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# Group Life

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

## **Be Attentive**

We live in a loud and distracted world full of social media, text messaging and selfies. For the short time in your group, silence your 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 so that others can also share. Avoid interrupting or dominating the conversation. We want to learn 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 our life with him. When everyone does the homework, the discussion promises to be rich and deep. Pray before you come in anticipation of what God will do in and through your group.

## **What Group Time Is and Is Not**

We want to create a safe place for everyone to be vulnerable but also 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 people or give unsolicited advice.

Give feedback that is: affirming (“thanks for trusting us with your story”), empathetic (“I’ve done the same thing” 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 . . .”). Also be careful about encouragement that is “too soon.” When someone has suffered pain or deep loss it is usually not the time to say that it will all be okay, that “God has a plan” or that this has happened to you and that it served an amazing purpose in your life. Usually it’s best to just say, “I’m so sorry. That is so hard.”

# The Story

## & How to Use This Study

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**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 this 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 second study guide in this three session series.**

You can request a copy of the first study guide by emailing [women@cachurch.com](mailto:women@cachurch.com). You can purchase the book *The Story* at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). It will also be helpful to have a Bible on hand as you use this guide. You can also look up all references on-line at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.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. Learn more at [cachurch.com/thestory](http://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 in our gatherings) 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 are especially challenging. We hope that this study guide gives 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 for the first time, this study gives an overview of Christianity beginning on page 4. Please feel free to question, disagree and wrestle with all that you discover. The Bible is not a book about neat, clean, nice people. Rather, 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 this 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

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### **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 of our imagination 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 and 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 references).

[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 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.

The Trinity is a mystery but absolutely central 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 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. We now share the righteousness of Christ, we join the mission of Christ (justice, love, reconciliation, proclamation of his goodness) and we are becoming more like Christ through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit who produces in us 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, 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. For instance, when we see God as just he does not cease being love and 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 1:3. Also consider 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 see in Chapter One 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. There was a myriad of trees in paradise, but God declared that they could not eat from one of them. They could eat from all the others, but not that one. 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 (to eat from that one tree) they set into motion death, decay and 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 author 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 truly irrational it is that he pursues us.

### **[3] The Irrational Pursuit of God**

Sin is always ultimately against God. This is why it is irrational that God comes after us with an outpouring of love, forgiveness, grace and redemption. God’s gracious pursuit is foreseen in Genesis 3:15 when he 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 see that God does not ignore sin, but even in dispensing justice he continues to pour out love for his creation even as they continually 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 with him through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

*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 Fifteen

God's Messengers

[1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 2, 4, 6; Hosea 4-5, 8-9, 14; Amos 1, 3-5, 9]



## **notes from the message**

Use this page to record notes from the opening talk.

[For easy access to the audio messages you can install the App that is available for Apple and Android devices. Go to the App store and search Christian Assembly Women].

## **Group Discussion ► Chapter Fifteen**

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 is the greatest joy you have experienced in the past month?

What is one challenge you are currently facing?

How have you experienced God pursuing you in the past 5 years?

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

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

# The Story: Chapter Sixteen

The Beginning of the End

[2 Kings 17-19; Isaiah 3, 6, 13-14, 49, 53]



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

## **The God of the Story**

What disturbs you about God in this chapter?

The prophet Isaiah has a vision of God described on page 224-225 (Isaiah 6:1-8). What does this vision reveal about God?

What do the words of God proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah at the top of page 228 (Isaiah 49:15-18, 23, 26) reveal about God and his relationship with you?

## **The Gospel Story**

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

## **The Beautiful**

How is God's beauty revealed through the words of the prophet?

## **The Horrible**

How do you see the people turning away from God?

## **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

How and when does God pursue his people?

## **Jesus**

Isaiah prophesies to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Record all that is revealed about Jesus on pages 228-230 (Isaiah 53). Note that we can see the fulfillment of portions of this prophecy in Matthew 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32; Romans 10:16; 1 Peter 2:22, 24)

## **Our Story**

In chapter sixteen of *The Story* Isaiah has an encounter with God (Isaiah 6:1-8) that reveals to him his identity in light of God's presence. You have already recorded what this passage reveals about God (p 11), now it is time to consider what this passage reveals about you.

### **Discovering Who We Are**

What does Isaiah discover about himself in this passage?

How are you like Isaiah?

Isaiah faces his guilt but also faces the forgiveness freely provided by God. Record what the following passages reveal about God's forgiveness.

**1 John 1:5-10**

**Acts 3:18-20**

**Colossians 1:13-14**

God asks for someone to go for him and Isaiah responds by saying, "Send me!" Ask the Lord where he might want to send you — sit and listen for his answer. To where or what is God calling you? What will it require of you to follow God's direction?

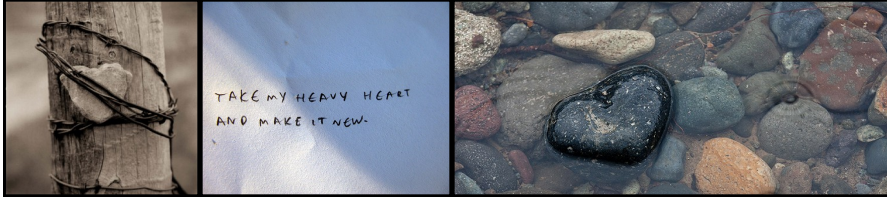
**notes from the message**  
**chapter sixteen**



# The Story: Chapter Seventeen

The Kingdoms' Fall

[Kings 21, 23-25; 2 Chronicles 33, 36; Jeremiah 1-2, 4-5, 13, 21; Lamentations 1-3, 5; Ezekiel 1-2, 6-7, 36-37.]



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

## **The God of the Story**

Ezekiel says on page 285 that he saw “visions of God” (for the full version read Ezekiel 1). Record what Ezekiel describes seeing.

What does this vision reveal to you about God?

## **The Gospel Story**

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

### **The Beautiful**

All seems lost and all seems in despair, but Jeremiah proclaims the goodness of God and the reason for his hope on page 244-245 (Lamentations 3:19-26). Record what Jeremiah says to be true of God.

### **The Horrible**

Jeremiah is called by God to bring a message of doom to Israel. This judgment was coming because Israel had forsaken God. Jeremiah says that they had committed two sins on page 238-239 (for a more complete reading go to Jeremiah 2). What are the two sins Israel committed (Jeremiah 2:13)?

### **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

God does not ignore sin but he still pursue his people to bring them back into right relationship with him. It is clear that Israel needs something they cannot produce within themselves. They need a new heart and a new life breathed into them by God. How does Ezekiel describe this on page 245-247 (Ezekiel 36:22-37:14)?

### **Jesus**

Record what the following verses reveal about how Jesus brings about newness of life in those who follow him.

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

**2 Corinthians 3:16-18**

**John 4:13 and John 7:37-39**



## **Our Story**

Ugh. What a chapter. The people forsaking God and the resulting judgment from God but also the hope that is found as God makes a way for forgiveness, freedom and redemption from sin.

### **Repentance that Leads to Life**

Jeremiah says that Israel committed two sins. They forsook God and they dug their own broken cisterns that did not hold water. Prayerfully consider the following questions:

How have you forsaken or been tempted to forsake (to leave, abandon or desert) God recently?

When are you most tempted to dig a cistern rather than trust God? (Jeremiah uses this picture of the cisterns to accuse Israel of following the gods they have made for themselves who have no power and hold no water— i.e. the false gods who can't come through for them).

Take a moment to confess where you have turned from God or not trusted him. Ask for his forgiveness. Record any thoughts you have.

Meditate upon the verses on page 244-245 (Lamentations 3:19-26). Sit with this passage until you experience the joy and peace of God's grace toward you.

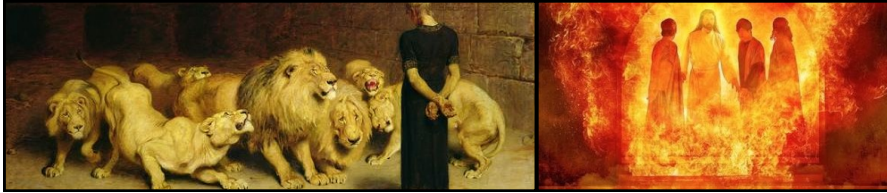
**notes from the message**  
**chapter seventeen**



# The Story: Chapter Eighteen

Daniel in Exile

[Daniel 1-3, 6; Jeremiah 29-31]



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

## **The God of the Story**

What does God reveal about himself to Daniel and his three friends?

On page 252 (Daniel 2:20-23) Daniel offers a prayer of praise to God. Take a moment to write out your own prayer of praise to God today.

## **The Gospel Story**

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

### **The Beautiful**

How does God show his presence and protection in this chapter?

### **The Horrible**

Where do you see people turning away from the one true God?

### **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

Daniel and his friends are living in exile, away from their home in Jerusalem but God has not abandoned them. Ultimately, as Jeremiah prophesied the place of their exile (Babylon) will fall and the Jews will return to Jerusalem. What is the promise God gives to his followers on page 261 (Jeremiah 29:10-14)?

### **Jesus**

On page 256 (Daniel 3:25) Daniel's friends are thrown in a fiery furnace and survive. While they are there a fourth man appears. Some believe this to be an angel and others suggest that it is a Christophany (a physical appearance of Christ before his incarnation). Regardless of which theory is true, it is clear that God is showing his presence to these three men. Read the following passages and record what they reveal about Jesus' presence with us today.

**John 14:18-20**

**John 1:14** (the "word" refers to Jesus—see John 1:1-5)

## **Our Story**

The book of Daniel contains narrative about the life of Daniel and his friends as well as prophetic visions that point to God's sovereignty in the midst of exile, suffering and persecution. In *The Story* we read the narrative section that shows how Daniel and his friends lived as God-worshippers among a people and culture opposed to their God.

### **Following Christ in a Different Land**

How does the place you live (your country, city, neighborhood, family, workplace) oppose the purposes of God?

How do you typically respond to opposition against your faith (whether perceived or real)?

How did Daniel respond to opposition to his faith?

**Read Romans 12:1-2** and consider where you might be conforming to the "pattern of this world" (v. 2). How might you transform this area of your life today?

**notes from the message**  
**chapter eighteen**



# The Story: Chapter Nineteen

The Return Home

[Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1, 8]



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

## **The God of the Story**

This chapter focuses on Israel's call to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed when the Jews went into exile in Babylon. The temple was the central place of worship for the Jews and a place of national and religious identity. The re-building of the temple after the exile was an opportunity for the Israelites to re-established their identity as worshipers of Yahweh.

Why is God worthy of being at the center of our worship? List all this chapter reveals about God and his worthiness to be worshiped.

## **The Gospel Story**

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

## **The Beautiful**

Multiple times in this chapter God says to not fear or be afraid. Why can the Israelites trust this command?

## **The Horrible**

How did Israel resist the will of God?

## **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

How does God pursue his people?

## **Jesus**

In this chapter we read selections from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. The ESV Study Bible says that 54 passages from Zechariah are "echoed in about 67 different places in the New Testament with the lion's share of these found in the book of Revelation." Read the following passages from Zechariah and the New Testament and record what they reveal about Jesus.

**Zechariah 9:9 and Matthew 21:1-9**

**Zechariah 12:10 and John 19:34-37, Revelation 1:5-7**

**Zechariah 13:7 and Matthew 26:31-35**



## **Our Story**

On page 266 the prophet Haggai speaks God's word against Israel (Haggai 1). They have neglected re-building his house (the temple) and have instead focused on building their own homes. And still they are not satisfied! **See also 2 Samuel 7:2; 1 Kings 6:9; Jeremiah 22:13-15.**

### **Building God's House First**

Where are you tempted to put yourself and your comfort before the purposes and heart of God?

What do you feel God inviting you to "build" as an offering of worship (basically something you can do for God that is an expression of your worship of him. This is not to be motivated by guilt but love)?

The really good news is that Jesus comes as the new and perfect temple. John 1:14 tells us that Jesus came and "tabernacled among us" (the tabernacle was the pre-cursor to the temple). He became the place of our worship. Because of the blood of Christ we can now enter into the Holy of Holies and be directly in God's presence (Hebrews 10:19-25, Matthew 27:50-51). By the grace of Christ we are now considered the temple of Christ. Read the following verses and record what they reveal about your position as a temple of Christ.

**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

**1 Corinthians 6:18-20**

How does the fact that you are "God's temple" effect the way you live?

**notes from the message**  
**chapter nineteen**



# The Story: Chapter Twenty

The Queen of Beauty and Courage  
[Esther 1-9]



**Read chapter twenty of *The Story* and record the key people and events. What do you learn about:**

King Xerxes

Queen Vashti

Mordecai

Esther

Haman

**List the key events.**

## **The God of the Story**

God is never mentioned in the book of Esther but he is certainly present. What does this historical account reveal about God?

## **The Gospel Story**

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

## **The Beautiful**

How does God protect his followers in the book of Esther?

## **The Horrible**

How is the absurdity of wickedness put on display in this chapter?

## **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

How does God pursue his purposes through Esther and Mordecai?

## **Jesus**

The story of Esther reminds the Jewish community of why they celebrate the Feast of Purim—that it was through Esther that the Jews were protected from annihilation. If the Jews had not been protected then God's saving work through Abraham's descendants would have come to an end. God's work through Esther points to the coming of Jesus as the ultimate mediator between God and humanity. Take a few moments to meditate on the beauty of Jesus as your Savior.

*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

**Luke 2:9-11**

*Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."  
Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven  
given to mankind by which we must be saved.*

**Acts 4:11-12**

## **Our Story**

Chapter twenty of *The Story* reveals God's providential placement of a person in the right place at the right time to accomplish his purpose of protecting the Jewish people. Esther's wisdom reigned over Haman's pride. Consider today where your pride might be standing in your way and how God might be inviting you to be wise to accomplish the purposes of his heart.

### **Pride v. Wisdom and the Purposes of God**

How and when does pride keep you from being like God (love, justice, compassion, holiness, faithfulness, obedience, forgiveness, servanthood, grace, patience, etc.)?

Esther had to be very wise in the way she approached King Xerxes. Where is God calling you to be wise today (in a relationship with a friend, spouse, co-worker, boss, child, parent, or in a decision at home or work?). What will it mean for you to be wise in this situation?

Where have you seen God providentially care for you in the past year? Record the event and then spend time worshipping/praising God.

**notes from the message**  
**chapter twenty**



# The Story: Chapter Twenty-One

Rebuilding the Wall

[Ezra 7; Nehemiah 1-2, 4, 6-8; Malachi 1-4]



Read chapter twenty-one of *The Story* and record your first impressions and general observations.

## The God of the Story

What does God say about himself in this chapter?

Three times Nehemiah refers to God as “great and awesome.” Read the following references and record why (based on the context around the verse) Nehemiah sees God as “great and awesome.”

**Nehemiah 1:4-6** (*The Story*, p. 295)

**Nehemiah 4:13-15** (*The Story*, p. 297)

**Nehemiah 9:31-33**

## **The Gospel Story**

Look back over chapter twenty-one and consider where you encounter the gospel.

## **The Beautiful**

What is beautiful about God in this chapter?

## **The Horrible**

What does the prophet Malachi reveal about Israel's disobedience on pages 302-304 (Malachi 1-4)?

## **The Irrational Pursuit of God**

God brings his people back to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon and calls them to worship him. What does this chapter reveal about God's love for his people? (see Malachi 3:16-18; *The Story*, page 304).

## **Jesus**

Teachers and prophets like Ezra and Malachi were calling the Jews to re-establish their unique identity as worshippers of Yahweh. Jesus also calls us to and gives us a new identity as his Church. What does the following passage tell us about who we are as "the Church"?

## **Colossians 1:15-23**



## **Our Story**

Chapter twenty-one of *The Story* shows Nehemiah seeking to lead his people in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1-2, 4, 6; *The Story*, p. 294-300). He faces obstacles and opposition. He faces the obstacle of gaining permission from his boss (the king) and he faces the opposition of those who do not want the wall to be rebuilt.

### **Facing Obstacles and Opposition**

List 2-3 obstacles or experiences of opposition that you are currently facing.

Nehemiah faced his difficulties with prayer, fasting and wisdom. How is God inviting you to face your challenges?

Nehemiah also faced his challenges with a confidence in the character of God. What do you know to be true about God that will help you face what is before you today? How did you come to know this truth?

**notes from the message**  
**chapter twenty-one**



# The Story: Chapter Twenty-Two

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The Birth of the King

[Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2; John 1]



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

## **The God of the Story**

One of the unique beliefs of Christianity is that God is a Trinity (see pages 4-5 of this study guide). God is one God and yet he is three persons. Jesus is known as the second person of the Trinity. How does this chapter reveal Jesus to be God?

What does this chapter reveal about God the Father and God the Holy Spirit?

## **The Gospel Story**

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

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

Consider the beauty of God's irrational pursuit of us and reflect upon these words from N.T. Wright (*Simply Christian*, page 91-92):

Christianity isn't about Jesus offering a wonderful moral example, as though our principal need was to see what a life of utter love and devotion to God and to other people would look like, so that we could copy it . . . Christianity isn't about giving the world fresh teaching about God himself—though clearly, if the Christian claim is true, we do indeed learn a great deal about who God is by looking at Jesus. The need that the Christian faith answers is not so much that we are ignorant and need better information, but that we are lost and need someone to come and find us, stuck in the quicksand waiting to be rescued, dying and in need of new life . . .

Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this — the finding, the saving, the giving of new life—in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It's the door to the prison where we've been chained up. We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God's rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access. In particular, we are invited—summoned, actually—to discover through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work at bringing it to birth on earth as it is in heaven. In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along.

### **Jesus**

Finally! Jesus has come! The Messiah is here! What do the following verses (also found in part in *The Story*, page 309-310) reveal about Jesus?

#### **John 1:9-13**

#### **John 1:14-19**

### **What Do We Do With Jesus**

Meditate for a bit on John 1:12: *"Yet to all who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name (his identity, his reality, who he is), he gave the right to become children of God."* To be a Christian is to "receive Jesus" (to receive the gift of him who is the author and sustainer of life and to believe in him for who he is — God, Lord, Savior, Messiah). Have you "received" Jesus? If so, when? If not, why?

## **Our Story**

Jesus comes to find us, to rescue us from sin and to make us his own. He calls us to not only believe in him but also to follow him.

### **Following Jesus**

Jesus meets Peter, Andrew, James, John and many others and he says, "follow me." What has it looked like for you to follow Jesus in the past and what does it look like today?

Read the following passages and record how they encourage you to follow Jesus.

**Luke 9:22-24**

**John 10:1-30**

**notes from the message**  
**chapter twenty-two**



## The People in My Group



# Prayer Requests

