



# Finales

## Finally, and Forever

by Beth Forman

### Bible Study Leader's Guide

Leader Notes in Blue

Bible verses in Red

Lesson as it appears in the *Quarterly* in Black

**NOTE to Leader:** To prepare as a facilitator or leader for this study, take time to read through the lesson beforehand. Pray that your planning and guidance will prepare the women in your group to reflect, learn and grow. Determine the approximate length of time for the lesson and then during the lesson, keep an eye on the clock so you will complete it without being rushed or going too long. One of the most important parts in facilitating any discussion is to give others the time to reflect and respond thoughtfully while gently keeping the focus on God's Word. If discussions get off track, it's your goal to guide everyone back to the readings and the lesson. Whether this is your first time leading or your hundredth, relax and trust in the Lord to guide you! Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

### Finales, Finallys, and Forever

Begin today's study by going to our Heavenly Father in prayer and asking the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts, study, and discussion so that it will all be pleasing to Him.

**NOTE to Leader:** If you are not comfortable with extemporaneous prayer, write a prayer ahead of time or invite someone else — ahead of time — to say an opening prayer.

We all know what it's like to finish a book or a movie and think, "That was a terrible ending!" But exactly what makes a bad ending? A good ending? Take a few minutes to discuss some fictional endings.

**NOTE to Leader:** Give the women time to share their thoughts. Think about books, movies, or television programs to get you started. If your group draws a blank, then suggest some classics like *The Sound of Music*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Most of us want the loose ends tied up. We want a *real* finale. Usually a good ending is one that ends the bad guys lose.

Let's explore endings, those Finallys and Finales when a goal was met, a prayer was answered or perhaps a door was slammed shut.

### Your Finally Moments

*Recall a time when you've set a goal, prayed a prayer, or longed for something that was just out of reach, and when it happened, you said, "Finally!" That's a Finally Moment!*

Share some of these moments and emotions. What's the problem with thinking that we'll be happy once we get that next Finally?

**NOTE to Leader:** Encourage the participants to come up with their own personal Finally Moments.

We keep looking for the next Finally as the answer to our uneasiness, sadness, or frustration. Perfect peace and joy seem to be just out of our grasp. Even if the Finally Moment we're awaiting is not a sinful quest in and of itself (Isn't it okay to hope for a new job?), the danger is in believing we will be happier once that Finally Moment happens. If we live this way, our lives will be, as Henry David Thoreau wrote, ones of "quiet desperation." This quote is from Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." Although not a Christian, Thoreau recognized man's constant pursuit for worldly things and encouraged a life of simplicity.

## Finally Moments in the Bible

Read and discuss the Finally Moments in the following passages:

Genesis 8:13–14.

By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

Who might have said, "Finally!"? Noah, his wife, and all the family would have been relieved to know the floodwaters were receding.

Ask the group how this Finally is also a beginning. God saw that Noah was righteous and the rest of the world was godless and corrupt. The flood destroyed the human race but preserved the righteous to begin again.

Read Genesis 21:1–7.

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac[a] to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Sarah and Abraham, beyond childbearing years, finally conceive in their old age and she gives birth to Isaac. After waiting patiently for twenty-five years from the time when God first made His promise to Abraham, they were blessed. Although having Isaac was an answer to her prayer, Sarah was still not content.

Read Genesis 21:8–11.

"The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, 'Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the

inheritance with my son Isaac.' The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

How might this be another Finally for Sarah? She was a protective mother who didn't like how Isaac was being treated by his half-brother, Ishmael. Perhaps she thought their lives would be better without Hagar and Ishmael. So when Abraham sent them away, Sarah may have said, "Finally!"

Read Genesis 29:20–30.

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her." So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant. When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

Ask, how is Jacob's story another example of Finally? What do you imagine his response was when he realized the deception? Sometimes our Finally Moments come after years of waiting for an answered prayer. Jacob had waited patiently seven years to marry Rachel, so he probably expected to say, "Finally!" on the day of the feast. He was shocked to know that Laban had deceived him by giving Leah to be his wife. His Finally Moment was snatched away from him.

Read Luke 15:1–10.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus

told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

### The Parable of the Lost Coin

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### What is the response to these Finally Moments? Rejoicing!

#### Luke 15:11–32

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

**NOTE to Leader:** Encourage the women to look at this Finally Moment from the perspective of the father and the son. When the prodigal son returned, the father rejoiced and may have said, “Finally, my son is home again!” Perhaps the prodigal son felt that Finally he was reunited with his family and his misery would be over.

### Finales

*Finales are those times when a curtain comes down, a door closes, and the words on the screen say “The End.”*

Read Genesis 3:22–24. What kind of finale did Adam and Eve experience? How have we been touched by this finale?

And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Adam and Eve were exiled forever from Eden. He even placed the cherubim with flaming sword to stop them from entering this perfect place, to stop them from accessing the tree of life. The couple’s rebellion against God brings sin and death into creation.

Even in the depths of this painful finale, however, we see a beginning. Read Genesis 3:15 and discuss the promise God revealed.

And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

God’s plan was already in place to save humankind from sin and death. Christ, the woman’s offspring, would ultimately defeat Satan on the cross and open the way to eternal life.

Read Genesis 37:27–28. What finales did Joseph experience?

Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed. So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, he lost his freedom as well as his family. Perhaps he also lost all hope for some time. At the time, he didn’t see how God was going to work things out but he trusted Him.

Read Genesis 47:23–25. What blessings do we see come from Joseph’s finale?

Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.” “You have saved our lives,” they said. “May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh.”

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After many years, Joseph eventually becomes favored by the Pharaoh and earns a position of power as the manager of Egypt’s harvests. Then during the severe famine, Joseph was able to provide for the people. Genesis 47:27: “Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.”

Read Genesis 50:20 and discuss God’s plan in Joseph’s finale.

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

God planned all of this to bring blessings. Luther wrote: “God causes good to result from evil, not that He wants evil to be done, but His goodness is so great even in our wickedness that He cannot do otherwise than forgive sin if the sinner sobs and implores His mercy. If this happens the sin shall be forgiven” (Lutheran Study Bible 93)

### Personal Finales

Share a time when you’ve had a good finale in your life, the end of a long illness, the end of a long trip. Have some of these finales become beginnings? (Consider that the end of the day is the beginning of rest and the end of winter is the beginning of spring.)

**NOTE to Leader:** Allow the group to explore this concept briefly with their personal experiences and the emotions they felt.

Let's shift gears and ponder the bad endings in our lives, times when it's over. The door shuts. We don't see how God is going to work this out. These might include failed relationships, loss of a job or a loved one. Share or quietly reflect on these finales.

**NOTE to Leader:** Allow time for the participants in your group to reflect. As a facilitator, let the silence come as this may create a comfort zone where someone is encouraged to share. Don't try to rush in and fill the quiet. You may want to suggest that women take a few minutes to write down their thoughts here.

Think about a time when you have been protected, like Noah and his family, by a finale.

This may come naturally out of the previous question, but allow the group some time to explore this idea. Perhaps the end of a job saved them from a temptation or led them to a new and better position. Maybe the end of a rocky relationship spared them from deeper pain.

## The Grand Finale

The Finally Moments and Finales in our life are not true endings. Once we've celebrated one Finally, there's another one just waiting in the wings. That's true of Finales, too. While we long for closure, we often don't get it. The curtains seem to come down only to be yanked aside for another scene, sometimes joyful, sometimes painful. Longing for Finallys and Finales isn't the answer to living in joy and peace.

Read Philippians 4:4–9 and share what you learn about living in God's peace.

**Philippians 4:4–9** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if

anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

This verse is filled with encouragement about living a peace-filled life, and it has nothing to do with seeking the next finally! Rejoicing in the blessings of today will bring peace. Practicing grace-filled living will bring peace. Focusing on others instead of ourselves will bring peace. Receiving the Lord's gifts of strength and grace through His Word and Sacraments will bring peace.

Read Matthew 27:45–51. What curtain was torn? Did many see this as a real finale?

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split

When Jesus died, the curtain was torn, revealing the final sacrifice on the cross for all sinners. The witnesses left the site of the crucifixion grieving the loss. They certainly felt that Jesus's life had ended. For many, it was a real finale. (See Hebrews 9:11 ff.)

Read the beautiful story of the Resurrection in Luke 24:1–9. What three words can be a daily reminder whenever we despair about the painful finales in our lives. **He is risen!**

**Luke 24: 1–9** On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the

women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.

Now read Hebrews 10:19–25. What does God's Word tell us about the Grand Finale?

As children of the Heavenly Father, we live as redeemed sons and daughters, filled with the confidence and hope that our Real Finale will be the Crown of Life we receive for eternity through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Read the following verses and discuss the beautiful promises we have about endings, finales, finallys.

Job 19:25

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

Our Redeemer lives!

Revelation 22:13

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been from the beginning of time! ("Heretofore, this title has been applied to the Father. The application here of this

title to Christ makes for a strong affirmation of Jesus' true Godhead." *Lutheran Study Bible*, page 2236.) The Father and the Son both claim the first (Alpha and Omega; 1:8; 21:6), and the third (Beginning and the End; 21:6). But "the First and the Last" is applied only to Jesus (1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Louis Brighton states in the *Concordia Commentary on Revelation*: "...descriptive titles that point to the infinite and eternal magnitude of the presence of Jesus Christ" (647; see Brighton's extended discussion of how the three titles are used in Revelation in their differing contexts).

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Throughout the Finallys and Finales in our lives, we can trust that God has a plan for good, a plan for our salvation. What a joy and comfort to know this!

Pray together: Father of Heaven and Earth, Sometimes all we can say is Wow! Your design for our life and the life of all Your children is such a beautiful weaving of the finales and finallys. Grant us the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us see that these aren't the real endings. May we trust alone in the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior for the Grand Finale, eternal life. In Christ's precious name we pray. Amen.

Close by singing the hymn "What Is the World to Me" (*LSB* #730; *LW* #418; *TLH* #430).

**For further study, the participants may want to look up the following verses for more examples of finales, finallys and forevers.**

- 1 Kings 8: 54–61 Finally! The Temple is finished . . . Solomon's benediction at the dedication of the temple
- 2 Samuel 12 David and Bathsheba's finale
- Exodus 14 Crossing Red Sea — The Israelites Escaped the Egyptians — Finally!
- 1 Samuel 17 David defeats Goliath
- Revelation 21:1–4 New Jerusalem