

# THE TRUE STORY

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 10-week 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



Week 1

## Big Picture:

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- God is Holy and Creator
- Humans created in His image—Imago Dei
- Humans created to live forever
- Humans given volition/choice to trust God or self
- Humans rebel and are cast out of garden & God's presence
- Humans were never created to determine/judge good & evil for themselves. This is God's sole authority.
- God pursues rebellious humans
- Missionary Identity/Missionary God

## 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 story is found in the Bible. It is about God, a being that was before all things, and created this earth and everything on it. God alone always does what is good and right and perfect—the Bible calls Him holy.

While God was creating the foundations of the earth, angels watched with amazement, singing together and shouting for joy! God created these beautiful angels to worship Him, but some of these angels rebelled against God and His ways. Because God existed before all things and because He created all things, He sets the standards by which all things are to live. So, any rebellion against God is called sin. God will not allow sin to remain in His presence forever, so He sent the rebellious angels into darkness on the earth, to face final punishment later.

(Pause for a moment...)

# Scene 2 - First Humans

**(From Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8)**

Then God decided He would create another being, one that was lower than the angels, called a human. So God took the earth and prepared it as a place for humans to live. His Spirit moved over the surface of the earth as...

- He made light—separating it from the darkness...
- He divided the oceans and the sky...
- He gathered the waters—so dry land would appear...
- He grew plants, flowers, and trees with seeds to reproduce themselves...
- He created the sun, the moon and the stars—setting the days and seasons in to motion
- He filled the seas with fish, the sky with birds, and the earth with all kinds of wild animals!

God put great care and creativity into all of His creation, giving it unbelievable potential. Then He looked at everything and said, “This is good!” After He had prepared the earth God said, “Let us make humans in our image, to be like us. They will be in charge of the earth and the plants and the animals that live on it.”

So God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed His own breath into him, giving him life. This man would be called Adam. Later, God created the first woman, Eve, from one of Adam’s ribs, to be a companion and helper for Adam. So God created both the man and the woman in his own image.

God blessed the man and the woman with the ability to continue creating through having children. He told them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over everything on the earth.” He placed the humans in a beautiful garden, a place where they had everything they needed to live life to the fullest.

In the center of the garden God placed two special trees. One was the Tree of Life and the other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil. God said that Adam and Eve could eat from any tree in the garden, except for one—the tree that would give them knowledge of good and evil. He warned them not to eat from this tree or they would surely die...

Daily, God would come and spend time with the humans, walking with them in the cool of the day. He showed them how to live in the best possible way—a life lived close to God, under His protection, doing the work He gave them—a life that is full and complete. And Adam and Eve loved being with God.

As God looked over all of His creation He thought, “this is VERY GOOD!” After creating all of this God rested, and He set aside a day of rest each week for His creation.

## 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. What was God’s relationship to His creation?
  - *He took great care in making it*
  - *He is distinct from the Creation, yet still intimately involved*
2. How do we know God’s creation was good?
  - *He proclaimed it “good” after each days’ work*
3. How did God make humans unique in His creation?
  - *They were made in God’s image*
  - *He breathed His own breath into them*
4. How do we know humans were created good?
  - *God declared them “Excellent”*
5. What kind of relationship did God have with the humans?
  - *He spent time with Adam and Eve, they loved being with God*
  - *He gave them responsibility—to care for God’s creation and to create*
  - *He showed them the best possible way to live, but gave them ability to choose*
  - *He protected them from evil*
6. What kind of relationship did Adam & Eve have with each other?
  - *Close, Eve came out of Adam’s body*
  - *Naked and unashamed*
7. What do you think is significant about the two trees in the center of the garden?
8. What did God want from the humans?
9. Do you think humans were created to live forever? What shows us this in the Story?
10. What do we learn about God in this scene?
11. What do we know so far about the meaning of life? Why are we here?
12. 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 & 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 & subdue the earth)*
13. How does that contrast with the way most people live in our culture today?

## Resources:

1. **Genesis chapters 1-3** | Read or listen online: <http://bit.ly/gen1-3>
2. **The Pleasure of God in His Creation** (a great article by John Piper about why God is pleased with what he created and what creation reveals to us about God) | <http://bit.ly/1ETuSoN>
3. **Is Evolution Compatible with Christianity?** (a message by Pastor Jonathan Dodson, who studied Anthropology in college) | <http://http://aclpodcast.libsyn.com/rss>
4. **Creation, Evolution, & Christian Laypeople** (Article by Tim Keller) | <http://bit.ly/1gkGuXu>

# ACT TWO: REBELLION (FALL)



Week 2

## Big Picture:

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Every human has chosen to sin—to choose self over and apart from God
- God looks at the heart
- Self and sin lead to separation and death... Obedience leads to life and relationship with God
- God has created and commanded us to be fruitful
- God is the source of grace and mercy

## Scene 1 - Separation

### (From Genesis 3)

One day, a serpent—the most clever of all the animals in the garden—came to the woman. He asked Eve, “Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?” Eve told him, “No, we can eat from any tree in the garden. It’s only the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that we are not allowed to eat from—or even touch, or we will surely die.”

The serpent said to her, “You won’t die! God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God—knowing everything, both good and evil.” When Eve saw how good and delicious the fruit looked, and that it would make her wise, she took some of it and ate it. She also gave some to Adam, her husband, who was with her, and he ate it! They chose not to believe God and to believe the lie. Instantly their eyes were opened and they became filled with shame and fear. They strung fig leaves together around their hips to cover their nakedness.

Toward evening they heard God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. God called to them, “Where are you?” Adam answered, “I heard you coming and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” God answered, “Why are you ashamed of being naked? Did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat?” Adam blamed Eve saying, “It was the woman you gave me. She gave me some.” Then God said to Eve, “How could you do this?” Eve blamed the serpent saying, “The serpent tricked me into eating the fruit.” So God said to the snake, “Because you have done this, You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. You will be the enemy of the woman and her children. You will bite his heel, but he will crush your head.”

God’s heart was broken because of their disobedience, but He could not ignore what they had done. God always does what is good, right and perfect—His perfect justice required that there be consequences for rebellion. So God punished Adam and Eve by



throwing them out of the Garden outside of His care and protection. No longer following God's way, they were now subject to sickness, pain and death. Not only were the people punished as a result of their disobedience, but all of the creation fell under a curse. Nothing remained as it was supposed to be... except God was still good, right and perfect, and nothing could change that. God continued to love Adam and Eve—He even created clothing for them out of animal skins so they would not be ashamed outside of the Garden.

## **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. How did God make humans unique among His creations?
  - *They were made in God's image - Imago Dei*
2. What did Adam and Eve choose to do in the story?
  - *Believe the lie of the serpent...choose to NOT trust God's words*
  - *Trust in self apart from God...trust in own abilities to manage good & evil in their lives*
3. What was the real temptation that Adam & Eve were presented with by the serpent?
  - *To choose self apart from relationship with God (pride)*
  - *We can provide meaning, significance and happiness for ourselves apart from God*
  - *To believe we are more equipped to manage the good & evil, right & wrong in the world*
4. What did God do right after Adam and Eve disobeyed?
5. Do you think that God didn't know where they were? Why did He go looking and asking questions?
6. What was the consequence of their actions?
  - *Consequences to their relationship with God, self, each other, and rest of creation*
  - *Separation, sickness, death*
  - *Mercy - He did not destroy them and clothed them*
7. Why do you think God required consequences for their sin and rebellion? Why didn't God just overlook their rebellion?
8. It said that all of creation experienced consequences for their sin. As you look around the world today, where do you see these effects?
9. In what ways are we like the man and woman in this story?
10. What do we learn about God in this story?
  - *He seems to know all things - He knew Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree*
  - *He will never allow evil to remain in his presence - He judged each of the characters in the story - He cast Adam and Eve out of the garden, and away from His presence*
  - *He promised One who would come to kill the serpent*
  - *He keeps his promises - though they did not die immediately, Adam and Eve's nature was changed, so God would not allow them to take from the tree of life - He reminded Adam that he would return to dust*
  - *He is the source of all grace - He warned them in advance - He made clothing for them of animal skins - the innocent animals were killed on their behalf so they could have clothing/covering*

## Scene 2 - Two Brothers

### (From Genesis 4)

After leaving the garden, Adam and Eve had two sons named Cain and Abel. When they grew up, Cain became a farmer, and Abel became a shepherd. At harvest time, Cain brought to God a gift of his farm produce, while Abel brought several of the very best lambs from his flock. God accepted Abel and his offering of the lambs, but he did not accept Cain and his offering. This made Cain very angry and upset. “Why are you so angry?” God asked him. “Why do you look so down? Won’t you be accepted if you do what is right? But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at your door, waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must bring it under control.”

Later, Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, “Let’s go out into the fields...” And while they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother. This was the first murder described in the Bible.

Afterward, God asked Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know!” Cain replied. “Am I supposed to keep track of him wherever he goes?” But God said, “What have you done? Listen... your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! You are now banished from the ground you have corrupted with your brother’s blood. No longer will it produce abundant crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless fugitive on the earth, constantly wandering from place to place.”

Cain replied to God, “My punishment is more than I can handle! You have removed me from my land... and from your presence; you have made me a wandering fugitive. All who see me will try to kill me!”

God replied, “No! They will not kill you. Anyone who tries to harm you will receive seven times your punishment.” So God put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. Then Cain left God’s presence and traveled to the land east of the Garden.

### Dialogue:

1. Why do you think God accepted one and not the other offering?
2. What did God say to Cain after He rejected his offering? What do you think that meant?
  - *Won’t you be accepted if you do what’s right? But if you refuse good, sin is waiting...*
  - *God looks at the heart—It was a heart issue. God spoke to Cain about doing what he already knew was right. He didn’t do it...it’s a heart issue, not a gift issue.*
3. Why do you think Cain killed his brother?
4. What are you willing to do for acceptance?
  - *How might your life change if you knew you were already loved and accepted regardless of what you do?*

5. What was God's reaction to the murder? Why didn't God just ignore what Cain had done? What punishment did Cain deserve?
  - *Cain deserved death.*
  - *God did not repay evil with evil—He showed fairness and grace.*
6. What do we learn about humans in this story?
  - *We try to hide from our sins (Where else in the story did you see this?)*
  - *We want what other people have*
7. What do we learn about God in this story?
8. Who do you think you are most like in this story?

## Scene 3 - The Flood

### (From Genesis 6-9)

The number of humans on the 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 constantly acted out in violence against each other. God saw that people's thoughts were completely evil—all of the time. This broke his heart and made him wish he had never created humans. So God decided to start over. He said, "I will completely wipe out this human race that I have created. I am sorry I ever made them."

But there was one man, named Noah, who found grace in the eyes of God. Noah had a close relationship with God and was the only blameless man living on earth at that time. So God said to Noah, "I have decided to cover the earth with a flood, destroying everything alive! But I will give you a plan to keep you safe."

God then told Noah to build a large ark, giving him specific instructions about how big to make it and what it should be like. God said to him, "Make an ark from wood and seal it with tar, inside and out. Then build many decks and stalls for animals inside of it. I promise to keep you safe in this ark! Bring seven pairs of animals I have approved for sacrifices and one pair of each of the others. These animals will come to you to be kept alive. And remember, take enough food for your family and for all the animals."

So Noah did everything exactly as God told him to do. Just as God said, the floods came water burst out from the earth and rain poured from the sky. When the waters came, Noah and his family and all of the animals boarded the ark. As the waters rose, the ark floated safely on the surface. The flood covered even the tallest mountains and all living creatures on the earth were destroyed; except for those on the ark.

After 40 days the rains stopped. Many months passed as the waters slowly began to dry up. For weeks, Noah sent out a dove to see if it could find dry land. Finally, the dove

returned with an olive leaf in its mouth. So Noah sent the dove out again, and when it didn't come back, he knew it was safe to return to land.

As soon as Noah came off of the ark, he built an altar, selected pure animals from every species, and sacrificed them to God as a symbol of thankfulness and worship. God was pleased with Noah's sacrifice and said, "I will never again curse the earth, destroying all living things with a flood, even though people's thoughts and actions are bent toward evil from childhood. God blessed Noah and his sons, telling them to be fruitful and multiply, go have many children and once again fill the earth with people.

Then God told Noah and his sons, "I have put all animals under your control. You can use them for food, but you must never eat animals that still have their lifeblood in them, and I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. Life is in the blood and all life belongs to me!" God also said, "As a symbol of my promise I will hang a rainbow in the clouds. When I see the rainbow, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth."

Noah's descendants forgot about God and how he had spared them in the flood. They made plans to construct a great city out of brick. They said, "Let's build a monument to ourselves that reaches to the heavens to show how great we are." God saw how people were gathering together to honor themselves instead of him. At that time everyone on earth spoke the same language. So God gave people different languages to make it harder for them to join together in rebellion. Then he scattered them all over the earth.

## Dialogue:

1. Why did God send the flood to destroy everything? Do you think He had good reasons for doing this?
2. Why were Noah and his family spared? What does it mean to be “blameless?” Was Noah sinless?
  - *The story tells us that all humans have sinned... including Noah*
  - *Was Noah spared because he had a close relationship with God and did not try and place blame for his sins?*
3. What did the evil, rebellion and violence of all the people in the world lead to?
4. What did Noah’s trust and obedience lead to?
  - *God provided a way for him to be saved*
5. What do the stories we have heard so far show us about what humans are like?
  - *Since the fall of Adam and Eve every person has been a sinner*
6. Does the world and people of Noah’s day sound much different than today?
7. Have you ever met a person that lived their life PERFECTLY? Never selfish?
8. From this story, how does God feel about humans?
  - *Disappointment and anger at our corruption*
  - *Compassion - by saving human race & making a promise to not destroy us again*
  - *God is committed to give us the best possible life - He always provides a way for us*
9. What did God say to Noah about blood and life?
  - *All life belongs to God & life is in the blood... all life belongs to & comes from God*
  - *When blood is taken, blood (life) must be given back to Him*
10. Why did God stop the people from building a monument to themselves?

## Resources:

1. **Genesis chapters 4-9** | Read or listen online: <http://bit.ly/gen4-9>
2. **Hebrews 11:4-7** “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks... By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”
3. **Romans 3:23** “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”
4. **Romans 6:23** “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
5. **Not the Way It's Supposed to Be**, Cornelius Plantinga

# ACT THREE: PROMISE



Week 3

*\*This is a longer section. You may need to split it into 2 different gathering times. We have noted which places in this section are good stopping points.*

## **Big Picture:**

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Our identity as the Family of God
- God chose His people by grace not by any merit of their own
- God is looking for a family to trust Him-not trust in their own ways
- The people He chose to work through were messy and sinful (His only choice given the condition of humanity)

## **Scene 1 - The Covenant**

### **(From Genesis 12-25)**

A few generations later, God established a special relationship and a promise with a man named Abram. This special promise was called a covenant— representing the deepest of all agreements between two people. God told Abram, “I want you to leave your country and your family and go to the land that I will show to you. 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.” This was an amazing promise that God was making. He was choosing to bless the entire earth through one family of people!

There was just one problem... Abram’s wife, Sarai, had not been able to have children, so how would the earth be blessed through their descendants? Not to mention that they were getting old. At that time Abram was about 75 and Sarai about 65!

So God led Abram and his family to a land called Canaan. There, God told Abram, “Look as far as you can see in every direction. I am giving this land to you and your descendants.” This land of Canaan would now be called the “Promised Land”.

Some time passed and Abram and Sarai still did not have a child. Abram asked God, “What good are all of your blessings if I don’t even have a son? I am getting old and soon I will have to give my inheritance to one of my servants.” God replied to Abram, “No, you will have a son who will inherit everything that I have promised you.”

Then God took Abram out beneath the night sky and said, “Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your family will be like this—too many to count!” And Abram believed what God said, so God called him “righteous” because of his faith.

Then God caused Abram to fall in to a deep trance while God visited Abram in a vision. To show Abram that He always keeps His promises, God instructed Abram to cut several animals in half, lining up the pieces with a pathway through the middle. In those days, when someone wanted to seal a covenant (the deepest of all agreements), they would walk through the pieces, signifying that if they broke the covenant, they would end up like those animals. They were swearing their life.

God told Abram that His descendants would be imprisoned by another country for four hundred years. But God was going to rescue His people and make them greater in the process. Not only that, but Abram would die at peace as an old man because God always keeps His promises. Then in the vision, God passed through the pieces. God did not ask Abram to pass through the pieces, instead telling him, that He would even give Abram's descendants land! God could be trusted because He always keeps His promises.

More years past and Sarai became impatient with not having a child. She asked her servant, an Egyptian woman named Hagar, to be a surrogate mother for her. Abram agreed with this plan. Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to a boy named Ishmael. But Hagar and Sarai's relationship became strained. During Hagar's pregnancy, she began to despise Sarai. In return, Sarai treated her servant Hagar terribly. Eventually, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away and not allowed to live with Abram's family.

When Abram was 99, God appeared to him again saying, "I am the mighty God; serve me with your entire life and live purely. I will keep my covenant with you for many generations to come. I am changing your name to Abraham, which means 'father of many nations'. Remember this... I will always be your God, and you will always be my people." Then God added, "I am also changing your wife's name to Sarah, which means 'mother of many nations'. Very soon she will be blessed with a son. You are to name this son Isaac." Both Abraham and Sarah laughed to themselves in disbelief of God's promise. Abraham wondered, "How can I become a father at 100 years old? How can Sarah have a baby when she is almost 90?" Sarah thought, "How could a worn out woman like me have a baby? And my husband is even older than I am!"

Abraham asked God, "Would you pass on your blessing through my son Ishmael?" But God said, "Why did you laugh? Is anything too hard for me? About a year from now you will have a son, named Isaac. It is through him that I will pass on my blessing—not through your servant's child."

Sure enough a year later—exactly as God had said—Sarah gave birth to their firstborn son, naming him Isaac, which means "laughter." The birth of Isaac was the beginning of God fulfilling the promise he made to Abraham. God desired for Abraham's descendants, called the Hebrews, to be a new kind of people who would show the world what it means to live in God's ways.

## 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. What was Abraham’s relationship with God like?
  - *Abraham trusted God—he believed God, when God made promises, he got up and left*
2. What strikes you as amazing about the covenant/promises God made with Abraham?
3. Where in the story did we see Abraham struggle to believe the promise?
  - *Abraham thought he would have to give up his inheritance to one of his servants*
  - *Abraham and Sarah laughed at God’s promise and thought “How could this happen...?”*
4. What did God promise to Abraham in this 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*
5. 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!*
6. What does it mean for your life if you believe the fact that you were chosen by God and blessed to be a blessing?
  - *God will protect and bless His people*
7. Where in this story have we seen God begin to keep His promise to Abraham?
8. Where else in the Story so far have we seen God keep His promise? (what He said has actually happened?)
  - *Adam & Eve dying, Cain with sin crouching, Noah with the flood...*
9. When in your life have you MOST had to trust someone? How did that turn out?
10. What is the significance that only God passed through the split pieces of the animals and did not require Abraham to?

## Resources:

1. **Genesis chapters 11-18, 26-50 & Exodus 1**
2. **Abrahamic Covenant, Genesis 12:1-3** “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And 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. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”



## Bridge Story

Years later, Isaac had his own son named Jacob—his name was later changed to Israel, which the descendants of Abraham would be called—meaning “struggler with God”. Jacob had twelve sons. One of his sons, named Joseph, ended up living in Egypt. Joseph invited his family to join him to escape a horrible famine that covered all the land. While living in Egypt, the people of Israel grew into a large nation. After Joseph died, the King of Egypt, named Pharaoh, feared Israel because of their great numbers. He treated them horribly and made Israel his slaves. Their slavery lasted 400 years. But God promised he would bless His people...

## Scene 2 - Deliverance

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

God's people cried out for deliverance from slavery. God heard their cries and remembered them. God used a man named Moses to rescue the Israelites from slavery. He sent Moses to warn Pharaoh that terrible things would happen to the Egyptians if they didn't release God's people. Pharaoh was arrogant and didn't listen, so God sent a series of horrible plagues to punish the Egyptians, but these plagues did not affect the Israelites.

God turned water to blood, filled the nation with frogs, gnats and flies, killed livestock, covered people in boils, destroyed the land with hail and locusts, and brought great darkness over the land. In spite of these horrific events, Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go. So God sent one more plague... a plague that would take the life of every firstborn person and animal in Egypt. But God provided a way for the firstborn of Israel to be spared.

He instructed them to take a first-born male lamb without defect, and sacrifice it to Him without breaking any of its bones. Then, they were to take the blood from the lamb and put it on the doorposts of their homes. So the people of Israel did what God told them to do. At midnight God sent the death angel through Egypt taking the life of all the firstborn, but passing over the homes that had blood on their doorposts. The Egyptians wept over this tragedy and begged the Israelites to leave, releasing them from their slavery. And now Israel, a large nation of over two million people, set out to return to the land God promised to Abraham.

But Pharaoh wanted revenge—he sent his armies after Israel to catch them and kill them. When the Israelites approached the Red Sea they thought they were trapped by the waters and would be caught by the Egyptians. But God split the waters so that the Israelites could cross the river on dry ground. When Pharaoh's armies tried to cross

behind them, God brought a huge wind that blew the waters back over them. The Egyptian Army was completely wiped out!

### **Dialogue:**

1. What do you learn about God in this story?
2. How could the Israelites avoid the death of their firstborn?
  - *They had to kill a lamb that was firstborn, male, and perfect, and put its blood on the door to their house.*
  - *They had to go inside, and hide behind the blood as the death angel passed through the land. God was the provider! Of course they would only do this if they believed God.*
3. In what other place in the Story do we see God's mercy in judgment?
  - *The promised seed that will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15) and yet be bruised in the process*
  - *The replacement of Adam & Eve's man-made clothing with a new, God-made clothing - In the ancient Near East, clothing was a sign of inheritance (i.e. the clothing of Joseph and being clothed in Christ)*
  - *God takes the initiative to provide*

# ACT THREE: PROMISE (continued)

*\*You may need to continue onto the next part of this section a different day or week.*

## Scene 3 - Instructions

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

Two months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites set up camp at the bottom of Mount Sinai. God descended onto the mountain in fire and a thick cloud of smoke covered the mountain. God called Moses into his presence on the top of the mountain. There, God spoke to him saying, “Tell my people this, ‘You saw how I carried you on eagles wings and rescued you from Egypt. Now if you obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured people—a kingdom of priests—set apart to represent me.’”

When Moses came down the mountain he told the people what God said. They all agreed, “We will do everything that God asks us to do. No really, we will follow all the commands.” After that God gave Moses instructions on how the people could return to following His ways and live in freedom, a life lived close to God and under his protection. We call these instructions the Ten Commandments, which were God’s basic rules for life. “I am your God who rescued you from slavery in Egypt...

- Put me above everything else.
- Do not worship other things.
- Do not misuse or disrespect my name.
- Remember to set aside a day each week to rest and worship me.
- Honor your parents.
- Don’t murder.
- Don’t steal.
- Don’t lie.
- Do not sleep with any one but your husband or wife—be faithful.
- Don’t lust after what others have—be satisfied with what I give you.”

God gave Moses more instructions, called laws, to give to Israel. These laws gave specific details about things like: how to treat neighbors and enemies, how to handle conflicts, what is fair punishment, when to work and rest, when to celebrate and worship, and what offerings are acceptable to God. But the people did not want to live within God’s boundaries and rebelled again, calling these instructions a new kind of slavery. Even those who tried to obey these rules found they could not keep them perfectly.

Because God always does what is good, right and perfect, he could not overlook their sins and the ultimate punishment for sin was death. A life must be given to pay for each person’s disobedience. But God loved his people, so He provided a way for them to substitute the life of an innocent animal in place of their own.

People would bring pure animals to God, asking him to transfer their sins to the helpless animal. The animal was killed and its blood was given in place of the guilty person. This system of sacrifice continued for hundreds of years. Eventually, God would ask his people to build something called a Temple, a building where God's presence would dwell among His people and the sacrifices could be made. After performing a series of rituals, the priest would enter into a special part of the Temple called the holy of holies, behind a curtain that symbolized the separation between God, who always does what is good, right and perfect and the sinful world. Here the priest would offer a sacrifice for himself and the people.

Sacrifices for sins had to be given day after day, year after year. And God accepted this, but only as a symbol of what was to come. He was preparing a final sacrifice that would pay for the world's sins once and for all.

### **Dialogue:**

1. Why are the sacrifices and the blood important?
  - *God said sin and rebellion must be paid for - Payment for sin is life (life for life)*
  - *Covenant with Noah teaches life is in the blood - blood is the only way to pay for sin*
  - *God holiness requires sin & rebellion to be dealt with or removed from His presence*
2. In what other place in the Story have we seen that the life (and blood) of an innocent animal was given for the sake of covering another person's sin?
  - *Adam and Eve, when God made clothes for them from the skins of animals.*
3. What is a covenant? What was the covenant that God was talking about?
4. Who was it given to originally?
  - *Abraham*
  - *The people of Israel (review elements of the original covenant promises)*
5. How do you think the Israelites could keep their side of the covenant?
  - *Trust God Obey God's commands*
6. Do you think God would remove His covenant if they did not obey Him?
  - *Partially—He may not bless & protect them but ultimately He chooses to save them*
  - *...to show how great He is, not based on how sinless they are*
7. Do you think this covenant was just for Israel? What do you think God meant by saying, "You will be a kingdom of priests"?
  - *They were to be his "display people" showing the world what He is like*
8. What is the purpose of the Commandments and Laws?
  - *Given once they were rescued from slavery, showing how to live in freedom*
  - *So they could live in covenant with God, close to Him*
9. What do God's Commandments and Laws show us about him?
  - *They show us that God wants to live in a close and grace-filled relationship with Him*
10. What is the result of following in God's ways?

## Scene 4 - The Kings & Prophets

(Story from Deuteronomy; Joshua; Judges; 2 Samuel; 2 Kings; Prophecies from 2 Samuel 7; Isaiah 7, 9, 40, 53, 61; Psalm 22; Micah 5; Zachariah 12)

After wandering the desert for forty years, God led the people of Israel across a river called the Jordan into the Promised Land and helped them recapture the land from their enemies. God gave them many victories in battle, and completely honored his promises to them—but the people rejected him and worshipped false gods. This false worship led them into many other sins.

Because of their sin and disobedience, God removed His protection and allowed them to be overpowered and punished by foreign nations. When the people suffered they would come back to God and beg for His help and forgiveness. God once again forgave them and sent leaders, called judges, to lead them in defeating their enemies. (These are not like judges we have today, but more like generals). Battle after battle, Israel conquered their enemies at every border. In victory the people would worship God, but soon after that the people turned away from God again and lived their own way.

Unfortunately, this became a pattern from generation to generation... the people of Israel would come to God and worship Him when they needed help, but when things were going well, they returned to worshipping other things. This was a time where everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Since kings ruled other nations, the people of Israel complained to God saying, “We want a human king that we can see to rule over us.” God gave the people what they wanted and allowed them to be ruled by a succession of human kings.

One of these earliest kings was named David. Even though David sinned greatly against God, God still called him “a man after God’s own heart.” God made a covenant with David and promised him that one of his heirs would be a king who would reign forever as king over God’s people and also as king over the entire Earth!

Unfortunately, the line of kings descending from David rebelled against God and His authority. God sent prophets to challenge the kings and the people to obey God and fulfill their role to be a light to the nations and bring blessing to them. But time and time again they refused to listen to these prophets. Because of their rebellion, God removed His protection from Israel and her kings and allowed other nations to come in and conquer them. The Israelites were forced out of the Promised Land and sent into exile, eventually to become slaves again.

For centuries God's people, Israel, would be out of their land and under the oppressive thumb of one world power after another. God continued to send prophets to the people even in exile. These prophets told of a hope that one day God would make a new covenant with His rebellious people. He would do this by sending a great savior, an eternal king called a Messiah, who would...

... fulfill the covenant himself

... redeem God's people from exile

... save God's people

... live a perfect life without sin

... and rule over God's creation forever!

Despite the warnings of the prophets, the people of Israel stopped listening to God, and God did not speak again for 400 hundred years.

### Dialogue:

1. What, to you, are the most striking characteristics of the history of the Israelites?
  - *What is the pattern that the Israelites got into?*
  - *They trusted in themselves instead of God, determining good and evil for themselves*
  - *When it got them into trouble they cried out to God...and He saved them!*
  - *Then they went back to doing what was right in their own eyes - they followed other gods after all He had done for them*
2. In what ways can you relate to this pattern that the Israelites lived in?
3. How quick are you to question or submit to authority in your life? Are you quicker to assume your own authority? Why or why not?
4. Overall, how has it worked throughout the Story when humans have not obeyed God's commands and lived for themselves?
5. How often does our world or culture justify things for personal comfort?
6. Who saved them from slavery initially and then over and over again?
7. From all of the stories so far what have you learned about God?

### Resources:

1. Much more than you could easily read in a week—the story comes from the books of **Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 2 Samuel, and 2 Kings**
2. Read or listen online: <http://bit.ly/deut> | <http://bit.ly/joshua> | <http://bit.ly/2sam> | <http://bit.ly/2kings>

# ACT FOUR: REDEMPTION



Week 5

*\*This is the longest section. You may need to split it into 3 different gathering times. We have noted which places in this section are good stopping points.*

## **Big Picture:**

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

We're going to look at someone who:

- Displayed the identities of Learner and Servant
- Was born of a virgin (human)
- Was baptized (identified with sinful humanity)
- Was led by the Spirit (Spirit-empowered)
- Was tempted (victorious over temptation - a sinless life)
- Was a Perfect Man (did what Adam did not do by overcoming the tempter and living a life of faith - perfect submission and obedience to the Father)

## **Scene 1 - The Birth of Jesus**

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

400 years passed since God had spoken to his people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundred of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire that the world had ever known. The Jews were still waiting and hoping for a king who would come to save them and lead them into victory.

Finally, God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph who was a direct descendant of King David which meant he was also a descendant of Abraham's. The angel told Mary that she would become pregnant and give birth to God's Son—even though she was still a virgin! The angel revealed that this child in her was from the Holy Spirit and would become a king whose kingdom would never end!

Sure enough, the next year Mary gave birth to a son, whom they named Jesus, which means, "the Lord is salvation." Not only did God reveal to Mary and Joseph that this boy was the long awaited Messiah king, but he revealed it to others, too. Angels shouted the news to shepherds who then ran into town to find the baby Jesus and tell everyone the amazing news! A star guided wise men from distant lands to come and worship and bring gifts to this newborn king. This birth was truly a miracle! Jesus grew up in both height and wisdom, and was loved by God and everyone who knew him.

## 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. What was unique about Jesus’ birth?
2. Who was Jesus a descendant of? How might this be significant?
  - *King David / Abraham*
  - *The Covenant being fulfilled*
  - *Prophecy fulfilled*
3. What else did you hear in this story that reminds you of what the prophets said about the messiah?
  - *Born of a virgin in Bethlehem / Nazareth*
4. Why might these things be important?
  - *His human, virgin birth shows that he is a human*
  - *It was predicted by the prophets that this would be true of the Messiah*
5. What does Jesus’ name mean? –
  - *The Lord is Salvation*
  - *Lord (of who...what?)*
  - *What is salvation? For who, from what? To what?*

## Scene 2 - Jesus’ Baptism

(Story from Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1)

God sent a messenger named John to tell people to get ready because the Messiah was coming to establish God’s kingdom. John was a distant cousin of Jesus, born just six months before him. He was a rugged man who lived in the wilderness, ate locusts and wild honey, and wore clothes made out of camel hair. John boldly challenged the Jews, “Don’t just say that you love God—prove it with your life. Turn from your sins and turn to God!”

He became known as John the Baptizer as he dunked those who had confessed their sins in the Jordan River. Baptism was a symbol that you were a part of God’s true people and of being washed clean from your sins and choosing a new way of living.

When Jewish leaders asked John if he was the Messiah, he responded, “No! But someone is coming soon who is far greater than me—I’m not worthy to untie his sandals or even to be his slave. You see... I baptize with water, but he will baptize with God’s Spirit!”

Soon after that Jesus came to be baptized. When John saw him he said, “I’m the one who needs to be baptized by you.” But Jesus insisted, so John baptized him in front of the crowds. When Jesus came out of the water, God’s Spirit came down from the sky—it looked like a dove floating down and resting on him. Then a voice from heaven said, “You are my son who I love—you bring me great joy!”



## Dialogue:

1. What do we learn about John from this scene?
2. What was John's message?
3. Why were people coming to be baptized by John?
4. What is significant about God saying to Jesus, "This is my son who I love..."?
  - *Declaring Jesus is his son! Son of God!!!*
5. What is God affirming for everyone publicly?
  - *Jesus' identity!*
6. What might change in your life if your identity came primarily from the Creator God's affirmation of you?

## Scene 3 - Jesus' Temptation

### (Story from Matthew 4; Luke 4)

Immediately after Jesus was baptized, God's Spirit led him into the wilderness. There, Satan tempted him for forty days and forty nights. During that entire time Jesus didn't eat anything and became very hungry. Satan tried to deceive Jesus saying, "If you're God's Son, why don't you turn these rocks into loaves of bread to eat?"

Jesus answered him, "No! When God spoke to Moses He said, 'People need more than bread to live—they must find their life in the words of God.'" Then Satan took Jesus to the top of the tallest building in Jerusalem and said, "If you are God's Son, jump off! Your sacred writings say, 'God will send His angels to catch you and you won't even hit the ground!'" Jesus replied, "Moses also wrote, 'Do not even try to test God.'"

Next, Satan took Jesus to the peak of a huge mountain. He showed him all of the nations of the world in their brilliance. He said, "I will give you all of this—anything you want—if you'll kneel down and worship me." Jesus responded, "Get away from me, Satan! It's commanded, 'Put God above everything else and only worship Him!'"

Then Satan went away and angels came and took care of Jesus. At this time he was about thirty years old. Throughout Jesus' life he never sinned or rebelled against God. He always chose to do what was good and right and perfect.

## Dialogue:

1. In your own words, what was Satan tempting Jesus with?

*There are clues to this answer in how Jesus responds to each of Satan's temptations...*

- *Food: To trust in his own provision for himself—but God is the true provider—God is good, so we don't have to look elsewhere*
- *Faith: To test his faith/relationship with God—but God alone is trustworthy—God is great, so we don't have to be in control*
- *Fame: To gain Jesus' worship, away from God—but God alone is worthy to be worshipped (where in the Story have we seen Satan try to do this before?)—God is glorious, so we don't have to fear others*

2. How did Jesus respond in this scene to Satan's temptations?

3. How was this different from Adam? How was it different from Israel in the wilderness?

- *Resisted and quoted God's Words to Satan*
- *Jesus is the perfect Adam & true Israelite*

4. What is Satan challenging when he asks Jesus... "If you're the son of God...do this"?

- *His Identity!*

5. Where have we seen Satan challenge a person and tempt them before? Did he challenge Eve's identity too?

- *"God just knows that you will be like Him if you eat..." They were created in God's image! To be like him!*
- *Satan's scheme is always the same here—twist God's original Words around and challenge our identity in God*

6. What are your thoughts about the part of the Story where it said: "Jesus never sinned or rebelled against God. He always chose to do what was good and right and perfect?"

7. From what we've seen & learned about humans so far, have we ever seen this before?

8. Have humans done well at managing good and evil, right and wrong?

- *But Jesus is a human...how could he be perfect!?*
- *Only God does what is good, right and perfect - Only God has the ability to manage good and evil perfectly*
- *Jesus would have to be God - He is God's Son—both God and man*
- *And yet, even though he was sinless, Jesus was born of a woman and baptized to identify with sinful humanity*

9. How well do you do at always choosing what is good and right and perfect?

10. What do you think enabled Jesus to do this—live this way perfectly?

# Scene 4 - Jesus' Disciples

(Story from Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 5)

Not long after that, John saw Jesus coming toward him and yelled out, "Look! There is God's Passover Lamb—he'll take away the sins of the world! God showed me he's the Messiah we've been waiting for—God's own son!"

As Jesus walked along the sea he told some of John's followers, "Come and follow me!" From then on Jesus surrounded himself with a few close followers, called disciples, showing them how to live in the ways of God. Then Jesus traveled throughout the area meeting in market places, homes and Jewish synagogues, teaching people God's ways. He brought a new message to them saying, "The Kingdom of God has come—now turn from your sins and turn to God!" Full of the Spirit's power, Jesus healed people with every kind of sickness and disease. News spread quickly about him and huge crowds began following him wherever he went. People traveled from miles away to be near him and see the amazing miracles he performed.

## Dialogue:

1. Why did John say, "Look! There is God's Passover Lamb"?
2. What do you remember about the first Passover lamb from earlier in the Story?
3. Where in the Story today did we see God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit) mentioned?
  - *Mary becomes pregnant through the work of the Spirit*
  - *At Jesus' baptism & when he's led into the wilderness to be tempted*
4. Where do you think Jesus got his power to do miracles?
5. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from all of this?
  - *The Father sent the Spirit*
  - *The Spirit has power and leads Jesus*
6. What do we learn about Jesus from this story (all four scenes)?
  - *Jesus humbled himself - He is God and man*
  - *God called him His Son whom He loves*
  - *He never rebelled against God, living a sinless life*
  - *He has amazing powers & He taught in new ways*
  - *People wanted to be near him*

## Resources:

1. Beginnings of the Gospels According to **Matthew, Luke and John**.
2. **The Word Became Flesh** (John Piper discusses the Incarnation in John 1—from an invisible God, to the law, to Jesus living among us, to Jesus revealing God to us, to God giving us grace.) | <http://bit.ly/piper-word-flesh>
3. **Is Jesus the Only Way to God?** (Jonathan Dodson) | <http://aclpodcast.libsyn.com/rss>
4. **Who Is This Jesus?** (A talk by Tim Keller looking at Jesus' claim to be God and our possible responses.) | <http://bit.ly/keller-who-is-jesus>

# ACT FOUR: REDEMPTION (continued)

*\*You may need to continue onto the next part of this section a different day or week.*

## Big Picture:

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Miracles (affirming Jesus' deity and power)
- Kingdom Teaching - Jesus is the perfect human KING come as a humble servant
- Showing the foretaste of the future - his life and teachings show us what the world should be like and will be under His rule
- Jesus' Calling: I am the Way the Truth and the Life
- God is a loving Father who desires restoration with His children

## Scene 5 - Jesus' Miracles

**(Story from Mark 2-5; Luke 3; John 1)**

Crowds followed Jesus wherever he went as he performed many miracles and healings. He cast demons out of people and the demons shuddered in fear before Jesus. His teaching and miracles concerned the local Jewish leaders; they were not comfortable with some of Jesus' unusual methods.

One time when Jesus was teaching he told a paralyzed man, "Don't worry, your sins are forgiven." When some local religious leaders questioned Jesus on who gave him the authority to forgive sins, saying God alone can forgive sin, Jesus proved his authority to them by healing the man completely!

Another time, Jesus was exhausted after teaching all day. He suggested that he and the disciples get into a boat and go to the other side of the sea. A fierce storm came up suddenly. No matter how hard they tried, his disciples couldn't keep the boat from filling with water and went to Jesus in a panic. Jesus stood up, and said to the wind and waves, "Quiet, be still now." And the wind stopped blowing and the sea became calm. When the disciples saw this they looked at each other and said, "Who is this man that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

On several occasions Jesus raised people from the dead. Once as Jesus was traveling he was asked to go to the home of a man named Jairus whose daughter was very sick. While on the way to their home, news arrived that the girl had already died. Jesus continued on and when he arrived at Jairus' home there was a crowd of people inside weeping loudly. Jesus asked them, "Why are you crying? The girl is not dead—she's sleeping." The crowd laughed at him. When they went into the girl's room, Jesus took the girl's hand and said,

“Little girl, get up!” Immediately the girl jumped out of bed and began walking around! Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were absolutely amazed!

After spending an entire night in prayer, Jesus chose twelve men out of all of his followers to be his apprentices, calling them apostles. They traveled with Jesus wherever he went as he taught them to live in the ways of God. He sent the apostles out to heal the sick, teach others what they had learned and to share the good news that God’s kingdom had finally come.

### **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. Did God create humans to live forever?
2. From what we’ve learned from the Story so far, why do people die?
3. Who gave man his life?
4. Who do you think has the power to raise people from the dead?
5. If Jesus has the authority to forgive sin, and has power over the creation, and has authority over the demons, and can raise the dead back to life, then who do you think he is?
6. Why do you think Jesus was performing these miracles?
  - *Jesus is reversing the effects of God’s curse on creation*
  - *Restoring it to perfect order!*
7. What are your thoughts about all of this?

## **Scene 6 - The Kingdom**

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

Jesus continued to teach people, “After all these years... finally... the Kingdom of God has come—turn from your sin and your own way of doing things and turn to God and His way!” One day he climbed up a hill with a group of his closest followers. They sat down together and Jesus began to teach them about life in God’s Kingdom.

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.” Then Jesus went on to teach about God’s laws that were given to Moses. Jesus said, “Don’t think I came to get rid of the laws of Moses and the writings of the Prophets. I have come to fulfill them!” He taught them, “The laws and commands tell you not to murder, but I say if you hate someone or insult them you are just as guilty as a murderer. Your words and actions bring judgment on you.” “The laws also tell us to never have sex with someone else’s spouse. But I say anyone who even looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.”

He also taught them, "If someone steals your shirt from you, offer them your coat too. Live generously! Love your enemies. Anyone can love their friends—but you are to love the unlovable. You must live differently, doing what is good, right and perfect—just like God your Father."

The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching; He had real power and authority - unlike anything they had ever seen.

(Pause for a moment...)

Jesus continued to teach about the Kingdom of God using short stories that had powerful meanings, called parables. He said, "The Kingdom of God is like a tiny seed that is planted in a field. This seed may be small at first but it grows into a large tree where birds can come and find shelter."

Jesus told dozens of stories like this to the crowds. He said the Kingdom is...

- Like a hidden treasure buried in a field—worth diligently searching for,
- Like yeast spread in a large ball of dough—just a little will change a lot,
- Like a precious pearl—worth trading everything for,
- Like a great feast—where the poor, the forgotten and the outcast all get invited, and on and on...

Jesus was asked, "When is this 'Kingdom' that you are teaching about going to come?" Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God is not something you can predict. People will not say, 'here it is,' or 'there it is,' because the Kingdom of God is already here in your midst." "Do not let all of this bother you. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms and I am going there to prepare a place just for you. You know the way to the place where I am going."

One of Jesus' followers asked him, "Lord, how can we be with you if we do not know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes back into a close relationship with the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father too. From now on, you do know him and have seen him in me."

People were astonished at Jesus' teaching and wisdom. They understood some of these pictures, but others remained a mystery to them.

One night a religious teacher named Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, "We know you were sent by God to teach us. Your miracles haven't proven that God is with you." Jesus replied, "You're right—but unless someone is born a second time they will never understand God's Kingdom." "What do you mean?", Nicodemus questioned. "How can someone who is fully grown climb back inside their mother and be born a second time?" Jesus answered him, "The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they have been born a second time by God's Spirit. Humans can only give human life, but God's Spirit gives new life in the Kingdom."

“How can this happen!?” Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, “What I am telling you is true. God showed His great love for people by sending me—His only Son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me and lives in my ways 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?  
**(IMPORTANT!!! You may need to guide people to the following answers. But seeing how this builds in the Story is hugely important. Otherwise, people will start thinking the Kingdom of God is some abstract, otherworldly idea.)**
  - *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 & make him a great nation that included all nations*
  - *God promised to make one of King David’s sons a king who would rule forever*
  - *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. Is his Kingdom like that of the human kings we heard about earlier in the Story?
  - *No—Jesus is the perfect human King always doing what is good, right & perfect*
  - *He is the true King the people always wanted!*
5. What would the world be like if everyone lived in the Kingdom, under God’s rule, care and protection?

## Scene 7 - The Lost Son

### (Story from Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus told them another parable about a father and his sons. “There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'I want my inheritance right now—give me what's coming to me!' "So the father divided the property between the sons.

It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and self-indulgent, he wasted everything he had on partying and prostitutes. After he had gone through all his money he ended up homeless and hungry. He got a job with a farmer who assigned him to his fields to feed the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. "That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, "Father, I've sinned against God; I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand."' He got right up and went home to his father.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again...'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring the best robe and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here! It is like he was dead and now he's alive! He was lost but now he is found!' And they began to have a wonderful time.

### **Dialogue:**

1. Why doesn't the father punish the son?
2. Why does he put the family ring on his finger?
3. What are they celebrating? The son did nothing but bad... does he deserve forgiveness and a celebration?
4. Who does the father in this story remind you of?
5. What would happen to you if your life was saved in this way?
6. The story of the lost son is a picture of what is called the *gospel*... after hearing this story, how would you explain the gospel?

### **Resources:**

1. **The Gospel in All its Forms** (Keller explains that like God, the gospel is both one and more than that.) | <http://bit.ly/17Btv2V>



# ACT FOUR: REDEMPTION (continued)

*\*You may need to continue onto the next part of this section a different day or week.*

## Big Picture:

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Substitutionary atonement - Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
- Forgiveness of sins
- Jesus is Lord over sin and death
- Jesus is Lord over all
- Is Jesus Lord over your life?

## Scene 8 - One Last Meal

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

Jesus and his disciples traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. Everywhere he went he had compassion on people and met their needs. The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders were becoming increasingly upset with Jesus and his claims. He continued to tell people that he could forgive their sins. This enraged the Jewish leaders—they saw this as the ultimate disrespect to God. They looked for ways to trap Jesus into saying something they could arrest him for, but Jesus was too wise for them.

Many of his stories pointed out the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. Jesus said, “When the Pharisees and teachers share with you God’s commands, listen to them—but don’t follow their example. They don’t live out what they teach.” The High Priest met with these leaders to discuss capturing Jesus and putting him to death. “We can’t arrest him during Passover,” they agreed, “or it will create a huge riot.”

Jesus and his 12 disciples met together in a home to celebrate the Passover. During the meal Jesus picked up some bread, thanked God for it, and broke it into pieces. Giving it to his disciples he said, “Take this and eat it, this is my body given for you.” Then Jesus picked up a cup of wine and thanked God for it. He gave them the cup and said, “All of you, drink this. It is my blood given for you—a new covenant between God and his people. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many. Remember me when you continue to eat and drink these things together.”

Jesus told them, “When you see what happens tonight you will all abandon me. It is part of God’s plan that I will be betrayed and die. But don’t fear, I will rise again from the dead!” He knew that his disciple Judas would betray him, bringing Jewish soldiers to capture him later that night when no one was around. After the meal, when it was dark,

Jesus went to pray. Filled with pain and sorrow, he pleaded with God, “Father, if there is another way besides my death, please let that happen—but I will do whatever you ask.”

### **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. Why was Jesus going to Jerusalem? What do we know about this celebration?
2. What was God’s Old Covenant with his people? What do you think this “New Covenant” is?
  - *The covenant was originally given to Moses...I will be your God & you will be my people*
  - *I will be your God AND I will enable you to be my people - to keep your end of the covenant (God will keep both sides of the new covenant)*

## **Scene 9 - Death and Resurrection**

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

Just as he had finished praying, Judas showed up with an armed mob. He greeted Jesus with a kiss—a sign to show the guards which one they should arrest. Jesus said to them, “Am I a dangerous criminal that you need weapons to capture me? Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple where I’ve been teaching everyday? No! This is part of God’s plan, just as the prophets predicted long ago.” When the guards arrested Jesus and dragged him away, the disciples ran away and hid. The guards beat Jesus and brought him before the Jewish leaders for questioning.

They asked, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” Jesus answered, “I am, and you will see me seated next to God in power, coming back on the clouds of heaven,” (symbols of his authority and power). When Jesus said this, the High Priest tore his clothing in horror and said, “Any man who claims to be God must be put to death.” Then they slapped Jesus in the face and spit on him.

Jesus was brought to the Roman governor, Pilate, since Jews could not execute anyone without official approval. The Jewish leaders stirred up the crowds and pressured Pilate to have Jesus put to death. They shouted, “CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!”

Pilate feared a riot would break out, so he handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Crucifixion was the most cruel and humiliating way to die. Jesus was brutally beaten and whipped by the soldiers. They put a crown of sharp thorns on his head and a purple robe around his shoulders. “Hail the King of the Jews!” they laughed. All night, the Roman soldiers continued to beat Jesus and mock him.

When morning came, they led Jesus to a place called Skull Hill. Like a criminal, Jesus was nailed to a heavy wooden cross between two thieves. Hanging there, he cried out,

“Father, please forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.” At noon, darkness filled the skies—blocking out the sun for three hours. Suddenly, the thick curtain hanging in the Temple tore down the middle! At that moment Jesus shouted, “Father! I give you my life... it is finished.” Then Jesus breathed his last breath and died.

The soldiers broke the legs of the criminals crucified next to Jesus to speed up their death. When they found that Jesus was already dead, they didn’t break his legs. To be sure, one of the soldiers stabbed him in the side with a spear—blood and water poured out.

Late Friday afternoon, Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross, wrapped in long strips of cloth, and buried in a rich man’s tomb. A large stone was rolled over the entrance to the tomb and Roman guards were posted to make sure nothing happened to his body. (Pause for a moment...)

Early on Sunday morning, some of the women who followed Jesus went to prepare his body for burial. When they arrived at the tomb, they saw the stone rolled away and the soldiers were gone! Suddenly, two angels appeared. They said, “Why are you surprised? You are looking for Jesus, but he is not here, he’s been raised from the dead.” The women were excited but afraid and hurried to tell the disciples the amazing news. Some of them ran back to the tomb and looked inside for themselves...

Jesus was not there!

In fact, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times over the next 40 days. They touched him, saw him eat food and perform miracles again. Jesus reminded them of his teaching about the Kingdom and opened their minds to understand how the whole Story has led up to him. Over 500 people saw him alive.

## Dialogue:

1. How does the Passover story we heard earlier remind you of Jesus' death?
  - *Jesus is the Passover Lamb that takes away the sins of the world...*
2. Why do you think the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?
3. Why did the curtain in the Temple tear in half? What did the curtain separate?
  - *The curtain represented the separation of God from His people*
  - *When it tore in half, it indicated this separation was being brought to an end; heaven & earth would be reunified*
4. How did Jesus fulfill the prophet's predictions about the coming Messiah?
5. Do you remember what Jesus said when he was hanging on the cross?
6. How could Jesus possibly forgive those who were killing him?
7. Do you believe that God can forgive what you have done in your life?
8. Do you believe he has forgiven you?
9. How is Jesus being raised from the dead significant? What does it say about him?
  - *He conquered death—the results of human sin and rebellion!*
  - *He didn't just exchange his life for ours to pay for our sins, but 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?

## Resources:

1. **Raised? Doubting the Resurrection** (a short eBook on the plausibility of the resurrection by Jonathan Dodson & Brad Watson) | [raisedbook.com](http://raisedbook.com)

# ACT FIVE: CHURCH



Week 8

*\*This section may need to be split into 2 different gathering times. We have noted which places in this section are good stopping points.*

## **Big Picture:**

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Jesus' commission to make disciples and be his witnesses
- Jesus is the Lord of the mission
- Disciples wait on the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit comes to live in disciples
- Disciples are empowered by the Holy Spirit
- The gospel is preached
- Thousands respond, repent and are baptized
- A call here to affirm Jesus as Lord by being baptized in community (Family)

## **Scene 1 - The Mission and Power**

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

In the weeks that followed Jesus death, he appeared to his disciples many times and was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses. Quickly, the news about his resurrection spread throughout the land.

One of Jesus' disciples named Thomas said, "I won't believe he is alive unless I can put my fingers into the holes where his hands were nailed to the cross." A few days later, Jesus appeared to his disciples and said to Thomas, "Put your fingers here—feel the hole in my hand. Put your hand into the wound on my side." Thomas shouted, "It is you, Jesus—my God!" Then Jesus said, "I will bless those even more who haven't seen, but still believe!"

Soon after that, Jesus met with his disciples over a meal. He said, "John baptized you in water, but in a few days you will be baptized with God's Spirit. This will give you power to live in my ways and tell the entire world about me."

Jesus commanded his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, GO and make disciples of all the nations, all over the world. Baptize these new disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey all the commands I have given you and to walk in my ways. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." God's Spirit will come and live inside of you—giving you peace and leading you in all the ways of truth." As the disciples watched, Jesus went up into the sky, disappearing in the clouds right in front of them!

(Pause for a moment...)

A few weeks later, a group of 120 of Jesus' followers, including his closest disciples gathered to pray together in Jerusalem. All of sudden, they heard a loud sound, like a roaring windstorm, that filled the house where they were meeting. Each of them was filled with God's Spirit and started speaking in languages that were not their own! They went out into the street and began to tell people about all that Jesus had done.

This roaring sound was heard throughout the entire city, and a large crowd had gathered outside the house to see what was going on. At that time, Jews from all over the world were living in Jerusalem. When the people heard Jesus' followers speaking, they said, "How can this be? They're from Galilee, but they're speaking in our own languages. This is amazing!" One of Jesus' disciples, named Peter, stepped forward to explain to the crowds what was happening. He said, "This is part of God's prophecy being fulfilled. We are eyewitnesses of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and is the true Messiah!"

Then Peter explained how Jesus had fulfilled everything the prophets said about the Messiah. He told the crowd, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God. In Jesus, you will find forgiveness—he is the final sacrifice for everyone's sin. This is God's new covenant offered not just to the Jews, but for all who want to be part of God's family." That day, thousands believed what Peter said and repented putting their trust in Jesus. They turned from their sins to follow Jesus and walk in God's ways. They were baptized and became a part of God's family—once again empowered to live out God's promise to be a blessing to all people.

God's new covenant was not written on tablets of stone like before, but on the hearts and minds of His people, so they would always know how to live in His ways. These followers of Jesus were deeply committed to God and each other... sharing everything they had, praying, learning God's ways together, and helping anyone in need all with great joy and generosity. Daily they ate together to honor and remember Jesus' life given for them. They saw God do amazing things through them—miracles and healing—as He added people to their group each day.

This was the beginning of what the Bible calls the Church—a community of people all over the world who, because of Jesus, once again enjoy a life that is full and complete—a life lived close to God—the way God always intended it to be!

### **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. What is the mission Jesus sends his disciples on?
  - *Make disciples and baptize them...*
2. What is a disciple? How do you make a disciple?
3. Where in the Story have we seen God's work having implications for all nations?
  - *The covenant with Abraham, "All nations on Earth will be blessed through you..."*

4. In light of the mission, why is it important that Jesus has ALL authority?
  - *He has the authority to command the mission*
  - *He has the authority to fulfill the mission*
  - *Disciples make disciples in his authority and power - not our own*
5. What do you think is the implication of “GO” and “make” disciples...? What are Jesus’ disciples to be about?
  - *“Go” implies intentionality, movement, change*
  - *“Make” implies it’s a process*
6. Is this command also for us today?
7. What’s the difference between someone who believes in God and a disciple of Jesus?
8. How do you need to live differently in light of this command?
  - *Disciples make disciples - Who are you discipling now in your life?*
9. Who is to be baptized? What is the purpose of baptism?
  - *If you have submitted to Jesus as Lord of your life and have confessed this to be true in your life, then you are his disciple... Have you been baptized?*
  - *Is there anything keeping you from being obedient in this way?*
10. In the Story, thousands repented and put their trust in Jesus. What were they repenting of and turning to?
  - *Living for themselves, as their own God, and turning to God in faith*
  - *Submitting to Jesus’ Lordship over all of life*
11. What was the result of their repentance? How did they live differently?
12. What do we learn about the Spirit from this Story?
  - *Jesus said God’s Spirit will come live inside you, giving peace & leading you in truth*
  - *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 preceded them preaching the gospel, even affecting their language and interpreting the gospel to the hearts of the listeners individually (many languages)!*
  - *THEN they went boldly to explain to people what happened - It was the work of the Spirit preceding and empowering their “going and preaching the gospel.”*
13. Do you have a growing sense of the Spirit of God dwelling in you?
14. How is the work of the Holy Spirit changing your life right now?
15. After Jesus ascended into heaven, what were his followers/disciples doing?
  - *Jesus commissions them; they wait on God’s Spirit in prayer*
  - *That is their role - Wait on God’s power*
  - *They were praying (listening) and the Spirit came*

## Resources:

1. **Prayer and the Gospel** (A great article by Keller on how the gospel changes our prayers from mere petition to fellowship with God in Christ.) | <http://bit.ly/1zLhyiQ>

# ACT FIVE: CHURCH (continued)

*\*You may need to continue onto the next part of this section a different day or week.*

## Scene 2 - The Early Church (Part 1)

**(Story from Acts 2, 4, 9:31; 1 Corinthians 16; 2 Corinthians 8)**

The Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled all the disciples, marked the beginning of the new covenant people, known as the Church. Thousands came to believe all that Jesus had done for them.

These new disciples of Jesus spent time together in prayer and were united in heart and mind so they shared everything they had. Selling their possessions and goods, they felt that what they owned was not their own. There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to anyone in need. They celebrated communion in their homes and ate together all with great joy, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. They testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. And the Lord added to their number daily people who were being saved.

The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. Everyone was filled with awe and all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade where they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching of the Word.

Guided by the Spirit, the church grew in Jerusalem and then spread throughout the region as the disciples gave their lives fully to the work of the gospel. They continued to preach about Jesus' death and resurrection and new life for all who would believe. They lived generous lives, sacrificing for those who were in need. All of this displayed God's great generosity toward mankind in real, tangible ways.

The believers were encouraged in a letter by one of the apostles, named Paul, "I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.

Despite great opposition, these were times of great growth and blessing for the Church as they were guided and strengthened by the indwelling Holy Spirit who led them in all the ways of truth and life.



## Dialogue:

1. What are the disciples up to in this new life? What types of things are they doing?
  - *Prayer, sharing their things, selling things to fund the mission, eating together, preaching, giving to the work, sacrificing, learning from the Apostles, studying the Word, celebrating communion, living a life of service...*
2. Where did you see them living out these Rhythms:
  - *Blessing, Listening, Eating, Speaking, Sabbath (Celebrating and/or Resting)*
3. What parts of this story are true in your life today?
4. Which parts of the story do you wish were true in your life?
5. What do you think is keeping these things from being true?

## Scene 3 - The Early Church (Part 2)

### (Story from 1 Corinthians)

Several years went by and problems began to arise among some of the believers. They were no longer living under the power of the Spirit, but instead were becoming just like the rest of their culture...

Corinth was a port city, and along with great economic gain and philosophical understanding came questionable moral behavior. The problems of the city began to affect the Corinthian church. Quarreling and divisiveness had sprung up among the believers and some leaders started to claim spiritual superiority over one another. Some of the believers even began to sue one another in public courts.

Others were coming to their communal meals and overeating and drinking to the point where some were drunk and some went away hungry. Sexual immorality in the church became a problem too. One man was even reported to be having an affair with his own stepmother and no one was doing anything about it! On top of all of that, the church was starting to divide itself into factions based on who's preaching they liked the best.

The Apostle Paul wrote them a letter stating, "each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.'" But Paul told them, "all things are yours . . . you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. The place of the preachers is not to establish themselves as leaders among men; instead, people should think of us all as servants of Christ."

There were also fights about which spiritual gifts were the "best" and they began to argue about whether Jesus was really raised from the dead or not. The good news for this story is that the church in Corinth was teachable and ultimately repented.

## Dialogue:

1. What was going on here? What had happened? Why such a difference between this church and the way things were in the beginning...?
2. How do you see “the church” acting like the Corinthian church today?
3. What is our only hope of not ending up like the Corinthian church...or being completely like the flesh-led world?
  - *Life led by the Spirit!*
  - *Romans 8:1-2 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”*

## Resources:

1. **The War Within: Flesh vs. Spirit** (John Piper teaching from Galatians 5 answers the what, why and how of “walking in the Spirit.”) | <http://bit.ly/piper-spirit>
2. **Pentecost: Transcendence and Truth** (sermon by Jonathan Dodson) | <http://aclpodcast.libsyn.com/rss>
3. **What is a Spirit-Filled Disciple?** (sermon by Jonathan Dodson) | <http://aclpodcast.libsyn.com/rss>

# ACT SIX: RESTORATION



Week 10

## Big Picture:

*This is where we're going... the big ideas you want people to understand more deeply during this session.*

- Spiritual disciplines (walking in the Spirit, prayer, Word, giving)
- Personal transformation (fruit of the Spirit)
- Gospel in rhythms of life (Spirit in life)
- Community life & service
- Renewal and restoration of all things!

## Scene 1 - Creation Restored

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

Jesus promised to come back one day, saying, "When I return again, everyone will know I am here. It'll be like a huge flash of lighting that fills the sky!" When Jesus returns he will restore the earth, setting it free from its curse. He will destroy all evil, sin and rebellion. There will be no more sin or sickness, pain, or death. Every Christian will be resurrected and restored just like Jesus. And they will live forever!

God showed one of Jesus' disciples, named John, what this would be like, in a dream. John faithfully wrote down all that God showed him... John wrote: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth were gone. And the sea was no more! 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, clear as crystal, 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. And they will see his face, and they will be known and marked as his own. 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!

### **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. When you heard this story today, what did it remind you of in the bigger Story we have heard so far?
  - *The garden, the way things were originally*
  - *God with humans, peace, harmony*
  - *No death - Humans living forever*
  - *All things restored to what God had intended!*
2. What do we see that was broken early in the story that is now reconciled and restored? Who restores it?
  - *Relationships, nature, life...everything!*
  - *Jesus is the one who makes all things new*
  - *Remember, he is Lord over creation, Lord over humanity, Lord over ALL!*
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*

### **Resources:**

1. **Heaven** (Randy Alcorn uses Scripture to help answer questions about what the new earth will be like.) | <http://bit.ly/heaven-book>
2. **The Dwelling Place of God & The Future of Faith** (sermon by Jonathan Dodson) | <http://aclpodcast.libsyn.com/rss>

## Other Recommended Resources:

[The Story-Line of the Bible](http://bit.ly/1LKITYb) (Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen) | <http://bit.ly/1LKITYb>

[The God Who is There](http://amzn.to/1LNddmR) (D.A. Carson) | <http://amzn.to/1LNddmR>

[The Drama of Scripture](http://amzn.to/1wskyVx) (Michael Goheen) | <http://amzn.to/1wskyVx>

[Audio Sample of the Story of God](http://bit.ly/1vCXjHG) (Soma Communities) | <http://bit.ly/1vCXjHG>