

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 2: A People For God

Questions for Personal Study

Try using the Bible Reading Guide as a way to daily interact with the Story.

As you re-read the story of Genesis 1-3, what stands out?

What stands out in Genesis 4-6? Do you see any repeated themes?

What does Genesis 6.5-8 tell us about humanity, God, and us?

What does Gen 3 tell us about humanity? What were the consequences?

What is God's response to Adam and Eve's sin?

How do you see humanity's sin and God's grace woven in Gen 1-12?

Questions for Study in Community

How are you doing on keeping up with the daily reading together?

Can you recount the major events in the Story up through Gen 15?

What would you say are the main themes of these chapters?

What particular things do you see God doing in Gen 12-15?

How is the promise of Gen 12 worked out in the rest of the Bible?

What is Abram's role in fulfilling God's promise? What does it cost him?

Questions for Staying on Mission

God promises Abram the land of Canaan. How does that work out?

When Jesus shows up in Jerusalem - Canaan - what does he do?

How does God restore his blessing to the world through Jesus?

How then are we involved in bringing the blessing back to the nations?

Does your life find its meaning and purpose in this Story?

How are you as an MC restoring God's blessing in Spokane?

For Further Reading and Learning

Trace the Story Line of the Bible in 5 Acts

<http://tinyurl.com/storyline>

Living Into God's Story, by Eugene Peterson

<http://tinyurl.com/livingstory>

The Gospel In All Its Forms, by Tim Keller

<http://tinyurl.com/ybgvtv76>

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 2: A People For God

Understanding The Story

The Bible is not a random collection of stories, heroes, and instructions. While it contains all of these things - and more - the Bible actually tells one Story. It tells *the* One Story, God's Story. The Bible recounts the faithful work of God as he pursues the creation that he loves. This creation - including each of us - has rebelled and run from God, and yet God continues to pursue and woo his people back to him. Ultimately, God sends his own Son who gives his own life to rescue his creation, restore it to himself, and eventually make everything new again. This is the true Story of the World, and it is the Story God invites each of us to find our part in. Are you ready to live the StoryFormed way?

Reviewing the Story

We began last week and it was beautiful. Starting with nothing, God spoke a grand beginning, and added layer upon layer of beauty and power. Lights and galaxies and planets exploded into existence at his command, and he declared it all good. He added sun and moon and stars, and was delighted as it kept getting better. He added water and fish and birds, and rejoiced over all he was making. He added great creatures and sea monsters, and we wondered if it could possibly get any better. The Story began.

And then He drew close and made man to steward and care for all He had made, and to commune with Him. God topped it all off and made woman, relationship, community, intimacy, and the opportunity to be known. There was no shame, no selfishness, and nothing but the glorious blessing of God. And God gave humanity a single purpose, to create a family and culture that reflected God's glory and goodness. The Story was good.

But then the unthinkable happened. Though we had all we could need in Him, we thought we'd replace God with ourselves. Sin entered the Story. Our task of discipling the world toward a culture that reflects the glory and goodness of God became impossible as we centered our lives on our own little stories. We lost God's blessing, and found ourselves under a curse. Shame, selfishness, and self-righteousness now rule our lives. The Story seemed lost.

And as God let creation go its own way, it became increasingly corrupt. Adam and Eve are sent out of the garden, and must learn to do life on their own in the world, detached from God and at odds with one another. They have kids - Cain and Abel - and the first murder in the world happens within a generation of leaving the garden. The Story continues to unravel.

Man kept pursuing the freedom to do it his way, apart from dependence on God. "Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him... and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1.21). What would God do with such ever-increasing rebellion? "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth and He was grieved in His heart. The Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6.5-8). Though Noah was a man like all the rest, God showed him grace, drew near to him, and made him a righteous man. God had not abandoned the Story.

Here are the beginnings of a redemption plan. It seems like we had to see that man wasn't able to heal the Story on his own. Our best efforts were far from disciplining the world toward a culture that reflects the glory and goodness of God. We fell so far short of the glory of God. So God was going to initiate His plan of redemption by scratching out what had started, and beginning again with a man named Noah. God began the hope that creation could reclaim the goodness, the shameless, the beauty, the community of the beginning. God graciously chose to not give up on the Story, and began to weave redemption.

A Promise

Through Noah, God rescues one family, and gives this family the same creation mandate he gave to Adam and Eve: "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (Gen 9.1). But this family quickly degenerates as well, as Noah plants a vineyard, makes wine, gets drunk, and passes out naked in his tent. Again, it is as if God needed to emphasize that no human family could ever possibly heal the brokenness of the creation, because every human heart is involved in the brokenness. We can't heal it because we each make it worse, even as we try to fix it. Do you believe that? Is that your story, as well? Are you convinced of your inability yet?

But even as God is emphasizing human inability, he is patiently working to show his awesome ability. Sin, selfishness, and shame cannot be removed simply by destroying all the wicked people. The flood destroyed everyone except Noah, but this man and his descendants went on to build the tower of Babel, the greatest monument to human self-absorption ever created. If this Story is going to be redeemed, God would have to do it himself.

So out of this world gone mad, God calls a man named Abram. Abram lived with his wife, father, and nephew in Ur, a pagan land where everyone - including Abram - worshipped false gods. Abram is not a righteous man by any means, but God graciously chooses him, commands him to leave his land, and gives him a wonderful promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." God is making a promise that he will restore all that was lost in Eden through this one man and his family. God is not hoping Abram will do something amazing and heal the world. Rather, God is telling Abram that He will heal the world through him, by blessing Abram and his family, growing them into a huge nation, and bringing his blessing back to all the nations through them.

Many years later, Abram still had no child, and his wife was barren. How would God make him into a nation if he doesn't even have one son? Again the promise comes to Abram: "Look to the heavens and number the stars if you are able... So shall your offspring be." And, as he looked up at those stars, Abram suddenly found his place in the Story: "Abram believed God, and God credited it to him as righteousness." Abram didn't have to do anything; God would do it through him. Abram had the one simple job we all have in God's story: just trust Him. Believe that he will do it. If Abram simply trusted God, God would give him a child, and that child would become a nation, and through that nation would come the One Man who could heal the world, Jesus Christ.

Thousands of years later, Jesus would do what you and I and Abram could never do. Like Abram, Jesus would leave his land - heaven - and go forth as God led him. Abram was not a righteous man, but God declared him righteous because he trusted God. Jesus was a righteous man, and as he trusted God, God made him to bear the sin of all of humanity. "For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5.21). In this Man, God finally removes the curse and brings his blessing back to his creation, heals the World, and redeems the Story.