



"It's always good to remember where you come from and celebrate it. To remember where you come from is part of where you're going." - Anthony Burgess

-SETUP-

All of our lives are made up of stories. Stories about our family, stories about us, stories about our country, city, school, etc. Stories shape the way we look at life. They're powerful! But what if I told you there is a Story that actually helps us make sense of our lives and why things work the way they do in the world? What if I told you... all the best stories ever told are actually echoing a Bigger Story that God is unfolding? Well this story exists! It's called "the Story of God". The Story begins, not with us, but with God. Deep down, we have a sense that this is true. We sense that we are important - that there is something dignified, majestic, and eternal about humanity. But we also know that we are not ultimate. Something (or Someone) greater than us exists. The Story of God is the story of Redemption that the Bible tells from cover to cover. It follows this pattern - CREATION - FALL - REDEMPTION - RESTORATION, and it tells of an amazing God who created a perfect world full of beauty, love, and amazing possibilities. It tells of heartbreak, sadness, loss, and pain. But it tells us of a God who came to redeem and promises a day when He will restore all that has been lost and more!

The story we're about to read is not a direct quote; it is a summary of the Story of the whole Bible. It will quickly give us the big picture on what God is up to and what life is all about. If you've never read the bible or you know a ton about it, either way this will be a great way to see the bigger picture of what God is up to...

-THE STORY OF GOD-

CREATION: This is a story found in the Bible about God, a being who has always existed and is the creator of everything out of nothing. God is the only one in this story who always does what is good, right, and perfect; the Bible calls Him holy, infinite, eternal, and unchanging. God exists in three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because God is Truine in his being, he wasn't motivated to create the world because he needed something - be it relationship, worship, or glory. Rather, he

created out of the overflow of his perfection - his own love, goodness, and glory. While God created the foundations of the earth, angels (His first creation) were there watching. They sang together and worshiped God . . . but some of these angels rebelled against God and His ways. The Bible teaches that all rebellion against God is called sin. Because of God's holiness, He will not allow sin to remain in His presence, so He sent the rebellious angels, now known as demons, down into darkness on the earth.

Then God decided to create another being, called humans, in His own image, which gave them unique dignity and value. God said, "Let us make man in our image to be like us." Humans were created beings, dependent on their Creator. Humans were made to worship, enjoy, love, and serve him. God then prepared the earth as a place for the humans to live; filling the earth with plants, birds, fish, and animals of all kinds.

God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden and trusted them to care for and rule over all of His creation on earth. God lived closely with these first humans, spending time with them daily, showing them how to live life in the best possible way. They lived their life close to God and under His protection—a life that was full and complete and eternal. The world (including the humans) existed in perfect peace, stability, harmony, and wholeness.

FALL: But rather than living under His authority, the humans turned away from God. The first humans chose to rebel against God and His authority, choosing to live in their own ways instead of His. Since God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain in His presence, Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, away from God. Separated from Him and no longer following His ways, Adam and Eve were now subject to sickness, pain, and death. God told them, "The way you have chosen to live will bring you great struggles and pain, and then you will return to the ground from which you came." Not only were these humans now separated from God because of their sin, but they would also suffer death in various ways as they were separated from the giver of life.

After leaving the garden the number of humans on earth grew rapidly. Not only did sin spread from Adam and Eve to their sons—it spread from generation to generation. Sin was everywhere you looked, in both actions and inclinations of the heart. Instead of reflecting God's character, humans resembled something totally antithetical to God's character, even to the point which all people constantly acted out in violence against one another. This went on for thousands of years.

Yet God pursued the humans and chose a man named Abraham, and established a special relationship with him called "a covenant" promise—representing the deepest of all agreements. God told Abraham, "I'll make you the father of a great nation and famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. The entire earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will always be your God, and you will always be my people." Abraham's family, called the Israelites, were to be a new kind of people who would show

the world what it means once again to live in God's ways. God gave them a vast amount of land where they enjoyed His blessings as they grew into a large nation.

As time went on, the Israelites began doing what was right in their own eyes and rebelled against God and His laws. They stopped trusting in God and worshiped idols—people, things, wealth, and power—instead of God. In their rebellion, the Israelites faced great struggles and numerous times ended up a defeated nation of slaves to oppressing nations. Yet, despite their continual rejection of God, He continued to love His people and promised that one day a descendant of theirs would come to rescue and restore humanity and all of creation back to the way God originally created it. Then there were 400 years of silence between God and His people.

REDEMPTION: The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundreds of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire the world had ever known. Finally God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. The angel appeared to her and said, "You will become pregnant and have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus. He will become a King whose kingdom will never end! This will happen supernaturally by God's Spirit, so this baby will be called God's Son." God revealed to Mary and her soon-to-be-husband, Joseph, that this boy was the long-awaited Messiah king, the one whom God promised He'd send to rescue His people! Sure enough the next year, Mary gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus, which means "the God who saves." Jesus grew up in both height and wisdom and was loved by God and everyone who knew Him. He lived a remarkable life, always choosing to live in God's ways and do what was good, right, and perfect. He was a rescuer who was fully human - so he could pay the debt humans owed to God for sin. But he wasn't *merely human* because his work would be to conquer sin. The Bible teaches that Jesus was fully man and fully God who came as a Substitute - to live the life of obedience humans had failed to live for all time.

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

He said, "God showed His great love for people by sending me—His only son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me 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. Those who want to live in God's ways will trust me and live forever!"

As God promised, He sent Jesus to rescue humanity from sin and the penalty of death. God

accepted Jesus' perfect life in place of our own. Jesus was brutally beaten and died painfully on a wooden cross, taking the punishment that all of rebellious humanity deserved! Three days later Jesus conquered death when God raised Him back to life, and He was seen by more than 500 eyewitnesses.

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

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, living in the ways of God.

RESTORATION: The Bible also tells us the end of this story. Jesus promised to come back one day to destroy all evil, sin, and rebellion. Jesus promised all that was lost, broken, and corrupted in the fall will ultimately be put right. Restoration doesn't just simply mean the salvation of individual souls; it means the restoring of the whole creation back to the original good. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, or death. God's Kingdom will come in fullness, and everyone and everything will live under His rule. Paradise will be re-established. Until then, all are invited to live in God's ways, experiencing life with Jesus and giving people a taste of what life is like in Jesus' Kingdom.



Discuss [20 minutes]

1. What stood out to you as we read this story?
2. What is God like in this story? (What do we learn about Him?)
3. Who is the hero of this story? What makes you say that?
4. What do we learn about humans in this story?
5. What to you is the best part of this story? Why?