

# Illustrated Bible Life

## The Quality of Story

**S**tories are powerful. I don't know many people who enjoy a lecture—even a good one—but millions of people around the world flock to movie theatres and read the latest novels every year. Jesus used stories—parables—to convey the most complex theological truths, stories that resound with us as powerfully today as they did to His first audiences.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the book of Genesis is one long story, a book about beginnings, as one of our authors this quarter puts it (see session 1). From the story of creation to the bitter tale of the fall of humanity, from the tower of Babel to the rainbow marking the end of the flood, from Abram's journey to the land of Canaan to the death of Joseph in Egypt, the book of Genesis tells stories.

Why are stories so compelling? What do we learn from stories that lectures will never teach? It shouldn't be too hard to see that stories are full of emotions; they form us spiritually, teaching us about morality in ways we can only feel. Head knowledge is good—God gave us our intellect as a gift—but heart knowledge moves us in ways that head knowledge never will.

One of William Shakespeare's most famous lines is, "The quality of justice is mercy." From the time I first heard those words, I've pondered just what that means. Story is one way to understand: If justice is facts and figures, then mercy is story. When a judge hands down a sentence on a convicted lawbreaker, he or she considers story in making the determination as to what is just. The judge looks at the lawbreaker's background and the circumstances of the infraction in making a decision that will affect the rest of the lawbreaker's life. Mercy can make the difference between that person becoming a hardened criminal, and breaking the downward spiral, putting that person on a redemptive path.

In the book of Genesis, mercy shines through the stories that we read. God's mercy in sparing Noah and his family in a world full of evil; God's mercy in sparing Lot and his family even though not even 10 righteous people had been found in Sodom and Gomorrah; God's mercy in protecting Jacob in spite of his deceptions and self-serving actions; God's mercy in protecting Joseph so that his family might one day be saved from a severe famine.

If story is compelling, then the story of God's mercy shines brightly in the book of Genesis. It sets the context for all the rest of Scripture. It culminates in the mercy that God showed in sending His only Son into the world: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). As you read the stories from Genesis in our studies this quarter, consider how story has formed you. What have you embraced as a result of what you have learned through the stories God has given us in Genesis?