

Citizens
Church
Presents

TERRAIN

A Lent
Devotional



written, photographed & designed in Birmingham, Ala.



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PROLOGUE

Written By
Joel Park

WEDNESDAY

On Ash Wednesday we put a smudge of dirt on our foreheads to remind us that we came from dust and eventually we'll be laid back in it.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season that remembers the wilderness wanderings of Israel and the temptations of Christ. In lent, we are invited to humbly embrace our limits and longings, and to say no to our sin and sinful desires. We are reminded that we, too, live on a journey of the in-between: as Christians, we begin our journey when we are freed from sin, and will end the journey only when our bodies are laid to rest in the dirt.

But until the end, we travel the landscape — **the terrain** — of the in-between. We live on a journey between the rescue of our hearts and the resurrection of our bodies.

There are no shortcuts. We do not travel alone.

THURSDAY

If you feel like your life is full of rocky terrain, you might start with Genesis. The book of Genesis begins in an idyllic garden and is downhill from there. Lying, deception, murder, kidnapping, trafficking, and betrayal all fill the storylines of this book.

If you are in God's family by faith, these people are your ancestors: lying, hardworking, backstabbing, brave, cheating, human people who had lives full of triumphs, failures, and hope just like you and me. They wrestled with God, they laughed at his promises, they clung to his faithfulness, they received his blessings over and over again.

In Genesis, Adam, Eve, and their children fall from grace into the rocky terrain of life. This Lent season we will journey with them, and we will see that no matter what life has for us and no matter what sin and brokenness we face, God can turn even the worst thing into something good (Genesis 50:20).



FRIDAY

O Lord,
Remind us often
when we are feeling proud,
arrogant,
beyond reproach,
pleased with ourselves,
self-sufficient in our ways,
that for such as us,
and better,
and worse,
you walked a road that took you to a cruel cross,
and rose again to show us where we might look for rescue
as from this lofty perch
we fall.
Amen.

- Author unknown

the
terrain
of
week
two



abundance / loss

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

chapters two & three

TUESDAY

God made Adam from the earth and placed him in a nearly unimaginable garden. His job was to tend, care for, and to see the fruits of his labor. He had full access to His creator. He walked in the garden with God. Yet, even knowing that Adam would choose sin over intimacy with his creator, God chose to lavish Adam with abundance.

God gives freely, not because he wants our love, but because that is who he is. He's the one who gives freely. The grandeur of this world and the blessings he bestows upon us all point to his power and goodness, not our ability. Abundance may look different at times. Sometimes abundance is financial, or a community of friends, or relationships — but God's abundance always comes from the same source: his grace. Even when Adam was hiding in the bushes. When the weight of his shame and the wrath of his creator bared down on him for the very first time, God offered him grace in the hope of a savior, Jesus. We can live abundantly because we have a savior who spares no expense for us, even at the cost of his own son.



abundance / loss

Written By
Talaya Champion

WEDNESDAY

Imagine the utter disbelief that Adam and Eve felt when the garden was sealed off to them. They stared out east of Eden to a cursed existence. One day lush gardens, docile animals, stomachs that never ached. The next was pain, toil, and murder. God's presence was gone. The cool of the eve strolls vanished. It wasn't a bad dream; there was no going back.

Where they once freely enjoyed God's abundance, in loss Adam and Eve were forced to see God's grace to them as undeserved. Each plant that blooms through hard soil and each child born through pain is undeserved grace. If they could experience loss surrounded by abundance, then we are hopeless without Jesus on this side of Eden.

No one goes through life without loss. We all face the choice to either harden our hearts or invite God into our pain. We can choose to believe God will provide or we can blame him for our loss. We have the gift of knowing who saved us, we have the gift of knowing what we are being saved from, we have the gift of the second Adam - his name is Jesus

THURSDAY

Abundance means little without need. Loss has no comfort without the hope of God's abundance. In Jesus, we find the answer to both. Adam and Eve had everything they could have ever wanted and yet they still chose to see what was behind door #2. They ignored one very important thing - that even in their abundance, they had needs. Conversely, when we are in pain, it is all too easy to forget God's promise of life and life abundant.

So how do we live this abundant life? Through Jesus. In times of abundance, we praise our creator. In times of loss, we recite the promises of Christ. We ask, that he will make our hearts and desires like his. We hope in heaven knowing that Jesus has saved us and provided a way.

FRIDAY

Jesus,

Through your creation, I see your power and beauty.

Bring me to awe before you.

Through your law, I see your holiness.

Help me to love and keep your law.

Forgive me for desiring things more than you, there is no one beside you.

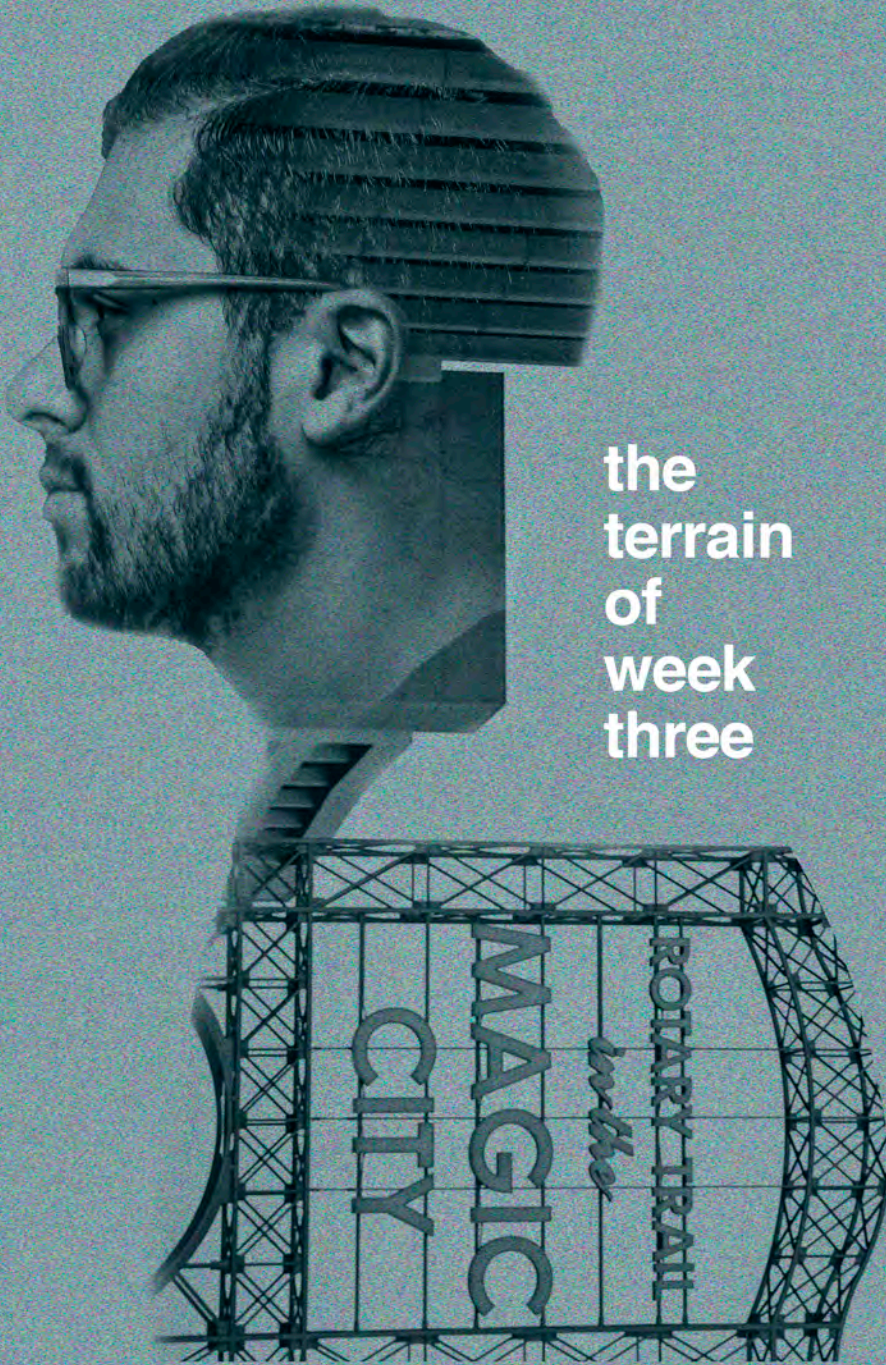
Help me when I falter and lose trust in your love for me.

Lord, help my unbelief.

Thank you for never leaving me without hope.

Thank you for giving me your abundant grace.

Amen.



the
terrain
of
week
three

belonging / loneliness

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

chapters
six
&
seven

TUESDAY

In a time of extreme wickedness, Noah alone was found to be good. Noah walked with God forsaking the ease of evil and choosing to stand alone. God gave Noah a very important job, the creation of the ark. But I can't imagine many lined up to grab an axe. This was not a quick build and would be impossible to miss! The ark was large enough for Noah, his household, two of every animal plus supplies. The community knew, but the news of the great flood fell on deaf ears. Noah was rejected by his community, but not rejected by God. He continued to persevere because he trusted God.

Following Jesus can seem like an impossible task when the world is set against you, the losses pile up, and obstacles never end. If we are striving alone, it can make the finish line seem farther away. But unlike Noah, we are not alone. We have been gifted with an entire world of brothers and sisters in Christ and the gift of the local church. We can work together and help each other. God restored his original plan of community after the flood, allowing us to not suffer in loneliness, but rejoice in unity.

belonging / loneliness

Written By
Tori Aguazul

WEDNESDAY

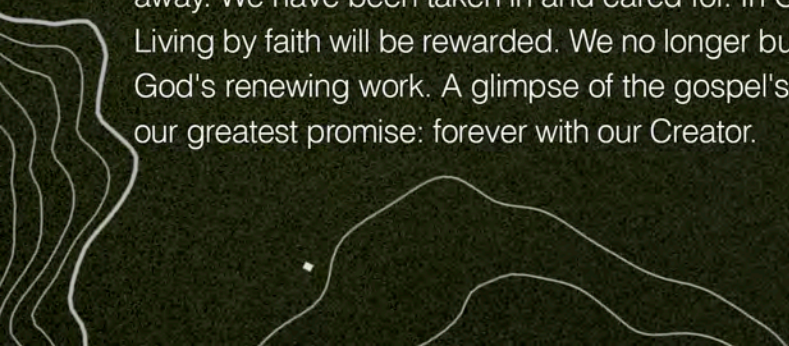
God fulfilled his promise to Noah. The waters rose and the earth was completely covered. All of the wicked humans and creatures perished. Noah survived as God promised, along with his family and animals on the ark. God provided for them all. They were all protected and cared for. Noah got to witness the restoration of the earth after a life surrounded by destruction. Noah, from birth to renewal, he believed in God's ultimate power with reverent fear. He traded the temporary pain of a cruel community for hundreds of years of joy, re-creating nations.

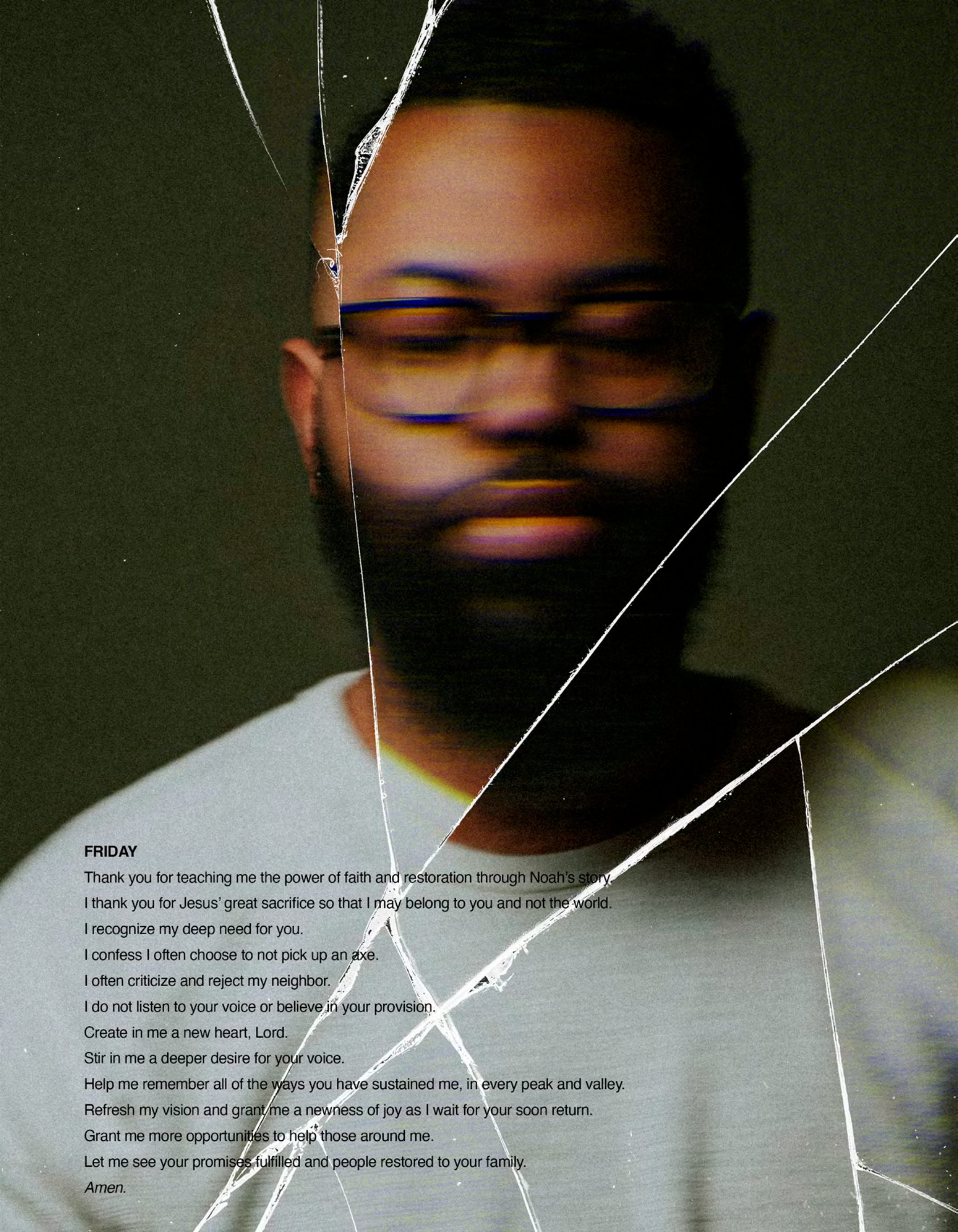
God is always faithful. He never shortchanges his promises but fulfills them with abundance. Noah trusted God and God provided. The promises of God will be completed as we wait in faith. Our lives are filled with evidence of God's faithfulness. We have been adopted into God's family; he provides for us out of his love. We are his creation, his masterpieces. God did not destroy the world because he hated it. But God restored the earth by removing sin and corruption. The destruction of his creation broke his heart. Yet God loved humanity enough to save us from death. Likewise, Jesus came and rescued us from sin and death once again, sealing our lives with his forever.

THURSDAY

God rewards those who are not afraid to be different. We cannot find belonging in God without risking rejection from the world. But this world is not the end. Just as Noah ushered in a new beginning, so will Jesus in his second coming. The earth we know will cease and God will restore it once again. This should give us great comfort! As we die to our sin and pursue a deeper friendship with God, we strengthen our trust in our powerful Creator awaiting eternity.

What an amazing gift: to belong! We are no longer outsiders! Jesus brought us home. No more running away. We have been taken in and cared for. In God's love and kindness, we all have a seat at his table. Living by faith will be rewarded. We no longer build alone but thrive as one. Jesus' church is a picture of God's renewing work. A glimpse of the gospel's eternal work. Changed lives now carry us forward into our greatest promise: forever with our Creator.





FRIDAY

Thank you for teaching me the power of faith and restoration through Noah's story.

I thank you for Jesus' great sacrifice so that I may belong to you and not the world.

I recognize my deep need for you.

I confess I often choose to not pick up an axe.

I often criticize and reject my neighbor.

I do not listen to your voice or believe in your provision.

Create in me a new heart, Lord.

Stir in me a deeper desire for your voice.

Help me remember all of the ways you have sustained me, in every peak and valley.

Refresh my vision and grant me a newness of joy as I wait for your soon return.

Grant me more opportunities to help those around me.

Let me see your promises fulfilled and people restored to your family.

Amen.

the
terrain
of
week
four



home / wandering

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

chapter twelve

TUESDAY

When Abram was seventy-five years old, God called Abram to leave his home country and journey to an unfamiliar land. We see Abram's obedience to the Lord in choosing to pack up his family, his livestock, and all his possessions, and leave his home. He left all that was familiar to follow the Lord's promise to lead him into a new land. A land the Lord had promised would become an inheritance for his descendants even though Abram and his wife were childless at the time.

He did not know where the Lord was leading him, yet Abram journeyed on. He spent many years of his life wandering, sojourning from place to place. Over two decades later, God gives Abram and Sarai new names - Abraham and Sarah. God promises that Sarah will have a son. Which was hard for Abraham to fathom as both he and his wife considered themselves well past the age of fertility. But God was faithful, he fulfilled his promise by giving Sarah the power to conceive and give birth to their son, Isaac.

We can see the depth of Abraham's faith in how he believed and obeyed God throughout his life and his story. Abraham did not live to see the fulfillment of all that the Lord had promised him, but he died in faith knowing that a heavenly home awaited him.

A white line-art topographic map graphic is located in the top-left corner of the page, partially overlapping the title text.

home / wandering

Written By
Halli Williamson

WEDNESDAY

After God called Abraham to leave his homeland and journey to a place he did not yet know, he and his wife Sarah were sojourners in foreign lands. On two separate occasions, Abraham lied about Sarah's true identity. Claiming she was his sister instead of his wife. The lie came from fearing for his life over trusting God to protect them.

Throughout his life, God gave several, repeated promises to Abraham. Abraham believed God but it is clear that he did not always trust God to come through for him. However, his mistakes and wanderings along the way did not nullify the covenant God had established with him. Just as our sins do not nullify the gospel. The goodness and kindness of God doesn't come and go, but it is here to stay. Abraham believed and he died in faith, even without seeing the fulfillment of all that had been spoken to him.

THURSDAY

God leads Abraham like a man amongst mountains and valleys. The promises are laid out like a blurry map: the land is challenging and what lies ahead is uncertain. The most treacherous moment came when the Lord asked Abraham to sacrifice his long-promised son Isaac. Yet Abraham had learned to trust God, followed through. And again God provided a way. God gave a ram instead at the last moment. As we learn to have home in God, we learn to trust him with the most precious of things. Just as God provided Jesus to be our substitute on the cross.

Centuries after Abraham's story, Christ was born to the virgin Mary. He came to the earth as a baby boy who would grow to reconcile His people to Himself through His death on a cross and His resurrection from the grave. Through Jesus, we are made right with God and Christ is now our righteousness. Yes, God had a physical home in mind for Abraham when He led him to the promised land, but He was also preparing for him an eternal home far greater than our experience of home in this world. Though we can't always see the full picture, we can trust that God stands true to His promises in Christ.



FRIDAY

Father,

Help us remember that though we are strangers and exiles on this earth,
you are preparing an eternal home for us.

Even in our wanderings, you are with us and your promises hold true.

You are a faithful God through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows throughout our lives.

Through Jesus, you made a way for us to be in right relationship with you.

And in this covenant, we can rest.

Help us to trust in your steadfast love, knowing that you are with us to the end.

Our eternal home is with you.

Amen.

the
terrain
of
week
five



waiting / wanting

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

**chapter eighteen
verses one – fifteen
& chapter twenty-one
verses one – seven**

TUESDAY

For a woman of Sarah's day to be childless not only meant a lack of lineage, but also that she would have no one to care for her if Abraham died before her. Every day of those decades of longing and waiting must have been lonely and isolating for Sarah. All she wanted was to do her part (even when deciding to use Hagar as a surrogate).

Despite this futile attempt, God blessed her greatly and left her unashamed in the end.

At the ripe old age of 90, Sarah bore a son whom she named "he laughs" to remind herself that God uses foolish things to shame the wise. Just a year before, Sarah overheard the prophecy of Isaac's birth during Abraham's holy meeting outside their tent. At the time, her laughter was from unbelief, now her laughter would be filled with joy and wonder toward the living God.

We can learn much about trusting God from Sarah's story. God will make good on his promise—always.

waiting / wanting

Written By
Shayla Carter

WEDNESDAY

God's promises often come with a waiting period. Anticipation can be exciting. But when the waiting ends in disappointment, it can be crippling. The longer the wait, the more forgetful we can become. And the more forgetful we are, the more we stumble into unbelief.


Sarah waited decades to bear a child. She thought her time had passed. Imagine hearing that the God of the universe has planned to give your husband many children, but you haven't been able to produce any. No wonder Sarah laughs overhearing the meeting outside the tent—she'd been waiting so long to produce an heir that she'd given up.

Far too often, we do the same. We wait and trust God will do what he said he would do. Then, after awhile time, we forget the promise and doubt creeps in. Will God really bless me? Will God really be with me always? We surrender to unbelief and trade our joy for cynicism in the process.

THURSDAY

We will experience seasons of both waiting and receiving. Sarah waited decades before she saw the fruit of God's promise to Abraham through her childbearing. By natural standards, it would seem impossible; by God's standards, it is simply a display of his power. Her long-awaited delight would be all the more delightful because of what God had done in her life.

Whatever next step you've been praying for, God sees you and hears you. Root deeper in God's truth and wait expectantly for him to do the impossible, remembering all that he has done.





FRIDAY

Sovereign God, you are in control of every detail of my life.
I confess that I want my life to fit the timeline I have set for myself.
This leads me to believe you are withholding from me,
Or that I should forge ahead on my own.
Forgive me for the times I have done this today and in the past.
Help me see that your ways are not my ways and your thoughts are not my thoughts.
I want to trust that you are working while I wait.
And when I do receive long-awaited blessings,
may I praise you for the works of your hand.
Amen.

the
terrain
of
week
six



love / rejection

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

chapter twenty-nine – chapter thirty verse twenty-four

TUESDAY

Jacob went into a far country after tricking his father and brother (Gen. 27). Who does he meet? The most beautiful woman in the world, at least to him. A love that would make seven years of work seem like only a few days (Gen. 29:20). For a man on the run with a promise from God and an angry family back home, his luck couldn't be greater than to find his dream girl right away. Jacob starts to transform. Love does that. Jacob is willing to work, instead of deceiving to get what he wants. He doesn't lie or cut corners with Laban (Rachel's father). Instead, Jacob deals earnestly with him.

God's promises come true as Jacob eventually will have over a dozen children (Gen 28). Rachel and Leah will bring forth children, and they will dwell in the land God promised them eventually. Leah, even though mistreated and under-loved, is never lost in the Lord's sight. Instead, the Lord favors those mistreated in this life. God isn't for the 'winners' of this world, but close to all. Love never fails.

love / rejection

Written By
Justin Karl

WEDNESDAY

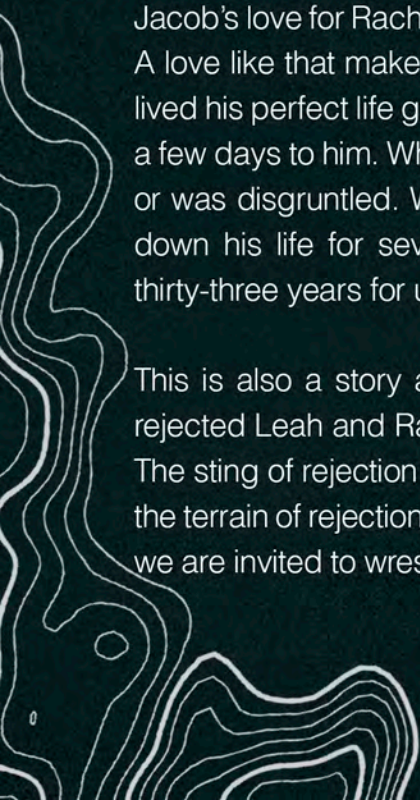
Jacob could not outrun his sins. No matter the miles. No matter the relational space. Laban's trickery traps him, just as Jacob's trickery poisoned his own family. We think we are strong enough to run away or clever enough to hide. But our sin stalks us like a prowling lion at the edge of darkness. Family cycles repeat without us even knowing the trap is springing again. The deceit of Laban to give Leah before Rachel in marriage leaves Leah unloved, Rachel embittered, and Jacob enraged.

Imagine years of suffering under your father's deceit? Instead of a simple marriage of love, the sisters are pitted against each other in endless competition. And they lose each other. Their choices to fight over love are their own. But the battleground of hate and envy was set by Laban's lack of love and foolishness. Some of the most difficult terrains of life are dealing with others' sins towards us. Sin makes us sinners. Sin also makes us sufferers.

THURSDAY

Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that it made seven years of work seem like a few days (Gen. 29:20). A love like that makes us question, "Do I understand what love is?" We can be tempted to think Jesus lived his perfect life grudgingly or reluctantly. But truly, it would seem his thirty-three years were more like a few days to him. Why? Because he loved his Father and loved his bride (us). Jesus never complained or was disgruntled. We will never over-estimate the strength of Christ's love for his church. Jacob laid down his life for seven years and seven years again, while Jesus laid down his life altogether, all thirty-three years for us.

This is also a story about rejection. Jacob rejected his brother Esau by deceiving his father. Laban rejected Leah and Rachel by deceiving Jacob. Leah experienced the rejection of being the other wife. The sting of rejection is poison to the bones. Yet, the Lord sees us and remembers us. The Lord knows the terrain of rejection, knows deception, and has felt the pain of envy in the nails. God knows our life and we are invited to wrestle with him (Gen. 32)





FRIDAY

Lord,

I cannot outrun my sins. I cannot hide.

Help me. Deal with me according to your grace and goodness.

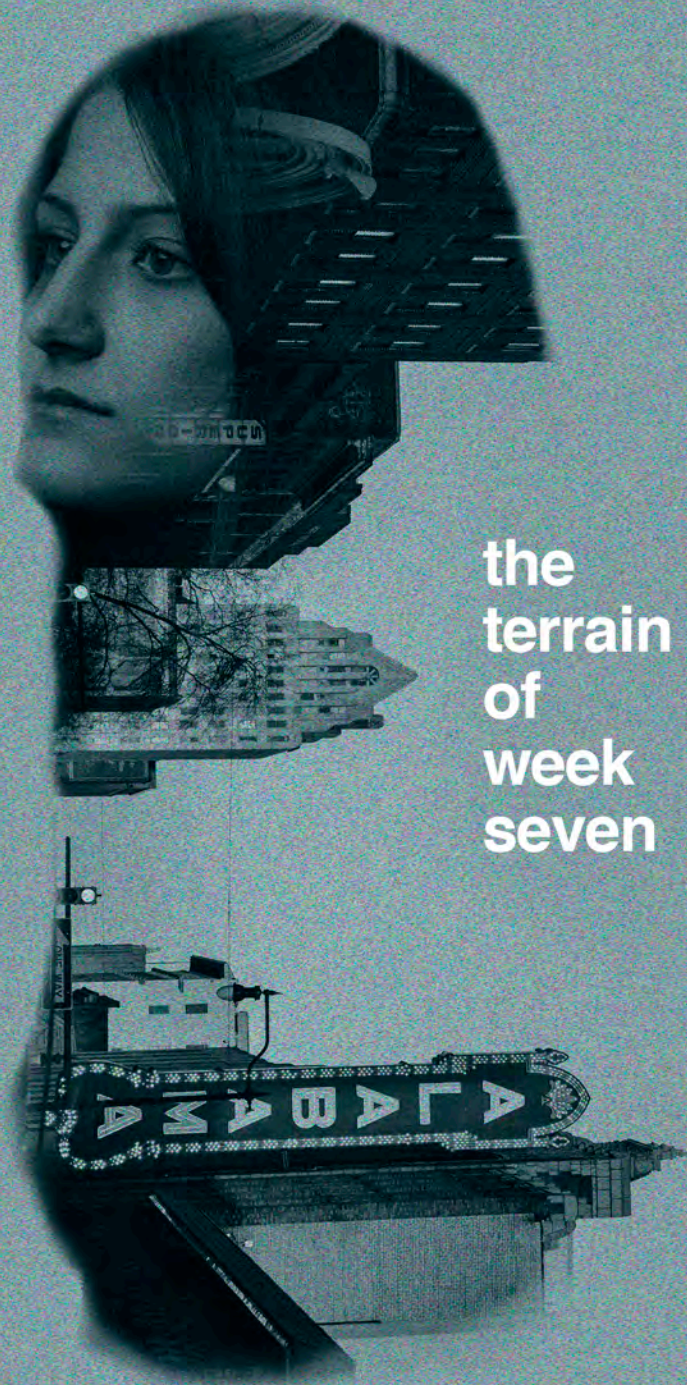
Rejection hangs over me like dark cloud.

The cruel words of the past stick to me like spilt honey on cloth.

But with you Lord, the day will be new.

You are a light to my path.

Amen.



the
terrain
of
week
seven

success / sorrow

begin your **monday** reading and praying over this week's passage

GENESIS

chapter thirty-seven & forty-five

TUESDAY

God was with Joseph. He had favor upon him, moving him into places and spaces of influence and power in a way only God could. Joseph's character was partnering with the hand of God. There are times in our lives when we look around and think things are too good to be true. We must not mock God by waiting for the other shoe to drop. We must acknowledge his leading, favor, and sovereignty as we use our success for his glory. We must not forget him as our gracious provider. Instead, humbly trust him in what we are given. We can see our success as an opportunity to serve and worship God and love those around us.

success / sorrow

Written By
Jess Grogan

WEDNESDAY

Joseph, despite his success, was no stranger to betrayal, loss, and grief. For every success, there was a setback following shortly after. The jealousy of his brothers led to betrayal. He was thrown in a pit, sold into slavery, taken far away from his family, and unjustly sent to prison where he was forgotten. Yet we still see that God was near to Joseph, very much involved in each step of Joseph's story.

We can cling to the hope that God is just as interested in being with us in the sorrows of life as he is in orchestrating our good.

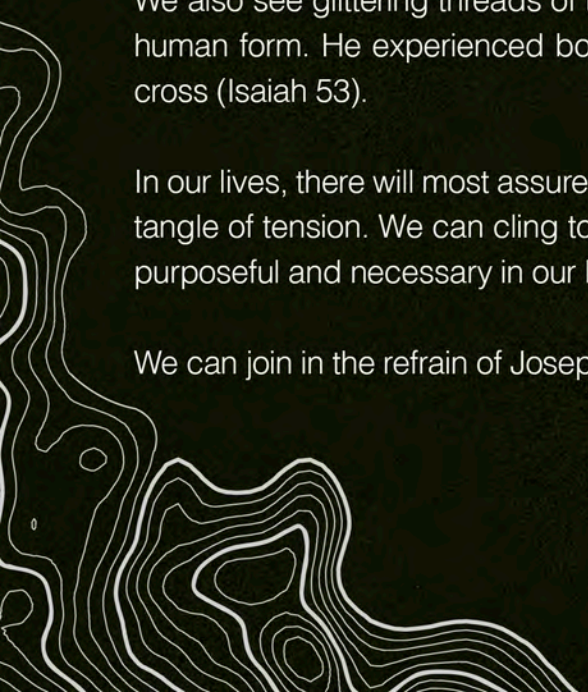
THURSDAY

Through the story of Joseph, we see that both our success and sorrow are in God's hands. He is tenderly leading us and guiding us through each place. He has not left us. He does not have us on a senseless roller coaster to show us who is boss. He is the tender of our days. He is lovingly and victoriously using each step forward and back to place us into the bigger picture of our lives, his glorious story.

We also see glittering threads of the story and work of Jesus. Jesus, full of divinity and glory, taking on human form. He experienced both success and sorrow as he fulfilled his ministry, culminating at the cross (Isaiah 53).

In our lives, there will most assuredly be success and sorrow. Sometimes they are held side by side in a tangle of tension. We can cling to the story of Joseph as a reminder that both success and sorrow are purposeful and necessary in our lives (Romans 8:28-29).

We can join in the refrain of Joseph, "what you meant for evil, God meant for good." (Genesis 50:20)







**GOOD
FRIDAY**



**Written By
Jess Grogan**

FRIDAY

On this Good Friday, help us to first see the good of the cross.

Jesus did not despise the cross but for the joy set before him endured it (Hebrews 12:2).

Help us look to you in each sorrow and success of our life,

knowing that through Jesus' day of forsakenness, we will never be forsaken by you.

Guard us from haughtiness.

That each success was not achieved by our own strength and worthiness.

Guard us from evil that tells us you are not near in every sorrow, big and small.

Give us a holy grip on our salvation that is our full hope,

our full assurance, that you will never leave us.

Move our hearts to worship King Jesus who has conquered it all.

Amen.

mission of citizens church

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who belong to Jesus
and seek the good
of Birmingham.

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