

# THE STORYFORMED WAY

## Part 9: The Church

### Questions for Personal Study

- How is the Story of the Bible a “rescue story?” Do you read it like that?
- What is God’s role in the Bible? Why is that important?
- What happens when we don’t read the Bible as a Story of Rescue?
- Is your story a story of God’s Rescue? In what ways?
- How has God rescued you from sin, guilt, and condemnation?
- Who have you shared your rescue story with lately?

### Questions for Study in Community

- Do you know each other’s rescue stories? Can you practice sharing them?
- How has being a Rescued one led to a desire to be in community? Has it?
- What keeps you from throwing in deeply to community right now?

### Questions for Staying on Mission

- Do you believe that God is on a Rescue Mission in the world?
- What evidence is there in your life that you believe in the Rescue mission?
- How can you as a Missional Community priorities joining this mission?
- What keeps you from throwing “all in” for this mission of Jesus?

### For Further Reading and Learning

John Stott: “I have a dream of a church which is a serving church— which has seen Christ as the Servant and has heard his call to be a servant too, which is delivered from self-interest, turned inside out, and giving itself selflessly to the service of others, whose members obey Christ’s command to live in the world, to permeate secular society, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, whose people share the good news of Jesus simply, naturally and enthusiastically with their friends, which diligently serves its own neighborhood, residents and workers, families and single people, nationals and immigrants, old folk and little children, which is alert to the changing needs of society, sensitive and flexible enough to keep adapting its program to serve more usefully, which has a global vision and is constantly challenging its young people to give their lives in service, and constantly sending its people out to serve. I have a dream of a serving church.”

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## Part 9: The Church

### The Story and Our Story

As we’ve come to the New Testament, and traced how the whole of the Bible has been anticipating the coming of Jesus the Messiah, we’ve also come to see that the Bible is emphatically *not about us*. The Old Testament begins with the story of the Creator’s overflowing joy and love exploding into a created world. Adam’s failure to trust God and deliberate choice to rebel against his kingly rule. In Adam’s failure we have humanity’s failure - he was our representative, and made the decision that plunged our race into depravity. And though we were not there making that decision with him, we vote “yes” to his choice each moment we live.

Adam’s failure was, thankfully, not the end of the Story. The God who created the world was not surprised by Adam’s failure, nor did it thwart his plan. God - in his sovereign wisdom and love - knew that creating a people would result in pain and misery as they chose rebellion. So, from the before the beginning of time, God had a plan to send a Rescuer who would do something so amazing and marvelous that he’d not only redeem the world but also so capture the hearts of his people that they’d love and worship God forever. The entirety of the Old Testament is the Story of God preparing to send the Rescuer, his own Son, who’d save us from sin and restore God’s broken world.

In the history of God’s dealings with Israel, we see God faithfully pursuing his people, holding out his hands to people who - despite his gracious care for them - continue to run from him in rebellion! Eventually, through the Story of Israel, we see that no merely human people will ever be able to solve the problem of sin and bring redemption to the world. The Old Testament closes with the voices of the prophets, pointing forward to the coming of a new Israel, a Faithful Servant, who would do for the world what Adam and Israel could never do!

### The World’s Rescuer and Ruler

Over the last few weeks we’ve looked at the coming of Jesus, God’s promised Rescuer and Ruler, who ushers in God’s kingdom in his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus comes to restore the world to rights, to make the world the

way God intended from the beginning. He does this ultimately by dying for the sin of the world, being the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He absorbs the brokenness and rebellion of the world, and the Father's rejection of that sin and wickedness, and in his resurrection ushers in a renewed world.

Suddenly - though Jesus disciples did not really understand it - the Story makes room for people like us. We get invited into the Story because Jesus has made a way. Jesus has conquered the sin that kept us from God, and in his resurrection he makes it possible for people like us to be filled with God's Spirit so that we can live into God's Story. The Story is *still* not about us; however, we've been invited to participate in God's work in the world!

But what does that mean? How do we live into God's Story? What does it look like for us today to have our lives - as individuals and as a whole church - shaped by the contours of this Story? And in what ways do we continue to *not* live in this Story?

### **The Church is a Rescued People**

Above all, what we see in the early church - both in the book of Acts and in the New Testament letters - is that the church is a Rescued People. Each and every person who is a part of this new community called the Church is a part not because of their commitment to God, their desire to be obedient, or their eagerness to serve in ministry. All of these are good things, but they do not make someone a Christian, do not make someone a part of God's rescued people. If you are a Christian, you are so because God has rescued you from sin, guilt, shame, and rebellion in Jesus Christ.

If you read the biographies of Christians throughout the ages, you'll notice that they always had a profound sense of being rescued. There is almost always a sense not they have found God but that God has found them! Yes, they often start with a "search" for truth; but end in there is usually a realization that they've been searched out! It turns out the process of becoming a Christian is not something we've initiated - it was Him all along! C.S Lewis recounts his conversion in *Surprised by Joy*: "You must picture me alone in that room, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me... I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the

most dejected and reluctant convert in all England... The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation." Lewis is saying that he was pursued and overtaken by God and His Great Love. Is that your story, too? We live into God's Story when we see how our life is really a story not about us finding God but about God pursuing and overtaking us! This begins long before conversion, and continues for the rest of your life as a Christian. You are being pursued by a jealous God who wants all of your heart!

### **A Rescued People on a Rescue Mission**

If you have been rescued - if that is really the deepest joy of your life - then two things result. These two things are not add-ons to faith in Jesus, as if they are only for "really committed" disciples. If you have really been rescued, then you'll join together on a rescue mission with others who have been rescued!

First, if you've really been rescued, you'll find that you have a whole new purpose for life. Everything that once seemed so important has begun to pale in light of the Story of God. If this is the True Story of the World, then living for any reason other than making this Story known is folly! This doesn't necessarily mean that you drop everything and become a missionary in Africa - though it certainly could mean that! It definitely means that you re-evaluate everything in your life, asking how each part of your life now begins to serve the ultimate purpose of making the Rescuer known! In other words, though you may not go as a missionary to Africa, there are no non-missionary Christians. If you've been rescued, you are now a part of the rescue mission!

Second, if you've really been rescued, you will find within yourself a growing desire to be in a community of the rescued. If you have been rescued, then being deeply and vulnerably connected with other rescued people will be a great joy of your heart! As you look through the New Testament, you'll notice that being a "non-connected" Christian is a contradiction in terms. You cannot be a Christian without other Christians. In fact, this commitment to being connected often led to some great conflicts and trials in the early church as rescued people learned to repent and love one another in real life! What we see in the New Testament is that each Christian was a part of a "display community." These rescued people came together to love, serve, and care for one another in radically sacrificial ways, despite how difficult it often was. No one had to create a small group program; those who have been truly rescued long to be with other rescued people to remember Jesus and celebrate all that he has done for them!