream God's dreams for us. His great pleasure is to see us shine brightly with the light of His presence—and His presence is beautiful, righteous, loving, and good. He has plans for all of us—and they always maximize the reflection of His glory in our lives.

God has plans. God has plans for *you*.



CLOSING MEDITATION

As we close our time, I want to invite you to do one of two optional meditations:

1. If reading Ephesians 1 fills you up—if you know this truth in your heart—spend a few moments offering God praise for the way you've seen Paul's words play out in your life.
2. If you wrestle to believe that Ephesians 1 could be true for you, take a moment to write God's Word into your heart. Record this passage below, but as if it's written directly to you and about you. Every time the pronoun "us" appears, write your name instead. Pay attention to the thoughts and emotions that come to mind, and then bring them before God. Ask Him to help you believe that His love and plans for you are real and powerful.

DAY 5

GOD INTENDS GOOD



READ

Chapter 2, *Not What I Signed Up For*

Use this space to capture any key phrases or takeaways from the chapter that you want to remember:

We've spent our first week slowly exploring the Joseph blessing, a living picture of what we can experience regardless of our uncertainty or trouble:

- Do not be afraid.
- God is here.
- God has plans to accomplish good for you and through you.

Can you imagine living each day as if you believed this blessing to be true for you, in every season, regardless of any uncertainty or trouble that comes? As we'll discover together in our study of Joseph's story, believing these promises is a hard-won victory. It requires grit: persevering through the tests, growing in deeper trust, and allowing God to write our victory stories in His way, for His glory.



REFLECT

I've chosen a couple of passages that speak of the goodness of God—and the good plans He has for us.

Psalm 116 gives us a glimpse of what it looks like to be both honest *and* trusting. Read through the psalm, bringing to mind any uncertainty you are facing right now and singing this song back to God.

Underline the phrases you resonate with. Circle the phrases you want to believe for yourself.



I love the LORD because he hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.

Because he bends down to listen,

I will pray as long as I have breath!

Death wrapped its ropes around me;
the terrors of the grave overtook me.

I saw only trouble and sorrow.

Then I called on the name of the LORD:

“Please, LORD, save me!”

How kind the LORD is! How good he is!
So merciful, this God of ours!
The LORD protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and he saved me.
Let my soul be at rest again,
for the LORD has been good to me.
He has saved me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.
And so I walk in the LORD's presence
as I live here on earth!
I believed in you, so I said,
"I am deeply troubled, LORD."
In my anxiety I cried out to you,
"These people are all liars!"
What can I offer the LORD
for all he has done for me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and praise the LORD's name for saving me.
I will keep my promises to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
The LORD cares deeply
when his loved ones die.
O LORD, I am your servant;
yes, I am your servant, born into your
household;
you have freed me from my chains.
I will offer you a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.
I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people—

in the house of the LORD
in the heart of Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

PSALM 116, NLT

You may notice that the psalmist talks about two actions that sound foreign to our ears: lifting up the cup of salvation and offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving. In the book of Leviticus, we learn about the different sacrifices God required of His people. (Offering sacrifices is no longer required because of the work of Christ, but understanding the sacrifices is helpful as we consider how we engage with God each day.)

Unlike a sacrifice offered because of wrongdoing, a thank offering was given to celebrate the relationship between God and the person making the sacrifice. The cup of salvation was lifted up as a sign of victory and a celebration of the deliverance and forgiveness offered by God to His people.

We know that salvation is what we receive when we believe in Christ—His divinity, His death and resurrection, and His living presence in our lives—but salvation is also an ongoing process of living into the ways we've been saved by God, over and over again: saved from our sin, saved from our guilt, saved from our anxiety, saved from our turmoil, saved from our doubt.



CLOSING MEDITATION

Be gentle with yourself as we close this time. Imagine your heavenly Father smiling and receiving you with open arms. What do you need to be saved from today? Ask Him and thank Him for what He's already done and what He continues to do in your life. You may want to use some of the language from Psalm 116 to write your own prayer here:

As we dive into the story of Joseph together in the coming weeks, my prayer for you is the one Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica:



So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of the way you live, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:11-12, NLT

This is the blessing of our life in Christ—as we live not for ourselves but for Him. Not glorifying ourselves but glorifying Him. Not praising ourselves but praising Him for the gifts He gives us, forgiving us again and again and again.

