

study guide

SURPRISED
BY
Love

10-WEEK
BIBLE STUDY SERIES
FOR WOMEN



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13 14 15 16 17 • 5 4 3 2 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS



	Introduction	5
SESSION 1	Surprising <i>Plan</i>	7
SESSION 2	Surprising <i>Beauty</i>	15
SESSION 3	Surprising <i>Promise</i>	23
SESSION 4	Surprising <i>Kinship</i>	31
SESSION 5	Surprising <i>Faithfulness</i>	39
SESSION 6	Surprising <i>Rescue</i>	47
SESSION 7	Surprising <i>Grace</i>	57
SESSION 8	Surprising <i>Assurance</i>	65
SESSION 9	Surprising <i>Reunion</i>	75
SESSION 10	Surprising <i>Restoration</i>	83
	Reflections	91
	Bibliography	96

*see how
great a love the father
has bestowed on us,
that we would be called
children of god;
and such we are*

1 JOHN 3:1

introduction

Welcome to *Surprised by Love*, the second set of Bible studies in our Journey of Joy DVD Bible study series for women. Elizabeth Talbot is the speaker and the author of the Study Guide in this set of lessons that are based on her book by the same title.

The North American Division Women's Ministries Department is pleased to partner with Elizabeth and her ministry, Jesus 101 Biblical Institute, to produce these Bible studies designed for small group settings or individual study.

Whichever study method you choose, be prepared to meet Jesus in a more intimate way than ever before as you learn what the Bible reveals about His amazing role as our *Go'el* (Kinsman-Redeemer). As women, we are born with a desire for someone to love us unconditionally forever and to be willing to fight for us if necessary. In *Surprised by Love* you will discover the good news—Jesus has done just that for you. He loves you with an everlasting love, and He will never let you go.

Carla Baker, Women's Ministries Director
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

My beloved sister:

I am so excited to take this "Journey of Joy" together with you! The Word of God is a deep well of refreshing treasures and marvelous insights of His love for us, and together we have the privilege of exploring it! I can't wait to spend some true intimate moments with you and with God through these pages.

I firmly believe that the entire Bible must be studied in the light of the Cross, where God's ultimate sacrifice for us settled our standing in His eyes, once and for all. The Cross is the main principle of interpretation for the whole Bible, as this quote from one of my favorite authors clearly states: "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary" (White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 315). One of the main themes from Genesis to Revelation is about our *Go'el*, Kinsman-Redeemer. The closest relative could do for the members of his family what no one else could do, and that included redeeming them from slavery and recovering the family property. And this is the amazing reality: in the instant when God created us in His image, He became our closest of kin and therefore committed Himself to a rescue plan! And the Bible is the story of how God was able to rescue His children, who had been kidnapped by the deceiver! What would you do if you lost your children? Let me share with you what our heavenly Father did for us. I trust that when you will have completed these studies you will be absolutely and utterly Surprised by Love. Are you ready? Let's get started!

Pastor Elizabeth Talbot, Speaker and Director
Jesus 101 Biblical Institute—a media ministry of the NAD



SURPRISING *Plan*

reading the word

As you read the biblical narrative, highlight words or phrases that catch your attention.

Genesis 1:1–19, 26–31, NASB

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

⁶ Then God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse, and it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹ Then God said, “Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas, and God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them”; and it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind, and God saw that it was good. ¹³ There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

¹⁴ Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. ¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness, and God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. . . .

²⁶ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the

image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed, it shall be for you; ³⁰ and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so. ³¹ God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

What phrases or concepts did you highlight? Why do you think these caught your attention?

seeking through study

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The seven Hebrew words that make up the first sentence in the Scriptures foreshadow the seven days of the creation process. God was preparing a *perfect* place for His children; they were the crown of His creation. As God was speaking their home into existence, He was also making qualitative statements about how well things were going. After the second day, “It was good” is found at the completion of every day, signifying that God was pleased with how earth was becoming the ideal home for *His babies*. Each day starts with “then God said,” and it ends with “there was evening and there was morning.” Every day God gave a command, and the narrative highlights the accomplishment of each command as we get closer and closer to *the day* when His children would arrive.

And then . . .

It was time! God was about to create His children—His babies. From this moment on, everything would be different. His universe would change forever. Their home was ready, the day had arrived. And God paused.

A divine council took place *exclusively* before creating humankind in the Creation narrative. As God is dialoguing in community, we get a glimpse of the uniqueness and climactic significance of this moment: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man’ ” (Genesis 1:26). “Man” (*adam*) is a collective name for humankind, as will be further explained in Genesis 1:27. God has reflected and decided to have children. You can almost picture in your mind a husband and wife in intimate conversation at the kitchen table, planning the most important decision of their lives: “Let’s have children.”

God’s children would be in His image: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Humankind would bear God’s image and likeness; humans would be like God but not identical to God; in His image and likeness, but not gods. God had made the decision. In Genesis 1:26, we hear the voice of God in the first person. Then the narrator poetically reports the creation of God’s children in the third person, emphasizing that we were created in His image: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

Humankind is created in the image of the Sovereign Creator, and as such, God delegates His

sovereignty and now His children are to rule the earth. They hold the highest place in the created order. Are you feeling pretty special by now?

Well, God thinks that His children are more than special. When He evaluates His creative work of the sixth day, He can't just call it "good" as in all the other days. No! The plants and the animals are good, the children are VERY GOOD! "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was *very good*. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31; emphasis added). Yes, having a garden is *good*, having a pet is *good*. But having children is *very good*! This was *the* day they came to life, and God would always remember it, the way you remember the day your child was born. That was the most important day in your life! And it was *very good*!

integrating the message

Fill in the blanks with your own name:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make _____ in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let _____ rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created _____ in His own image, in the image of God He created _____" (Genesis 1:26, 27).

IMAGE OF GOD

In the ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the designation of being "in the image of God" was reserved exclusively for prominent people: kings, important officers, and royal rulers. The Genesis narrative emphasizes that God did not make such distinctions. When God decided to create mankind in His own image, He did not make some people more special than the others—He did not separate them by hierarchy and power. *Every human being* bears the image of God. The royal language is used for every child of God, regardless of status, caste, gender, or position in society. YOU are a child of God! We are His royal children!

The concept of the *image of God* is so special that it appears only four times in Jewish Scripture and always in relation to the creation of humankind (see Genesis 1:26, 27 [twice]; 9:6). The Hebrew verb *'bara* ("create") is used only with God as the subject. He creates children, male and female (*'adam*), in His image, according to His likeness. Each gender is given unique characteristics that together make a complete, comprehensive, and complementary view of God. We are all created in the image of God!

Only the biblical Creation speaks of a God who serenely makes man in His own image to be part of His divine family. Only the biblical Creation rehearses the story of a supreme Godhead who deliberately creates humans for the purpose of fellowship. Only the biblical Creation recalls that humans are given rulership of the earth as God's representatives.

Later Seth is described as being "in his [Adam's] own likeness, according to his image" (Genesis 5:3). God had children in His image; Adam had children in his image; and you have children in YOUR image! Perhaps you are already beginning to understand the plan of redemption . . . and we haven't even started yet.

What does it mean to you personally that you are created in the image of God?

What are your children worth to you? Now, do you understand your worth in God's eyes?

DIVINE DIALOGUE

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make . . .’” (Genesis 1:26). This is the only “divine dialogue” in the Creation account. The Godhead planning to create the human race: “Before undertaking the next act of creation God took counsel. This unique reference to God’s reflecting in community before making something underscores both the importance and the uniqueness of what God was about to create” (Hartley, *Genesis*, p. 47).

Why do you think God took counsel before creating the human race?

Why did God call the sixth day of Creation week “very good”?

SELFLESS COMMUNITY

God, who is love and exists in the selfless intimate community of Three Persons in One, was about to create a race to love and cherish: humankind. God wanted to give humans the capacity to love selflessly, too, so that they might understand His love better. And because God exists in the intimate community that we call Trinity, He intended that a woman and a man also would exist in an intimate community that we call marriage: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become *one* flesh” (Genesis 2:24; emphasis added). I think it is extremely important and revealing that the Hebrew word used for “one” in this verse is the same word used in the Shema when describing the “oneness” of God: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is *one*!” (Deuteronomy 6:4; emphasis added). The *Shema* (Hebrew for “hear”), found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, is the Jewish confession of faith, and is recited daily. God is one God, existing in community, as a man and a woman are one flesh. Perhaps now humankind would understand God’s selfless love for them a little bit better.

Does marriage teach us anything about the Godhead?



drawing my story

Draw a picture of God creating you in HIS image.

What surprises you the most about your drawing?

1

Learning from life

What would you do for your child? Let me tell you what my parents did for me.

Suffering is hard enough. But when in addition to suffering you also feel alone, it is easy to fall into hopelessness. I remember a particular Christmas, many, many years ago. It was a difficult and lonely season in my life. This was a dark, cold loneliness, a time of helplessness and of unspeakable pain. It was a time of mourning, the type that takes a long time to process, because dreams die slowly and painfully. It wasn't helping that this was the holiday season, a time of family togetherness and celebration. Deep inside, in my soul, in that sacred place where no one else is allowed to enter, I was feeling ALONE, terribly ALONE! My parents, who had always

been very supporting and loving, lived on the East Coast of the United States while I lived on the other coast, in California. Neither my parents nor I had enough money to visit the other for Christmas that year. So they had planned to spend it in Maryland, and I would be alone, with only my thoughts and questions for company.

But then something incredible happened! I received good news, something that I couldn't have possibly imagined! An airline decided to advertise a very inexpensive special fare just for Christmas. However, the promotion came with a very specific restriction: The trip both ways had to be completed within a window of forty-eight hours, on December 24 and 25. I understand that a one day visit like this would make sense for anyone who lived within an hour or two of their loved ones. But who would cross the whole country, flying six hours each way in less than forty-eight hours? Well . . . MY PARENTS did! They called me to announce excitedly that both of them were coming to spend Christmas together with me! They would arrive on December 24 and leave the following evening. WOW! I can't even describe what I felt! How could anyone love me that much and come all this distance just to let me know that I was NOT alone?!! I will never forget that Christmas. I remember every detail about it. I was not alone after all . . . someone loved me and cared for me deeply. Sometimes love and suffering require extraordinary and unexpected measures. God would demonstrate His love for us in a most surprising manner . . .

considering the narrative

Watch the DVD entitled "SURPRISING Plan" and reflect on these questions:

How does it make you feel that the whole earth was created for you?

How do the gifts of beauty and love from the Master Designer affect you?

What does it mean to you when Jesus calls you "DAUGHTER"?

What is your main identity? Does your identity make any difference in difficult times?

What is the difference between being "healed" and being "made whole"?

Share your answers with your study group, and repeat these words of Scripture together:

*"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us,
That we would be called children of God;
And such we are" (1 John 3:1).*

After watching the video presentation for this lesson, turn to the Session 1 "Reflections" box at the end of this Guide for an assignment from the Bible study group leader.

understanding the scriptures

1

JESUS IN SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:1-5	JOHN 1:1-5
<p>¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.</p> <p>² The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.</p> <p>³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.</p> <p>⁴ God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness.</p> <p>⁵ God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.</p>	<p>¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . .</p> <p>² He was in the beginning with God.</p> <p>³ All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.</p> <p>⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.</p> <p>⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.</p>

How many things do you find in common between the two texts?

Why do you think John chose the Genesis background to introduce Jesus to his readers?

Do you comprehend the Light? Are you living in the Light? (See John 1:1-5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5.)

responding in gratitude

Write a Thanksgiving Psalm or a Prayer of Gratitude to God for creating you in His image, for lovingly forming a beautiful world for your home. Thank Him for loving you with an everlasting love and promising that He will NEVER FORGET YOU!

*"Can a woman forget her nursing child
And have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of
My hands" (Isaiah 49:15, 16).*

god's surprising plan

God's surprising plan was to create children in HIS IMAGE, to share the dominion of this world with them, to give them the ability to multiply and fill the earth, and to fellowship with them throughout eternity. That the sovereign God of the universe would deliberately design us in His image is more than our minds can comprehend. He created us to be with Him forever! Yes, the Master planned you and me. We will live in awe of His *surprising* plan throughout eternity. And wait until you see what He went through to make His plan successful!