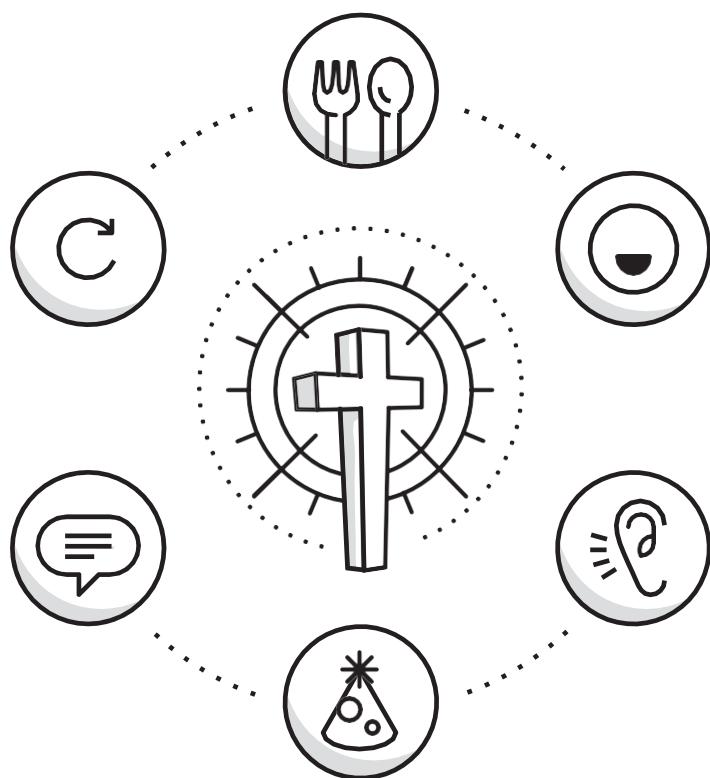


THE STORY-FORMED WAY



The Saturate Story of God Resources were developed from story sets created by the International Mission Board of the SBC. These story sets were adapted into the Story of God by Caesar Kalinowski and Mike Novelli for Soma. These resources have been further edited over the years by the leadership of the Soma Family of Churches. You are free to use, remix, and build upon this work non-commercially if you attribute Saturate and abide by terms found at: saturatetheworld.com/license.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STORY-FORMED WAY

As a missional church we began to ask ourselves a clarifying question: “What is *the mission?* What is the mission Jesus gave His Church?” The surprisingly simple answer is, “GO, and make disciples!” Discipleship is the mission. There are lots of different experiences, teaching, and events that are part of accomplishing this mission, but we could not miss the fact that making disciples was our primary mission.

Another important thing God showed us was that we were to “make” disciples. The word *make* implies a process—a process that has steps to it and is intentional. This is not to say that discipleship is a one-size-fits-all process. But there must be some common foundational pieces to everyone’s discipleship process that help create “channels” of learning that can, and hopefully will, be “filled up” for the rest of our Christian walk (2 Tim. 2:2). By the way, we believe the discipleship process begins at the point of relationship, not at the point of conversion!

We also believe the use of stories and times of deep, shared interaction are a historically proven and powerful way of helping people on their discipleship journey. We live in stories. Stories are the language of our world. Stories speak to the mind, the body, the emotions—our spirits. In a story, we can identify with situations we have never been in. Our imagination can be unlocked to dream what before was unimaginable. Together we learn about life as we connect through stories.

We all yearn to know many of the same parts of the Story. . . .

What happened before time began? How did all of this start?

Who or what created me?

Why do I exist?

Does my life really matter? Does it have meaning? To whom?

What happens after I die?

Why is the world the way it is? Things don’t seem to be going that well. . . .

The Story-Formed Way was created to be a starting point of discipleship. It is a ten-week journey through the Story with times of dialogue, interaction, and reflection that serve as a foundation for new disciples (anyone with whom you are in a relationship) 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!

USING THE STORY-FORMED WAY

If you haven't walked through the Story of God training document and video training series, you may want to spend time doing that first at www.saturatetheworld.com/storyofgod

A TYPICAL STORY SESSION

Opening

Don't plan to get together with a group of strangers and jump straight into the Story. Take your time and build relationships as you get to know one another. Create an environment where you and your friends are comfortable and interested in going deeper into the things of God. Introduce the idea of going through the Story together in a natural way. Don't pull a relational bait and switch!

1. Review previous narrative

Unless it's your first session, work together as a group to retell the last story you discussed together. Try not to move ahead until everyone is up to speed. This will help clear up any misconceptions or forgotten parts.

2. Tell the new narrative

This should only take around two to five minutes. Stick to the Story!

3. Retell the new narrative

Retell the story as a group, asking everyone to participate in the retelling. Say, "Let's see if we can retell the events of this story in the order they happened." You'll need to help out a little (or a lot) at first, but throughout time your friends will get better at this part. Then see if one person can retell the entire story. Again, everyone can (gently) remind him or her if he or she misses something. This retelling builds clarity and helps with retention.

Note: When using the Story-Formed Way, there is often not enough time to do the full retelling of the previous stories. See the Story of God Training Module for more ways to do this.

4. Dialogue about the narrative(s)

This is where everything really starts to open up and become alive in your community. This part is critical in drawing out key ideas and truths from the Story. Use questions to keep discussion going, always directing your friends back to the narrative for answers and insights. This is not the time for you to preach! You are here to guide listeners to discover truth and insight from the Story, NOT from YOU! There are several suggested questions provided as a starting point for you to use with each narrative. Do not turn this into a Q&A session! Remember, you want to facilitate genuine dialogue around the Story.

5. Intersect with the Story

Spend a little time with a few life-application questions, helping people connect their lives to the Story. This will naturally flow out of each dialogue time with just a little prompting. This is also a great time to have a couple people share their personal story. You'll be amazed at how everyone will naturally connect that person's story to parts of the Story told and discussed that session.

TELLING THE STORY

Get to know the narrative

Read the narrative over and over. Really get to know the story, what the characters are like, what they're feeling, what they sound like. Work hard to be as accurate as possible in your retelling. The narratives are already super-condensed. Skipping parts of them can leave out important parts that will connect with future narratives.

Stick to the narrative

Don't mix other stuff from your knowledge of future stories into the narratives. This will only confuse your listeners. You are "hanging clothes on a clothes line" in sequence. Keep a straight line. Remember, don't add your "personal favorite" insights into the narratives. Let the Bible speak for itself via this narrative, and don't skip parts. Good storytellers use fewer words, short sentences, and leave spaces and pauses for people to think and imagine.

Tell the narrative from beginning to end

If you stop to answer questions, preach, or add extra parts you will only confuse people. They could also end up thinking your "helpful additions" are actually part of (and found in) the Bible!

Be real and natural

Set up your story time and setting in the most natural way possible. Don't set up a mini-church service in your living room or café. How do you normally tell each other stories when you hang out? Do you stand or sit on couches or on chairs in a circle? Try and make this as "normative" as possible so it will feel like an extension of the rest of the time you are having together. You want this to be easily reproducible. Be genuinely animated and enthusiastic! Use gestures and facial expressions—be sure they are appropriate and natural. Be very careful about joking and sarcasm—they can reinterpret the story to be very different from the biblical meaning you think you are giving them.

Use your voice to create the atmosphere

Pacing incorporates both the volume and rate at which you tell the story. Dialogue slows a story's pace down, while narrating action usually speeds it up. Repetition is a common part of storytelling—don't fear it. Use it carefully to reinforce important parts of the story. Be especially careful on how you voice God and Jesus! What is God feeling in a particular situation? Is He angry or broken-hearted and disappointed? How you voice God and Jesus will leave a HUGE impression on the listener as to the character and

heart of God! Be appropriately animated and enthusiastic. If you read off the page with no emotion or life you are not really storytelling; you're just reading—BORING!

Relax and be yourself

Have fun with this process—it really is amazing! Don't let your own hang-ups or “performance idols” ruin your (or everyone's) experience. Be patient. At first some people may think this process is too simple or “childlike.” Don't worry; stick to it—after you are a few sessions into it they will realize how much there really is to be learned from each narrative, and they'll start to get into this different way of learning.

Practice makes a BIG difference

Practice the story and have others listen to you and give you feedback. Like anything, you will get better the more you tell stories and lead dialogue. Find a “safe group,” such as your family, kids, close friends, or staff, to practice with. Ask for real, constructive feedback on how you can improve your skills and the storytelling experience.

Read through the entire Story BEFORE you begin

If you are new to the Story or this method of teaching, it is imperative that you not only practice the stories, but you should read completely through all of the narratives and dialogue in your story set before beginning. This will help you connect key insights and parts of the Story found in the early narratives with parts found later on. This will make a HUGE difference in how effective your story experience will be for the participants. Understanding exactly where the Story and dialogue questions are going will make you much more successful.

LEADING THE DIALOGUE

Direct learners back to the Story for answers, insight, and truth

This is not your chance to preach or look smart. We want to connect people to the Bible and the narratives found there for their answers. Everything can be answered from within the narrative we just heard or the Story so far. Insisting that we find our answers from within the story causes us to live in and experience the story in a more powerful way. After answers are given, ask questions such as, “Where did we see that in the story?” or, “Where have we seen something like this before in the story so far?” This will teach them both a biblical and systematic theology at the same time, while reinforcing the Scriptures as our source of truth—not you or “group-think.”

Redirect questions back to the group

Don't feel like you need to be the “Bible answer man” or woman. Let the group know that God gives insights into the Story that help us learn as a community. Try to affirm that everyone has valuable input.

Only discuss information that has already emerged from the story

Remember: “Always backward—never forward.” This is important with people that have some (or a lot of) biblical knowledge. People have a tendency to want to bring in their

own insights that are not in the stories or are from stories not yet told. Don't let this happen. It will ultimately bring about confusion—not clarity.

Don't turn the dialogue into “Question & Answer” time

For most of us, our experiences of learning in school growing up, in university, or in church have included a lot of Q&A times and testing designed to see if we had read and memorized the “right information.” We can naturally tend to default to this method of teaching ourselves. Fight this! This is not a “curriculum.” We are not trying to quiz our listeners to see what they remember from the Story. We are trying to get them to listen to God and one another to gain insights into who God is and what we can learn and apply AS A COMMUNITY from experiencing the Story together. Allow the group to learn from each other as much as possible.

Learn to live with tension and mystery

Tension is a powerful tool in teaching and helping people to learn. Jesus was a master at this and often used mystery or tension to engage His disciples. Jesus taught using stories that challenged the status quo and caused people to consider a new reality and to show what His Father, God, and the Kingdom were really like.

SCHEDULES AND POTENTIAL USES TO THE STORY-FORMED WAY

The ten sessions of the Story-Formed Way essentially represent ten hours of story and dialogue. This material can be engaged by a community over ten weeks, a weekend, or an all day event.

Weekly

Spend ten weeks walking through one session each week. This is a practical way to get the story sown into the life of your community. In this schedule, you would spend more than two months engaging the Story! Take advantage of this common focus by having conversation outside the “story time” about how people are growing and seeing the narrative of Scripture.

If you chose this schedule, spend time casting vision for this experience before the first week and ask people who are going to participate to committing to all ten weeks. It's so hard to build off the story and grow as a community if people miss big sections of it. Missing even one week is huge!

Weekend

Many communities have chosen to tell the story over a weekend. This can be a powerful way to launch a community or DNAgroup! Imagine spending that much quality time together and processing the greatest story ever told! If you plan to use the Story-Formed Way over a weekend away, plan on spacing some of the sessions out to give people breaks and opportunities to connect outside of the story sessions. Also, you

won't need to review each session, only the sessions after an extended breaks and meals. Here is a potential weekend Story-Formed schedule:

Friday Night: Session 1 (Creation & Rebellion) and Session 2 (Sinful Humanity)

Saturday Morning: Session 3 (A People of God) and Session 4 (Exodus and Law)

Saturday Afternoon: Session 5 (The Person of Jesus), Session 6 (The Works of Jesus),

Saturday Night: Session 7 (Death & Resurrection)

Sunday Morning*: Session 8 (Mission & Power), 9 (The Church), and 10 (New Creation)

**The final three stories can be done in about two hours.*

One Day

Another very powerful way to do the Story-Formed Way is in a single day. This can be particularly helpful for taking an entire core team, multiple communities, and for a single community as well. Many people find it easier to get childcare for an entire day to focus on this training.

Be aware, if you're going to walk through the story this way, you will have to be a stickler with the clock. As the storyteller, you will need focus your questions, take out the reviews, and won't need to do the wrap up section until the final story.

Here's a potential schedule for doing the Story-Formed Way in one day:

8:00 am - 10:30 am: Session 1 and Session 2

Break

10:45 am - 12:00 pm: Session 3 and Session 4

Lunch

1:00 pm - 3:00 pm: Session 5, Session 6, Session 7

Break

3:15 pm - 5:00 pm: Session 8, Session 9, and Session 10.

SESSION 1: CREATION AND REBELLION

Before you begin . . .

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 and God's presence
- Humans were never created to determine/judge good and evil for themselves. This is God's sole authority.
- God pursues rebellious humans
- Missionary identity/missionary God

SET THE TONE

Especially this first week, spend some time setting up the right atmosphere for dialogues that will foster growth.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try to answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

PRE-STORY SETUP

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

Let's jump in to our first story.

STORY 1: CREATION

Story from Genesis 1-3, Job 38, Revelation 12

This story is about God, a being who 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. Some of these angels rebelled against God and His ways—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.)

Then God decided He would create another being, called a human. 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 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 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. 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. The humans were given the job to develop the hidden potentials of God's world. He told them, "Be fruitful and multiply. 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 and 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. Adam and Eve loved being with God.

As God looked over all 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.

DIALOGUE: CREATION

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

Q1. 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.

Q2. How did God make humans unique in His creation?

Q3. What was the humans' vocation or job in the creation?

Q4. What kind of relationship did God have with the humans?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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.*
- *He protected them from evil.*
- *They loved being with God. He gave them the ability to choose.*

Q5. What kind of relationship did Adam & Eve have with each other?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

*Close, Eve came out of Adam's body.
Naked and unashamed.*

Q6. What do you think is significant about the two trees in the center of the garden?**Q7. What did God want from the humans? You may need to guide the discussion toward “trust and obedience”.****Q8. Do you think humans were created to live forever? What shows us this in the story?****Q9. What do we learn about God in this scene?**

STORY 2: REBELLION

Story from Genesis 1-3

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. 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 humans 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: REBELLION

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

Q10. What did Adam and Eve choose to do in the story?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

Believe the lie of the serpent...choose to NOT trust God’s words...

trust in self apart from God...trust in their own abilities to manage good evil in their lives.

Q11. What was the real temptation Adam and Eve were presented with by the serpent?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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 and evil, right and wrong in the world.*

Q12. What was God's initial response to Adam right after he had disobeyed?**Q13. Do you think God didn't know where they were? Why did He go looking and asking questions?****Q14. What was the consequence of their actions?****Q15. Why do you think God required consequences for their sin and rebellion? Why didn't God just overlook their rebellion?****Q16. It said all of creation experienced consequences for their sin. As you look around the world today, where do you see these effects?****WRAPPING UP THE SESSION****Q17. What do we learn about God in this story?**

SESSION 2: SINFUL HUMANITY

Before you begin . . .

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.

REMEMBER TO SET THE TONE:

Even though you shared this the first week, you need to reinforce these “rules”, spend some time setting up the right atmosphere for dialogues that will foster growth.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try to answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

If you are going through the Story-Formed Way over the course of 10 weeks you will want to recap the previous week before continuing. As the leader, you can walk through each of these points. You can also ask the group to recap and fill in the gaps where necessary to bring everyone back into the story. If you're walking through the Story over a weekend or in one day, you can jump right back into the Story or you can ask the group to share insights they had during the break.

- **Last week . . .** we looked at God creating the angels and the foundations of the earth. We saw that some of the angels rebelled against God, and because God will never allow evil to remain in His presence, He cast these rebellious angels out of heaven, away from His presence.
- **Last week . . .** we also saw how God finished creating the earth and all living things, including humans, which He created in His image to be like Him. God blessed the humans by sharing His authority with them and telling them to be fruitful and multiply, continuing in creation. We learned humans were given the ability to choose and ultimately chose to disobey God and attempt to manage right and wrong for themselves, apart from God.
- **Last week . . .** again, God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain in His presence, so He cast Adam and Eve out of the garden, away from His presence. God continued to show His care for the humans by not destroying them and also creating clothing for them out of animal skins so they would not be naked and ashamed outside of the garden.
- **Last week . . .** what really stuck with you from our last time together?

STORY 1: TWO BROTHERS

Story 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.”* 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: TWO BROTHERS

Q1. Why do you think Cain killed his brother? (jealousy)

Q2. Why did God accept one offering and not the other?

Q3. God’s first interaction with Cain, what is God doing? Why angry?

Q4. What was God’s reaction to the murder? Why didn’t God just ignore what Cain had done? What punishment did Cain deserve?

You may need to guide the discussion toward

- *Cain deserved death.*
- *God did not repay evil with evil—He showed fairness and grace.*

Q5. What do you think Abel’s blood was saying? (guide toward “for justice”)

Q6. What do we learn about humans in this story? (Where in the story did you see this?)

You may need to guide the discussion toward...

- *We try to hide from our sins.*
- *We want what other people have.*
- *We have the choice to do what is right.*
- *We have the tendency to not listen to God.*

STORY 2: THE FLOOD

Story 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 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 forty 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 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, to 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.*"

DIALOGUE: THE FLOOD

Q7. Why did God flood the earth and destroy everything? Do you think He had good reasons for doing this?

Q8. Why were Noah and his family spared? What does it mean to be “blameless”? Was Noah sinless?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *The story tells us 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?*

Q9. From this story, how does God feel about humans? You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Disappointment and anger at our corruption.*
- *Compassion: by saving the human race and making a promise not to destroy us again.*
- *God is committed to give us the best possible life—He always provides a way for us.*

Q10. Where previously in the story have we seen God blessing and telling people to “be fruitful and multiply”? How might that be significant?

You may need to guide the discussion toward: *God hasn't given up on His original purpose for creation.*

Q11. What did God say to Noah about animals and their blood?**Q12. What did God say about murder and blood and life? Why is it important?**

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

All life belongs to God, and life is in the blood. It is God Himself who gives life. He requires that blood (life) be given back to Him when life is taken!

WRAPPING UP THE SESSION

Q13. What does the story teach us about God?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *God is powerful—in control of the elements.*
- *God will never allow evil to remain in His presence.*
- *The flood is absolute confirmation that God always judges sin in all men.*
- *AND—God is the source of all grace. He saved Noah and his family and ultimately the Human race!*
- *Before saving them, He warned them of the coming judgment, an act of grace, just like with Cain.*

- *He promised never to destroy the earth again, even though He knew man would continue to sin.*
- *God knew what was in the heart of every man. God knows all things.*

SESSION 3: A PEOPLE OF GOD

Before you begin . . .

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 all humanity).

REMEMBER TO SET THE TONE

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

If you are going through the Story-Formed Way over the course of 10 weeks you will want to recap the previous week before continuing. As the leader, you can walk through each of these points. You can also ask the group to recap and fill in the gaps where necessary to bring everyone back into the story. If you're walking through the Story over a weekend or in one day, you can jump right back into the Story or you can ask the group to share insights they had during the break.

Last week . . . we learned all humans sin—chose themselves over God in their hearts. God looks at the heart, not just actions. God shows mercy and grace even while justly punishing human rebellion.

Last week . . . we saw that self and sin lead to separation and death, while obedience leads to life and relationship with God. God also says life is in the blood, and all life belongs to him.

Last week . . . we also discussed what it means that God has created and commanded us to be fruitful.

STORY 5: COVENANT

Story from Genesis chapters 11-18, 22, 26-50 Exodus 1

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, and so we won't be dispersed across the world.*" 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.

[PAUSE AND ASK THIS QUESTION] Q1: Why did God stop the people from building a monument to themselves?

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 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 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 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.

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 99?*" Sarah thought, "*How could a wornout woman like me have a baby? 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: COVENANT

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

Q2. What was Abraham's relationship with God like?

You may need to guide the discussion toward some of these:

- *Abraham trusted God—he believed God. When God made promises, he got up and left.*
- *But there were times when he didn't trust God (Hagar, laughing).*

Q3. Where in the story did we see Abraham struggle to believe the promise? You may need to guide the discussion toward some of these:

- *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?"*

Q4. Do you remember what a “covenant” is?**Q5. What did God promise to Abraham in this covenant?**

You may need to guide the discussion toward some of these:

- *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.*

Q6. What does this promise tell us about what God is like?

You may need to guide the discussion toward some of these:

- *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!*

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION**Q7. Where so far in this story and the others we have read does God keep His promise (what He said has actually happened)?**

You may need to guide the discussion toward some of these:

- *Adam and Eve dying, Cain with sin crouching, Noah with the flood.*

SESSION 4: EXODUS & LAW

Before you begin . . .

BIG PICTURE

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

- God rescues His people from slavery and oppression from sin.
- God gives the law to show them how to live with Him as their God (the Law was given to the people once they were rescued from slavery, showing them how to live in freedom).
- God gives His chosen people a way to atone for their sins and live close to Him.
- They were to be a people who display God's glory to the nations.
- They rebel again and live in their own ways—doing what was right in their own eyes (determining good and evil for themselves).

BRIDGE STORY

Okay, I am going to give you one paragraph here that is going to give you a lot of info spanning a long period of time. I'll read it slowly and make sure you track. This is important!

Years later this son Isaac had his own son named Jacob—his name was later changed to Israel, which the descendants of Abraham would be called. 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.

STORY 1: DELIVERANCE

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. 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 firstborn 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 went through Egypt, taking the life of all the firstborns 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. Now Israel, a large nation of more than 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. God split the waters so 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: DELIVERANCE

Q1. What do you learn about God in this story?

Q2. How could the Israelites avoid the death of their firstborn?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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.*

Q3. 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?

You may need to guide the discussion toward: In the story of Adam and Eve when God made clothes for them from the skins of animals.

STORY 2: INSTRUCTIONS

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 possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation—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 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, live in freedom, and be a light to the other nations. We call these instructions the Ten Commandments.

*"I am your God who rescued you from slavery in Egypt.
Put Me above everything else. Do not worship otherthings.
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 or steal or lie.
Do not sleep with anyone 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 such as . . .

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. 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: INSTRUCTIONS

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

Q4. Why are the sacrifices and the blood important? (Where have we seen these before?)

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *God said that sin and rebellion must be paid for. Payment for sin is life for life. The covenant with Noah teaches us that the life is in the blood. Blood (a life given) is the only way to pay for sin.*
- *Holiness requires that sin and rebellion be dealt with or be removed from His presence.*

Q5. What is a covenant? What was the covenant God was talking about? Who was it given to originally?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Abraham*
- *The people of Israel*
- *Review elements of the original covenant promises*

Q6. How do you think the Israelites could keep their side of the covenant? You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Trust God*
- *Obey God’s commands.*

Q7. Do you think God would remove His covenant if they did not obey Him?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Partially—He may not bless them and protect them, but ultimately He chooses to save them to show how great He is, not basing this on how sinless they are.*

Q8. 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.

Q9. What is the purpose of the commandments and laws?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *The Law was given to the people once they were rescued from slavery, showing them how to live in freedom, close to God so they could live in covenant with Him.*

Q10. What do God’s commandments and laws show us about Him?

They show us God wants to live in a close and grace-filled relationship with Him.

STORY 3: KINGS AND PROPHETS (OR “THE REST OF THE OT”)

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 came back to God and begged 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 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 blessings 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.

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.
- 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 years.

DIALOGUE: KINGS AND PROPHETS

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

Q 11. What, to you, are the most striking characteristics of the history of the Israelites?

Q 12. What is the pattern the Israelites got into?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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.*

Q13. In what ways can you relate to this pattern the Israelites lived in?

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION

Q14. From all of the stories so far what have you learned about God?

Have people think of all the attributes of God they've seen in the Story so far. Write each one on a dry erase board, poster board, or a bunch of post-it notes as people name them. Then close your time together praying to this God.

SESSION 5: THE PERSON OF JESUS

Before you begin . . .

BIG PICTURE

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

- Identity as a learner and servant.
- Born of a virgin (human).
- Baptized (identified with sinful humanity).
- Led by the Spirit (Spirit-empowered).
- Tempted (victorious over temptation, lived a sinless life).
- Perfect man (He did what Adam didn't do by overcoming the tempter and living a life of faith—perfect submission and obedience to the Father).

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

STORY 1: FINALLY!

Story from Matthew 1–2 Luke 1–2

Four hundred years passed since God had spoken to His people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundreds of years. They were

now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire the world had ever known. The Jews were waiting, longing, hoping for the day when God would return and send a king who would save them and lead them into victory.

Some tried to keep the Law God gave to Moses as strictly as possible to show they were faithful to the king when he came.

Some colluded with the Romans.

Some sought to take the kingdom by force and acted out in violence against the Romans.

And some hid away in remote mountains, segregating themselves for when the king came.

Everyone was waiting. And waiting. And waiting . . .

Finally, one day 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 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: FINALLY

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

Q1. What were the Jewish people waiting for? How were they waiting?

Q2. Put yourself in that story. Your ancestors have been waiting for 400 years. Which posture would you have been taking? Which group would you be in? (We suggest you go around the room and make everyone pick a team)

- Keeping the rules?

- *Hiding away?*
- *Colluding (or giving in) to the people oppressing?*
- *Fighting back?*

Q3. Who was Jesus a descendant of? How might this be significant?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *King David / Abraham*
- *The Covenant being fulfilled*
- *Prophecy fulfilled*

Q4. What does Jesus name mean? – The Lord is Salvation

- *Lord. Lord of who...what?*
- *What is salvation? For whom, from what? To what?*

STORY 2: 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, 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 rested on him. Then a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son whom I love—you bring me great joy!"

DIALOGUE: JESUS'S BAPTISM

Q5. What do we learn about John from this scene?

Q6. What was John's message?

Q7. Why were people coming to be baptized by John? What did the story say?

Q8. What do you think is significant about God saying to Jesus, "This is my Son whom I love"?

Declaring Jesus is His son! Son of God!

Q9. What is God affirming for everyone publicly? J

Jesus's identity!

STORY 3: JESUS'S 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: JESUS' TEMPTATION

Q10. 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.

- *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.*
- *To test His faith/relationship with God—but God alone is trustworthy.*
 - *God is great—so we don't have to be in control.*
- *To gain Jesus's worship, away from God—but God alone is worthy to be worshipped. (Where in the story have we seen Satan try and do this before?)*
 - *God is glorious—so we don't have to fear others.*

Q11. How did Jesus respond in this scene to Satan's temptations?

Q12. How is it different from Adam? How is it different from Israel in the wilderness?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Resisted and quoted God's words to Satan.*

Q13. What is Satan challenging when he asks Jesus, “If you're the son of God... do this”?

You may need to guide the discussion toward: His identity!

Q14. Where have we seen Satan challenge a person and tempt him before?

Q15. 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?

Q16. From what we have seen and learned about humans so far, have we ever seen this before?

STORY 4: 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: DISCIPLES

Q17. Why did John say, “Look! There is God’s Passover Lamb”?

Q18. What do you think the people thought of when he said this?

Q19. What are the implications of this claim about who Jesus is?

Q20. What details do you remember about the first Passover lamb from our previous stories?

Q21. Where in the Story today did we see God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) mentioned?
You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Mary becomes pregnant through the work of the Spirit. At Jesus’s baptism.*
- *The Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted. Jesus did His miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Q22. Where do you think Jesus got His power to do miracles?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *The Spirit of God that had descended on Him—The Holy Spirit.*

WRAPPING UP THE SESSION

Q23. What do we learn about Jesus from this session (all four scenes)?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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.*
- *People wanted to be near Him.*
- *He taught in new ways.*

SESSION 6: THE WORKS OF JESUS

Before you begin . . .

BIG PICTURE

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

- Miracles (affirming Jesus's deity and power).
- Kingdom teachings—Jesus is the perfect human KING who came as a humble servant.
- Showing the foretaste of the future—His life and teachings demonstrate and declare what the world should be like and will be like under His rule.
- Jesus's calling: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life—to the Father and to restoration.
- God is a loving Father who desires restoration with His children.

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

Last week . . . we looked at Jesus' birth and life—a humble life, human in every way, tempted in every way, just like us. But Jesus lived His life without ever sinning or losing trust in His Father, God. Jesus found His very life and identity in and from His Father.

Last week . . . we also saw Jesus filled and empowered to do miraculous things by the Holy Spirit.

Last week . . . we also learned the names given to Jesus at His birth: Jesus—the Lord is salvation and Immanuel—God with us. These names showed us a lot about why He came to earth and who He is.

STORY 1: MIRACLES

Story from Luke 3, John 1, Mark 2-5

Note: Guide people to listen for ways Jesus is “fixing” creation or “putting it right.”

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’s 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.*” 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 to heal the sick, teach others what they had learned, and share the good news that God’s Kingdom had finally come.

DIALOGUE: MIRACLES

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

Q1. Did God create humans to live forever?

Q2. From what we've learned from the Story so far, why do people die? Who gave man his life?

Q3. Who do you think has the power to raise people from the dead?

Q4. If Jesus has the authority to forgive sin, has power over the creation, has authority over the demons, and can raise the dead back to life, then who do you think He is?

Q5. Why do you think Jesus was performing these miracles?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Jesus is reversing the effects of God's curse on creation, restoring it to perfect order!*

Q6. What are your thoughts about all of this?

STORY 2: KINGDOM

Story from Matthew 5, 7, 10, 13, 18–20; Mark 3–6, 10, 13; 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's teaching; He had real power and authority—unlike anything they had ever seen.

Pause for a moment and ask these questions before continuing with the rest of the story:

- **In your own words, what was Jesus's message?**
- **How was Jesus's teaching similar to what we saw earlier in the story?**

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 that comes in a blaze of glory. 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.

DIALOGUE: KINGDOM

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

Q7. 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 and make him a great nation that included all the other 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.*

Q8. What do we learn about Jesus from these stories?

Q9. Is His Kingdom like that of the human kings we heard about earlier in the stories?

No—Jesus is the perfect human King. He always does what is good and right and perfect. He is the true King the people always wanted!

STORY 3: 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 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 twelve 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: LAST MEAL

Q10. Why was Jesus going to Jerusalem? What do we know about this celebration?

Q11. 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, and 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.

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION

Q12. Based on everything you’ve seen in this story so far, what do you think Jesus is going to do next? What do you think Jesus *must* do next?

SESSION 7: DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Before you begin . . .

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?

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

Last week . . . we looked at how Jesus lived His life. Everywhere He went crowds flocked to Him, and He performed many miracles, healing everyone who came to Him. We saw that Jesus has the authority to forgive sin, has power over creation, has authority over the demons, and can raise the dead back to life.

Last week . . . we also learned the Kingdom of God is a kingdom of the heart. And we saw that the only way to the Father is through Jesus.

Last week . . . what really stuck with you from our last time together?

STORY 1: DEATH AND RESURRECTION

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 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's 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 throughout the next forty 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. More than 500 people saw Him alive.

DIALOGUE: DEATH AND RESURRECTION

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

Q1. How does the Passover story we heard earlier remind you of Jesus's death?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *Jesus is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.*

Q2. Why do you think the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus?

Q3. Why do you think the curtain in the Temple tore in half? What did the curtain separate?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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 and earth*

would be reunified.

Q4. Do you remember what Jesus said when He was hanging on the cross?

Q5. How could Jesus possibly forgive those who were killing Him?

Q6. How is Jesus being raised from the dead significant? What does it show us about Him?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *He conquered death—the results of human sin and rebellion! He didn't just exchange His life for ours to atone for our sins; He also secured new life for us!*
- *God doesn't abandon His physical creation. He wants to renew and restore all of it!*

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION

We regularly finish this story session with a short teaching where the storyteller holds up two hands to demonstrate a covenant was between two sides. God always held up His side, and the people always failed their side. On the cross, God did one side, and Jesus held up ours.

Q7. Is this good news? How is this good news to you?

Q8. What would faith in this story look like?

SESSION 8: THE MISSION AND POWER

BIG PICTURE

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

- Jesus's commission to make disciples/be His witnesses.
- Jesus is 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).

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

Last week . . . we looked at Jesus's death and resurrection. We saw that Jesus is the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He died as a substitute for us, taking our sins and punishment upon Himself. He came offering forgiveness, not judgment. But we also learned Jesus taught that people bring judgment on themselves by not obeying His teaching and commands.

STORY: MISSION POWER

Story from John 20, Matthew 28 John 14 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 more than 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 said to 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, just as the prophets had promised—giving you peace, leading you in truth, and empowering you for the mission I am sending you on.*"

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. All of them were 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 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’s 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: MISSION AND POWER

Q1. What is the mission Jesus sends His disciples on?

You may need to guide the discussion toward: Make disciples and baptize them

Q2. What is a disciple? How do you make a disciple?

Q3. Where in the Story have we seen the work of God having implications for all nations of the Earth?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

The covenant with Abraham “All nations on Earth will be blessed through you”

Q4. In light of the mission, why is it important that Jesus has ALL authority?

Q5. Who is to be baptized? What is the purpose of baptism?

Q6. 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?

Q7. In the story, thousands repented and put their trust in Jesus. What were they repenting of and turning to?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- Repented of living for themselves, as their own God, and turning to God in faith—submitting to Jesus' Lordship over all of life.

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION

Q8. What do we learn about the Spirit from this story? You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- Jesus said God's Spirit will come and live inside of you—giving you peace and leading you in all the ways of 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. It even affects their language and it interprets 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."

SESSION 9: LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Before you begin . . .

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 and service

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

Last week . . . we looked at Jesus's command to His followers to be and make disciples: people who believe in Jesus and are continually learning how to walk in His ways. We learned that this command is for all ages—all people who follow Jesus. This command is for us! We are to be actively making disciples. We are all called to be baptized as a public display and confession of our faith in Christ.

Last week . . . we also talked about the idea that all of this is the work of God. He precedes us and makes us able to believe in Jesus. He then sends us out, by the power of His Holy Spirit, to live the life of a disciple and then also to make disciples. It is ALL God's work!

Last week . . . what really stuck with you from our last time together?

STORY: THE CHURCH

Story from Acts 2 and 4; Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians 16; 2 Corinthians 8

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled all the disciples, thousands came to believe all 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 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. 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's 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.

Jesus called one man, Paul, who had previously been killing the followers of Jesus, to lead in this mission to bring the good news of Jesus to the whole world. Paul went out with a team on several missionary journeys proclaiming the good news of Jesus in all the major cities in the Roman world. He faced much persecution. But he also saw many new churches planted. He would write letters to these young churches, encouraging and exhorting them to be faithful communities on mission in their cities.

The last thing we know of Paul, he was in the city of Rome, the capital and center of the world, freely proclaiming the good news that Jesus is Lord!

DIALOGUE: THE CHURCH

Q1. What are the disciples up to in this new life? What types of things are they doing?

*You may need to guide the discussion toward:
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

Q2. Where did you see them living out these rhythms: BLESS, LISTEN, EAT, STORY-FORMED, SABBATH

Q3. How are they able to live this way? Why do they live this way?

WRAPPING UP THIS SESSION

Q4. What would it look like and what would it cost, for you, to participate in a church like this?

Q5. What would have to change?

SESSION 10: CREATION RESTORED

Before you begin . . .

BIG PICTURE

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

- Cost of discipleship
- Cultures restored (all nations brought back to God)
- A people of reconciliation
- Jesus's return
- God restores all things

SET THE TRAINING TONE

You will not need to repeat this list every week, but be aware of these and reestablish the right tone as necessary.

- We are here to learn and change (not just a social time, but we also desire to grow closer and build community).
- Have fun, and keep things moving and participatory.
- Welcome a challenge from me or others in the group (give each other permission to challenge us—probe, ask questions, etc.).
- Strive to be honest and vulnerable, and we should honor that by keeping what is shared in confidence.
- We are going to try and answer questions as much as possible from within the Story found in the Bible. Everything we need to learn about God and humans can be found right here in His Story!

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S STORY

Last week . . . we looked at Jesus's disciples in the early church. We saw they lived a life of 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, and living a life of service together.

STORY: CREATION RESTORED

Story from Luke 17; Acts 3; 1 Corinthians 15; Rev. 21:1-8; Rev 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. They will live forever!

God showed one of Jesus's 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—will inherit all these blessings. 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: CREATION RESTORED

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

Q1. When you heard this Story today, what did it remind you of in the bigger story we have heard so far?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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!*
- *Water—no sea and a river. In the story, water is a sign of judgment and unknown. Now the judgment is gone, and life is restored.*

Q2. What do we see that was broken early in the Story that is now reconciled and restored? Who restores it?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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!*

Q3. How does it make you feel that (if you are in Christ—His disciple) you will live forever?!

Q4. 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's disciples? How are we to live in light of this?

You may need to guide the discussion toward:

- *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.*

WRAPPING UP THE STORY-FORMED WAY

You just concluded quite the journey! Spend time reflecting on insights, learnings, and things that have marked each of you by the Story. One way is to give space for each person to share one or two take-aways. If you are doing this as a community, ask the profound question, if all of this is true, what does this change about us and how we live. We also regularly spend time worshipping through song to finish this profound experience.

