

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Beginnings and Separation

Questions for Personal Study

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

What does Genesis 1 tell us about God?

How does Genesis 1 and 2 differ? How are they similar?

What does Gen 1-2 tell us about humanity? What did God give them?

What does God require of Adam and Eve?

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?

What are some ways we can encourage each other to learn the Story?

What is the main theme of Genesis 1-3? How would you summarize it?

How do you see that main theme working out in the world at large?

How do you see that theme working out in your own life?

Questions for Staying on Mission

What does Genesis 1-3 tell us about God's relationship to the world?

What are some of the implications for those who don't know God yet?

How do you see God pursuing sinful humanity in Genesis 1-11?

How is this mission of God still happening today?

What practical ways are we joining God in his mission together? Are we?

For Further Reading and Learning

The Pleasure of God in his Creation, John Piper

<http://bit.ly/piper-creation>

What Every Theologian Should Know About Creation, Evolution, & Design

<http://bit.ly/id>

Understanding Options for Design & Evolution, Tim Keller

<http://bit.ly/5MXwsl>

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Beginnings and Separation

Understanding The Story

One of the most striking (but often overlooked) details about the Bible is that, from beginning to end, it tells One Story. Though it contains a variety of genres, is written by a variety of authors, and contains a variety of little stories within it, the Bible is telling One Central Story. It all holds together along a unified storyline, and our goal over the next 4 months is to trace the threads of that Story.

Does it surprise you to know that the Bible is really telling only one Story? Do you tend to read the Bible as a book of hero tales, stories of great men and women of faith, and how we can become like them? Or does the Bible seem more like Aesop's fables, a series of disconnected stories that seek to teach moral principles for life? Or perhaps you think of the Bible as a big rule book, with lots of commands and imperatives from God? The Bible certainly contains stories of men and women of faith, though it is doubtful that any one of them should be called "heroes!" It does contain smaller stories that teach moral principles. And of course it has commands and instructions. All that is a part of the Bible. But the Bible itself is proclaiming one message into which all those smaller pieces fit.

A hindu scholar once said to the great missionary Leslie Newbigin: "I can't understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion—and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don't need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it." (From Newbigin, *A Walk Through the Bible*).

The Bible tells a "unique interpretation of universal history." In other words, the Bible tells a story that claims to be *The Story*. The Bible is not offering one interpretation of the world and the humanity that occupies it; rather, the Bible claims to offer the true interpretation of the world, humanity, and the God who

created and sustains it all. As scholar and theologian N.T. Wright has said, the Bible “offers a story which is the story of the whole world. It is public truth.”

Over the next 4 months, we’ll be exploring together the Story of the Bible. We’ll spend a ton of time just reading and listening to the Story, trying to hear how the main theme is woven in and out of all the seemingly disconnected parts. If you are familiar with the Bible, the challenge will be to put aside your assumptions and just listen with open ears and a humble heart. Be slow to assume you know this stuff already, and be ready to be surprised by the Story. If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, coming to understand the main Storyline will be invaluable in learning where to place all the seemingly disconnected parts. This commentary will help your understanding, the reading program will build on your learning during the week, and the study guide questions below will help you and your community to learn together.

Most of all, our hope is that this study draws you into the Story of the Bible. Eugene Peterson says it best: the Bible “does not so much present us with a moral code and tell us, ‘Live up to this,’ nor does it set out a system of doctrine and say, ‘Think like this.’ The biblical way is to tell a story and invite us, ‘Live into this - this is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world; this is what is involved in becoming and maturing as a human being.’ We don't have to fit into prefabricated moral and mental or religious boxes before we are admitted into the company of God. We are taken seriously just as we are and given place in his story - for it is, after all, God's story. None of us is the leading character in the story of our lives. God is the larger context and plot in which all our stories find themselves.” Ready to live the StoryFormed way?

Creation and Humanity

The Bible actually begins in the middle. It doesn’t begin at creation, with the book of Genesis. It actually begins in Exodus, with a man named Moses, who is called by God to lead a people called Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into a land God is giving to this people. As they are waiting in the desert for this new home, God reveals himself to Moses, and gives Moses the background Story to who this God is and what he is up to in the world. God tells Moses to write down the story that we know as the book of Genesis. Moses is gathering the stories his people have told over the centuries and placing them into the big Story that God has been weaving since before time began. What would Israel have learned about God, humanity, and themselves as they read Genesis 1-3?

First, they would learn about God. He is the Creator of all that is, who fashioned the universes with simple but powerful words. As Creator, he is also the rightful King of Creation. Everything that is made belongs to him and finds its fulfillment in Him. Most importantly, they would have learned that their God is not just one among many; this Creator is the Only True God, and every other god is nothing but an idol. They would have learned why he deserves worship.

Second, they would learn about humanity. God creates humanity in his image - they are to find their life, identity, and source of significance in relationship to Him alone. They reflect him. Humanity is made in community, not as single isolated human beings, but as a family. This family is given the task of cultivating the earth God has made, bringing forth a God honoring culture in every sphere of life. They would have learned their original design and purpose.

Third, they would learn the sad story of the brokenness of the world. As they heard the Story of Adam and Eve spurning their loving Creator in pursuit of the self-sufficiency, they’d learn the source of all the brokenness in the world. They’d learn that sin is not so much breaking laws as it is mistrusting God’s good intentions. They’d learn that running from God is humanity’s natural bent, and they’d see their own participation in that rebellion.

Redemption - The Story Begins

But even in sadness of the beginning of the Story, Israel would learn of God’s faithful love for his people. When Adam and Eve first sin, God comes looking for them. He pursues them. Though he justly brings a curse upon them for their disobedience, he simultaneously promises that he will one day bring redemption, healing all the brokenness in the world. This is the main theme of the entire Bible. Humanity is made to image God, but instead spurns God and uses his good gifts in rebellion against him - again and again. But God, like a scorned lover, pursues his creation, to rescue them from themselves, and draw them home, back to himself and the relationship he intended to have with them.

Thousands of years later, in another garden, another man would experience the temptation to mistrust God’s heart. Jesus Christ would see the cross, understand the full implications of taking the Sin of the World upon his shoulders, and willingly step forward in obedience to his Father. To Adam God had said, “Obey me and live;” to Jesus God says, “Obey me and you will die.” And in the obedience of Jesus, God opens the way back into the Garden of Eden, back into fellowship with God. The Bible’s main theme is “God saves sinners.”