

A stylized, abstract illustration of a landscape. The background is a mix of warm colors: deep reds, oranges, and browns, suggesting a canyon or rocky terrain. A bright yellow sun is positioned in the upper right quadrant. In the center, there are blue mountains of varying shades. A winding river in shades of teal and blue flows through the bottom of the scene. The entire illustration is framed by a thin white border.

VALLEYS

FINDING COURAGE, CONVICTION,
AND CONFIDENCE IN LIFE'S LOW POINTS

KAT ARMSTRONG

STORYLINE

If you are longing for a breath of fresh air in your spiritual life, this study is for you. Kat Armstrong brings to life both familiar and less familiar Bible stories in such an engaging way that you can't help but see how the God of the past is also working and moving in your present. Through the captivating truths revealed in this series, you will discover more about God's faithfulness, be equipped to move past fear and disappointment, and be empowered to be who you were created to be. If your faith has felt mundane or routine, these words will be a refreshing balm to your soul and a guide to go deeper in your relationship with God.

HOSANNA WONG, international speaker and bestselling author of *How (Not) to Save the World: The Truth about Revealing God's Love to the People Right Next to You*

We are watching a new wave of Bible studies that care about the Bible's big story, from Genesis to Revelation; that plunge Bible readers into the depths of human despair and show them the glories of the Kingdom God plans for creation; and that invite readers to participate in that story in all its dimensions—in the mountains and the valleys. Anyone who ponders these Bible studies will come to terms not only with the storyline of the Bible but also with where each of us fits in God's grand narrative. I heartily commend Kat's **Storyline Bible Studies**.

REV. CANON DR. SCOT MCKNIGHT, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary

Kat Armstrong is an able trail guide with contagious enthusiasm! In this series, she'll take you hiking through Scripture to experience mountains and valleys, sticks and stones, sinners and saints. If you are relatively new to the Bible or are struggling to see how it all fits together, your trek with Kat will be well worth it. You might even decide that hiking through the Bible is your new hobby.

CARMEN JOY IMES, associate professor of Old Testament at Biola University and author of *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*

Kat has done two things that I love. She's taken something that is familiar and presented it in a fresh way that is understandable by all, balancing the profound with accessibility. And her trustworthy and constant approach to Bible study equips the participant to emerge from this study with the ability to keep studying and growing more.

MARTY SOLOMON, creator and executive producer of *The BEMA Podcast*

Kat Armstrong takes you into the heart of Scripture so that Scripture can grow in your heart. The **Storyline Bible Studies** have everything: the overarching story of God's redemption, the individual biblical story's historical context, and the text's interpretation that connects with today's realities. Armstrong asks insightful questions that make the Bible come alive and draws authentically on her own faith journey so that readers might deepen their relationship with Jesus. Beautifully written and accessible, the **Storyline Bible Studies** are a wonderful resource for individual or group study.

LYNN H. COHICK, PHD, provost and dean of academic affairs at Northern Seminary

Christians affirm that the Bible is God's Word and provides God's life-giving instruction and encouragement. But what good is such an authoritative and valuable text if God's people don't engage it to find the help the Scriptures provide? Here's where Kat Armstrong's studies shine. In each volume, she presents Bible study as a journey through Scripture that can be transformational. In the process, she enables readers to see the overarching storyline of the Bible and to find their place in that story. In addition, Armstrong reinforces the essential steps that make Bible study life-giving for people seeking to grow in their faith. Whether for individuals, for small groups, or as part of a church curriculum, these studies are ideally suited to draw students into a fresh and invigorating engagement with God's Word.

WILLIAM W. KLEIN, PHD, professor emeritus of New Testament interpretation and author of *Handbook for Personal Bible Study: Enriching Your Experience with God's Word*

You are in for an adventure. In this series, Kat pulls back the curtain to reveal how intentionally God has woven together seemingly disconnected moments in the collective Bible story. Her delivery is both brilliant and approachable. She will invite you to be a curious sleuth as you navigate familiar passages of Scripture, discovering things you'd never seen before. I promise you will never read the living Word the same again.

JENN JETT BARRETT, founder and visionary of The Well Summit

Kat has done it again! The same wisdom, depth, humility, and authenticity that we have come to expect from her previous work is on full display here in her new **Storyline Bible Study** series. Kat is the perfect guide through these important themes and through the story of Scripture: gentle and generous on the one hand, capable and clear on the other. She is a gifted communicator and teacher of God's Word. The format of these studies is helpful too—perfect pacing, just the right amount of new information at each turn, with plenty of space for writing and prayerful reflection as you go and some great resources for further study. I love learning from Kat, and I'm sure you will too. Grab a few friends from your church or neighborhood and dig into these incredible resources together to find your imagination awakened and your faith strengthened.

DAN LOWERY, president of Pillar Seminary

Kat Armstrong possesses something I deeply admire: a sincere and abiding respect for the Bible. Her tenaciousness to know more about her beloved Christ, her commitment to truth telling, and her desire to dig until she mines the deepest gold for her Bible-study readers makes her one of my favorite Bible teachers. I find few that match her scriptural attentiveness and even fewer that embody her humble spirit. This project is stunning, like the rest of her work.

LISA WHITTLE, bestselling author of *Jesus over Everything: Uncomplicating the Daily Struggle to Put Jesus First*, Bible teacher, and podcast host

I'm convinced that the Bible is somehow powerfully simple and beautifully complex. Like a diamond viewed from different angles, Scripture continually confronts my heart in fresh ways. This Bible-study series offers insightful perspectives and gives its participants a refreshing opportunity to admire the character of God and be transformed by the truth of his Word. Our souls need to meander through the minutiae and metanarrative of the Bible, and the **Storyline Bible Studies** help us do both.

KYLE IDLEMAN, senior pastor of Southeast Christian Church and bestselling author of *Not a Fan* and *One at a Time*



VALLEYS

FINDING COURAGE, CONVICTION,
AND CONFIDENCE IN LIFE'S LOW POINTS

KAT ARMSTRONG

NavPress 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit NavPress.com.

Valleys: Finding Courage, Conviction, and Confidence in Life's Low Points

Copyright © 2023 by Kat Armstrong. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

NavPress and the NavPress logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. *Tyndale* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Ministries. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team:

David Zimmerman, Publisher; Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor; Olivia Eldredge, Operations Manager; Julie Chen, Designer; Sarah K. Johnson, Proofreader

Cover illustration by Lindsey Bergsma. Copyright © 2023 by NavPress/The Navigators. All rights reserved.

Author photo by Jody Rodriguez, copyright © 2021. All rights reserved.

Author is represented by Jana Burson of The Christopher Ferebee Agency, christopherferebee.com

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked CSB are taken from the Christian Standard Bible,® copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-584-2

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my dad, Ronald K. Obenhaus.

I think you would have loved this.

Contents

A Message from Kat *xi*
The Storyline of Scripture *xiii*
How to Use This Bible Study *xvii*

INTRODUCTION: The Valleys Storyline *i*

LESSON ONE: Trusting God with Your Giant-Sized Doubts *5*
Valley of Eshkol: Where Moses' Spies Scout the Promised Land
(SCRIPTURE: NUMBERS 13–14)

LESSON TWO: Facing Your Battles with Courage and Conviction *33*
Valley of Kishon: Where Deborah and Jael Defeat Their Enemy
(SCRIPTURE: JUDGES 4–5)

LESSON THREE: Staying Brave When the Odds Are against You *59*
Valley of Elah: Where David Fights Goliath
(SCRIPTURE: I SAMUEL 17)

LESSON FOUR: Resisting Fear When Your Life Bottoms Out *83*
Valley of Death: Where God Comforts Scared People
(SCRIPTURE: PSALM 23)

LESSON FIVE: Resurrecting Hope When Your Confidence in God Is Lost *115*
Valley of Dry Bones: Where Ezekiel Prophesies Israel's Restoration
(SCRIPTURE: EZEKIEL 37)

As You Go *143*

Acknowledgments *148*

Resources for Deeper Study *149*

About the Author *151*

Notes *153*

A Message from Kat

THE BIBLE IS a literary masterpiece.

Whether you are new to the Christian faith or a seasoned Bible reader, I wrote the **Storyline Bible Studies** to guide you through the storyline of Scripture—each following a person, place, or thing in the Bible. Maybe you are practiced in dissecting a passage or verse and pulling things out of the text to apply to your life. But now you may feel as though your faith is fragmented, coming apart at the seams. The **Storyline Bible Studies** will help you put things back together. You'll discover cohesive, thematic storylines with literary elements and appreciate the Bible as the literary masterpiece that it is.

Tracing a biblical theme, with imagery like mountains and valleys or sticks and stones, will spark your holy curiosity and empower you to cultivate a biblical imagination. I'm praying that your time studying God's Word is an awe-inspiring catalyst to engage and experience God's truth—that you would marvel at the artistry of God's storytelling. And that the Bible will never feel dull or boring ever again.

I wrote *Valleys* when I was starved for encouragement and rebuilding my faith. Do you know that feeling? The valleys of our faith can be miserable places—where our trust in God feels buried. At least that’s how it is for me. When I’m in the lowlands, I wonder if all the pain has purpose. And I let my thoughts run wild with fear.

I ask God, *When will this end?*

How will this end?

Why me?

Why, God?

In the middle of that place, do you know what I found? Valleys in the Bible. Valleys whose names I could hardly pronounce. But what took place in these low points felt oh-so-familiar. There in the dark basin of my circumstances I found God, again and again.

And I know you will too.

Together, we are going to study five valleys in the Bible storyline. Some are geographical realities and others are metaphorical places, but God uses them all to teach us about his staying presence. You’ll find that each valley represents your lived experience.

Whether you are doubting God’s power, finding it harder and harder to face your battles with courage, or feeling like the odds are against you, this Bible study is for you. If you feel like your struggles are undefeatable giants, you’re in the right place.

When your faith bottoms out, God is right there with you. He can revive your frail faith. In fact, I’m convinced your lowest points are fertile ground for God to cultivate deep soil—where your trust in his power runs deep.

Deep places for a deeper faith.

Love,



The Storyline of Scripture

YOUR DECISION TO STUDY THE BIBLE for the next few weeks is no accident—God has brought you here, to this moment. And I don't want to take it for granted. Here, at the beginning, I want to invite you into the most important step you can take, the one that brings the whole of the Bible alive in extraordinary ways: a relationship with Jesus.

The Bible is a collection of divinely inspired manuscripts written over fifteen hundred years by at least forty different authors. Together, the manuscripts make up tens of thousands of verses, sixty-six books, and two testaments. Point being: It's a lot of content.

But the Bible is really just one big story: God's story of redemption. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible includes narratives, songs, poems, wisdom literature, letters, and even apocalyptic prophecies. Yet everything we read in God's Word helps us understand God's love and his plan to be in a relationship with us.

If you hear nothing else, hear this: God loves you.

It's easy to get lost in the vast amount of information in the Bible, so we're going to explore the storyline of Scripture in four parts. And as you locate your experience in the story of the Bible, I hope the story of redemption becomes your own.

PART 1: GOD MADE SOMETHING GOOD.

The big story—God's story of redemption—started in a garden. When God launched his project for humanity, he purposed all of us—his image bearers—to flourish and co-create with him. In the beginning there was peace, beauty, order, and abundant life. The soil was good. Life was good. We rarely hear this part of our story, but it doesn't make it less true. God created something good—and that includes you.

PART 2: WE MESSED IT UP.

If you've ever thought, *This isn't how it's supposed to be*, you're right. It's not. We messed up God's good world. Do you ever feel like you've won gold medals in messing things up? Me too. All humanity shares in that brokenness. We are imperfect. The people we love are imperfect. Our systems are jacked, and our world is broken. And that's on us. We made the mess, and we literally can't help ourselves. We need to be rescued from our circumstances, the systems in which we live, and ourselves.

PART 3: JESUS MAKES IT RIGHT.

The good news is that God can clean up all our messes, and he does so through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one denies that Jesus lived and died. That's just history. It's the empty tomb and the hundreds of eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after his death that make us scratch our heads. Because science can only prove something that is repeatable, we are dependent upon the eyewitness testimonies of Jesus' resurrection for this once-in-history moment. If Jesus rose from the dead—and I believe he did—Jesus is exactly who he said he was, and he accomplished exactly what had been predicted for thousands of years. He restored us. Jesus made *it*, all of it, right. He can forgive your sins and connect you to the holy God through his life, death, and resurrection.

PART 4: ONE DAY, GOD WILL MAKE ALL THINGS NEW.

The best news is that this is not as good as it gets. A day is coming when Christ will return. He's coming back to re-create our world: a place with no tears, no pain, no suffering, no brokenness, no helplessness—just love. God will make all things new. In the meantime, God invites you to step into his storyline, to join him in his work of restoring all things. Rescued restorers live with purpose and on mission: not a life devoid of hardship, but one filled with enduring hope.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S STORYLINE

If the storyline of Scripture feels like a lightbulb turning on in your soul, that, my friend, is the one true, living God, who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is inviting you into a relationship with him to have your sins forgiven and secure a place in his presence forever. When you locate your story within God's story of redemption, you begin a lifelong relationship with God that brings meaning, hope, and restoration to your life.

Take a moment now to begin a relationship with Christ:

God, I believe the story of the Bible, that Jesus is Lord and you raised him from the dead to forgive my sins and make our relationship possible. Your storyline is now my story. I want to learn how to love you and share your love with others. Amen.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

ROMANS 10:9, NRSV

How to Use This Bible Study

THE **STORYLINE BIBLE STUDIES** are versatile and can be used for

- ▼ individual study (self-paced),
- ▼ small groups (five- or ten-lesson curriculum), or
- ▼ church ministry (semester-long curriculum).

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Each lesson in the *Valleys* Bible study is divided into four fifteen- to twenty-minute parts (sixty to eighty minutes of individual study time per lesson). You can work through the material one part at a time over a few different days or all in one sitting. Either way, this study will be like anything good in your life: What you put in, you get out. Each of the four parts of each lesson will help you practice Bible-study methods.

SMALL GROUPS

Working through the *Valleys* Bible study with a group could be a catalyst for life change. Although the Holy Spirit can teach you truth when you read the Bible on your own, I want to encourage you to gather a small group together to work through this study for these reasons:

- ▼ God himself is in communion as one essence and three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- ▼ Interconnected, interdependent relationships are hallmarks of the Christian faith life.
- ▼ When we collaborate with each other in Bible study, we have access to the viewpoints of our brothers and sisters in Christ, which enrich our understanding of the truth.

For this Bible study, every small-group member will need a copy of the *Valleys* study guide. In addition, I've created a free downloadable small-group guide that includes

- ▼ discussion questions for each lesson,
- ▼ Scripture readings, and
- ▼ prayer prompts.

Whether you've been a discussion leader for decades or just volunteered to lead a group for the first time, you'll find the resources you need to create a loving atmosphere for men and women to grow in Christlikeness. You can download the small-group guide using this QR code.



CHURCH MINISTRY

Church and ministry leaders: Your work is sacred. I know that planning and leading through a semester of ministry can be both challenging and rewarding. That's why every **Storyline Bible Study** is written so that you can build modular semesters of ministry. The *Valleys* Bible study is designed to complement the *Mountains*

Bible study. Together, *Mountains* and *Valleys* can support a whole semester of ministry seamlessly, inviting the people you lead into God's Word and making your life simpler.

To further equip church and ministry leaders, I've created *The Leader's Guide*, a free digital resource. You can download *The Leader's Guide* using this QR code.



The Leader's Guide offers these resources:

- ▼ a sample ministry calendar for a ten-plus-lesson semester of ministry,
- ▼ small-group discussion questions for each lesson,
- ▼ Scripture readings for each lesson,
- ▼ prayer prompts for each lesson,
- ▼ five teaching topics for messages that could be taught in large-group settings, and
- ▼ resources for deeper study.

SPECIAL FEATURES

However you decide to utilize the *Valleys* Bible study, whether for individual, self-paced devotional time; as a small-group curriculum; or for semester-long church ministry, you'll notice several stand-out features unique to the **Storyline Bible Studies**:

- ▼ gospel presentation at the beginning of each Bible study;
- ▼ full Scripture passages included in the study so that you can mark up the text and keep your notes in one place;
- ▼ insights from diverse scholars, authors, and Bible teachers;
- ▼ an emphasis on close readings of large portions of Scripture;
- ▼ following one theme instead of focusing on one verse or passage;
- ▼ Christological narrative theology without a lot of church-y words; and
- ▼ retrospective or imaginative readings of the Bible to help Christians follow the storyline of Scripture.

You may have studied the Bible by book, topic, or passage before; all those approaches are enriching ways to read the Word of God. The **Storyline Bible Studies** follow a literary thread to deepen your appreciation for God's master plan of redemption and develop your skill in connecting the Old Testament to the New.



INTRODUCTION

THE VALLEYS STORYLINE

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you found yourself in a low place? That's where I was as I started to trace God's work in the valleys of Scripture. In fact, as I told my closest group of friends, I was at one of my lowest points in ministry. In the middle of a global pandemic, I'd pivoted till I was dizzy. God had showed up in mighty ways . . . but I was exhausted and ready to give up hope.

As I walked through my personal valley, I was surprised to discover that the valleys in the Bible have far more meaning than just as geographical markers or pins on an ancient map. In his literary genius, God repurposes valley settings throughout Scripture to signal tests of faith—and the deepening of confidence in the One who is with us in the valley.

I'm still struggling through my same valley in many ways. But I'll tell you this: The comfort and encouragement I received from my journey through the Bible's valleys has changed me to my core. My circumstances may have not yet changed

for the better, but my friends would tell you that *I've* changed. Something has shifted. God did that as I studied the valleys storyline in Scripture.

In *Valleys*, we're going to explore

- ▼ *Numbers 13–14*: the Valley of Eshkol, where Moses' spies scouted the Promised Land;
- ▼ *Judges 4–5*: the Valley of Kishon, where Deborah and Jael defeated their enemy;
- ▼ *1 Samuel 17*: the Valley of Elah, where David fought Goliath;
- ▼ *Psalms 23*: the Valley of Death, where God comforts scared people; and
- ▼ *Ezekiel 37*: the Valley of Dry Bones, where Ezekiel prophesied Israel's restoration.

We're going to do this by looking at each valley through four different lenses:

- ▼ **PART 1: CONTEXT.** Do you ever feel dropped into a Bible story disoriented? Part 1 will introduce you to the valley you're going to study and its scriptural context. Getting your bearings before you read will enable you to answer the question *What am I about to read?*
- ▼ **PART 2: SEEING.** Do you ever read on autopilot? I do too. Sometimes I finish reading without a clue as to what just happened. A better way to read the Bible is to practice thoughtful, close reading of Scripture to absorb the message God is offering to us. That's why part 2 includes close Scripture reading and observation questions to empower you to answer the question *What is the story saying?*
- ▼ **PART 3: UNDERSTANDING.** If you've ever scratched your head after reading your Bible, part 3 will give you the tools to understand the author's intended meaning both for the original audience and for you. Plus you'll practice connecting the Old and New Testaments to get a fuller picture of God's unchanging grace. Part 3 will enable you to answer the question *What does it mean?*

- ▼ **PART 4: RESPONDING.** The purpose of Bible study is to help you become more Christlike; that's why part 4 will include journal space for your reflection on and responses to the content and a blank checklist for actionable next steps. You'll be able to process what you're learning so that you can live out the concepts and pursue Christlikeness. Part 4 will enable you to answer the questions *What truths is this passage teaching?* and *How do I apply this to my life?*

One of my prayers for you, as a curious Bible reader, is that our journey through this study will help you cultivate a biblical imagination so that you're able to make connections throughout the whole storyline of the Bible. In each lesson, I'll do my best to include a few verses from different places in the Bible that are connected to our valley stories. In the course of this study, we'll see the way God shows up in valleys throughout his Word—and get a glimpse of how he might show up in our lives today.

God's Word is so wonderful, I hardly know how to contain my excitement. Feel free to geek out with me; let your geek flag fly high, my friends. When we can see how interrelated all the parts of Scripture are to each other, we'll find our affection for God stirred as we see his artistic brilliance unfold.

LESSON ONE

TRUSTING GOD WITH YOUR GIANT-SIZED DOUBTS



**VALLEY OF ESHKOL:
WHERE MOSES' SPIES SCOUT THE PROMISED LAND**

SCRIPTURE: NUMBERS 13-14



PART 1

CONTEXT

Before you begin your study, we will start with the context of the story we are about to read together: the setting, both cultural and historical; the people involved; and where our passage fits in the larger setting of Scripture. All these things help us make sense of what we're reading. Understanding the context of a Bible story is fundamental to reading Scripture well. Getting your bearings before you read will enable you to answer the question *What am I about to read?*

TELL ME IF THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR.

You feel like your world cracked. The bottom fell out of your plans or relationships or health. You're at your lowest of lows. You not only have "friends in low places,"¹ you've got caverns in your soul.

Maybe you've been there before. Maybe you're there right now. The human condition is such that we'll all likely be there again.

The dips in life might cause us to question God. That's normal. Everyone who follows Jesus will experience a crisis of faith at some point in their journey. When your doubts seem to erode your faith, it's hard to trust God's plans and his goodness. But God can handle your doubts and your questions.

In this lesson, we are going to read from the book of Numbers about a small group of spies sent by Moses to scout the Promised Land. The twelve spies, including a man named Caleb, find that the Valley of Eshkol is just as fertile as

God promised. But there is a big problem: Giants occupy the land. For most of the spies, fear leads the way. Doubts set in. And the Israelites end up experiencing decades of consequences because they can't bring themselves to look past the giants.

But Caleb is different.

My husband, Aaron, wanted to name our one and only child Caleb, after this man in the Valley of Eshkol story who kept his eyes on God. This valley story

means a lot to me and my family. Embedded in my son's name is an aspirational blessing and a legacy of faith. Maybe soon, Caleb Armstrong will reach for his Bible and turn to the pages in Numbers 13 and 14 to remind himself who else has lived with his name. My prayer is that his connection to this man will help him trust God with his own giant-sized doubts.

If you don't spend a lot of time reading the book of Numbers, you're in good company. I rarely do either. Every time I revisit a story in Numbers, I reorient

myself to God's storyline of redemption to find my bearings. The story of the Valley of Eshkol in Numbers 13 and 14 connects to everything that has happened before it and everything that will come after.

On page 1 of the Bible, God creates the first man and woman in his image and starts a relationship with his people. Very soon after, God launches his project—to see his family flourish. But Adam and Eve rebel against God's good plan to bless the whole world. This is the first time in the Bible, of many, that God forgives sin and creates a way for people to remain in relationship with him.

In one of God's many acts of grace, he chooses Abraham and his family to bless the world because Adam and Eve failed to. Most of the book of Genesis is about Abraham's family line. (And let's just say that if Abraham had his own Netflix series, he would have won an Emmy.)

By the time we get to the next book of the Bible, Exodus, we find God's people enslaved under the Egyptians. God acts again, rescuing his people through a man named Moses, who leads the Israelites out of oppression, through the Red

Valley of Eshkol: You might see this referred to as the Valley of Eshcol elsewhere, depending on which translation you reference. I followed the spelling of the translation I quoted for this passage.

Sea, and to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. Again God proves that he longs to forgive—and restore a loving relationship with—his people. At Mount Sinai, he does this through a covenant that reassures the Israelites of their inheritance: the Promised Land. This would be a place of fruitfulness and abundance, overflowing with plenty, a home for God’s people to settle and grow.

Right off the bat, you and I should sense that the Promised Land is a sacred echo of the Garden of Eden, a place of promise and hope. The Promised Land, like Eden before it, points us to our bright future with God and helps us tangibly understand his uncompromising, unending love.

In the Valley of Eshkol, we see that Caleb takes God at his word, trusting in the promise even in the face of doubt—while those around him give way to fear. Like me, you may find a deep connection with the people who are struggling with fear, but my hope for us all is that we will emulate Caleb’s faith. As we study this low point in the Israelites’ journey, I want us to see that our God is powerful enough to overcome the giants in our lives.

If you are in the valley of doubt, I have good news for you: *God can be trusted.*

- 1. PERSONAL CONTEXT: What is going on in your life right now that might impact how you understand this Bible story?**

2. SPIRITUAL CONTEXT: If you've never studied this Bible story before, what piques your curiosity? If you've studied this passage before, what impressions and insights do you recall? What problems or concerns might you have with the passage?