

A 4 - W E E K B I B L E S T U D Y

# BACKWARDS

*A CALL TO OBEDIENCE*

# CALLING

L I Z A N N R O D R I G U E Z



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W E E K O N E

01



# LESSON NOTES





# personal narrative

I realized after I posted my "spinning" video that I had not told many (any, really) people about what was coming next in life. So, as opposed to explaining it many times and reliving it all, I am writing down for all to see.

Earlier this year I was sitting in my boss's office, we were talking about what was coming next for me. I recently graduated from DTS and I thought doors would open and I prayed for whatever would come. I spoke to my boss through tears saying, "I hope God does not call me back into education."

I said those words because I did not want to feel like a failure. A girl who quit a stable career in education to chase some big dream only to walk back with her tail between her legs. A girl who at thirty still did not know what she wanted. A girl who had big dreams but no way of seeing them through so she went back to what was safe.

I begged God for something. Anything.

During that season of prayer, I taught our churches Wednesday night Bible Study. My friend, Sarah had the vision for a journey through the Old Testament. She wrote a beautiful study that pushed us through the desert, the valley and the fire.

The second week of the Bible study we were learning about Hagar and the desert, I noticed that God called her back into her old surroundings.

He called her backwards.

I moved quickly from this story into the next two weeks, praying that her story would not be my story. That my story would be staying in the part-time internship. That my story would be going somewhere, anywhere but Dallas.

This whole summer Hagar stood out to me. Her life, her journey, her backwards walk into her old surroundings. I never wanted her story. I wanted a different story.

But I knew in my heart that my story was going to be the story of Hagar. The story of being called back to where I came from.

Again, I begged. I held tight to my vision of the future.

Two weeks ago, I received a text asking if I would allow my resume to be passed on to a school. I was driving home and instead found myself in the parking lot of the school. I prayed for the staff, the students and myself. I cried tears of loss, tears of grief over what I thought "next" would look like.

There in the parking lot, I found peace.

48 hours and an interview later I had a job offer. An offer to teach 6th grade math. An offer to go backwards.

Here I am now. 48 hours away from being an employee of Arlington ISD. 48 hours away from being the former intern of the women's ministry of First Dallas. 48 hours away from a new season.

I can see the next journey and it is with joy and excitement that I walk back not as the same girl who left but as a girl who knows this is where she is supposed to be.

Not as a failure. As girl who knows backwards in God's will is better than anything forward outside His will.

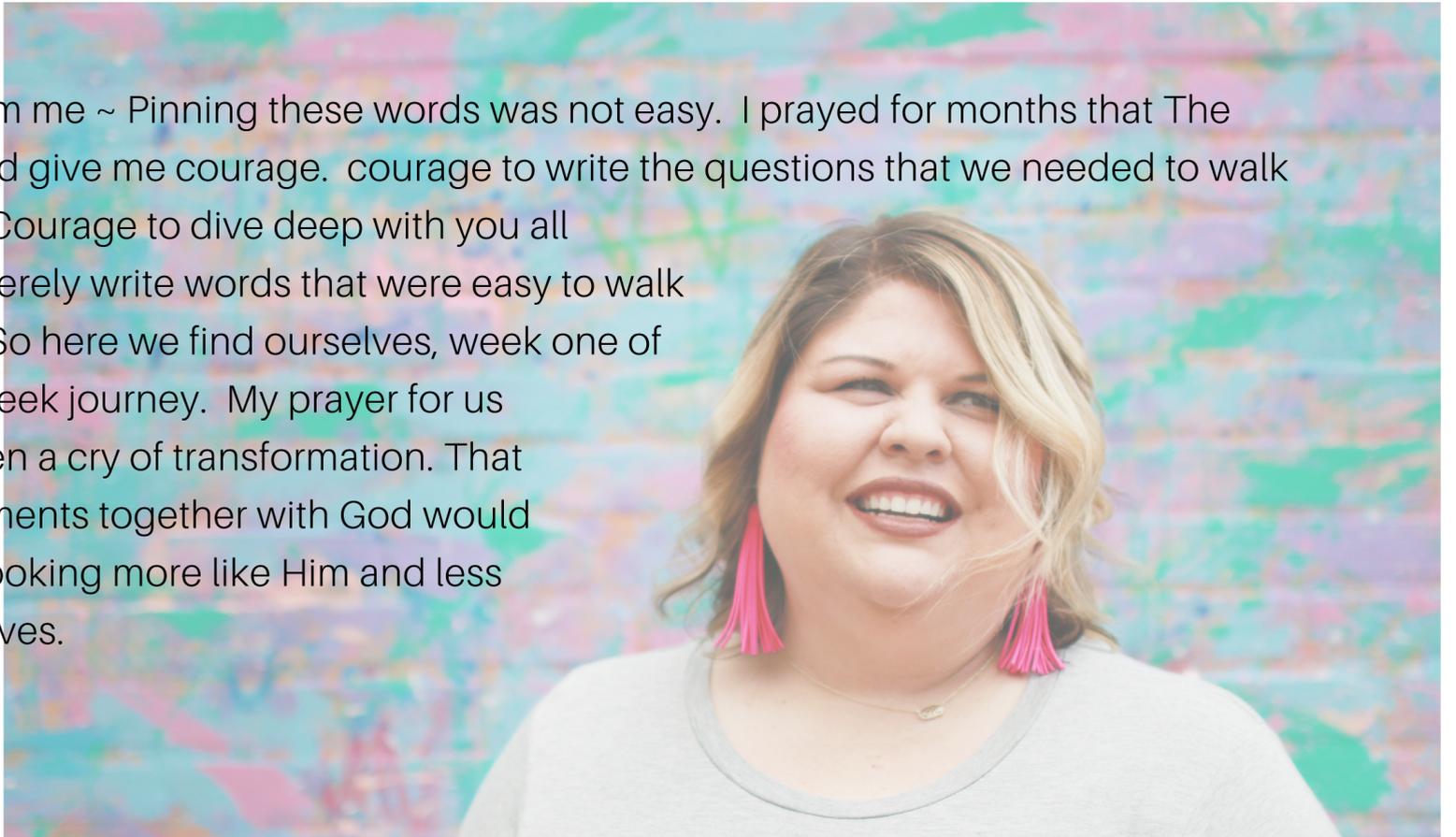
My name is Liz and I teach 6th grade math. I am standing firm on who God is and walking confidently in the direction He is calling.

~ Liz A. Rodriguez

# WEEK ONE

## LOOK BACK

A note from me ~ Pinning these words was not easy. I prayed for months that The Lord would give me courage. courage to write the questions that we needed to walk through. Courage to dive deep with you all and not merely write words that were easy to walk through. So here we find ourselves, week one of our four week journey. My prayer for us all has been a cry of transformation. That these moments together with God would leave us looking more like Him and less like ourselves.



Lets take a look back at the first lesson. I love a good look back because it allows us to reflect on what stood out to us, where God is calling us to lean in and what should actually impact our lives in our daily living.

~ What stood out to you from the teaching?

~ What aspect of your life do you sense God asking you to lean into His calling and not your own desires?

~ We ended the session with the charge to be obedient women. Where in your life are you needing to be obedient?

# WEEK ONE

## PERSON: THE WOMEN AT THE WELL

Why this woman?

Recently I was asked what story is always on my heart, what story I love most to share. It is this one! The woman at the well is me, she is us. We all have been hopeless and empty at some point, and the beauty of this story is Jesus meets her, sees her, loves her and forgives her, and she returns home changed!

Lets read her story. Read John chapter 4:1-30. Answer the questions below.

~ Where was Jesus coming from? Where was He headed? What city did He have to go through?

~ In verses seven through twenty-six we notice how the woman's knowledge of Christ builds till she acknowledges Him as Christ. How does she refer to Him in the following verses?

~Verse 7-10:

~ Verse 11-15:

~ Verse 16-24:

~ Verse 25-30:

~ Jesus was talking in spiritual terms. The woman was not comprehending all that Jesus was saying. Why might this be?

~ According to verse twenty-four, those who worship Jesus must worship in

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

~ Verse twenty-eight tells us the woman left Jesus. Where did she go? What did she do?

~ What was the response of the people to her action and words?

List two observations from the text.

1.

2.

An observation can be a phrase that is repeated, a person, place or thing that was new to you, a comparison that is made or a cause and effect that is seen.

# WEEK ONE

## SUPPORT: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Where is Sameria?

Why is this location of this story key to our understanding all that is going?

The following scriptures are listed to build our understanding of all this passage means.

~ Verse ten talks about Living Water. Read Isaiah 12:1-6 and John 7:37-39 and write down what they say about the Living Water.

~ "I AM" is stated in verse twenty-six. Compare this verse to that of the Old Testament wording in Exodus 3:14.

~ In verse fifteen we see that Christ is sharing the gospel but the soil is rough at the beginning. Let's look at the types of soil written of in Matthew 13:20-23. Record the types and what they produce.

~ What does Hebrews 10:19-25 say about pure water.

"Return" is used over three hundred and fifty times in scripture. Over the next few weeks we will read some of these passages and hear of others who returned, or were sent backwards. This week lets take a peak into Ruth one, especially verse twenty-two. Who returned and what was the end result of this backwards journey?

# WEEK ONE

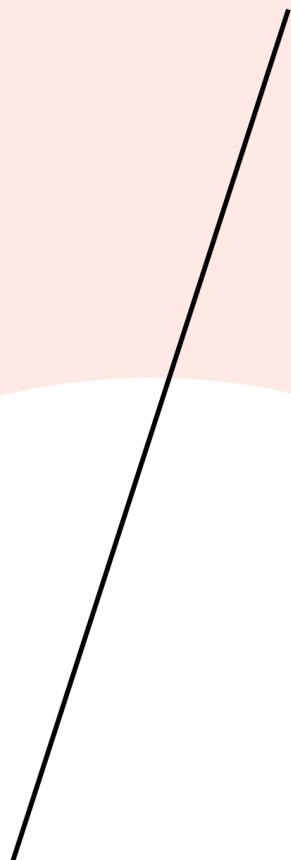
## ACTION: THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Have you lived through a season of being called backwards? A season of having to walk a direction you did not see coming? A season of having to return to a place you thought you were through with?

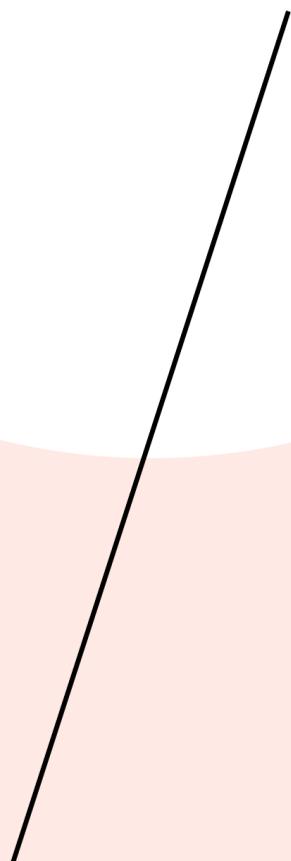
Write about it below in paragraph form. There is beauty in being about to talk about the journey you are on or have walked through. If you have not practiced it when the opportunity comes to share you will not be ready to speak of all the good God has done in and through you. So, use the space below to practice sharing your backwards story.

Personally, I would recommend writing as if you were talking with a friend over a cup of coffee. If I was across the table from you I would be drinking a chi tea latte eager to hear how God called you backwards and what He taught you through the journey!

02



W E E K T W O



02



# LESSON NOTES





# *personal narrative*

Well, I did the thing that no self-respecting, independent, career-driven 34 year old wants to do... I moved back in with my parents. You see, the Lord had clearly spoken. He asked me to resign from my upwardly-mobile, successful career that I loved, leave the town and church I loved, leave my closest friends on the planet, and do a brand new thing. He was calling me into ministry to women in the local church. But not just any ministry to women-- a very specific type of pastoral care ministry to women. I knew I needed biblical and theological training, and I knew that part of the Lord's instructions to me involved moving to the DFW area, so I began taking classes full-time at Dallas Seminary. But you see, the thing that made this especially scary was that I had literally never seen a women's pastoral care ministry position exist on staff of a local church. As a divorced single mom, I wrestled with believing the lie that no church would ever hire me, and feared that quitting my secure, stable job and moving to Dallas would have been the dumbest thing I ever did. At times the lies of the Enemy were overwhelming. But nevertheless, I fought to believe that the Lord would equip me and would provide for me, and would do exceedingly, abundantly beyond anything I could ever imagine. So I pressed on... reading theology books, writing papers, being stay-at-home-mom to my preschooler, and finding myself incredibly grateful for the many blessings that came from living with my parents.

When we moved in with them, I had no idea how long we would be there, or what would be next for my son and me. It was such a faith journey. And month after month God miraculously provided every penny we needed. He provided sweet community for us, opportunities for me to serve alongside and learn from women in ministry in the church we were attending, and we truly thrived in every way. It was a season of growth and preparation, faith-building and waiting. And then, in the Lord's perfect timing I was hired by The Village Church to serve on the ministry staff doing the exact things that I'd felt the Lord calling me to do. I now have the privilege of caring for women, shepherding leaders, and providing biblical counsel for women in crisis.

Moving back in with my parents sure felt like going backwards. But it actually wasn't at all. It was part of a trajectory that the Lord designed to use my gifts and experiences and training for Kingdom purposes, and for my own spiritual growth and formation. Looking back, it's easy to see how the Lord crafted every step and how He faithfully guided and provided, and how His marvelous graced sustained me through every doubt and question.

~ Friend

# WEEK TWO

## LOOK BACK

Lets take a look back at our second lesson. We all know I love a good look back. Taking the time to think through all that God laid on your heart and is calling you to is key for transformation. Plus who does not like to look at all the convicting notes they wrote. (haha! Sometimes my notes are hard to read because I write messy when the Holy Spirit is at work!)

~ What stood out to you from the teaching?

~ What aspect of your life do you sense God asking you to lean into His calling and not your own desires?

~ We ended the session with the charge to be women who share the good news of Christ wherever He has us planted. Where are you planted? Have you shared Christ with those people lately?

# WEEK TWO

## PERSON: MAN WITH DEMONS

Why this man?

To be honest, in preparing for this study I called my dad and asked him who from scripture he could think of that was called backwards. He suggest this passage. I was a bit stunned because who tells someone to go look at the demon passage. Not me! But here we are! After much reading and research I found myself excited to share this story with yall. Why? Because what Jesus does here is AMAZING and how the man responses is life giving.

Charles Ryrie labels Mark 4:35-9:1 as "Jesus Prerogatives" meaning His right over certain things. This week we will look at His right over demons and the call to go back and tell.

Let's read his story. Read Mark 5:1-20. Answer the questions below.

~ In verses two through three what words repeat themselves? What does this repetition show us?

~ In verses twelve through eighteen three requests are made. Lets write the three requests below. Be sure to note how Jesus responds to each.

~Verse twelve

~ Verse seventeen

~ Verse eighteen

~ What contrast was seen in the man's behavior from the start of the chapter as compared to verse fifteen.

~ How does Jesus respond to the man's request in verse eighteen? Which direction is he called?

List 2 observations for the text.

1.

2.

An observation can be a phrase that is repeated, a person, place or thing that was new to you, a comparison that is made or a cause and effect that is seen.

# WEEK TWO

## SUPPORT: MAN WITH DEMONS

~ In verse seven we see that the demons knew Jesus was the Most High God. In the following verses note what the Old Testament and the New Testament say about our Most High God.

~ Genesis 14:18-20

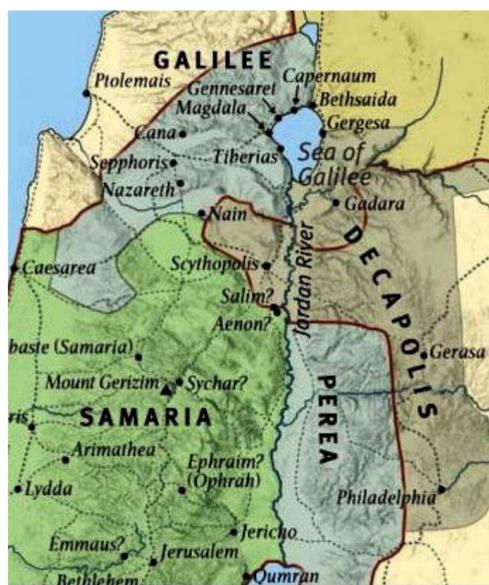
~ Psalms 21:7

~ Luke 1:32

~ What does the word "Legion" mean.

If your Bible does not say in the notes google will get you the correct answer. At least it did when I tried,

~ Locate Gerasenes on the map.



~ This same account is found in Matthew 8:28-34 and in Luke 8:26-39. Read these and compare them to that found in Mark.

~ Why pigs? Leviticus 11:7-8 lays out why the demons would choose pigs based on Jewish law. What does Leviticus say?

~ Around verse seventeen the community asks Jesus to leave based on all that had transpired. What are some reasons you believe they would prefer Him to leave rather than stay?

This week's return passage is found in Exodus. Read Exodus 14:23-31. What test of returning did Moses and the Jews have? What had they seen return?

This story gives a different view point of the word return and I love it!

# WEEK TWO

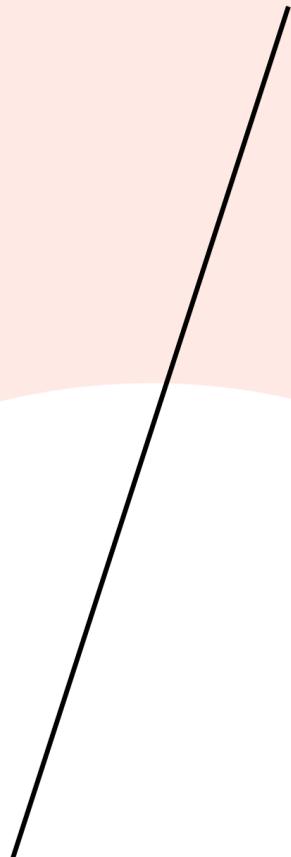
## ACTION: MAN WITH DEMONS

Last week we wrote our backwards story out. This week the action call challenges you to practice telling your story to yourself. Perhaps say it out loud while you are driving on your way to work or when you are getting ready in the morning. Run it through your head and allow God to mold the words.

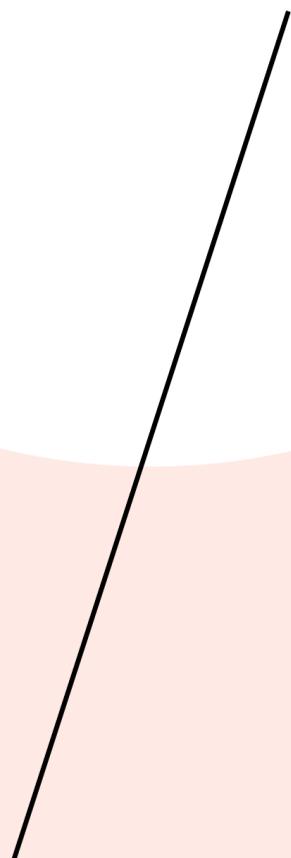
Once you have said it a few times go back to last week and work through the words. What changes need to be made?

I know I am asking for us to look like women who talk to themselves while driving. BUT thanks to Bluetooth it will simply look as if you are talking on the phone! I believe we need to practice sharing our story so when the time comes we are confident to speak boldly of all God has done. And if you see me driving down the road, you will know I am talking to no one but myself and God. Working out the words of my story!

03



W E E K  
T H R E E



03



# LESSON NOTES





# *personal narrative*

Almost always my obedience to what the Lord has asked me to do comes with expectations of a dramatic change...and selfishly, a change that will benefit me. While there have been times in my life where this type of change has occurred, this was not one of those times!

I grew up in the typical Christian home where my dad was a deacon and my mom was a star volunteer. We were always at the church! While I did profess to be a believer at a very young age, I know now that I didn't fully grasp basic Christian principles. These principles included God's love, His grace and mercy, all of which are truly key in understanding the Gospel - the price that was paid for me. Those things I might have known in my head but they were not embedded in my heart...yet!

My mother's poor health, a broken relationship, and a move to a big city over 600 miles away from home led me back to church at the age of 24.

I didn't know where the journey back to "finding God" would take me, but I did know that I needed to start by finding a church home. After several awkward church-shopping visits, I had found my home!

Eureka! NOW EVERYTHING WOULD FALL INTO PLACE.

For those that are reading this...are you laughing? I truly did believe this since I was obedient in going back to church. I thought God would provide a job at a non-profit organization where I could use my skills to directly further His Kingdom and would provide a new friend group for me to "do life with" - women that would know me in and out and would always be there for me.

Boy, was I wrong. Haven't we all been here? Haven't we all been in a place where our expectation is that He would fix our problems because we obeyed Him in one area? My obedience to pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus was not met with any of those things (right away). The reality is that I wasn't called to build or aid in some sort of missionary start-up, but was called to STAY.

What? Yeah, that's right. I was called to STAY in my exact same job, which was surrounded by the exact same friends who knew me before my "eureka" moment. The feeling of wanting to change so badly but being reminded of your past is certainly one of desperation. The struggle of being called to stay in the same environment, while being transformed by God's love, grace and mercy (those Christian principles I did not understand early in life) resulted in extreme pain filled with ugly-cry moments and, certainly, loneliness. My friends and co-workers knew the old me and, while I would have preferred a new start as the new me, God called me to stay and testify of all that was going on in my life.

So, where am I going with this? The end of the story is that, yes, I expected a change to happen immediately due to my obedience. However, it was in those dark moments of disappointments, of staying, that I truly clung to the Lord's presence. My desperation for change turned into a longing to hear what my next steps were from Him and Him alone.

My plan didn't matter anymore; it was only His that did.

The truth is that being called to stay was best for me.

Our Lord and Savior wants the ultimate best for you, too. Whatever season of life you are in or whatever you are being called to do (maybe it's to 'stay', like me), trust that the Lord who knew who you were long before you were born, who knows your struggles and who sees you. He alone knows what is best for you. Cling to Him in the hurt and the disappointment and He will teach and mold you into who He created you to be.

# WEEK THREE

## LOOK BACK

It is that time again! Lets look and see what all stood out, burned a place in our hearts and what all God is asking us to keep stored in our hearts. The teacher in me loves this page because it makes some of the moments where we thought "oh that was good" stick and become truths we live by. Please note that if you are completing this with a group of women the thing that stood out to you may not have been something I said but something they said!

~ What stood out to you from the teaching?

~ What aspect of your life do you sense God asking you to lean into His calling and not your own desires?

~ We ended the session with the charge to be women who live in the freedom that comes from Christ. Where in your life are you needing to experience freedom?

# WEEK THREE

## PERSON: JOSEPH AND FAMILY

Before we get to this week's verses (chapters really) I want to let you know a secret. I was writing this lesson while doing laundry and dishes. The whole time I was highly unsatisfied with where I thought the lesson was going. I was walking around my house talking it out (my normal) and all of a sudden something hit me! The Holy Spirit brought me to my face as I thanked Him for the clarity this week needed. That is all I am going to tell you now! Just you wait till the end.

I want us to get a picture of all that has happened before we launch into this week's passage. Joseph's family returned but it was not without some hardships. For the passages below, write their section headings found in your Bible. I will give you the first one as an example.

- ~ Chapter 37:1-11: Joseph's Dream
- ~ Chapter 41:1-36:
- ~ Chapter 37:12-36:
- ~ Chapter 41:37-56:
- ~ Chapter 39:1-23:
- ~ Chapter 42:1-38:
- ~ Chapter 40:1-22:

Now, let's read Joseph's story starting in chapter forty-two and reading through chapter forty-six.

~ In chapter forty-two how did Joseph treat his family? What does chapter forty-one verse fifty-one tell us about Joseph's attitude toward his brothers and their actions?

**I know it is a lot but I have so much faith in what God is going to do in our lives through these chapters!  
YOU CAN DO IT!**

~ In chapter forty-three, when do we see a change in Joseph take place? What were his actions?

Chapters forty-four through forty-six read like a roller coaster. However, there is such beauty in all that is happening. For each of these chapters, write a title (like the ones you copied earlier but this time in your own words) that will help you to remember all that happened. They can be cheesy, catchy...whatever it takes to help you remember the story. Also write two observations from each chapter below.

~ Chapter 44:

- 1.
- 2.

**An observation can be a phrase that is repeated, a person, place or thing that was new to you, a comparison that is made or a cause and effect that is seen.**

~ Chapter 45:

- 1.
- 2.

~ Chapter 46:

- 1.
- 2.

# WEEK THREE

## SUPPORT: JOSEPH AND FAMILY

~ In chapter 43:12-14 What name does Jacob use for God?

This is the fourth time this name is used for Him in Genesis. Look at the other four times and record what they say.

~ Genesis 17:1

~ Genesis 28:3

~ Genesis 35:11

~ In Romans 12:1, we see a reference as well. What does this New Testament verse say?

~ Chapter 46:3 God spoke to Israel and told of a great nation, a renewed promise, and gave him the same assurance given to Abraham and Issac. The following passages support these claims. Pair the claim with the passage.

~ Exodus 1:1-7

~ Great nation

~ Genesis 15:1; 26:24

~ Renewed promise

~ Genesis 35:11

~ Same assurance given to Abraham and Issac

~ Stephen gives a speech recorded in Acts seven. He summarizes Joseph's life in verses nine through sixteen. Compare and contrast these verses with what we have read in Genesis. What are the similarities, differences, and details.

This week's return passage is located in the prophecy of Hosea. Read Hosea 6:1-3. What is happening here? Who is returning? What follows as a result of the return?

# WEEK THREE

## ACTION: JOSEPH AND FAMILY

Last week I asked you practice telling your story to yourself. I know I called us to talk to ourselves in our car, but my hope and my prayer is that it helped you flesh out your story! This week we are taking it one step further. The call to action is to share story with three people inside your comfort zone. This means a spouse, roommate, bestie, parent, or child. Someone who you can call up and say "This Bible study lady is making share my story, do you have a few minutes?" Then when they say YES! share your story and have a conversation about a time when God called you and possibly them backwards!

Once you have said shared your story with a few people come back here and record how it went. Journal a prayer for those you shared with and what you desire God to do in and through your story.



At least this week I am asking  
you to share with people!  
Real humans!

04



W E E K F O U R

04



# LESSON NOTES





# *personal narrative*

In 2011, I was twenty-five years old, I was in law school, and I hadn't been single for any real length of time in more than seven years. I wasn't attending church regularly, I wasn't praying daily or reading Scripture, but I did believe in God.

In November, I met someone that was about five years my senior, had a career I admired, and he was so handsome! We started dating immediately and like most of my previous relationships, I got serious about him in a matter of months. Unfortunately for me, he was recently divorced and not really looking for a serious relationship.

I knew that having a physical relationship before marriage was wrong, but I consistently and willingly disregarded God's way. After all, what guy in today's world would stay in a relationship with a girl if she wouldn't have sex with him? I really believed that and I used it as my rationale for having physical relationships with all of my boyfriends.

A year later, the Lord was really working on me. I knew I needed to get back in church and I was lucky that my boyfriend was willing to go with me without much of a fight. In 2013, we began attending a Sunday School class that shined a bright light of shame on our relationship. We both knew we needed to change a lot of things, but the biggest area we needed to work on was our sexual relationship. We needed to stop it completely. I knew it and he knew it, but only I was willing to do it.

I begged him to work with me to stop our sexual relationship until marriage. I even suggested we slowly take steps to remove it so that it wasn't such a sudden change. We always had separate apartments, but if I'm honest, it was for appearances only. I suggested maybe we start staying in our own apartments at night to slowly ease into the change. He was not as willing to change our relationship to model God's idea of a Christian courtship.

I prayed every day, multiple times a day, for God to soften my boyfriend's heart to the changes I knew needed to be made in our relationship if it was ever going to work. Every day, though, I was met with resistance that sometimes turned into meanness and anger from him.

I started to wonder whether I was supposed to leave the relationship because he wouldn't agree to date me God's way. I began to believe it would be easier for me to simply find a man who would date me God's way from the get go. This whole "changing the relationship" after two years was too hard and too emotional. There were nights I would lay awake in bed and plead with God to tell me it was okay to leave the relationship. I was tired of fighting, of being insulted, of working so hard to "fix" our relationship when I felt like I was the only one truly trying.

Day after day and night after night, God was calling me to stay. I loved this man, but it hurt to love him and that didn't seem fair. I wanted to leave, I wanted an easier relationship, I wanted someone who was as faithful and prayerful as I'd been the last few months. That didn't seem like a big ask, so why wouldn't God let me leave? I couldn't make sense of it, but I stayed in the relationship. Slowly over six months to a year I began to see his heart transform and soften to making the changes God was calling us to make together. It certainly was not in my timing, but it was in God's perfect timing that all of it began to happen.

In May 2014, he proposed to me on the steps of the altar of our church. Of course I said yes! He told me that he was ready to be the spiritual leader of our relationship and that he wanted me to trust him in that role. He prayed over our relationship and our future marriage. That is how our marriage started - in complete surrender to the God who ordained our meeting, our relationship, and our marriage. We have been married almost three years and we recently welcomed our first child, a baby girl, into the world.

God's timing was different from mine. He has a lot more patience than I do. I held on to the promise that He is faithful and that while I may not understand his timing or purpose for certain things, He sees a picture that is bigger than anything my human brain can fathom. I am so proud to serve a God who called me to stay in a relationship that was hard and needed restoration. He's given me this testimony and I'm delighted to be able to share it with you.

# WEEK FOUR

## LOOK BACK

I know it is the end but this week we will do a lot of looking back and remembering all God taught us during these past four weeks. Here is why I love a good look back. Once I heard a message on stones of remembrance. Honestly, I thought it was weird and did not take much of it seriously. Boy was that a MISTAKE! The Old Testament takes stones of remembrance seriously and beautifully. A year or so later God did a massive work in my life and used a stone to teach me a lesson. A stone of remembrance, if you will. That stone sits in my car (right now it is in my car!) as a stone of remembrance of all God did that afternoon in my life. This week will act as the stone of remembrance for us and this study.

~ What stood out to you from the teaching?

~ What aspect of your life do you sense God asking you to lean into His calling and not your own desires?

~ We ended the session with the charge to be women who know how they will respond and who they will rely on when they are called backwards, even if they did not see it coming. How can you prepare to be this kind of woman?

# WEEK FOUR

## REMEMBRANCE

This week I am going to ask you to look over each teaching lesson and the verses that went along with that section. Pull out one or two things from each lesson that you want to remember. Things that when others ask you about this study you will share with them. The highlights of the taught lessons, the truths spoken by your small group, the words that you heard in the still small voice in your own life, the insights you wrote down in your personal time with the Lord. What couple of things, ideas, verses, images do you want to hold dear from each week.

Lesson One:

**I know you may be tempted to skip this weeks homework. PLEASE do not! This is the week to press into all God has for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to press on you what you need from this study. My prayer for us this week is we would be transformed as we think back over these four weeks!**

Lesson Two

# WEEK FOUR

## REMEMBRANCE

Lesson Three

Lesson Four

# WEEK FOUR

## ACTION: REMEMBRANCE

Last week I asked you practice telling your story to your people! This week the call to action is to share your story with someone (or two, even three people) outside of your comfort zone! Tell others of God's faithfulness in time when you where not where you thought you should be. Tell others of the God you serve who knows what is best for you even when it does not make sense. Pray for the opportunity to share!

Once you have shared your story come back here, journal about your experience and write a pray for the person you shared with.

**I am so excited to hear the stories of you sharing your backwards story with others!**  
Be sure to use  
#backwardscalling  
and tell me all about it on  
facebook and instagram!



