

The Hayride Journey: Enjoying the Ride with God

A Five-Week Study Guide for Personal Reflection

Welcome to the Ride:

I'm so glad you're joining me for The Hayride Journey! 🍂❤️

Over the next five weeks, we're going to take a journey together through Scripture, using the peaceful picture of an evening hayride to remind us of what it looks like to travel through life with God.

Along the way, we'll experience the open road, the guiding light, the unseen passenger, the valley trail, and finally, a hopeful horizon. Each stop along our journey will encourage us to slow down, reflect, and notice how God is present—even when we can't always see what He is doing.

Each week includes devotion and Scripture, a Digging Deeper section, practical ways to apply what we're learning, and action step. You'll also find reflection questions, along with space to write down what God is placing on your heart.

My hope is that you won't feel like you need to rush through this study. Grab your Bible, your favorite creative supplies, and maybe a cozy fall drink. Take your time with the Scripture, enjoy the creative process, and allow God to meet you right where you are.

There are no perfect answers and no artistic skills required—just come with an open heart.

So settle in, enjoy the ride, and let's see where God takes us on The Hayride Journey. ❤️

Week 1: The Open Road (Genesis 12:1-4)

God told Abram to leave his country, his family, and his father's home for 'the land I will show you.' There was no map and no itinerary, only a promise. Abram was seventy-five, settled, and secure, yet he went. Hebrews 11:8 sums it up: he obeyed 'even though he did not know where he was going.' Faith is often less about certainty than about trust extended one step ahead of the evidence. God also attached blessing to the going, both for Abram and through him to others. Think of the hayride pulling away at dusk, where you can see only a few feet by lantern light. The not-knowing can become an invitation into wonder and trust. We want blueprints, but God tends to hand out lanterns.

Week 1 Digging Deeper: Small, Repeated Yeses

Abram's story did not end with one obedient step. Later chapters show him wavering, making mistakes, and even lying out of fear in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20). The journey of faith is a series of small, repeated yeses, and God kept walking with Abram anyway. Notice too that Abram did not travel alone. Genesis 12:5 says he took Sarai, Lot, their possessions, and the people of his household. Faith draws others along and reshapes relationships. When Abram arrived in Canaan, his first act was to build an altar (Genesis 12:7), a place of worship rather than security. Also read Hebrews 11:8-10 and Genesis 12:5-9.

Week 1 Application: Take the Next Faithful Step

Action Step: Identify one small, concrete 'next step,' not the whole journey, and take it this week, even if you can't yet see where it leads.

Reflection Questions:

Where is God inviting you to step out in trust this season, even without knowing the full destination?

What familiar comfort (a relationship, a routine, a way of thinking) might God be asking you to release in order to move forward?

Like Abram, have you taken a step of faith and then wavered? How does it change things to know God stayed with him anyway?

Who might be watching or walking alongside you on your own journey right now, whether you've noticed them or not?

Week 2: Riding by Firelight (Exodus 13:21-22)

By day the Lord went ahead of Israel in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire. The pillar 'never left its place in front of the people,' not when they grumbled, doubted, or looked back longingly at Egypt. God's answer to a people facing open desert was not a set of instructions but His visible, moving presence, always just ahead. Like a flashlight calling back 'watch the dip here' on a dark hayride, guidance often comes as enough light for this step, then the next. The pillar also changed form: cloud for shade and direction in the heat, fire for light and warmth in the cold night. God shapes His guidance to what we actually need, not a one-size-fits-all manual.

Week 2 Digging Deeper: Led Toward Difficulty, Shielded in It

Exodus 13:18 says God led Israel 'by the desert road toward the Red Sea,' not the shortest or easiest way, but one that would soon require even deeper trust. Sometimes the pillar leads us directly toward difficulty because that is where God intends to show Himself most powerfully. Exodus 14:19-20 shows the pillar later standing as a barrier between Israel and the pursuing Egyptian army, light for God's people and darkness for their pursuers. The same presence that guides us can also shield us. Also read Exodus 14:19-31 and Psalm 119:105.

Week 2 Application: Trust the Light You Have

Action Step: Before a decision or hard conversation this week, pause and ask God to light just the next step, then follow it, trusting the light will keep coming as you need it

Reflection Questions

Where in your life do you wish you had the 'whole map,' when God seems to offer only the next few steps?

Can you recall a season when God's guidance looked different than you expected, like cloud instead of fire? How did He meet you specifically?

What would it look like this week to trust the light you have rather than waiting for more light before you move?

Has God ever led you toward a difficulty rather than around it, only for you to see the reason later? What did that teach you about His presence?

Week 3: The Unseen Passenger (Luke 24:15-16)

On resurrection day, two grieving disciples walked toward Emmaus, rehashing the crucifixion and puzzling over rumors of an empty tomb. Jesus Himself fell into step beside them, but they 'were kept from recognizing him.' Their sorrow and confusion clouded their sight. God is rarely hidden from us; more often we are so loaded with worry, grief, or busyness that we walk right past His presence. Like an unnoticed passenger on the hayride, shoulder brushing ours with every bump, He may be nearest when we are least aware. Only when Jesus broke bread did they see Him, and looking back they realized their hearts had been burning all along (Luke 24:32). The invitation is not to manufacture a dramatic encounter but to slow down enough to ask, 'Could this be Him?'

Week 3 Digging Deeper: Questions Before Answers

Before He is recognized, Jesus asks questions: 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' (Luke 24:17). He enters their grief patiently, listens, and only then opens the Scriptures to explain what was said about Himself (Luke 24:27). God often meets us through patient presence and good questions before answers. Once they recognized Him, the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell the others (Luke 24:33). Recognizing Christ's presence rarely stays private; it sends us back toward community. Also read Luke 24:13-35 in full.

Week 3 Application: Open Your Eyes in the Ordinary

Action Step: Choose one ordinary moment each day this week (a walk, a meal, a commute) and pray, 'Open my eyes to see You here,' before it begins.

Reflection Questions

Where might God have been walking beside you recently, unnoticed in the busyness or sorrow of your days?

10. Week 3: Can you think of a 'burning heart' moment from your past that you only recognized as God's presence looking back?

11. Week 3: What might help you slow down enough this week to notice Him in the ordinary moments rather than only in hindsight?

12. Week 3: Jesus asked questions before offering answers. Who in your life might need you to simply listen and walk alongside them right now?

Week 4: Through the Valley Trail (Psalm 23:4)

David writes 'even though I walk through the darkest valley,' not 'if.' The valley is part of the terrain of a life well lived. Shepherds knew that the road to green pastures often ran through narrow, shadowed ravines; the only way through was through. What turns David's fear into confidence is not the absence of danger but the presence of the Shepherd: 'for you are with me.' The comfort is relational, not circumstantial. The rod protects from predators, and the staff guides, rescues, and gently corrects. Like the driver who keeps the wagon moving through the darkest, bumpiest stretch, speaking calmly to the horses, the Shepherd does not remove the valley but walks every uneven step with us. David wrote from experience, having known betrayal, loss, being hunted, and deep personal failure.

Week 4 Digging Deeper: The Valley Is the Middle of the Story

Read Psalm 23 as a whole. It begins with green pastures and quiet waters (v.2), passes through the valley (v.4), and ends at a table prepared 'in the presence of my enemies' with an overflowing cup (v.5). The valley is the necessary passage between provision and abundance, not the final scene. Notice also that David shifts from speaking about God ('He makes me lie down,' v.2) to speaking directly to Him ('you are with me,' v.4) just as the valley begins. Hardship drew him into more intimate conversation with God rather than pushing him away. Also read Isaiah 43:2 and John 10:11-14.

Week 4 Application: Walk With the Shepherd

Action Step: Name one hard thing you're currently facing. This week, instead of trying to fix or outrun it, say 'Shepherd, walk with me through this' each time it comes to mind, especially when it feels heaviest.

Reflection Questions

What valley are you walking through right now, and what would it look like to focus less on escaping it and more on noticing the Shepherd within it?

The rod protects and the staff guides and rescues. Which do you most need from God in this season?

Who has been a 'steady voice up front' for you during a hard season, reminding you that you weren't walking alone?

Have you noticed hardship drawing you into more direct, honest conversation with God, as it seemed to for David? What did that closeness look like?

Week 5: A Hopeful Horizon (Philippians 3:13-14)

Paul writes from prison, 'Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on.' He had a past worth forgetting, having persecuted Christians, yet he let grace have the final word over it. Hope does not require a clean past, only a God who lets us leave it behind and walk forward. As the hayride nears home, the sky opens in gold, barn lights glimmer, and people laugh and hum, with relaxed anticipation rather than anxiety. Paul's pressing forward is not earning a prize but responding to a grace that has already taken hold of him. This is not a finish line to sprint toward, gasping, but a horizon to walk toward, together, with joy. The ride doesn't end when the devotional does; it continues with the same faithful God.

Week 5 Digging Deeper: Hope Without Arrival

Philippians 3:12 gives the context: 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.' Paul is honest about his own incompleteness, and that is precisely the point. Hope requires forward motion sustained by grace, not performance. In Philippians 3:15 Paul describes this posture as the mindset of the mature, suggesting that maturity is measured not by how far you've come but by whether your eyes are still lifted toward the horizon. Also read Romans 8:1 and Isaiah 43:18-19.

Week 5 Application: Carry a Hope Forward

Action Step: Write down one hope you're carrying into the horizon ahead, not a plan or a to-do, just a hope, and place it where you'll see it daily as a reminder that the journey continues with joy.

Reflection Questions

As this journey continues beyond these five weeks, where is hope calling you next?

What from your past is God inviting you to 'forget,' not erase, but release its grip on your present?

Looking back over all five weeks, which scene or Scripture spoke to you most, and why?

Paul shows that maturity isn't arrival but continuing to lift your eyes toward the horizon. Where do you need to keep pressing forward without having 'arrived' yet?

Series Review: One Continuous Ride

The five weeks form one journey: stepping out in trust (Abram), being led one lit step at a time (the pillar), discovering a presence beside you even when unnoticed (Emmaus), walking through hardship without walking alone (the valley), and lifting your eyes to the future with hope (the horizon). As a group or on your own, trace how each week builds on the last. Which stage of the ride are you in right now: the open road, the firelit night, the unnoticed companion, the valley, or the horizon? Name it honestly, and ask what God's invitation is for that stretch of road.

Scripture References

Genesis 12:1-4

"The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.""

(NIV)

Hebrews 11:8

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going."

(NIV)

Exodus 13:21-22

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."

(NIV)

Luke 24:15-16

"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him."

(NIV)

Luke 24:31-32

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?""

(NIV)

Psalms 23:4

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

(NIV)

Philippians 3:12

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

(NIV)

Philippians 3:13-14

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

(NIV)

Key Takeaways

Main points to remember and apply

1. Faith is often trust extended one step ahead of the evidence. God gives lanterns, not blueprints.
2. God's presence goes before us and adapts to what we need, whether direction, shade, light, warmth, or protection.
3. Jesus is often nearer than we realize. Slowing down helps us recognize Him in ordinary moments.
4. The valley is part of the road, not a detour from it. The comfort is that the Shepherd is with us.
5. Grace has the final word over our past, so we can press on toward the horizon with hope instead of pressure.
6. The journey of faith is a series of small, repeated yeses, and God keeps walking with us even when we stumble.

Additional Notes

- Sermon Notes, Week 1 (The Open Road): What is God asking me to trust Him with?

- Sermon Notes, Week 2 (Riding by Firelight): Where do I need light for my next step?

- Sermon Notes, Week 3 (The Unseen Passenger): Where might I have missed Jesus beside me? _____
- Sermon Notes, Week 4 (Through the Valley Trail): What valley do I need to bring to the Shepherd? _____
- Sermon Notes, Week 5 (A Hopeful Horizon): What hope am I carrying forward?

- My action step this week: _____
- Prayer requests and answered prayers: _____