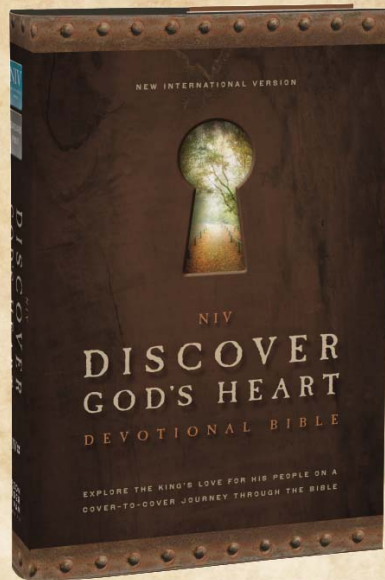


# Explore the King's Love for His People

A Biblical Reading Plan



Experience the love, compassion, grace, and truth of the Lord's heart in a new way through these daily readings. This 21-day reading plan is built from the *NIV Discover God's Heart Devotional Bible* by Zondervan.

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# Day 1:

## The Complete Forgiveness of God

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### God's Story

Jacob is dying. Joseph goes to his bedside, bringing his sons — Manasseh and Ephraim — with him. Jacob musters the strength to remind them of God's great promises for their family and adopts Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons. He blesses them, crossing his arms and placing his hands on their heads, blessing the youngest, Ephraim, with the blessing of the firstborn.

Then he calls for the rest of his sons. The reunited family gathers around his bedside, and he speaks a prophetic blessing over each one — with especially lavish blessings for Judah and Joseph. Their faithfulness has been noticed. Jacob directs his sons to bury him with his parents and grandparents in the promised land, and then breathes his last. Jacob's family and all of Egypt's dignitaries lay his body to rest with great honor — the one who wrestles with God has died.

With their father gone, Joseph's brothers worry that Joseph will finally punish them for betraying him. They ask for his forgiveness, which he graciously gives. God's chosen family is strong and growing in Egypt.

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### The King's Heart

When it comes to the perfect righteousness God gives us in Jesus, our hearts echo the cries of Joseph's brothers, who said, in essence: "Our debts are too great. We deserve to die — surely he hasn't completely forgiven us. There must be something we can do to pay him back. Maybe we can serve him as slaves."

So like Joseph's brothers, we offer our service. We'll work for righteousness. We'll live rightly, not from a forgiven heart filled with gratitude, but from a distant and skeptical one. Our right living gives us a false sense of self-assurance, as if we can bring anything to God. But it does something much more tragic: It keeps us from free-falling into the endless depths of God's love and goodness. People who wrongly believe they're earning God's acceptance keep one foot on shore, unable to swim in the endless ocean of God's complete love.

Joseph's complete forgiveness of his brothers mirrors the heart of God. "My child, you don't understand. You're forgiven. You're righteous. And I want friends, not slaves. Come close. I will take care of you."

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### Insight

Jacob's blessing on Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, meant that they'd enjoy equal status with Jacob's other sons, their uncles. Joseph's territory in the promised land would be divided between Ephraim and Manasseh, but Levi (Jacob's third son) would receive no share of the land. The number of tribal allotments would remain the same — 12.

# Day 2:

## God's Proposal

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### God's Story

Two months after the rescue from Egypt, God leads his people to Mount Sinai. Speaking to Moses from the mountain, God tells him that out of all of the peoples on the earth, God wants to make a covenant with the Israelites. He wants them to be his special treasure, his people who follow him and his ways. The people unanimously agree — they will be his.

For two days, the people prepare themselves — clothes scrubbed, faces washed. The Most Holy God is going to speak to them. There is no room for impurity in the presence of the perfect.

On the morning of the third day, their knees knock as lightning strikes. Thunder claps. A loud trumpet blasts. Mount Sinai can hardly handle God's glory as it violently shudders. God comes down in fire, and thick smoke billows.

In the midst of the thundering skies and the trembling knees, the Holy One speaks. God gives the people his holy ways — the Ten Commandments, commands about how to live. Overwhelmed by God's power and presence, the people beg Moses to speak to God so they don't have to. The Holy One is overwhelming.

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### The King's Heart

"I am the God who chooses you," God said to the childless Abraham. "I am the God of all power," he said as he mocked Egypt's false gods through the ten plagues. "I am the God who rescues you," he said as he parted the sea and drowned the Egyptians. "I am the God who provides for you," he said in the daily delivery of manna.

The people at the foot of Mount Sinai had been chosen, claimed, healed, fought for and provided for — all before they had ever heard or kept a single commandment.

The events of Mount Sinai are akin to a betrothal. God proposes that the people are to be his — in essence, to take his name. And while keeping commandments was a part of the covenant, it wasn't the entirety of it. God does want his people to follow his ways. But keeping commandments is just outward evidence that their hearts are his.

We follow God's ways because we love who he is. We love his character and his perfect goodness, and we trust him. Like the Israelites, we are not to live rightly in order to be God's. We are to live rightly because we already are his.

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### Insight

Many Biblical scholars consider the scene at Mount Sinai to be a proposal — and the rest of Scripture as a record of God's relationship with his people. It's not a coincidence that our story ends in a wedding celebration (see Revelation 19:6 – 9).

# Day 3:

## A Prayer After God's Heart

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### God's Story

Hannah is childless. Her husband's other wife, Peninnah, has several children —and Peninnah heartlessly throws that fact in Hannah's face. On one of the family's trips to the tabernacle for an annual festival, Hannah seeks God in his sanctuary and with desperate abandon pours out her heart to him. She pleads for a son, promising that she will dedicate the child to him. God hears her — and answers. Soon, Hannah gives birth to Samuel. His name means "God hears."

Once Samuel is weaned, Hannah brings her God-miracle to the tabernacle, joyfully giving him back to God. Young Samuel stays with the high priest Eli at the tabernacle and grows up serving the Lord.

Eli's two sons are immoral priests, stealing sacrificial meats and using God's tabernacle as a site for sexual trysts. God informs Eli through a prophet that his sons are going to die.

Then the Lord calls to Samuel from inside the tabernacle. He tells Samuel that he is going to do something that will shock all of Israel. God will not tolerate evil in his holy home.

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### The King's Heart

It is painfully difficult to watch the ones you love scorn you. For generations. That must have made Hannah's prayer that much sweeter to the Lord. If he would give her a son, she would make sure that he would serve God and God alone, a God-pursuing life. And God could see Hannah's heart. He knew she meant every word she prayed. From the heart of one of God's daughters came a prayer directly after his.

He must have been elated the day Hannah dedicated Samuel to him. Lesser women would have attempted to use him simply to get their prayers answered, to get a son. But not Hannah. The sheer joy that spills out in her prayer of praise — as she is leaving her miracle son behind for good — reveals her sweet motives. God heard her prayers and answered her. And she is overjoyed to give Samuel back to him.

The Lord didn't just give Hannah the gift of Samuel. He gave her three more sons and two daughters. The woman whose heart was overwhelmed with love for God was again overwhelmed with his goodness to her.

And God didn't just make Samuel any old servant of his. He made him a prophet and Israel's last judge — a great man who changed the course of the nation.

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### Insight

Hannah's prayer of praise is very similar to Mary's prayer of praise after Gabriel told her she was going to give birth to Jesus (see Luke 1:46 – 55). The gracious God had been lavishly good to both Hannah and Mary, and they couldn't help but praise him.

# Day 4:

## God's Heart Home

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### God's Story

God wants his people to remember how his dwelling place came to be in Jerusalem — the richness, the history — and why his heart is there. So the Chronicler continues recounting the story.

As David settles into Jerusalem, he is struck by the differences between his home and the tent where God's ark dwells. He wants to build God a house. The prophet Nathan, David's spiritual adviser, hears from the Lord that night. God is pleased with David's idea, and God is going to build David's house — his family line — forever. But, David's son will be the one to build God's house.

Honored and humbled, David praises the God who has been too good to him.

In every battle David fights, God gives him the victory. Still, Satan successfully tempts him to count his fighting men — to trust in his own strength rather than God's. God is betrayed, angry. There is a penalty for David's distrust, and God allows David to choose it. Rather than a three-year famine or three months of war, David chooses the third punishment — three days of "the sword of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 21:12) through plague. David knows God will be merciful.

God's angel travels throughout Israel, slaying people. Arriving in Jerusalem, the angel is about to begin killing the residents of the city. God interrupts. "Stop! Enough!" God spares Jerusalem. David buys the plot of land where the angel stops and worships there.

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### The King's Heart

God's angel stood over Araunah's threshing floor — sword drawn, battle ready.

"Stop! Enough!" God commanded him.

This command echoes an order God had given to a knife-drawn father generations before. Abraham was poised and ready to slay his own son because God had told him to. "Stop! Put down your knife!" God's angel had said.

God's angel had given that command to Abraham at the very same place: on Mount Moriah, or Araunah's threshing floor.

Perhaps, centuries later, as the sword-drawn angel was poised over that familiar mountain, God remembered the deep faith and love of the father who was willing to give him his most precious possession — his everything.

And perhaps God looked forward to that same place in Jerusalem where his own Son would walk. Perhaps he looked to the day in Jerusalem when he would not stay his hand, a day when the blood of his own Son would mingle with the dirt.

The place was too meaningful, too sacred — too much love had been and would be shared there. It was precious to him. So God stayed his hand.

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### Insight

Solomon built God's glory-temple on Mount Moriah, the site of Araunah's threshing floor (see 2 Chronicles 3:1).

# Day 5:

## God on Trial

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### God's Story

Job, a blameless, honorable man, loves God and loves his family.

One day the angels come before God's throne to report to him. Satan is among them. As God talks with Satan, he points out the loyalty of his servant, the virtuous Job. Satan slanders Job, making the accusation that Job honors God only because God has lavishly blessed him. God grants Satan permission to do what he wants with all that Job has.

In one day, Job loses his livestock, his hired hands and his children. Job grieves, but he still worships God.

Once again, Satan comes before God's throne with the angels, and once again God draws his attention to Job — who still hasn't cursed him. Satan grumbles that if Job's health were taken away, he would turn his back on God. God grants Satan permission: He can hurt Job, but he can't kill him.

Soon Job is covered from head to toe with painful, oozing sores. His wife advises him to curse God. Job refuses. Three of his friends hear about his troubles and come to sit with him. They are stunned by his appearance, and for seven days no one speaks. Then Job breaks the silence, bemoaning the day he was born.

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### The King's Heart

"God is good," Job proclaimed with his life. When Satan came before God's throne, God highlighted Job's trust in him. As the cosmic prosecutor who always puts God's goodness on trial, Satan questioned Job's motives. "Take away the blessings," Satan slandered, "and Job will curse the Blesser."

"God is good."

"Is he really?"

The cosmic trial was played out on the stage of Job's life. Satan accused Job of trusting God only when life is good. God was looking for a man who would trust in his goodness even when life obviously isn't good.

It seems heartless for God to allow Job to suffer. But God put limits on Job's hardships. Satan could take Job's wealth, health and children, but he could not take Job's life. Job's death would leave no room for restoration or vindication. And the good God who was guiding this mysterious story of suffering would not have that. Job's story would not end with evil's victory.

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### Insight

In order for Satan to instigate any hardships in Job's life, God had to allow it. While the "why" behind suffering is almost always a mystery, there are two realities that are certain: Nothing happens to us that isn't filtered through the Father's hand of love. And if God allows hard times in our lives, he is always using them for good. Always.



# Day 6:

## God, Our Daily Friend

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### God's Story

Psalm 60: It seems that God is angry with his people — enemies have come against the nation. The psalmist knows that “human help is worthless,” so he calls on God to deliver them from their enemies.

Psalm 61: The psalmist is overwhelmed by life. He needs God, his strong Tower, his Refuge, the Rock who is higher than he is to lift him above his troubles.

Psalm 62: The psalmist commands his soul to rest in God, because God is his fortress and in him he is unshakable. Power belongs to God and unfailing love is found in him.

Psalm 63: When threatened by deadly enemies, the psalmist longs for God. God's love is better than life, and he clings to the God who upholds him.

Psalm 64: David's enemies conspire in secret and think they're going to get away with their evil plans. But God will shoot them with his arrows — they won't get away with anything.

Psalm 65: God provides for the earth. He waters its land so it bursts forth with crops and grasses for the flocks to eat. The meadows and flocks “shout for joy and sing.” Happy are those who live under the good King's care.

Psalm 66: God has done great things — he has rescued his people and kept their feet from slipping. The psalmist beckons the earth and the people on it to praise the God who has done awesome deeds.

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### The King's Heart

Over and over and over, David and the other psalmists went to God with the same basic request: “God, enemies are attacking me. I need your help.” This prayer in the Psalms is so frequent it can seem redundant.

God could have included anything he wanted in his holy Word. He determined what content would go into his Scriptures. He could have made it so that just one or two of these “Help me” prayers were preserved. But he didn't. God kept dozens.

Why? David and the other psalmists cried out for God's help over and over. Every day brought a new challenge, and every day they sought God in it. “I need you, God. And I'm turning to you.” Inviting God into our dailyness, our one-foot-in-front-of-the-other activity, is of utmost importance to him.

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### Insight

The “streams of God” (Psalm 65:9) are demonstrations of God's provision. Rivers are God's life-delivery system for trees and plants. They need water and he brings it right to them. Not coincidentally, a river flows from God's throne (see Revelation 22:1 – 2). Its waters give life too.

# Day 7:

## The Always God

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### God's Story

Psalm 90: Moses prays that the everlasting God would teach us dust-made people to number our days so that we can gain hearts of wisdom.

Psalm 91: Angel-guarded and God-loved, the person who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Psalm 92: God causes the righteous to flourish like sturdy trees planted in his house. In their old age they will be green and fruitful, because he is their Rock.

Psalm 93: “The Lord on high is mighty.” The seas praise him with their pounding waves, and holiness adorns his house for endless days.

Psalm 94: Arrogant men are crushing God's people, so the psalmist calls on the “God who avenges.”

Psalm 95: For 40 years, God was angry with his people who didn't trust him. The Lord implores those who hear his voice not to harden their hearts.

Psalm 96: The gods of the other nations are mere idols — they have done and do nothing. But God created everything. The psalmist urges, “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.”

Psalm 97: Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne, and his fire consumes his enemies. Those who love him are to hate evil because he does.

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### The King's Heart

“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2).

Before time began, God was. There has never been a minute in which he didn't exist, and there never will be. He exists outside of time — God is the Always.

The Everlasting One knows all of our days — he knows all of every day. He sees every event from every angle and knows every outcome.

And the Everlasting One has chosen to do something incredible. He has chosen to make us eternal with him. He has chosen to take our mortal lives — where “our days may come to seventy years, or eighty” (Psalm 90:10) and extend them into forever. He makes us eternal. And he does it all so that we can be with him. Forever.

Our destiny is to be with the infinitely good One forever. God has made it that way because he wants it that way. He wants us. What a beautiful future. What a beautiful God.

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### Insight

After the Babylonian exile, Psalm 92 came to be part of the worship at the rebuilt temple. Every Sabbath, during the morning sacrifice, God's people sang about how he plants his people strong and sturdy in his house. “You make me glad by your deeds, Lord,” God's people would sing.

# Day 8:

## God, the Love-Rich

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### God's Story

Psalm 140: Evil men have set a trap for the psalmist — they plan to trip his feet. He asks God to protect him and make their plans fail.

Psalm 141: The psalmist wants his praise to be like the evening sacrifice. He asks God to guard his words and help him to have no part in wicked deeds.

Psalm 142: Hiding in a cave, with enemies pursuing him and plotting against him, David cries out to God — his “portion in the land of the living.”

Psalm 143: The psalmist prays, “Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”

Psalm 144: David needs God, his warrior. He knows that God gives victory to kings and that the people whose God is the Lord are blessed.

Psalm 145: The psalmist exalts his God, the King. He is good to all, faithful to his promises and compassionate toward everything he has made. “Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”

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### The King's Heart

“The Lord is . . . rich in love” (Psalm 145:8).

God is love-rich. There's no shortage of love when it comes to God. We can drain the love-bank of the people in our lives — our brokenness and dysfunction making their love run thin. But that never happens with the Lord. He loves, loves and spills out more love. And if the infinite God is rich, he is rich indeed.

But the abundance of God's love doesn't make it less precious. We have a tendency to think that when there's a lot of something, it's less valuable because it's common. *Oh, God loves everybody*, we think. And we treat his love as common, stiff-arming it from reaching our hearts.

But that's not the way things work in God's economy. God has paved the streets of heaven with gold — earth's most precious metal. That's a lot of gold in a common place, but the quantity doesn't decrease its value. Gold is still the most precious of metals. God's home is lavishly filled with earth's greatest treasure. Because he chose it to be that way.

So it is with the love of God. It is abundant, it is infinite, and it is precious. God loves everyone, yes. But he loves you. Richly.

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### Insight

Many of the psalms allude to spending intentional time with God in the morning (see Psalm 5:3; 59:16; 143:8). The psalmists valued starting the day with their Friend.

# Day 9:

## God, the Glorious, Mysterious One

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### God's Story

While Hezekiah was king of Judah, men who worked for him compiled more of the wise sayings that God gave Solomon.

Solomon has a message for fellow kings and their officials. The wicked should be removed from the king's court like dross is removed from silver. A wicked ruler is "like a roaring lion or a charging bear . . . over a helpless people" (Proverbs 28:15). But while many people seek an audience with the king, "it is from the Lord that one gets justice" (Proverbs 29:26).

Solomon also speaks about trustworthy people: If a friend wounds, it is a trustworthy injury and a needed rebuke. A trustworthy messenger is like a cold, satisfying drink on a hot day. Trustworthy people can develop each other's character like iron sharpens iron.

One of Solomon's closing proverbs serves as a summary: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

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### The King's Heart

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2).

The great King knows all. As he spoke so poetically to Job, there are many mysteries that are too mighty for our intellects to comprehend or our souls to carry. While God has revealed much about life and about himself, he has left much a mystery. God is the Mysterious One.

Yes, the great God is our close Friend. He has chosen to draw us close to himself. We can bask in the love he pours on us. But he is still high, holy, mighty and other. The same God who draws us close commanded the universe into orderly existence with just a word — matter and molecules snapped into being at his command. The same God who beckons us into his presence is constantly surrounded by majestic creatures we've never seen, creatures who worship him because his good glory invokes such a response. The same God who gave us breath has no end and no beginning. God is the Beautiful Mystery, and it is to his great glory that he is not fully comprehensible.

Be comforted in the presence of the high and holy One. He is bigger than anything you will face. Let his bigness snap your worries into perspective like the matter snapped into order at his command. And take heart. Even though you do not understand God in his entirety — and never will — he is good. In the mystery, you can trust his heart.

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### Insight

"An enemy multiplies kisses" (Proverbs 27:6). Jesus experienced the truth of this proverb himself with Judas's betraying kiss (see Matthew 26:49).

# Day 10:

## The Shadow Banisher

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### God's Story

God extends Isaiah's view from the near future to the distant future — to the end of days as we know days.

People have sinned, violating God's covenant. Humanity stands guilty. Justice must be met. So God is going to ruin the face of the earth. He has planned a day when he is going to shake the foundations of the world, destroying most of the people and punishing both spiritual forces and earthly powers for their evil. He will obliterate the old order. And as he does, the godly remnant will sing for joy.

Then, a celebration. God will prepare a joyful feast for his people. He will destroy death forever, remove all of his people's disgrace and tenderly wipe away every tear from their faces. Moab — likely representing all of God's enemies — will be trampled. The celebrating will be unprecedented.

In that day, Judah will sing God a song of praise. The people have longed for him to bring his judgments to earth and teach its inhabitants righteousness. And he will do so.

In that day, God will tend to his fruitful, overflowing vineyard. Fruit from Israel will fill the world. God will crush all of those who don't follow him, destroying their dark idols in the process. At the trumpet's sound he will gather all of his people who have been exiled in Egypt and Assyria. They will join the throngs of people who are worshiping him in Jerusalem.

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### The King's Heart

Since the day we were born, we have been living in the shadows. Fallenness covers us like a sheet. But a day is coming when God "will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 25:7–8).

God hates the shadow we've been under. And there will come a day — a great day — when God will banish everything that has darkened life. Sin. Evil. Demonic forces. Death. Sickness. Pain. Shame.

And the same hand that will wipe away all evil from the earth will gently wipe away the tears that the evil shadow has caused us to cry. The Divine One will be so close that he will personally brush the tears off our faces. And the celebration will never end.

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (Romans 13:12).

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### Insight

Isaiah 26:19 is one of two times in the Old Testament that refers to God's plan to resurrect our bodies. The other is in Daniel 12:2.

# Day 11:

## God's Grace in Fish Form

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### God's Story

God wants the people of Nineveh to turn to him or he is going to destroy them. So he calls Jonah to deliver his message.

But Jonah, well aware of how horrendously violent the Assyrians are, doesn't want to go. He gets on a boat that's sailing in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

God won't let Jonah shirk his instructions. He sends a storm, and Jonah and the crewmen eventually figure out that Jonah's disobedience is what has angered God, who in turn has angered the sea. When Jonah is thrown overboard, the storm stops, and God sends a large fish to swallow him. God won't let his prophet drown.

After a three-day time-out in the fish's belly, a repentant Jonah is ready to go to Nineveh. He heads straight there. He preaches God's message and the people of Nineveh wholeheartedly repent. God withholds his judgment.

But instead of rejoicing, Jonah is angry. Jonah complains that he knew God would be merciful. Sulking, Jonah travels to a place east of Nineveh and waits to see what will happen to the city. There God teaches him an object lesson about God's goodness.

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### The King's Heart

God could have sent another prophet. He could have allowed Jonah to sink to the sea bottom and called on someone else to deliver his message to Nineveh.

But God mercifully sends a lifesaver, a fish. God wasn't giving up on Jonah. He continued to show him his goodness.

In the same way, God could have destroyed the violent Assyrians. They were cruel enemies of his people with a national practice of beheading and impaling those who were in their way. But God mercifully sends them a prophet, giving them an opportunity to turn from their wicked ways.

Even though Jonah had a three-day chance to learn about God's goodness, he apparently didn't learn it completely. He pouted when the Assyrians repented and God relented, and Jonah does the same when the plant God sends for him withers. But God gave Jonah the same grace he gave the Assyrians. He didn't give up on him; he patiently explained his reasoning, even when he didn't have to.

It is ludicrous. The God of the universe doesn't need to let his creations in on what he's doing and why. But God doesn't view his relationship with us that way. God wants his prophet — and everyone — to see his good heart.

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### Insight

Jesus uses Jonah's three-day fish belly experience to illustrate his upcoming situation of spending "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" in explanation of his death and resurrection (see Matthew 12:40).

# Day 12:

## Jesus, the Compassionate Teacher

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### God's Story

As Jesus continues to show the world what his kingdom looks like, he encounters opposition. The Pharisees seek to trap him.

When Jesus heals a demon-possessed man who can't see or speak, the Pharisees accuse him of using dark forces to do it. He logically argues that Satan, the prince of darkness, wouldn't cast out darkness. He explains there's a conflict going on, and anyone who isn't on his side is against him.

Jesus uses parables to teach about God's kingdom — parables about a farmer, weeds, a mustard seed, yeast, a hidden treasure, a pearl and a fishing net. He teaches in parables so that those who want to hear can more easily absorb the truths of God's kingdom and those who aren't ready won't be able to understand.

Sadly, King Herod has John the Baptist beheaded. Jesus withdraws for some time alone. But the crowds follow him, and he can't help but take care of their needs. He heals them, and when they get hungry he multiplies food. The only alone time he is able to get is late at night. In the wee hours of the morning, he catches up with his disciples out on the lake by walking on the water to their boat.

The Pharisees consistently oppose him with man-made religious rules. And Jesus consistently rebukes them — he is after pure hearts, not just outwardly pure lives.

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### The King's Heart

God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed, but his enemy came overnight and planted weeds. And now the wheat and weeds grow up together.

God has chosen for things to be that way. For now, the people of the kingdom and the people of the evil one grow up alongside each other. It's messy. God's kingdom exists, but it's not here fully. The kingdom of darkness — with its disease, death, and sin — still infects. While we might want to rip out the weeds once and for all, God says to wait. One day he will rid the world of darkness, but he knows that people who don't believe in him will be casualties. And he doesn't want that to happen. So he continues to allow "the field" to grow, giving more people an opportunity to know him.

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### Insight

After God's people returned from exile, their religious teachers began to set up meticulous rules to prevent them from breaking the law that God had given Moses. These rules were passed down orally, and God's people were weighed down by the burden of keeping them. These rules are the "tradition of the elders" (Matthew 15:2) that the Pharisees consistently accused Jesus of breaking.

# Day 13:

## God's Present Kingdom

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### God's Story

Jesus shares a parable about a manager who shrewdly relaxes the outstanding balances of his master's debtors so that they'll help him after he gets fired. Surprisingly, the master commends him. He's using his resources to plan for the future.

He tells another parable about a rich man who is cruel to a poor man named Lazarus. Lazarus goes to heaven, while the rich man goes to hell and begs Lazarus for help. Sadly, not even a spectacular sign, like a person returning from the dead, can change those whose hearts are set against God's word.

Jesus sends ten men with leprosy to be examined by the priests. On the way they all get healed, but only one — a Samaritan — humbly returns to thank Jesus.

Some Pharisees ask Jesus when his kingdom will come. He says it won't be observable because it's in their midst — it's already here for them to take part in.

Jesus tells two parables — about a persistent widow bugging a corrupt judge and about a Pharisee who is self-righteous before God versus a humble tax collector who's not. In both parables, Jesus is teaching that his fair Father will see to it that justice is done.

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### The King's Heart

"The kingdom of God is in your midst," Jesus tells the Pharisees (Luke 17:21). Rather than a hidden secret that needs to be unveiled, God's kingdom is there with the Pharisees, ready for them to enter as active participants.

God's heart-desire is for his people to live in his kingdom — where he reigns, and where love, joy, justice, peace and goodness are the laws of the land. Jesus wants to clarify that his kingdom isn't just coming at some point in the future, like the Pharisees were thinking. It is already here, in the present, in their everyday lives. God's kingdom is where justice is done, where love is lived out — where this world that we live in here and now is a glimpse of heaven. God wants the Pharisees and everyone to join in his kingdom and become actively involved in spreading it. And then, one day, he will usher in the kingdom completely.

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### Insight

Jesus explains that "the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John" (see Luke 16:16 – 17). The Law and the Prophets served their roles through the time of John the Baptist, but Jesus is doing something new. At the same time, not one word of the Law and the Prophets is to be dropped — the Law and the Prophets approve of the new thing Jesus is doing. They've been pointing to him, but they can't accomplish what he is out to do.



# Day 14:

## God the Truth

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### God's Story

Paul and Barnabas have a serious disagreement, so Silas takes Barnabas's place as Paul begins his second missionary journey. In Lystra, a young disciple, Timothy, joins their team.

Desiring to take the gospel to Europe, God gives Paul a dream of a man in Macedonia calling for help. The group sails across the Aegean Sea and travels to Philippi. Lydia, a trader of purple cloth, believes in Jesus. Paul casts a demon out of a slave woman who predicts the future; her owners are furious. They have Paul and Silas thrown in jail. As they pray and sing, God brings an earthquake, bursting open the jail cells. The jailer and his family believe in Jesus.

God leads Paul and his companions to Thessalonica. Some of the Jews accuse Paul of proclaiming a king other than Caesar. The city is in an uproar — the new believers send the missionaries to Berea. The Jews in Berea search God's Scriptures, and many trust Jesus. But when Jews from Thessalonica track Paul down, he has to leave Berea. Timothy and Silas stay while Paul is escorted to Athens.

In Athens, Paul dialogs with the Athenian philosophers at the Areopagus. He points out their altar to an unknown god and tells them about Jesus. Many believe.

Paul travels to Corinth and meets a believing couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Silas and Timothy catch up with him there. After the Jews reject his teachings, Paul starts to teach the Gentiles. He stays for a year and a half, then departs for Ephesus, where he stays briefly, leaves and then returns. God is growing his kingdom.

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### The King's Heart

Before God sent his Son to earth, people did their best to figure out the answers to their meaning-of-life questions: Why are we here? Where did we come from? The Greeks invented gods and mythologies, guessing about what these gods were like. Philosophers pontificated.

As Paul pointed out, the Athenians stumbled on some truths. Paul built on those truths, helping the Athenians see how their hearts were already longing for who God really is.

If God had not sent his Son, we would have spent our lifetimes trying to figure him out, never knowing what was really true. But thankfully, God wants us to know him. And because of his heart, and because he sent people like Paul who are zealous for it, we do.

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### Insight

Paul quotes some of the Athenian's own poets when he says "For in him we live and move and have our being," and "We are his offspring" (see Acts 17:28). Paul affirms the truth of these ideas, but explains that they're about God, not Zeus.

# Day 15:

## The God Who Wants Us to Believe in Him

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### God's Story

Paul continues to explain that God has been telling the same story all along.

Abraham didn't earn right standing before God by following the law. God hadn't given the law yet. Abraham simply trusted that God was able to declare him, an unrighteous man, as righteous. And God did. All God's people — including Jews — become righteous in the same way: by trusting in God's ability to make us so.

Paul explains that if God's people were defined by their ability to follow the law, then God would have no people at all because no one can follow it exactly. The only way for God to have followers is for him to do what he does — to “[call] into being things that were not” (Romans 4:17), to count those who believe in him as righteous when they aren't. We have our righteousness credited to us by God because by faith we believe in God and in what he says — just like Abraham did.

God loves us so much that he sent his Son to die for us while we were his enemies. And he did it all to declare us right with him through his blood. Even though Adam ushered sin into the world, Jesus makes righteousness available for the entire world. And that is a cause for great celebration.

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### The King's Heart

From the beginning, God has wanted his people to believe in him. “Trust me that I'll take care of you here in the wilderness,” he was saying as he sent manna to his hungry people. “Trust me that I can defeat these enemies,” he said to his people as they stood outside the promised land with ten spies saying it couldn't be done. God has always wanted people to believe in his good heart and his ability to save them.

Our belief in God is so important to him that it's how he chooses to make us right with him. Our very salvation depends on heart-trust in him.

“Trust that I can do this,” he says. “Trust that I have the ability to call into being things that were not. Trust that I am good enough and powerful enough to deem you righteous even though you aren't. And when you believe in me, I will do what you believe I will — I will make you righteous. Because I truly am that powerful and that good.”

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### Insight

God promised Abraham a certain plot of land — the promised land (see Genesis 12:1 – 7). But through this new covenant, Abraham's family would inherit the world (see Romans 4:13). All land would be holy land.

# Day 16:

## God, the Warm Truth

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### God's Story

The ancient city of Corinth is steeped in Greek philosophy, idol worship and sexual immorality. The new believers there have much to learn about life in Christ.

The people of Corinth pride themselves on their intellectualism. Impressed with eloquent speakers, groups would often align themselves with traveling speakers who came to share ideas. The Corinthian church is doing the same with the teachers of the gospel — Paul, Apollos, Peter, even Jesus — and it's causing divisions in the church. Paul wants them to follow God's Spirit.

Paul explains that his teachings about God and his kingdom, and especially about the cross, may seem foolish for some; but for believers — those who have God's Spirit and therefore eyes to see — it's full of God's secret wisdom. There's a way for a person to live where they follow God's Spirit, and there's a way for a person to live that's simply "human," a kind of intellectual "soul care" that focuses on a person's inner life without acknowledging God. Paul calls the believers in Corinth to be Spirit-driven because, with the Spirit, they have access to God's very mind.

The church's focus is wrong: They're boasting of their super-intellectualism while they're tolerating a sexual scandal and suing each other. Certain lifestyles don't fit in God's kingdom, where citizens are temples of God's Spirit.

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### The King's Heart

"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God . . . No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God . . . We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:10 – 11,16).

It was always God's intention for us to be close. When he sent his Spirit to live within us, he showed just how close he intended.

Inside us, God dwells. He speaks to us, teaching us. Even though we live in the kingdom that is already here but has not yet fully come, he speaks. He is the joyful, tender, loving, peaceful Voice. The warm Truth.

Through God's Spirit, he gives us open access to his mind — the endless brilliance of the deep things of God. From the moment we believed in Jesus, we began a journey of exploring God's good heart. And this journey will last through eternity because with the Infinite One there's always more to delightfully explore.

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### Insight

In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Paul names the teachers that believers were identifying themselves with. Apollos was a Jewish believer from Egypt who taught in Corinth after Paul's visit. Cephas is the apostle Peter's Aramaic name. There's no record that Peter ever went to Corinth, but believers who knew him possibly claimed to teach in his name.

# Day 17:

## God, the Flower's Provider

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### God's Story

While Paul is under house arrest in Rome, he receives a gift from the Philippian church — one of the first churches he shared Jesus with. God prompts him to write them a joy-filled letter of thanks.

God started a great work in their hearts, and he will see it through until Jesus comes back. Paul prays that God will increase their knowledge of his great love for them so they'll be able to tell the difference between good and evil in order to live fruitful lives.

After unbelieving Jews caused a riot in Jerusalem that resulted in his arrest, Paul eventually appealed his case to Caesar. Now in Rome, he might be executed. But he doesn't care whether he lives or dies. Whether he lives to tell of Jesus' love or dies to be with him, either way sounds good to Paul.

Paul urges believers to do for each other what Jesus did for all people: He laid down his life for all of us. As we live like people who have been rescued, we are to show the ways of light and life to a dark, dead world.

The Philippians are to reject teaching that says they can be saved by good works — they are part of God's family, and their citizenship is in heaven because of what Jesus has done. Paul encourages them to stand firm in the Lord by rejoicing in him always, presenting him with their every need and trusting that he will take care of them.

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### The King's Heart

God clothes the lilies. He decorates flowers that live mere weeks with colors that inspire artists. The flowers don't have souls; they don't have minds to think. They are fleeting, yet God sees to their needs. From 93 million miles away he sends sunlight to feed them, creates cycles to deliver life-rain, orchestrates our exhalations to be their provision.

God is aware of what a lily needs. And he provides for it. Not only does he provide, but he provides lavishly — the lily blossoms with beauty.

And we are God's most precious treasures, the ones he loves so dearly that he gave up his Son. He knows our needs too, and he provides for us — his treasures — lavishly. There is no need for anxiety. He asks us to present our requests to him (see Philippians 4:6), not because he doesn't know our needs, but so that we can recognize him when he answers.

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### Insight

The poem about Jesus in Philippians 2:6 – 11 might have been a hymn of the early Christian church, a hymn that Paul adapted for his letter.

# Day 18:

## The Fun God Intends

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### God's Story

False teachers are declaring that marriage and certain foods are bad. Many people in the church at Ephesus have come out of a dark, idolatrous culture in which drunken feasts and orgies are common. As a knee-jerk reaction, false teachers are making blanket rules that marriage (sex) isn't good, nor are certain foods. It's dangerous teaching. Everything God created is good.

Paul urges Timothy to give himself completely to training in godliness like he would train physically. He wants Timothy to teach God's Word to the people in his church. And when people look down on him because he's young, Paul wants him to remember that God called and gifted him for this role. He will sustain him.

Timothy is to exhort members of the church with loving gentleness — they are his family members. Widows are to be taken care of. Teachers should be paid for their work. And Timothy should do nothing out of favoritism.

Paul warns against the love of money. As believers, we are to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). We are to put our hope in God, “who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). When we are rich in good deeds, we “lay up treasure for [ourselves] as a firm foundation for the coming age” (1 Timothy 6:18 – 19).

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### The King's Heart

“Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Timothy 4:4).

God could have made the world quite a bit less good, and it would still be good. But he chose to make it very good. We could get sustenance by eating bland gruel for every meal. But he chose to create strawberries and blueberries and acai berries — and he chose to give us minds to create even more flavors. The world could have a uniform smell. But instead God gave different scents to roses, crisp fall mornings, and campfires. He could have designed us to reproduce by giving high-fives. But he chose to make it intimate and passionate and pleasurable.

We know the parameters God set up for these good things. Within the boundaries God set up, he gives us complete freedom to run and play. And he wants us to; it is his design.

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### Insight

In 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul quotes a verse from Deuteronomy alongside a statement from Jesus that was recorded in Luke — calling both “Scripture.” Even in the AD 60s, portions of the New Testament (or what ultimately became a part of the New Testament) were considered Scripture, on par with the Old Testament.

# Day 19:

## God Is Light

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### God's Story

The Spirit inspires the apostle John to write a letter to believers, likely to believers who lived in a number of places. John has heard, seen and touched the Word of life — Jesus — and he is spreading the news of the here-and-now eternal life that Jesus offers to all who believe in him.

God is absolute light — void of darkness. In that light, our dark sin is exposed; but if we walk with him in the light, confessing our sins to him, Jesus' blood will cleanse us from sin. We are to avoid sin as fiercely as possible, but when we do sin, Jesus advocates for us.

We will be able to recognize true believers because they will live like Jesus did — obeying God's commandments. God is love, and his commandments can be summed up in one word: love. Even though we aren't required to keep God's commandments for salvation, a Jesus-like, love-filled life is the mark of a believer.

False teachers have arisen who are leading believers astray. John warns that anyone denying that Jesus is the Son of God come in the flesh is not from God and should not be followed.

We are God's children, born of God. We will get to see Jesus in all his glory, and we should live purely to prepare ourselves for that incredible moment.

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### The King's Heart

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). There is not a speck of darkness in God, not a spot of injustice or unkindness. God can never be cruel, unjust or unloving.

"God is love," John later explains (1 John 4:8). He is pure love. That means that God always has the purest and best intentions in every situation; everything he does is a work of love.

We never need to question God's motives or his heart — he is always good, kind and loving. There is no safer place to put our trust. So while we may not understand a situation or how it's going to turn out, we can always trust God's heart. And then, on the other side of the situation or perhaps in the fullness of God's kingdom, we will see that God was acting with pure goodness — as he always is and can only be — all along.

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### Insight

John mentions the "world," and how we're not supposed to love it (see 1 John 2:15), throughout his letter. He isn't referring to the earth as we know it — the earth is God's good, but broken, creation. He's referring to the people and human systems that stand in opposition to God.

# Day 20:

## God's Loving Truth

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### God's Story

God inspires John, “the elder,” to write to Gaius, a member and evidently a leader of a church. Gaius is walking in the truth. He is faithfully living like a child of the King, advancing God's kingdom by loving him and other people well. Other believers have come to John and testified about Gaius's love and how wonderfully faithful he is to God and his truth. Nothing brings John more joy than hearing that fellow believers are living in light of all God has taught.

Gaius's love has even extended to teachers who have visited his home as they travel to tell people about Jesus. These believers have told John about Gaius's extreme generosity. John is delighted.

Then John shares a warning. Another church leader, Diotrephes, likes to be first in everything. He slanders believers, he isn't hospitable and he even throws out members of the church if they treat traveling believers kindly. John warns Gaius not to be like Diotrephes, who is doing what is evil.

John signs off his letter with peace and writes that he wishes to visit Gaius soon to see his friend face to face.

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### The King's Heart

Because God is good, there are certain things that he hates — like injustice, unkindness, jealousy and dishonesty. And because he is good, there are certain things he loves — kindness, justice, integrity — attributes that line up with his heart. As his children, we are to magnify what God loves and stand against what he hates.

In his letter, John does that. He celebrates Gaius's hospitality but condemns Diotrephes's lack of it. He even implies that Diotrephes's evil actions demonstrate he doesn't know God. John is loving what God loves and hating what God hates. And, to borrow a phrase from Paul, he is “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

As we grow closer to God, we'll be better able to identify what he loves and hates. Not only that, but he'll begin to shape our hearts like his. We'll start to love what he loves and hate what he hates.

As our hearts start to beat in rhythm with God's, we'll be able to speak the truth in love too. As we share God's truth, our hearts beating with his, the broken world will both see what is true and feel God's love in it. We'll be representing the Lord Jesus as he is — “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

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### Insight

John writes favorably about Demetrius, telling Gaius that everyone — and even “the truth itself” — speaks well of him (3 John 12). Demetrius was perhaps also the carrier of this letter.

# Day 21:

## God's Glorious End-Beginning

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### God's Story

Satan is bound for a thousand years, during which Jesus reigns on earth. Then Satan is freed to do his worst for one final brief period. He deceives the nations and gathers a huge army that comes against God's people. But a battle is never fought. Fire comes from heaven and burns up the army. Satan is thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and false prophet were thrown earlier. They are to be tortured forever.

God resurrects the dead, and they stand in front of a large white throne. Books containing every action of every person are opened, along with the book of life. God, at last, takes his seat and executes the final judgment. And he also destroys death, the last great enemy.

John sees the new heaven and the new earth, and the new Jerusalem descends from heaven. Heaven and earth are joined together — God has come to live with us! He will personally wipe every tear from our eyes and we will never hurt again. "I am making everything new!" God says from his throne (Revelation 21:5).

An angel shows John the new Jerusalem and then measures it. The city is about 1,400 miles long, wide and high — a perfect cube, just like the Most Holy Place of the temple. The entire city is God's dwelling place, and it gleams with his glory. From God's throne streams liquid life; "the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, [flows] . . . down the middle of the great street of the city." On either side of the river stands the tree of life; the leaves "are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1 – 2).

Then three times Jesus brings home the final point of this incredible revelation that he has given John: "I am coming soon!" (Revelation 22:7,12,20).  
"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

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### The King's Heart

Satan slithered into the garden accusatorily questioning God's heart.

"God is good," creation declared.

"Is he really?" Satan questioned.

And the evil one continued questioning, accusing, deceiving throughout all of human history.

But human history and our own stories stand as witnesses to the truth.

And once God vanquishes Satan forever and joins heaven to earth so that he can live with us as he always intended, we and the glorious angels will declare the most foundational truth of the universe. It's what has always been true, but we will then know it in the depths of our souls: "God is good."

"Is he really?"

"Yes! He is good, good, good!"

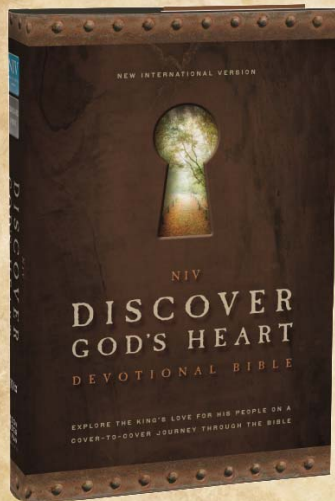
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### Insight

God's Word ends with Amen — "Let it be so." Indeed, King Jesus, let it be so.



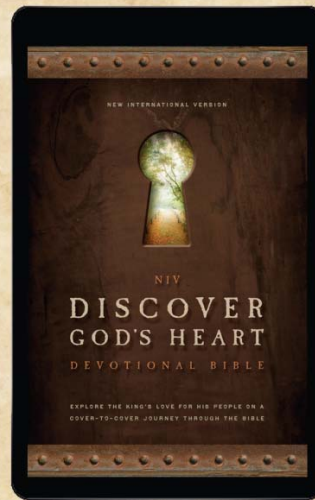
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