

What is your favorite story?

## God's story—your story

### goals for this lesson

- ▶ To understand an overview of “God’s Story”—the good news of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ To consider how to connect the story of your life to this gospel story.

**H**ave you ever noticed how everyone perks up when a person starts to tell a good story? People who were lost in a sermon or bible study, suddenly find their way again. Those who were dozing off in class, awaken. Stories have a captivating quality. Whether we are young or old, stories grab our attention. Stories also have a life-defining quality. Stories are so important that it can be argued that we use them to make sense of our lives and world. Cultures and societies have their own defining stories—whether for good or evil. For instance, Hitler’s National Socialism fashioned its own story to create an identity, and justify its actions—a story of the Aryan race as the highest racial entity; a story that was a hodgepodge of other stories, including Wagner’s music, Germanic mythology, and Nietzsche’s philosophy.

Families and individuals also have their own defining stories, each with its own characters, plot, conflicts, love and betrayal, tragedy and hope. These stories are so foundational that they define how we think, how we behave, how we feel about others and about ourselves. However, they are by no means static, and sometimes undergo significant revision. More pointedly, we like to make up stories to bring meaning and hope to our lives. Like daydreamer Walter Mitty in James Thurber’s short story, we have a fantasy world filled with stories where we are more successful, better-known, more loved, admired, and desired, more in control, in better health, and living in peace and comfort. Thus, viewed in this light, and considering the gospel as a story, our lives are a conflict of stories—one trying to rule the other. Which is real? Which one brings life and meaning? In this lesson, we will unpack and apply some of these themes. ✨



**S**ome of the most popular movies tell great stories, like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix*. We can easily argue that one of the reasons why we like stories so much is because the gospel is a true story. The good news about Jesus is the great true story. So movies like *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Matrix*, capture us, not only because they are good stories, but because they contain elements of the one true gospel story. For example, the great enemy in *The Lord of the Rings* is the dark Lord Sauron. This sounds similar to Paul in Ephesians 6:12, that we do not fight against flesh and blood but against evil powers. Likewise, in *The Matrix* we hear the phrase, “Welcome to the real world.” It is a world where people are held hostage and in bondage to evil forces, and they don’t even know it—sounds like the New Testament again. ■

- 1 What is one of your favorite stories? Why do you like it?

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## Creation

God's story, chapter 1

**Read: Genesis 1:1–31**

- 2 As the beginning of the story, this passage is crucial. Like any story, this introduction provides us with important information on the character and direction of the story. What do you consider to be the vital elements of this story?

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## Fall

God's story, chapter 2

**Read: Genesis 3:1–12**

- 3 This is the next development in the story. We all do things for a reason. Our actions are never divorced from our hearts desires. Why do you think Adam and Eve ate the fruit?

4 What are some results of their disobedience? How do they talk? What do they feel? How do they act?

5 The patterns in stories repeat themselves. We will see that the nation of Israel repeats the story of Adam and Eve. In addition, we will find a similar repetition in our own lives. Look at your answer to question 4 above, and describe a similar experience in your own life—a time when you talked, acted, and felt like Adam and Eve. Why do you think you responded the way you did?

## Israel

God's story, chapter 3

**Read: Genesis 12:1–3; Exodus 19:1–8**

- 6 After the failure of Adam and Eve, the story moves to the creation of the nation of Israel. What was the purpose of the nation of Israel? What characteristics were to define her?

**Read: Isaiah 1:1–7**

- 7 What happened to Israel?

- 8 The stories of our lives can follow a similar trajectory. Briefly describe a time in your life when blessing (success, material prosperity, family blessing, work recognition) was followed by you forgetting about God? Remember: this “forgetting” is not so much an intellectual forgetfulness, but a heart condition, where, for example, we increasingly think more highly of ourselves, look down on others, take matters into our own hands, become over-confident in our abilities, or lack prayer.

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## Jesus

### God's story, chapter 4

**Read:** Isaiah 9:6–7, 52:7; Matthew 4:23; Luke 2:8–11, 4:43; Acts 5:42; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4; 2 Timothy 2:8

9 What is the “good news” according to these passages?

**Read:** Mark 1:14–15 and Acts 2:36–38

10 What should our response be to this good news?

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## You

### God's story, chapter 5

**The New Testament is** a description of the culmination of God's story, and an exhortation to the church to live out of the “good news” story. As a community, and as individuals, God calls us to continually connect our lives to this great story. How do we do this? The way to life and relationship is nothing more than the implanting of this gospel story into our lives and communities. God's Spirit does this through a vital and active faith that grows in its reliance upon Jesus, together with an increasing forsaking of our sinful desires and hopes. ■

**Read:** Ephesians 6:10–20

**This passage contains major elements** of God's story. Paul uses a metaphor to tell us more about this gospel. It is the metaphor of God's armor, which consists of a number of pieces. Paul, building on Old Testament images, lives within a gospel story that has a number of elements to it. Yes, there are evil powers, but central to the story is God's armor: his faithfulness, righteousness, truthfulness, and salvation. God has been faithful to his people, and he will continue to be truthful. He is going to save all his people. He fights for them. God

is righteous and is putting the whole world right. God himself comes to protect you. God himself comes to fight. So, we in fact live in a story, and it is this story that Paul wants to impress on us, and urge us to center our lives on it. Paul has a story he lives by.

**Paul is speaking about God's armor.** It is not *our* armor. Sometimes people subtly switch this around, so that the passage becomes all about our armor. Consequently, the story becomes centered on us—our faith, our righteousness, etc., until, like David in Saul's armor, we are immobilized and unable to fight! This is not Paul's emphasis, which we can confirm by looking at some Old Testament background to this passage, such as:

**Psalms 91:4** "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."

**Psalms 143:1** "O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief."

**Isaiah 11:5** "Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist."

**Isaiah 59:17** "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."



How  
does one of  
your favorite  
movies contain  
elements of the  
gospel story?

**So in order for you to fight the battle,** you have to take up this "word of God" (this story) and believe it to be true. You have to reorient your life around this story. This is different from saying, "Oh, here are my weapons! Let me pick them up—my faith, my righteousness, my Bible—and then ride off like a lone knight into battle." Rather it is a call to center yourself around who God is and what he is doing. It is believing these different aspects of the gospel story: that God is righteous, faithful, and true. That is how you battle these evil forces standing against you—how you are to be strong *in the Lord*, and in his power. It is by appropriating this gospel story to your life. You and I are now a part of God's story. Your individual story fits into a grander plan that extends before and beyond your 70-odd years on this planet.

**So how do we practically connect God's story to our story? Below are two examples from Ephesians 6:10–20. Read the material below and answer the following questions.**

### Righteousness

**God is a warrior** whose breastplate is righteousness. He is putting the whole world right, including you and me. If we belong to Jesus, God has given us a new image, status, and reputation. God has made us *right*. This is an essential part of the gospel story. If we forget this part, we start inventing our own stories to improve our reputation and our image before others.

A while back, I got into an argument with my wife. I forget what we were arguing about, but one thing I do remember—I was zeroing in for the kill, about to expose her for how angry she gets. "Do you remember when we were first married," I said, "and you threw my calculator at me, and it broke?" How do you think she responded? It went something like this, "It wasn't me who threw it; it was *you*."

Then things vaguely started to come back to me...she was right. It is clear that I like to revise the story of my life, to improve my reputation and image. When I am not living in light of the gospel story, it is easy to forget that God has made me right. I end up creating my own stories to show just how upright I am. I remember others' flaws and offences with knifeline precision, but when it comes to me, "Well, I don't remember it that way. I'm just not the kind

of person who throws calculators around. It can't be possible." I realize that my memory is not a faithful librarian dutifully cataloguing every event in my life for perfect retrieval. Or if it is, "someone" has ransacked the library, ripping up various books, altering some, and hiding others.

Thus, to connect this story of "good news" to our lives is going to take death, a dying to ourselves. The Ephesians passage has warfare imagery, and usually in a war there is one thing you try not to do—die! But this is a war where you and I are called to die, and in many different ways. We will have to die every day to our own reputation-building; to the stories we make up, the works of fiction we create. To center on God and the gospel, requires a painful death of all our unbelieving desires, fears, and dreams. ■

**11** What is a story you created, one that you later realized was wrong, or at least to be an embellishment of the truth? This could be one incident (as described above) or a certain time-period in your life. Describe a time where you thought you were more "right," "correct," or "upright" than you actually were. In other words, write down how you created a "work of fiction"—your own story, which included a view on how right, correct, and absolutely certain you were about something or somebody.

**12** Attempt to connect the gospel story to the story you described. How does the fact that you are right with God, his child, and have his Spirit have any bearing on the incident you described?

**Prayer**

**Paul finishes off this passage in Ephesians** with a call to pray. Prayer is another way we center ourselves on the gospel story, and become more connected to what God is doing in this world.

**Perhaps you have had the experience** of being anxious about something! Your mind was racing and your heart was beating a little faster; but then you prayed, and those feelings and thoughts faded away. This happened because as you prayed you reoriented your life around the gospel. A similar thing can happen during worship. You may arrive at church on Sunday morning a basket case. However, during the worship as you sing and pray, you center yourself on Jesus, and those fears, worries, and struggles start to lose their sting and intensity.

**Prayer not only centers** you on God, it also connects you to God's work in this world. The more the story of Jesus takes hold of our lives, the more we will pray, and the more we will understand what God is doing, his passion and plan for this world. In addition, we will see more clearly that we are part of this story and part of this cosmic battle. We are characters in the story, and are part of God's renewal of this world. We can take risks in this world because we know that we are part of a grander story and therefore something far more important than our own present comfort and security. The gospel story includes us as individuals, but contains far more, and nothing less than the restoration of the entire cosmos. Being *in* this story automatically connects each one of us to the world in its need, suffering, and sin. This story is not finished! With every page we turn, the story becomes more breathtaking, beautiful, life-changing, and world-transforming than we ever imagined. ■

- 13 Write down a prayer regarding what you would like God to do in your life and relationships as you take this course. Write a prayer expressing your desire to connect the gospel story to your life in deeper ways.

Mon > Tue > Wed > Thurs > Fri > Sat > Sun

**Through the week**

- Ask your Father to show you some more ways you try to justify yourself. Recruit one or two people to pray for you while you work through this course. Tell them what you asked for in question 13.