

# The Story of Faith

# God is telling the world a story.

The story begins in eternity past and stretches into eternity future.

Human beings are story-shaped creatures. We are born into stories, raised in stories, and live and die in stories. Whenever we have to answer a big question—who am I, why am I here, what should I do, what happens to me when I die?—we tell a story. The single best way to understand faith, and a faithful life, is as a story in which you play a role. Your life task is to participate in the greatest story ever told.

It is what you were created for.

If faith was primarily an idea, the intellect alone might be adequate for dealing with it. But faith is a life to be lived. Story, like life, engages all of what we are—mind, emotions, spirit, body. Faith calls us to live in a certain way, not just think in a certain way. It is no surprise, then, that God opens with an unmistakable story signature: “In the beginning...”

# This is Where it All Started.

Everything started in the beginning. Sounds funny, but it's true. Everything, and we mean everything, started in the beginning. In the beginning God created the Heavens and Earth in seven days—all you see, all you don't see—and it was good.

The Earth is filled with an exhaustive number of intricate details that undeniably demonstrate that our world was created by God and was not created because of a random series of events. The tilt of Earth's axis, the mix of nitrogen and oxygen in our air, the distance of the Earth from the sun—those are just a few of the details. If there's a design, there's a designer.

He was and always will be three in one—a community: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...a Trinity. All three were present at the beginning. And, he created us to be just like Him—relational. He marked us with an identity as his image bearers. We are God's greatest creation; he created us in his image to live in fellowship with him and one another. Your life has a purpose.

## The Word is Life.

Now let's be clear about the Bible: it's a God thing. He inspired the books' authors by his Spirit to speak to all generations of believers, including us today.

The Bible is the primary means by which he tells us about himself, and how to be in right relationship with him.

God calls us to immerse ourselves in his story as a community and as individuals. We are focused on faithfully interpreting and living out that story today as we are led by the Spirit of God.

“There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”

And the greatest commandment that God gave us in his word is this: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” His Word also declares “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) will be given to you as well.” We call this putting Jesus first. By putting Jesus first, people experience a quality of life that is otherwise inaccessible to them.

## The Key To Faith That Lasts.

Through the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, God establishes the home and in doing so, it becomes the primary way in which he works in the world. Before God could transform humanity, he needed to create a strong home. It's the place where faith is nurtured, grown and multiplied. And this is true today. We can't outsource our faith and spiritual formation. We must take responsibility for our own journey with God and for the next generation. God's story doesn't spread through the world unless we live a lifestyle of passing on our faith, seven days a week. This embodies what we call putting home first—the natural next step after putting Jesus first.

Moses gave us a blueprint for living this way: "Impress them [God's commands] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." And we are careful to remember the cry of the prophet Joel: "Tell it [God's story] to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation."

## Disobedience Messes Everything Up.

But there are forces that battle against us. Satan leads these forces and is the one who tempted the first humans. Their names were Adam and Eve and God created them originally good. But, they gave into temptation. God's perfect creation was shattered and evil and death, both physical and spiritual, entered the story and continue to be a part of our world today. This devastating series of events resulted in our relationships with God, others, ourselves and creation being fractured and in desperate need of redemption.

## God Deals With Evil and Selfishness.

People continued in their wrong ways until God decided to judge the world for its extravagant selfishness and evil. God sent a worldwide flood to destroy mankind and animals on land. God's grace was shown to one man, Noah, and his family. Noah was instructed to build an ark to save a remnant of animals and humanity. Sadly, only Noah and his family boarded the ark. God's judgment swept the world, after which God made a covenant with man to never destroy it again with water. The rainbow is God's reminder of his covenant with us.

## Mankind Disobeys Again.

After the flood, God commanded Noah and his family to multiply and fill the earth. Instead, people built the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves rather than worshipping God. They wanted to show God how great they were. God judged their disobedience by confusing their language. The people were scattered across the globe.

## God's Plan Continues to Be Revealed.

God did not abandon his creation to destruction and decay; rather, he promised to restore our broken world. As part of this purpose, God chose a people, Abraham and his descendants, to represent him in the world. God promised to bless them as a nation so that through them all nations would be blessed. In time they became enslaved in Egypt and cried out to God because of their oppression. God heard their cry, liberated them from their oppressor and brought them to Sinai where he gave them an identity and a mission as his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy people. Throughout the story of Israel, God refused to give up on his people despite their frequent acts of unfaithfulness to him.

When Israel remembered the stories that told them who they were, where they had come from and who their God was, they prospered. When they quit telling the stories, they no longer understood who they were and they invited disaster. And the same is true with us.

## God's Heart Made Known

God brought his people into the Promised Land. Their state of blessing from God was intimately bound to their calling to embody the living God to other nations. They made movement toward this calling, yet they disobeyed and allowed foreign gods into the land, overlooked the poor and mistreated the foreigner. The prophetic voices that emerge from the Scriptures held the calling of Israel to the mirror to show them how they treated the oppressed and marginalized. Through the prophets, God's heart for the poor was made known and we believe that God cares deeply for the marginalized and oppressed among us today. Causes such as clean water for all people, the abolition of human slavery and community revitalization through micro-enterprise have grown out of God's heart for people.

## History Turns When Jesus Shows Up.

In Israel's disobedience, they became indifferent and in turn irrelevant to the purposes to which God had called them. For a time they were sent into exile, yet a remnant was always looking ahead with longing and hope to a renewed reign of God where peace and justice would prevail. Over 350 scriptures foretold the coming of Jesus hundreds of years before he came. He fulfilled 29 of them in one day. These prophecies and longings of his people found their fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Mysteriously, God became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood. <sup>3</sup>He was both divine and human.

## Jesus Had a Mission and He Accomplished It.

Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, heal the sick, bind up the brokenhearted and set captives free, proclaiming a new arrival of the kingdom of God, bringing about a new exodus and restoring our fractured world. His path of suffering, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection has brought hope to all creation and healing to those that believe. Jesus is our only hope for bringing peace and reconciliation between God and mankind. By trusting Jesus we are forgiven and brought into right relationship with God as our Savior through faith in Jesus Christ.

## Now We Have a Mission.

God is now reconciling us to each other and ourselves. When we put Jesus first in our lives, we become set apart and begin the process of learning and living The Prioritized Life—the life of Christ himself. This is a lifelong process of battling evil and injustice and becoming more like Christ. It's a battle against the things that destroy faith. Hypocrisy, gossip, backbiting, excessive behavior and legalism work against the purposes of God. The Church, led by individuals called by God, is a global and local expression of living out the way of Jesus through love, radical generosity, peace, sacrifice and healing as we embody the resurrected Christ, who lives in and through us. As this community grows with people who have accepted God's free gift of redemption through Jesus, we put others first and reach a broken and hurting world.

## We Remind Ourselves and Celebrate Often.

As a community of believers, the Church is rooted and grounded in Christ, practicing the spiritual disciplines. These serve to keep our lives focused on God and include: Bible study, prayer, worship, solitude, fasting, sacrifice, service, confession and fellowship. We celebrate each significant spiritual milestone that a person reaches (baby dedication, salvation, baptism, etc.). Water baptism by immersion is an ancient symbol that is used to celebrate and declare a person's commitment to Christ after turning away from destructive habits and receiving the gift of eternal life. Holy Communion is the way that we remember Christ's suffering and death for our salvation until the Lord returns.

We take time to sing songs together to praise God for who he is as well as bind us together in unity and remind us of what God has done for us. We value all expressions of gratitude to God (clapping, raising hands, singing, etc.). We are careful to remember that these things should not divide us because God looks at a person's heart to determine true devotion to him, not their outward actions.

## The Holy Spirit Fills and Empowers.

The Spirit of God enters the life of all those who put Jesus first and affirms them as children of God. After salvation, the Spirit fills and empowers us to tell others about what God has done for us. The Spirit also convicts, guides, comforts, counsels and leads us into truth through a communal life of worship. Our lives become outward expressions of our faith, demonstrated by the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit experienced on the Day of Pentecost and throughout the history of the early church recorded in Acts. Through the help of the Holy Spirit we are lovingly encouraged to grow in separation from what is wrong and live out a holy life of obedience just as the first believers did in New Testament times.

## Jesus is Coming Back.

Jesus will physically return to Earth and there will be a resurrection of believers in Christ who have died along with those who are alive. Jesus will return again with the believers and reign for a thousand years before establishing his permanent dwelling place. The day is coming when Jesus will come back to judge the world, bringing an end to injustice, punishing those who rejected Him and restoring all things to God's original intent. God will reclaim this world and rule forever. The earth's groaning will cease and God will dwell with all people who have accepted Him. We will be with Him forever in a new heaven and a new earth that he is preparing. On that day we will beat swords into tools for cultivating the earth, the lion will lie down with the lamb, there will be no more death, and God will wipe away all our tears. Our relationships with God, others, ourselves and creation will be whole. All will flourish as God intends. This is what we long for. This is what we hope for. And we are giving our lives in anticipation of this future reality now.

# This is God's Story.

The Bible instructs us: “Let this be recorded for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord.” Who is this future generation? It includes, among others, you and me. How is it we have the opportunity to know the God who created us? Because someone lived the story, and someone else told the story, and someone else wrote it down, and others chose to repeat it, and many were willing to die for it. And so, generation after generation after generation, God's love for his creation has been told—and we are the beneficiaries.

Which prompts a question: are we going to be the generation that does not pass on the story? Stories are never more than a generation from extinction. They are disappearing everyday, and so will faith, unless we tell it's story in ways that draw people to make it their own.

This is the meaning of our story: God made us, God loves us, God calls us. That is the master plot.

If you do not take time to understand it, study it and pursue it, you will never correctly understand who you are or why you are here.

God offers a story that we are invited to make our own. We play a role. We have a responsibility—to remember what God has done and to tell it to the next generation.

## This is God's story.

## This is our story.

## May we tell it well.

## May we live it fully.

# Sources

## God is telling the world a story—Perspective

*The Power of Words and the Wonder of God*, John Piper,  
Justin Taylor, pp. 105-107

## God Made Everything...Including You—Creation

Genesis 1

John 1:1

## The Word is Life—Authority of the Bible

2 Timothy 3:15-17

Deuteronomy 6:5

Matthew 6:33

John 10:10

## The Key To Faith That Lasts—Home First and SevenStyle

Genesis 2

Deuteronomy 6:7

Joel 1:3

## Disobedience Messes Everything Up—Corruption

Genesis 1:26,27

John 17:11

Deuteronomy 6:4

Genesis 3:6

## God Deals With Evil and Selfishness—Catastrophe

Genesis 4-6

## Man Disobeys Again—Confusion

Genesis 7

## God's Plan Continues to Be Revealed—The Exodus

*The Power of Words and the Wonder of God*, John Piper,  
Justin Taylor, p. 108

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua

## God's Heart Made Known—Compassion

Major and minor prophets

## History Turns When Jesus Shows Up—Christ

John 1

1 John 4:10

Matthew 1:23

## Jesus Had a Mission and He Accomplished It—Cross

Ephesians 1:22,23

Acts 1:8

Galatians 2:10

## Now We Have a Mission—Jesus First, Others First

Romans 12:1,2

Hebrews 7:26

Acts 2:22

I Corinthians 15:3

Matthew 28:6

Acts 1:9

Luke 24:47

Isaiah 53:4,5

## We Remind Ourselves and Celebrate Often—Disciplines, Sacraments, Worship

Matthew 28:19

I Corinthians 11:26

Psalm 96:1-2

1 Samuel 16:7

## The Holy Spirit Fills and Empowers—Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit

Luke 24:49

Romans 12:1,2

Hebrews 12:14

Galatians 5:22-23

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Acts 2

## Jesus is Coming Back—Consummation

I Thessalonians 4:16,17

Isaiah 11:6-9

Revelation 21:8

II Peter 3:13

## This is God's Story—Our Responsibility

Psalm 102:18

*The Power of Words and the Wonder of God*, John Piper,  
Justin Taylor, pp. 112-113