

THE STORY

Why do I exist?

If God is all-powerful, why doesn't he stop evil and suffering?

What does it mean to be good?

If Jesus is the main point, why the Old Testament?

How do we know if the Bible is true?



The Beautiful. The Horrible. The Irrational Pursuit of God.





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Group Life

Welcome to community. We were made for life together but life together can get messy so here are some suggestions to make your time in your group fun, safe and life-changing.

Be Attentive

We live in a loud and distracted world of social media, text messages and selfies. For the short time in your group, silence your cell phone and put it away. When someone is sharing, lean in to listen and ask questions. When you share, keep on topic and seek to be concise (not rambling or dominating the time) so that others can also share. We always want to be learning from one another and we learn the most when we listen.

Come Prepared

The emphasis of this time is to know God and to grow in your life with him. When everyone does the homework, the discussion promises to be rich and deep. Pray before you come with an anticipation of what God will do in your group.

What This Time Is and Is Not

We want to create a safe place for everyone to be vulnerable and confident that what they share will not leave the group. This is a time to grow in love for God and for one another. This is not a time to fix one another or give unsolicited advice. This can be a challenge. Be sure that your feedback is: affirming (Thanks for trusting us with your story), empathetic (I've done or thought that) and attentive (can you say more about how that made you feel?).

Avoid feedback that is: condemning (Oh my, I have never heard of anyone doing that), counseling/fixing (You should . . . Have you tried . . . You need to stop . . .) or all about you (that reminds me of when I was . . .). Also be careful about encouragement that is "too soon." When someone has just suffered pain or deep loss it is usually not the time to tell that that it will all be okay or that "God has a plan" or that this happened to you and it served an amazing purpose in your life. Usually it's best to just say, "I'm so sorry. That is so hard."

Kids

Each week gifted and competent people care for our children across the street in our Kids' Church facility. If your child needs you, your number will appear on the screens above the stage, or you will receive a text. If you have an infant with you during the meeting and he/she becomes restless, we have a room just for you in 2435 by the restrooms. It provides privacy but also allows you to see and hear the message.

Covering the Cost

An offering envelope is on your table each week (or with your local group leader). Our desire is to never charge for the Bible Study (books, coffee, childcare, DVDs, etc.). This offering allows us to make sure that all women can participate. Give as you are able — a lot, a little or nothing. We trust that together we can make this study happen for all who desire to join us.

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The Story

& How to Use This Study

The Story is a 31-week journey through the Bible that we are doing together as a **Christian Assembly** family from September 2014 to May 2015. If you do not attend Christian Assembly, no worries, we're glad to have you join us in Women's Bible Study. When you get the book, *The Story*, you receive a condensed version of the Bible to help you see the chronological, continuing story of God and his people. This is the book we will use for our study. You can purchase *The Story* at amazon.com.

How is Christian Assembly Going Through *The Story*?

As a church family we are reading through **The Story** together each week. In the weekend worship services you will hear a sermon related to your weekly reading. Christian Assembly will take a couple of breaks for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Learn more at cachurch.com/thestory.

How is Women's Bible Study Going through *The Story*?

We are following the same schedule as **Christian Assembly** and the weekend services but we will only cover 24 of the 31 weeks in our three sessions (Fall 2014, Winter 2015 and Spring 2015). If you don't attend Christian Assembly we encourage you to read all the chapters of *The Story* (even if we don't cover them at Women's Bible Study) so that you experience the joy of knowing the God of the entire Bible.

How will this Study Guide Help Me Understand the Story of the Bible?

The Bible can be a long and difficult read at times. Certain sections of the Old Testament (where we will spend 16 weeks) can be especially challenging. We hope that this study guide will give you a clear understanding of the character of God and the main idea of the Bible. We also hope that you will find yourself worshipping God in deeper and more passionate ways through the reflection questions provided here.

If you are exploring the Christian faith, this study will give you a comprehensive understanding of Christianity. Please feel free to question, disagree and wrestle with all that you discover. The Bible is not a book about neat, clean, nice people. The Bible is a book about really messy people being irrationally pursued by a mysterious, gracious, holy, righteous, loving and sometimes disturbing God.

The story of the Bible—even the Old Testament—is the story of Jesus. In Women's Bible Study we will connect every **Biblical Story** to the **Gospel Story** so that **Your Story** is marked by the beauty and the goodness of Christ.



Key Concepts

for Understanding the Bible

What the Bible Is and Is Not

The Bible can be a daunting book. It is filled with many genres and literary types: prophecy, historical narrative, parables, allegories, metaphors, commands, lists, poems and apocalyptic literature. In the Bible, God is shown as compassionate and patient, full of grace and abounding in kindness. But he is also shown as angry and dispensing judgment. When we read the Bible we are confronted with a God who is larger, more mysterious and more disturbing than a Sunday School teacher might let on. We encounter a God who is multidimensional and personal. He is not the make-believe god in our mind but he is the God who is grace and truth, delightful and disturbing, infinite and intimate.

The Bible is not a self-help book, although it is filled with wisdom. The Bible is not a history book, although it is set in real time, real space and is historical in context. The Bible is not a story book filled with myths and fables simply to inspire, although it is filled with narratives that are true and stories that are instructive. The Bible is not essentially about us, it is about Jesus. The Bible contains 66 books, written over some 2000 years, by an estimated 40 human authors, that make up one book divinely inspired by God that reveals Jesus Christ and the salvation God brings through him.

The Old Testament is the Bible Jesus read, memorized and quoted. The New Testament references the Old Testament almost 300 times (some scholars, who look at inferences to the Old Testament as well as direct quotes, have their count at up to 4,000).

[Jesus said to the Jewish leaders:] *“You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”*

John 5:39-40

And then Jesus, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

Jesus, the Trinity and Knowing God

As Christians, we read the Old Testament through the lens of what is revealed in the New Testament—Jesus. He is the fulfillment of the promises in the Old Testament as well as the completion of the story of the Old Testament. And, of course, we read the New Testament with an understanding of the Old Testament that reveals God as creator, covenant-maker, king and sovereign Lord. He is the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph who pursues all people (including the Gentiles). He is the God of history—eternal, yet invading time and space.

The Old Testament promises a coming Messiah (a king, the anointed one from God). Jesus was ultimately seen by his followers as that Messiah (after quite a bit of initial confusion). The universal language of the day translated Messiah as “Christ” so that the word “Christ” is not just a name but a title with a clear meaning — “the anointed king sent by God.” Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the King (Acts 17:7; Revelation 17:14, 19:16).

When reading the Bible it is important to know God as a Triune God. This is one of the unique beliefs of Christianity. The Bible never uses the word Trinity but it reveals a God who is a

Trinity. This is a mystery but significant to our understanding of God. *“The doctrine of the Trinity means that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Stated differently, God is one in essence and three in persons. These definitions express three crucial truths: (1) The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons; (2) each person is fully God; and (3) there is only one God.”* (For more on the Trinity: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource/what-is-the-doctrine-of-the-trinity>).

The Trinity helps us understand that Jesus did not just show up on the scene at his birth but that he existed for all eternity. When we read Genesis 1:1 in light of Colossians 1:16-17 and John 1:1-4, 14 we see that Jesus is present in the very first verse of the Old Testament.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . .

Genesis 1:1

For in Jesus all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. Jesus is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:16-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind . . . The Word became flesh (the person of Jesus) and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-4, 14

Jesus is eternal and co-creator with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1-2). Jesus is also the Messiah promised in the Scripture

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

John 4:25-26

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

Acts 2:36

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 5:42

Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the promise of Messiah, he is also the completion of the Gospel Story, he is the good news.

The Gospel Story

As we read the Bible it helps to know the storyline that runs from Genesis to Revelation. The story of the Bible is:

- God creates the world and everything in it (Genesis 1-2; Colossians 1:15-17)
- All of creation and humanity falls to sin, decay and death (Genesis 3 through Revelation 20, Romans 1-11)

- God sends his Son, Jesus, to redeem the world and create a new humanity (John 1, 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Matthew through Revelation)
- Ultimately, all of creation will be renewed putting an end to death, suffering, decay and injustice (Acts 3:20-21; Revelation 21-22).

We call this the **gospel** because the word **gospel** means “life-altering good news.” The gospel is not merely good advice admonishing us to live a moral life but it is good news to be received, proclaimed, enjoyed and celebrated. It is the good news that Jesus is Messiah. It is the good news of new beginnings and eternal life because of Jesus’ resurrection. It is the good news of a personal God rescuing his creation from sin and death. It is the good news that we are accepted by God not because of our religious striving but because of his benevolent grace (unmerited kindness) expressed throughout Scripture.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:22-24

The gospel is good news because it tells us that we are transformed into a new humanity in Christ— sharing the righteousness of Christ, joining the mission of Christ (justice, love, reconciliation, proclamation of his goodness) and becoming more like Christ through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control —Galatians 5:22-26).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God sent Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18, 20-21

Meeting God and Finding Ourselves in The Story

The story of the Bible is the story of the beauty of God and his creation, the horrible effect of sin and God’s irrational pursuit of his rebellious creation. Augustine said that if we want to know ourselves we have to know God our creator, and if we want to know God we have to know ourselves. Each week as we study *The Story* we will explore these three themes:

1. The God of The Story

- What does this chapter reveal about God?

2. The Gospel Story

- How does this chapter connect to the greater Gospel Story?

3. Our Story

- How does this chapter transform our stories?

The Beautiful, the Horrible and the Irrational Pursuit of God

Before we dive into the actual study let’s consider the Gospel Story one more time and break it into three parts: the beautiful, the horrible and the irrational pursuit of God. This is the story of the Bible. This is the story that changes our story and the trajectory of our life.

[1] The Beautiful

The Bible is the story of God. He is beautiful because he is glorious, meaning that he is

valuable and ultimately worthy of praise and adoration and following. A major theme in the Bible is the glory of God.

God is beautiful because he is perfection, holiness, righteousness, justice, love, kindness, faithfulness, eternal, Trinity (God who is One, God who is three—forever in relationship, forever expressing love), joy, hope, creator, ruler, king, forgiveness, grace, truth, patience, all-knowing, everywhere present . . . and the list could go on. It is important to remember that God is not just loving: he is love. God is not just forgiving: he is forgiveness. God is not just righteous: he is righteousness. And God is always all of these attributes simultaneously. When we see God as just he does not cease being love. When we see him as love, he does not cease being just.

God's beauty is seen throughout Scripture and is seen in Jesus. Jesus "*is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word*" (Hebrews 1:13; see also 2 Corinthians 4:6).

The Bible is first and foremost about God, but it is also about us. It is the story of men and women in relationship with their creator. We are beautiful because he is beautiful. We are beautiful because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We are beautiful because we share in the glory of God and are given the dignity of a purpose determined by God himself.

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and
crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet . . .*

Psalm 8:3-6

We are beautiful because we belong to God. We were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16).

[2] The Horrible

So, if God is beautiful and we are beautiful, why is there so much suffering, evil and pain in this world? How can we be so flawed and broken if we are so beautiful? The Bible gives us a context for understanding this conflict that must first be understood in light of the beauty. The horror is that the beauty of God's intent is marred by the sin of humanity.

We don't love the word "sin". It seems filled with guilt, shame and hate. Many use this word to point a finger at others ("they are sinners") or to gain religious power and control ("we're the good people, we're the righteous ones—follow us, be like us"). But when the Bible speaks of sin it speaks of a condition that we all possess (there is no "us and them" in the gospel).

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

Note that in this passage, sin is connected to falling short of God's glory — the very thing we were created for (to bear his image, to be like him in his beauty). We will see in Chapter 1 of *The Story* (Genesis 1-3) that when God created humankind he gave them freewill and choice. He placed them in paradise and gave them all that they needed along with the comfort, joy and security of his presence.

For humans to live freely they had to have the ability to choose for or against God. So God gave them that ability. Among the myriad of trees in paradise God declared that from just one they could not eat. He warned that if they chose to eat from it, they would die. This wasn't just about eating fruit, it was about demonstrating faith in God their creator and king. In choosing to

eat the fruit of that tree they said “no” to trusting God. At the core of “sin” is the desire to be our own god, to be the ruler of our own destiny.

When the man and woman made this choice against God they set into motion death, decay and the condition of a nature bent on self (Genesis 4:7-8, 5:1-31; Isaiah 50:2; Romans 1:21-25, 5:12-21, 6:23). Men and women experienced a spiritual death (separation from the presence of God in the Garden) and a physical death (people died—Genesis 4-5). The consequence of sin effects everything. Sin destroys our relationships—men and women experience shame, mistrust and blame (Genesis 3:6-13), there is now murder (Genesis 4:8), death (Genesis 5), wickedness and evil that begins in the heart (Genesis 6:5-8), pride (Genesis 11) and on and on and on. Sin causes alienation from God because we choose to worship created things over and above the Creator (Romans 1:25). The result of sin is the decay of bodies (sickness and disease that lead to death) and the destruction of nature (floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, etc., Romans 8:18-22). Sin touches everything.

“Sin is pervasive, subtle, deceptive and deadly,” says Graham Goldsworthy. It is only when we recognize this despairing truth that God’s grace can ambush our hearts and our lives. When we consider our rebellion toward God we begin to see how irrational it is that he pursues us.

The Irrational Pursuit of God

Sin is always ultimately against God. This is why it is so irrational that he comes after us with an outpouring of love, forgiveness, grace and redemption. The gracious pursuit of God is foreseen in Genesis 3:15 when God alludes to the coming of Jesus (the future offspring of the woman) who will bring a final end to the ways of Satan. Throughout the Old Testament we will see that God does not ignore the sin of humanity, but even in dispensing justice he continues to pour out love for his creation even as they display disobedience, selfish ambition, ingratitude and pride. God doesn’t pursue us because we pursue him, he pursues us because he is love.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:6-11

The story of God is the story of his persistent and irrational pursuit of those who turned their back on him. It is the story of God restoring our relationship to him and to the glory of an identity found in him.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:18

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering . . .

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory . . . those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8:1-3, 14-17, 30

The Story: Chapter One

Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It
[Genesis 1-4; 6-9]



notes from the message

Use this page to record notes from the opening talk.

[To watch or listen to this talk go to iTunes —> podcasts and search for “Women at Christian Assembly”. For easy access to the audio you can install the Christian Assembly App that is available for Apple and Android devices at their App Stores.]

Group Discussion ► Chapter One

Before discussing the message, get to know the people in your group. Use the following questions as a guide. Take a moment to record your answers to the questions and then share them with one another.

What are you hoping to gain from this study of *The Story*?

What three words best describe the story of your spiritual journey?

1.

2.

3.

What two questions would you like to ask God today?

1.

2.

What is your one take-away from the message you heard on Chapter One of *The Story*?

How will you apply what you heard to your life this week?

The Story: Chapter Two

God Builds a Nation

[Genesis 12-13, 15-17, 21-22, 32-33, 35; Romans 4; Hebrews 11]



Read chapter two of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

List five words that describe God as you experience him in this chapter.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What most surprises you about God in this chapter?

What one question do you have for God?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter two and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

How is God beautiful in this chapter?

How do the people in this story display the image of God?

The Horrible

Where do you see a lack of faith in God in this chapter?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

How does God pursue his people in this chapter?

Jesus

Look up the following verses and record how Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac points to and foreshadows the coming of Jesus.

John 3:16-18

Romans 8:31-34

1 John 4:8-10

Our Story

Chapter two of *The Story* is filled with invitations from God. He invites Abraham to leave the familiar and follow him by faith to an unknown land of promise. He invites Abraham to be a blessing by making him the father of a great nation designed to worship God. He invites Abraham to demonstrate faith by sacrificing his son Isaac.

The Invitation of God

What is God calling you to leave behind today in order to follow him with greater abandon and trust?

How is God calling you to be a blessing this week to a family member, friend, co-worker or neighbor?

Where is God calling you to demonstrate faith in him? It could be by sacrificing something or by adding something to your life. Don't answer this immediately. Sit in prayer with a posture of listening to the prompting of the Holy Spirit who is God. Record what he reveals to you.

notes from the message
chapter two



The Story: Chapter Three

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

[Genesis 37, 39, 41-48, 50]



Read chapter three of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

Imagine you are Joseph explaining the nature and character of God to your brothers. What would you say?

Why do you think God allowed so much suffering in Joseph's life? [Note: the Bible does not give an answer to this question. This is just a question for you to ponder as you consider the character and nature of God].

What one question do you have for God?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter three and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

How is God beautiful in the life of Joseph?

How does Joseph display the image of God?

The Horrible

Where do you see a lack of faith in God in this chapter?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

In chapter three we see God preserving Joseph's family as a "remnant on the earth" (p. 39). This family will be in the lineage that leads to Jesus (Matthew 1:1-3, see p. 40). What appears on the surface to be irrational about God's pursuit and protection of this family?

Jesus

The connection of this event in history to Jesus is that God is protecting the lineage of the Messiah through the preservation of Joseph and his family. But Timothy Keller notes that we can also see Jesus as the "true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the King, forgives those who betrayed and sold him, and then uses his power to save them." What do these verses reveal about Jesus?

Luke 23:26-34

Hebrews 2:9-18

[Be sure to pause and worship Jesus before you move on with your day]

Our Story

Chapter three of *The Story* shows God's persistence to preserve his people and the lineage of the Messiah. But he does it in a way few of us would script. He allows Joseph to be sold into slavery, then falsely accused and imprisoned. Of course looking back on these events we see that God was positioning Joseph to save his family from famine and destruction. But in the midst of all the suffering it might not have been so apparent that God was at work.

The God Who is Present When He Doesn't Seem Present

Look back on your life and consider a time that God seemed to have abandoned you or left you in a type of prison. Describe that time.

As you look back now, how do you see God's presence with you and his provision for you?

Where does it feel like God is not present for you today? [In a relationship? Intervening in a difficult situation? Providing for an emotional or physical need? etc.]

Read Psalm 139 and use it as a guide for worship and prayer. Record any words or phrases that particularly speak to you today.

notes from the message
chapter three



The Story: Chapter Four

Deliverance

[Exodus 1-7, 10-17]



Read chapter four of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

What does God reveal about himself to Moses when they meet on Mount Horeb (p. 45–47)?

What do you find disturbing about God in this chapter? Why?

What does this chapter reveal about “the glory of the Lord” (p. 53, 54, 56)?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter four and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

How is God beautiful in this chapter?

How does Moses display the image of God?

The Horrible

Where do you see a lack of faith in God in this chapter?

The Israelites are enslaved to Pharaoh but what else are they enslaved to in this chapter (see also **Romans 6**)?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

God is determined to deliver Israel from Egypt. What does he do to deliver them that makes you want to worship and praise him?

Jesus

When John the Baptist announces the presence of Jesus he declares, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus comes as the true and perfect Passover lamb. What do the following verses reveal about Jesus as the lamb who saves?

Hebrews 9:19-22, 10:1-18

1 Peter 1:18-21

Our Story

Chapter four of *The Story* reveals God as our deliverer and savior. He delivers Israel from slavery to the Egyptians so that they will worship him. Worship is mentioned over 20 times in Exodus. Repeatedly there is a call to worship one God—Yahweh— and to not worship any other gods.

The God Who Delivers

In **Romans 6** Paul says that sin is like slavery — it masters us and rules us. Sin is not just an outward condition (stealing, immorality, gossip, lying, etc.) it is also an inward condition (greed, jealousy, hatred, un-forgiveness, judgment, covetousness, etc.). What is a sin that seems to be enslaving (ruling, mastering, oppressing) you today?

How is this sin oppressing you and keeping you from living a life of freedom?

1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that God always provides a deliverance out of sin. What “way out” is he offering you today to free you from sin?

What steps will you take today to be free from this sin? [Remember these may be steps you have to take every day! Freedom from sin is rarely a one-time event].

notes from the message
chapter four



PAUSE

Reading Chapter Five

We will not meet together to discuss chapter five of *The Story*, but don't stop reading! Don't stop looking for who God is and how his story is shaping your story!

Looking Back

Since we are pausing this week for a break from gathering, it seems right to look back on what we are learning about God and the Gospel Story. One of the major themes in Scripture is the Kingdom of God. Jesus proclaims that his presence is ushering in the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:20-21) and in doing so he redefines the coming of the Kingdom. Jews were expecting a Kingdom in which Rome would be overthrown, they would be vindicated and an earthly rule would be established. With the coming of Jesus, his Kingdom was inaugurated but not yet fully realized. We continue to live today in a time when the Kingdom is present (through the Holy Spirit, the church and the work of God) but not fully present. Christians today enjoy the presence of God and seek to live under his rule, but they also eagerly await his return when he will fully establish his reign and make all things completely new (humanity, nature, relationships, etc.).

All of this was being established from the very beginning. The Kingdom of God is defined simply as the rule and the reign of God. Vaughan Roberts says the Kingdom of God is “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.” Here is how we see the coming of God’s Kingdom so far in *The Story* [adapted from *God’s Big Picture*, by Vaughan Roberts].

The Pattern of the Perfect Kingdom Established [Chapter One, Genesis 1-2]

God establishes his Kingdom in creating earth. As creator, he is the ruler. In the Garden of Eden we see God benevolently ruling and reigning over his creation. He gives them a beautiful place to live that is abundant with food and life. God blesses humankind and gives them purpose — to co-reign with him (Genesis 1:28-30) and to care for the planet. God is also with them in a unique way — speaking to them and walking with them. The pattern of the Kingdom is established: God’s people (Adam and Eve), in God’s place (the Garden of Eden), under God’s Rule (the word of God).

The Perished Kingdom [Chapter One, Genesis 3-6]

God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to demonstrate their trust and faith in him as they lived under his generous leadership. His instruction was simple, “you are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” But, ultimately they broke this command. Evil came in the form of a serpent and convinced them that God could not be trusted, that God was withholding something good, and that to eat the fruit was to gain wisdom.

Sin then becomes a reality (Romans 3-5). Sin is the nature of humankind that seeks to rule and reign our own lives apart from God. Sin ruins everything: relationships, life, purpose, peace, creation, worship, etc. Adam and Eve face the judgment of God and are banished from the garden, no longer living under the rule and reign of God. But God, even in judgment shows grace. He clothes their naked bodies (Genesis 3:21—representing a gracious covering of their shame) and he keeps them from the tree of life so that they don’t have to live forever in a state of separation from God.

The Promised Kingdom [Chapter Two—Three, Genesis 12-50]

God makes a promise to Abraham that through him he will re-establish his Kingdom. The

descendants of Abraham will be God's people, living in his land, enjoying his blessing and blessing all the peoples of the earth. The promise is the gospel—the good news of God's rescue, redemption and restoration of all things. It is partially fulfilled in the history of Israel but it will be ultimately and completely fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

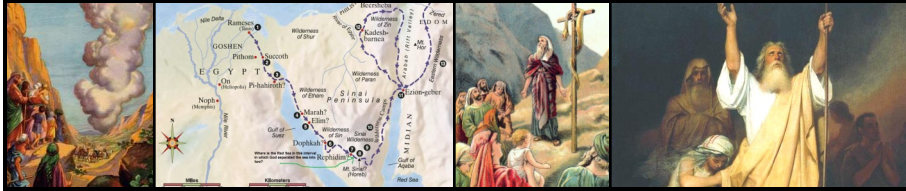
The Partial Kingdom [Chapter Four—Five, Exodus]

Through the Exodus from Egypt, God shows that he has not forgotten his people. He leads them by his presence (cloud by day and fire by night) to the land that he has promised. In Chapter Five (Exodus 19-20) God gives his people his law so that they might live under his rule and enjoy his blessing. The law is not given as a condition to become the people of God but as a way to demonstrate that they *are* the people of God. God proclaims that he *is* their God (Exodus 20:2) and that this is the way that his possession lives. But the problem of sin still lingers with Israel as we will see in Chapter Six. As Israel enters this promised place (Chapter Seven) God's kingdom continues to be only a partial kingdom as they struggle to live by faith under his rule and reign.

The Story: Chapter Six*

*Note: We took a break from Bible Study the week of Chapter Five and are continuing in Chapter Six
Wandering

[Numbers 10-14, 20-21, 25, 27; Deuteronomy 1-2, 4, 6, 8-9, 29-32, 34]



Read chapter six of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

God is often said to be angry in this chapter. Why?

Of course, God is seen in this chapter as more than just angry. List the many characteristics of God on display in this chapter. How does he act? What does he do? What does he not do?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter six and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

How is God beautiful in this chapter?

The Horrible

If you could travel back in a time machine, what would you say to Israel?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

God desires to lead his people into the land he promised through the leadership of Moses. He longs for his people to trust him, obey him and worship him. How does God continue to be faithful to his people in this chapter?

Jesus

In this chapter we see Moses acting as a mediator between God and the Israelites. What Moses did imperfectly for Israel, Jesus does perfectly for us and for all creation. Record what the following passages reveal about Jesus as our mediator.

1 Timothy 2:3-6

Hebrews 9:15

1 Peter 3:18

Our Story

Chapter six of *The Story* can be a difficult chapter to read. People are complaining, God is angry, Moses is pleading, Miriam and Aaron are jealous and it feels like constant conflict. But we do see grace in God's just perseverance and Moses' kindness as he pleads for the very people who come against him.

Grumbling, Complaining, Forgiving and Persevering

As you read this chapter, what did you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to experience?

The Israelites are portrayed as grumbling and complaining at the provision of God. When do you most often find yourself complaining, even when God is providing?

What is one step you can take this week to help combat any complaining or grumbling (outwardly and/or inwardly)? Pause to ask God for his help.

Moses is betrayed by Miriam and Aaron but then pleads for Miriam's healing. Who is God inviting you to forgive today? What blessing can you pray for them today?

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude 24-25

notes from the message
chapter six



The Story: Chapter Seven

The Battle Begins

[Joshua 1-2, 6, 8, 10-11, 23-24]



Context: As you read these passages in Joshua remember that the land of Canaan holds a significant place in God's establishment of his coming Kingdom.

“. . . the covenant with Abraham, the Exodus from Egypt, and the gathering at Mt. Sinai had called the nation of Israel into existence and established its place within God's plan to undo the effects of sin on creation. Like Eden, the land of Canaan symbolized the paradise and sanctuary in which God desired to live with his people. But as Joshua and the following generations discovered, entering and securing the inheritance was not easy, both because of the ferocity of the Canaanites (which includes idolatry, immorality and child sacrifice) and the hard-heartedness of the Israelites.” — Mark Strom, *The Symphony of Scripture*.

God desires for the Israelites to set Canaan apart and make it a place of holiness and worship. But, the Israelites have their own issues [fear, unwillingness to root out the idolatrous nations in the land and forgetting to consult God]. So, when God fights for Israel it is as an act of his kindness and grace, not a response to their performance.

After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6

Read chapter seven of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

How does God demonstrate the following in this chapter:

Power —

Faithfulness —

Holiness/Righteousness —

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter seven and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

Where is faith demonstrated in this chapter (see also **Hebrews 11:30-31**)?

The Horrible

How do you see the horror of sinful and broken humanity on display in this chapter?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

The salvation of Rahab is a demonstration that God makes a way not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles to share in his Kingdom. Throughout the Old Testaments, Gentiles are invited to worship God. Read **Romans 3:22-30**. What does it reveal about the beauty of God's salvation?

Jesus

In this chapter we see God remaining faithful to his promise to Abraham—He *will* bring his people into the land and they *will* take possession of it. God's faithfulness, as we see in **Deuteronomy 9:4-6**, was not based on the goodness of the Israelites but on his goodness, commitment and grace. The salvation that Jesus brings to all people is always a result of his goodness not ours. Record what these passages reveal about the grace and kindness of Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-10

2 Timothy 1:9-10

Our Story

Chapter seven of *The Story* reveals God as a personal God (he knows and leads Joshua), a powerful God (he fights for Israel) and a promise-keeping God (he brings the Israelites into the promised land).

The Personal, Powerful, Promise-keeping God

How has God met you in a personal and intimate way in the past year?

Where do you long for God to be powerful in your life today?

Read **Romans 8** and list all the promises recorded in this passage. Once you complete your list, circle the three promises that mean the most to you today and record why you chose those three. Consider sharing this with a friend or spouse today.

notes from the message
chapter seven



The Story: Chapter Eight

A Few Good Men . . . and Women

[Judges 2-4, 6-8, 13-16]



From *God's Big Picture*, by Vaughan Roberts, p. 79-80 —

“The book of Judges tells of Israel occupying the promised land after Joshua’s death. It’s a depressing read. Repeatedly the Israelites turn from God’s rule and do what seems right in their own eyes. God responds by judging them and allowing them to be defeated by their enemies. When they cry out to God for help, he responds by providing a judge/deliverer. These judges defeat their enemies in the power of God’s Spirit and restore peace to the land, but it never lasts for long. Repeatedly the Israelites turn from God and the cycle begins again (Judges 3:7-12) . . . The judges are a sign of God’s grace but they are not an adequate solution for the problems of Israel. These judges are a motley group who are certainly not models of godly living. Jephthah kills his own daughter and Samson is a womanizing thug . . . Judges points us to a longing for a better leader, who will bring about a lasting solution to the problem of Israel’s sin; we should be longing for a king . . . Judges ends with these words that appear four times in this book: ‘In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit’ (Judges 21:25).”

Read chapter eight of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

What does chapter eight reveal about God?

Why does God find the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth so offensive?

What one question do you want to ask God after reading chapter eight?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter eight and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

What is beautiful about God in this chapter?

The Horrible

God hates idolatry (the worship of anything we make ultimate above God. Idols can be good things that we make ultimate things by expecting them to give us security, value and pleasure apart from God). Why is God so offended by idolatry? Is he insecure?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

How does God persistently pursue his people in this chapter? Why is this a bit mind-boggling?

Jesus

The book of Judges reminds us of our need for more than a temporal deliverer. We need Jesus, the perfect and eternal rescuer from our cycle of sin. Record what the following passages reveal about Jesus as our ultimate deliverer.

Romans 5:6-11

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Galatians 4:4-7

Hebrews 9:11-15

Our Story

Chapter eight of *The Story* reveals a God who does not ignore sin, people who continue to return to sin and a God who repeatedly rescues these people from ultimate destruction.

Idolatry in Its Many Forms

One of the evils that Israel turns to is idol worship. In *Counterfeit God: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex and Power and the Only Hope that Matters*, Timothy Keller suggest that we all have idols and he gives four ways to discern them. Take a moment to discover your idols by taking this inventory based on Keller's thoughts.

1. What do you daydream about?

[What occupies your mind when you have nothing to think about? Is it a scenario about career advancement? Is it about material possessions? Is it a relationship with a particular person? Keller notes: "One or two daydreams is not an indication of idolatry but what do you *habitually* daydream about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your heart?"]

2. How do you spend your money?

[Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also." Your money flows most effortlessly toward your heart's greatest love. The mark of an idol is that you spend too much money on it and that you must try to exercise self-control toward it constantly.]

3. What is your real — not professed — god?

[A good way to discern this is how you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes. If you ask for something and don't get it, you may become sad and disappointed — this is normal. Those things are not necessarily idols. But when you respond with explosive anger or deep despair, then you may have found your real god.]

4. Look at your most uncontrollable emotions.

[Look for your idols at the bottom of your most painful emotions, especially those that never seem to lift and that drive you to do things you know are wrong. If you are angry, ask, "Is there something here too important to me, something I have to have at all cost?" Do the same with strong fear, despair, guilt, anxiety, etc.]

Commit to remove the idols from your heart and set your hope on Christ. Be patient. See this as a journey you will be on for the rest of your life. **Read Colossians 3:1-5.**

notes from the message
chapter eight



The Story: Chapter Nine

The Faith of a Foreign Woman

[Ruth 1-4]



From the *Introduction to Ruth* in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson —

[The book of Ruth is the] small story of two widows and a farmer in their out-of-the-way village. The outsider Ruth was not born into the faith and felt no natural part of it—like many of us. But she came to find herself gathered into the story and given a quiet and obscure part that proved critical to the way everything turned out.

Scripture is a vast tapestry of God's creating, saving, and blessing ways in this world. The great names in the plot that climaxes at Sinai (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses) and the great names in the sequel (Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon) can be intimidating to ordinary, random individuals: "Surely there is no way that I can have any significant part on such a stage." But the story of the widowed, impoverished, alien Ruth is proof to the contrary. She is the inconsequential outsider whose life turns out to be essential for telling the complete story of God's ways among us. The unassuming ending carries the punch line: "Boaz married Ruth, she had a son Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David."

David! In its artful telling of this "outsider" widow, uprooted and obscure, who turns out to be the great-grandmother of David and the ancestor of Jesus, the book of Ruth makes it possible for each of us to understand ourselves, however ordinary or "out of it," as irreplaceable in the full telling of God's story. We count, every last one of us, and what we do counts.

Read chapter eight of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

The God of the Story

What does chapter nine reveal about God?

The Gospel Story

Look back over chapter nine and consider where you encounter the gospel.

The Beautiful

How does God display his kindness in this chapter?

The Horrible

Jesus warns his follower that there will be trouble in this life (John 16:33). We know from Chapter 1 (Genesis 1-5) that with the choice of sin comes the reality of death and decay. What are the “troubles” that Ruth and Naomi face in this chapter?

The Irrational Pursuit of God

Who does God use to rescue and redeem Ruth from her troubles? How do we see God's hand in this?

Jesus

Boaz is referred to as a “kinsman-redeemer” based on the laws of the Pentateuch that declared that men were to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble or need (Leviticus 25:47-55). The Hebrew term for kinsman-redeemer means “one who delivers or rescues.” God is the kinsman-redeemer when he, as the Father of Israel, delivers them from Egypt. Jesus is considered an example of a kinsman-redeemer when he, as our brother (Hebrews 2:11), redeems us and rescues us from sin. What do the following passages say about Jesus as our redeemer?

Colossians 1:13-14

1 Corinthians 1:30

Titus 2:11-14

Galatians 3:13-14

Our Story

Chapter nine of *The Story* tells of an outsider, Ruth, who is rescued by a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz. He provides for her and providentially sets her up for a significant place in the plan of God. Certainly as this story played out in history few saw any significance in it until decades later when those looking back saw that Ruth, the Moabite, became the great grandmother of David. And of course, Matthew tells us that Boaz, her husband and the great grandfather of David, was the grandson of Rahab, the prostitute who hid the spies (Matthew 1:5-6). What a picture of who God uses and grafts into his plan!

Chosen by God

Look back on your story with God (perhaps it goes back 40 years or just four days). Record how God pursued you and redeemed you into a relationship with him.

When you reflect on God's pursuit of you, name 1-2 events or people that God used to bring you into relationship with him. What is surprising about these events or people?

Sit quietly before God in a posture of worship. Thank him for his kindness to you
(**Titus 3:3-8**)

"Let the focus of your inner life rest on one truth, the staggering, mind-blowing truth that God loves you unconditionally as you are and not as you should be. Because nobody is as they should be."

Brennan Manning

notes from the message
chapter nine



The People in My Group



Prayer Requests

