

THE TRUE STORY

STORY OF GOD SUMMARY

CONTENT ADAPTED FROM SOMA COMMUNITIES



MISSIO DEI
COMMUNITIES



CREATION



REBELLION



PROMISE



REDEMPTION



CHURCH



RESTORATION

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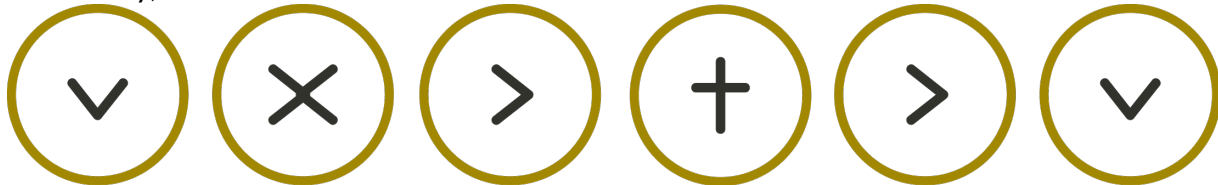
INTRODUCTION

Characters, plot-twists, conflict, resolution, purpose--story. We speak in stories, we read/watch stories, and we live unfolding stories. Who doesn't love a good story? What we often don't consider is that our lives are formed by larger stories. Larger narratives help us make sense of the world by answering questions such as: How did we get here? What is our purpose? Why is the world the way it is? What does the future hold? Big stories such as Naturalism, Christianity, Consumerism, Americanism, Buddhism, etc. attempt to answer these questions in particular ways. They shape our character - our story.

One way to answer these questions is through the lens of the Biblical Story. Many tend to see the Bible as one of the following:

- A Rule Book
- A Compilation of Stories
- A Collection of Moralistic Fables
- Motivational Sayings
- Condemnation

As believers in Jesus, however, the most accurate way to understand the Bible is to see it as a Divine Drama; a dramatic six-act play. But it is not a fairy tale. It is a True Story, *the* True Story, that defines all other stories. The six acts are:



CREATION REBELLION PROMISE REDEMPTION CHURCH RESTORATION

The True Story was created to immerse people into the biblical story, a narrative of God's redemption for the world. Two-thirds to three-fourths of the Bible is narrative. The Story-Formed Way familiarizes people with the biblical story, while also allowing them to discover how the overlapping sub-stories (Creation, Redemption, Promise, Redemption, Church, Restoration) work together to comprise one big story. The goal of this material is to immerse people into the Story in order to see how God answers our various questions in His grand narrative.

This journey through the Story of the Bible includes considerable dialogue, interaction and reflection. It is helpful for new, renewed, and growing disciples. It is also an excellent way to introduce people to the claims of Christ and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Remember the dialogue is not a quiz. The "answers" below each question are there to help you as a leader guide the discussion toward some key ideas.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The True Story was created to be a starting point of discipleship. It is a journey through the Story with times of dialogue, interaction and reflection that serve as a foundation for new disciples (anyone you are in a relationship with) and gives more mature disciples an easy, reproducible method for introducing groups of people (or an individual) to the claims of Christ and what it means to be a disciple. Do this often!

The True Story is a retelling of the Biblical Story, but it is not meant to be a replacement for it! It is a tool to be able to understand the narrative of Scripture better and a means to introduce God's Story to some who might not otherwise hear it. Please test what you read and discuss with Scripture.

Ground Rules:

- No Bibles. Each story has scripture references at the beginning that we can study later. But we've found it most helpful if people don't have bibles open as we go through.
- Stay in the Story. In order to level the playing field among all participants, the discussion needs to be based on the stories that we have heard. Resist the temptation to bring in outside details that you may know.
- Go backward, but not forward. You can always go back and reference previous stories. But don't jump ahead.

Setting the Tone:

- We are here to exchange ideas, grow closer and experience change.
- Let's have fun. We'll also keep things moving along and participatory.
- Welcome questions and challenges from others. Explicitly give permission to probe, ask questions and doubt.
- Let's all strive to be honest and vulnerable. Also, honor one another by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- The aim of the Story-formed Way is to ask genuine questions and discover answers directly from within the biblical story. God has revealed Himself through this Story, so let's take a posture of learning directly from Him.

ACT ONE: CREATION



Pre-Story Dialogue:

Q: As you look around the world, does everything seem it is as it should be?

Q: Have you ever wondered what is wrong with the world and why?

Q: If you could imagine the world the way it should be, what would it be like?

There was a day when the world was very much like you described... and a day when it will be again.

What if we could live in a world where there was no sickness or pain or death? No pollution, poverty, war or hatred? Is it possible that the world that we all want, what we all dream of, is exactly the world that God originally created and intended?! And what if God actually has a plan and a way to set everything right again? The Bible shows us that there is such a way...Let's start at the beginning of The Story...

Scene 1 - Beginnings

(From Genesis 1-3; Job 38; Revelation 12)

This is a story found in the Bible, about God, a being who has always existed and is the creator of everything. God is the only one in this story who always does what is good, right and perfect—the Bible calls Him Holy. While God created the foundations of the earth, angels (His first creation) were there, watching. They sang together and worshiped God; but some of these angels rebelled against God and His ways. The Bible teaches that all rebellion against God is called sin. And because of God's holiness He will not allow sin to remain unaddressed in His presence, so He sent the rebellious angels, now known as demons, down into darkness on the earth.

(Pause for a moment...)

Scene 2 - First Humans

(From Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8)

Then God decided to create another being, called a human, in His own image. God said, “Let us make man in our image to be like us.” He then prepared the earth as a place for the humans to live—filling the earth with plants, birds, fish and animals of all kinds. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden and trusted them to care for and rule over all of His creation on earth.

God lived closely with these first humans, spending time with them daily, showing them how to live life in the best possible way. They lived their life close to God and under His protection—a life that was full and complete and eternal.

Post-Story Dialogue:

Remember this is a dialogue, not a quiz. The “answers” below each question are there to help you guide the discussion toward some key ideas.

1. Who is this Story about?
2. How did God make humans unique in His creation?
 - *They were made in God’s image*
3. What kind of relationship did God have with the humans?
 - *He spent time with them daily; lived closely with them*
 - *He gave them responsibility—to care for God’s creation and to create*
 - *They lived under His protection*
4. If this story does not center on us, but on God, how do we find our purpose to life? What are humans doing with Him in the story?
 - *Enjoying and learning from God—spending time with Him and living in His ways*
 - *Doing the work He gave them to do (they had a job to cultivate and subdue the earth)*
5. How does that contrast with the way most people live in our culture today?

ACT TWO: REBELLION (FALL)



Scene 1 - Separation

(From Genesis 3, 4, 6-9)

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and His authority, choosing to live in their own ways instead of His. Since God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain unaddressed in His presence, Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, away from God. Separated from God and no longer following His ways, Adam and Eve were now subject to sickness, pain and death. God told them, “The way you have chosen to live will bring you great struggles and pain and then you will return to the ground from which you came.” Not only were these humans now separated from God because of their sin, but they would also suffer death as they were separated from the Giver of Life.

After leaving the garden, the number of humans on earth grew rapidly. Not only did sin spread from Adam and Eve to their sons—it spread from generation to generation.

Even though humans were created in God’s image, everyone chose to disobey God. They all constantly acted out in violence against each other. This went on for thousands of years.

Dialogue:

1. What did Adam and Eve choose to do in the story?
 - *To rebel against God and live their own way*
2. What was the consequence of their actions?
 - *Separation, sickness, death*
3. Why do you think God required consequences for their sin and rebellion? Why didn’t God just overlook their rebellion?
4. The Story said sin spread from generation to generation. As you look around the world today, where do you see these effects?
5. In what ways are we like the man and woman in this story?

ACT THREE: PROMISE



Scene 1 - The Covenant

(From Genesis 12-25, 37-50; Exodus 1-2, 7-12, 19-20)

Then God established a special relationship and a covenant promise— representing the deepest of all agreements—with a man named Abraham. God told Abraham, “I’ll make you the father of a great nation and famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. The entire earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will always be your God and you will always be my people.”

Abraham’s family, called the Israelites, were to be a new kind of people who would show the world what it means to once again live in God’s ways. God gave them a vast amount of land where they enjoyed His blessings as they grew into a large nation. He was a loving Father to them.

But as time went by, the Israelites began doing what was right in their own eyes and rebelled against God and His laws. They stopped trusting in God and worshipped idols—people, things, wealth and power—over God. In their rebellion, the Israelites faced great struggles and ended up a defeated nation of slaves. But God continued to love His people and promised that one day a descendant of theirs would come to rescue and restore humanity, and all of creation, back to the way God originally created it.

Then, there were 400 years of silence between God and His people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundreds of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire that the world had ever known.

Dialogue:

1. What was Abraham’s relationship with God like?
2. What did God promise to Abraham in His covenant?
 - *To make him the father of a great nation, giving him many descendants*
 - *To bless and protect him*
 - *To bless all the nations of the earth through him*
3. What does this promise tell us about what God is like?
 - *God desires to bless all people*
 - *God has chosen a family (nation) to be His blessing and to live in His ways - to show the world what He is like - a people blessed to be a blessing!*
4. What would it mean if for you if you were chosen by God and blessed to be a blessing? Is this true of you?
5. What pattern do we keep seeing in the relationship between God and His people?
 - *He loves them... they reject Him... He loves them...*

ACT FOUR: REDEMPTION



Scene 1 - The Birth of Jesus

(Story from Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2)

Finally, God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. The angel appeared to her and said, “You will become pregnant and have a son and you are to name him Jesus. He will become a king whose kingdom will never end! This will happen supernaturally by God’s Spirit, so this baby will be called God’s Son.”

God revealed to Mary and her soon-to-be-husband, Joseph, that this boy was the long awaited Messiah king, the one who God promised He would send to rescue His people! Sure enough the next year, Mary gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus, which means “the God who saves”. Jesus grew up in both height and wisdom and was loved by God, his Father, and by everyone who knew him. He lived a remarkable life, always choosing to live in God’s ways and do what was good, right and perfect.

Dialogue:

1. What was unique about Jesus’ birth?
2. What does Jesus’ name mean? –
 - *The God who saves*
 - *What is salvation? For who, from what? To what?*

Scene 2 - Jesus’ Life

(Story from Matthew 3-5, 7, 10, 13, 18-20; Mark 1-6; Luke 3, 5, 6, 8-10, 12-15, 17; John 1, 3)

As a man, Jesus called people to follow him, inviting them to be a part of what he called the Kingdom of God. He called people to once again live under God’s rule and reign. He said, “God blesses those who realize their need for Him; the humble and poor, the gentle and merciful—the Kingdom of God belongs to them. God blesses the pure in heart and those who hunger and thirst to be with Him.” He taught people that the Kingdom of God is within our hearts.

He said, “God showed His great love for people by sending me—His only son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me will find life that is complete and eternal! He sent me here to save people—not to judge them. Those who want to live in sin and darkness will reject me and bring God’s judgment on themselves. But those who want to live in God’s ways will trust me and live forever!”

Dialogue:

1. Think through the stories we have told so far. What is the Kingdom of God?
 - *In the beginning, God created the whole earth to be His Kingdom*
 - *Adam and Eve rebelled against this Kingdom rule*
 - *God promised to bless Abraham making him a great nation that included all nations*
 - *The people had been waiting for 400 years for the King to come*
2. How does someone get into the Kingdom of God, according to this Story?
3. What do we learn about Jesus from these stories?
4. What would the world be like if everyone lived in the Kingdom, under God's rule, care and protection?

Scene 3 - Jesus' Death & Resurrection

(Story from Matthew 26-28; Mark 14-16; Luke 22-24; John 13, 17-20)

As God had promised, he sent Jesus to rescue humanity from sin and the penalty of death. God accepted Jesus' perfect life in place of our own. Jesus was brutally beaten and died painfully on a wooden cross, taking the punishment that all of rebellious humanity deserved! Three days later Jesus conquered death when God raised him back to life, and he was seen by over 500 eye witnesses. Through his death and resurrection, forgiveness of sin and adoption into God's family are possible for all people. He is now a loving Father to all who believe in Jesus.

Dialogue:

1. If Jesus truly was the Son of God, how could he have been killed this way?
2. Why would God have created this plan for His only Son to die?
3. What did Jesus' death mean for God's people?
4. Do you believe that God can forgive what you have done in your life?
5. How is Jesus being raised from the dead significant? What does it show us about him?
 - *He conquered death—the results of human sin and rebellion! He didn't just exchange his life for ours to atone for our sins, he also secured new life for us!*
 - *God doesn't abandon His physical creation. He wants to renew and restore all of it!*

This is a story about a Holy God who has pursued sinful and rebellious humans with the desire of restoring them to a close and loving relationship.

- If that is NOT your story, what is your story?
- Is the story you tell primarily about you or about God?
- Which story do you currently live by?

ACT FIVE: CHURCH



Scene 1 - The Mission and Power

(Story from Matthew 28; John 14, 20; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Soon afterward, Jesus went to be with his Father in heaven, rising up into the clouds right before his followers' eyes! He promised that he would send his own Holy Spirit to come and dwell within them. The Spirit would remind them of all Jesus taught, transform their hearts to be like Jesus and give them power to walk in the ways of God like Jesus did. Jesus also sent his followers to go out and tell others about him—his life and his sacrifice for their sins—and lead them to trust him and walk in his ways.

This was the beginning of what the Bible calls the Church—a community of people all over the world who, through faith in Jesus, once again enjoy a life that is full and complete—living in the ways of God.

Dialogue:

1. What did Jesus send his followers to do?
 - *Tell others about him - his life and sacrifice - and lead them to trust in him*
2. What is a disciple? How do you lead someone to Jesus?
3. Is this command also for us today?
4. What's the difference between someone who believes in God and a disciple of Jesus?
5. How do you need to live differently in light of this command?
 - *Disciples make disciples*
 - *Who are you discipling now in your life?*
6. What do we learn about the Spirit from this Story?
 - *Spirit reminds us of what Jesus taught*
 - *In some ways like back in the garden (closeness with God restored), in some ways better...God, by His Spirit now lives INSIDE people! Restoration is taking place now*
 - *The Spirit empowers us for God's work*
7. How is the work of the Holy Spirit changing your life right now?
8. Do you have a community of people like the Church described in this story to live life with?

ACT SIX: RESTORATION



Scene 1 - Creation Restored

(Story from Luke 17; Acts 3; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1-8, 22:1-7)

We can join this amazing story... the story continues with us!

The Bible also tells us the end of this story... Jesus promised to come back one day to restore the earth, setting it free from its curse. He will destroy all evil, sin and rebellion. Then there will be no more sickness, pain or death. Every follower of Christ will be resurrected and restored just like Jesus. And they will live forever!

God showed one of Jesus' disciples, John, what this would be like in a vision. John wrote down all God showed him: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth! And I saw the holy city coming down from God out of heaven. It looked like a bride beautifully dressed and ready for her husband."

"And I saw a river, with the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of Jesus. It flowed down the center of the main street in the holy city. On each side of the river grew a tree—and BOTH—were a Tree of Life! On them was enough fruit to heal all the nations of the world!

No longer will there be a curse upon anything, for the throne of God and of Jesus will be there, and His disciples will be there worshipping Him. There will be no night time there—no need for lamps or sun—for God Himself will shine on them. And together, they will rule over everything forever and ever.

"Then I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is again among the humans! He will live with them, and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sadness or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

And Jesus, sitting on the throne said, "Watch, I am making everything new! Everything has happened as planned! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. Everyone who overcomes the world—those who believe in me and allow me to conquer sin and selfishness for them—they will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children."

But everyone who chose to rebel and never trust in God's gracious sacrifice was sent away from God's good presence in the lake of fire - this is the second death.

And Jesus said, "Watch as you wait for me, because I am coming back soon!"
Amen!

God's Kingdom will one day come in fullness and everyone and everything will live under His rule. Until then, by the Spirit's power we get to live in God's ways, giving people a foretaste of what life is like in Jesus' Kingdom.

Dialogue:

1. How does the end of this story sound like the beginning of it?
 - *No sickness, pain, or death*
2. How are these things restored?
 - *Through what Jesus has done!*
3. How does it make you feel that (if you are in Christ—his disciple) you will live forever?!
4. In the Story we see All nations living together in peace worshipping God forever... what does that show us about what God is now doing among His people—Jesus disciples? How are we to live in light of this?
 - *If God created everything "good" and "excellent" and is restoring all things to that condition, we cannot live at odds to His perfect plan*
 - *We, too, are to be agents of His reconciliation*

APPENDIX 1

4 GOSPEL QUESTIONS:

1) WHO IS GOD?

What do we learn about His character and nature through this story?

2) WHAT HAS HE DONE?

What stands out to you about the work of God through Jesus?

3) WHO ARE WE?

What is our identity as a result of God's work?

4) HOW DO WE LIVE?

Practically, how do we get to live in light of our new identity?

Use these four questions to study God's Story - not just the True Story Summary here, but whenever you are studying Scripture. These questions are a great Bible study tool for your individual time with the Lord and for your time growing in community. Your DNA group should always be coming back to these four questions.

A few things to keep in mind...

- Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak through his word. It's his job to guide us into all truth and to glorify Jesus (John 16:13-14).
- Depending on the passage, a study Bible may be helpful in providing some important background information. Commentaries can be helpful as well, but most will provide too much information and could be distracting. Keep it simple!

APPENDIX 2

SHARING YOUR STORY:

Every follower of Jesus has a story to tell, and it's a story about God and his grace. However, many of us have not been equipped to tell our story in such a way that it points to Jesus as the hero. As those who want to show and share Jesus every day, it's imperative that we learn to talk about him through the medium of our stories. Often, telling our story will be the most natural way to talk to our not-yet-believing friends about Jesus.

Every great story contains four movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. God's Story follows the same pattern. God's Story is the Great Story, the story that helps us make sense of all other stories. God's Story is the ultimate Good News, the gospel that we find on the pages of the Bible. Understanding the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration pattern in God's Story will help us make sense of our stories, and of the broken world in which we find ourselves. Below is a quick summary of these four movements along with the themes that emerge in each one.

CREATION

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Origin and Identity.

We all have a fundamental belief about our origin – who or what gave us our existence, made us who we are, and shaped us into the person we are today. As you begin your gospel story, talk about your background, some early shaping influences, and what gave you your sense of worth and value.

FALL (REBELLION)

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Brokenness and Blame.

The world we live in is not as it should be. We are not as we should be. Brokenness is all around us. We often tend to place the blame at the feet of others: parents, siblings, friends, teachers, leaders, and even the government.

As you tell your gospel story, talk about specific ways that your sin brought about pain and destruction in your life. Include failed attempts at fixing the brokenness in your life.

REDEMPTION

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Rescue and Deliverance.

All of us look to created things to save us, to rescue us, to give us significance, and to make us right. Money, possessions, acceptance, approval, relationships, and achievements all seem to offer some hope for repairing the brokenness in our lives. But the gospel tells a different story! The Redemption movement of your story has the potential to be very powerful because you get to declare your faith in Jesus. Talk

specifically about how you placed your trust in Jesus to save and rescue you from your sin and from the brokenness in your life. Describe how Jesus' life, death and resurrection have brought redemption to specific broken parts of your story.

RESTORATION

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Hope and Transformation.

There's a deep longing within each of us for change, for things to be different tomorrow than they are today. What we're all craving is a mending of the brokenness that surrounds us. Because of what Jesus has done, restoration has begun. We are a new creation, and we've been made right with the Father! His Spirit lives in and through us, making us more like Jesus, even though we are still living in a fallen, broken world. Conclude your gospel story by talking about what the Spirit is doing in your life now. Share some evidences of His grace, indicators that you've been made new, that His restorative work has already begun in you.

Understanding God's Story is essential for properly interpreting the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration elements in our own story. Though we regularly believe that our stories are about us, our stories are really about God. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Your story is ultimately God's Story. It's by Him and about Him. Your story is good news, a story about God's redemption of a broken person. He is the main character and the hero, not you. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." (Romans 11:36).

Think through the four elements of your story, and consider how each one is an opportunity to point to your need for God and his work. Our stories consist of a countless string of smaller scenes, so begin by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to show you which parts you should include in your gospel story.

A FEW STORY TIPS

- Make your story about 10 minutes long.
- Use normal, every day language to tell your story.
- The Father already knows your story and accepts you fully because of Jesus, so you can be totally honest with others. Don't fear what people might think.
- Be prepared to share your gospel story in the midst of spiritual conversations with not-yet-believers. Anytime the conversation turns to God, Jesus, Church, or the Bible, it might be a great opportunity to share how Jesus is the hero of your story.
- Pray and ask the Spirit to speak through you as you tell your story.

REMEMBER, IT'S ACTUALLY HIS STORY!