

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

Today marks the beginning of a new group year as well as a new study within our One Groups. As you know, South Plains as a congregation is undertaking a unified effort to go through the entire Bible based on the outline laid out in *The Story*. This is not an attempt to use *The Story* as a substitute for Scripture, but rather to accompany our readings and help us all work through the Biblical text together. To this end, our Adult Bible Classes, our preaching, and the curriculum we use in One Groups will all come from the same set of texts.

For our groups, we will focus on living out—or making practical application—of those texts we are studying for the week. Our Adult Bible Classes will serve more as the informational time, which will allow groups to focus on how we actually put those texts into practice. Your job as a leader of a One Group is not to further break down the meaning of the texts, but to say: OK, if these are the implications from the text, then how do we make this a part of our own lives, that is, how do we live this story?

I will include a brief overview of the texts we have studied each week, but the purpose of this is to serve as a review and ensure we are all on the same page. Do not feel like you have to repeat what has already been done.

Summary of the Text:

Scheduled text for this week: Genesis 1-3 (Note: this is the text for the congregational reading and is used here for context. We will be looking at a smaller section of the text, as indicated above.)

Chapter 1 of Genesis begins the story of creation. The earth was a formless void and through the power of God, the earth was created. This answers the question all societies ask: Where did we come from? We came from God. He is sovereign and did not just take over something already there—he created what is.

Genesis 1.26-27: I think it is important to see that humankind was created in the image of God, and created as relational beings. Notice the plural: “Let *us* create mankind in *our* image.” More than how we look in comparison to God, we may need to think about how we relate to one another in comparison to him.

Genesis 1.31: God had proclaimed everything he created as “good” until he creates humankind, and he declares it “very good.”

Genesis 2: I want your group to read this chapter together because it develops the relationship between God, Adam, and Eve within the garden. We often think of Eden as a perfect place and I think it is a fair way to think of it. Everything is good, both the environment Adam and Eve lives in and the relationship they have with one another and with God. Looking forward to 3.8, we get a sense that God often came and walked in the cool of the afternoon with Adam and Eve. This does not appear to be a one-time checking up on his fallen creation, but a normal occurrence. Imagine what it must have been like to live in a perfect garden and get to visit with God. That’s the kind of “perfection” we want to communicate.

Genesis 2.25: I find it interesting that the fact Adam and Eve were both naked, but not ashamed is mentioned. It is almost as if the writer of Genesis wants to be sure we completely understand the level of intimacy we find

LESSON #1

Date: 09/09/2012

Text: Genesis 2

The Big Picture: Many of us are quick to realize that the world we live in is not the world as God first created it. We are pulled away from God and from good relationships with other followers of Christ. Today, we will remind ourselves of who we were created to be and the relationships we were created to have.

Materials Needed: “Creating a Group Covenant” Guide

in this perfect place. Obviously, compared to how we would react—or perhaps our reaction even thinking about Adam and Eve wandering around naked—the fall has removed us from this sort of relationship.

Genesis 3: The destruction of this idea of perfection is the point of the chapter. We are told of the fall of humankind and the subsequent expulsion from this garden paradise. The relational intimacy is also destroyed. Notice that Adam and Eve immediately knew they were naked and were ashamed when they ate the fruit. Everything is suddenly different.

We are not going to focus on chapter 3 in group for the simple reason that I want us to focus on building relationships with other group members. Focusing on sin, the fall, the destruction of relationships in your first meeting together is not a conducive way to begin your group life cycle.

Preparing for the Group Time:

Because this will be your first time together as a group, be sure to spend time getting to know one another. Some of the groups have many of the same members back, but even if you have just one new family added to your group, you need to be sure to go around the circle and introduce yourselves. If you have a choice between shortening this greeting time or the discussion time, I would say shorten the lesson. Getting to know one another and starting off on the right foot is that important.

In addition to getting to know one another, I would recommend sharing with your group the need to develop a covenant. A covenant is simply a set of guidelines that your group discusses and agrees upon which help shape how your group will function throughout the upcoming year. It includes procedural things, like are we going to eat and if so, how will we determine who brings what food. It helps the group establish parameters for how long your meeting will be, where you will meet each week, and what elements will be a part of each meeting (discussion, prayer time, a time of worship, etc.).

A covenant also allows people to express their goals for the group. One of the biggest reasons people leave a group is they do not feel like their goals are being met. For instance, if a family hopes to have at least an hour of in-depth study time as a part of the group, but the rest of the group spends more time in prayer than study, that family will feel like the group is not meeting their needs. Sharing your goal for group through establishing a covenant allows for everyone to understand the direction a group will go.

A covenant also allows you to evaluate the direction your group is headed. If the group is moving away from the goals that were originally expressed, a revisit of the covenant helps you steer the direction back toward a positive outcome.

Finally, a covenant gives you an understanding to better navigate troubles that may happen in the group. I have visited with groups in the past that faced challenges within the group—challenges that created a tension in the group that began to erode the ability of the group to make a difference in the lives of group members. The groups that had established a covenant and were able to revisit it were able to remind themselves of what was important to the group, make some adjustments, and made it through that difficult time stronger. The groups that did not have a covenant did not have a common understanding or common goals to fall back on and either struggled for the rest of their existence or simply disbanded and stopped meeting. It may seem like a lot of effort now, but I promise you having a covenant pays off in the long run.

I have included an information sheet about group covenants, including a couple of samples. My suggestion is that in your first meeting, you mention to the group the need for the group to establish a covenant and ask the group to think about what their goal(s) is/are for the group over the upcoming week. Then, the following week, you collect those ideas and put them down on paper. After putting them on paper, you will be able to develop some specifics, which I would return to your group to allow them to agree upon or to alter in some way before adopting them as your group covenant.

Living the Story

Lesson #1
Text: Genesis 2

Lesson Outline:

As mentioned above, begin your group time having everyone in the group introducing themselves. Be sure everyone is included. Some questions that may be good introduction questions might include:

- If you could be doing anything else besides being here at group, what would you want to be doing?
- What was the best small group experience you have ever had?
- How did you end up at South Plains?

To begin your discussion time, ask everyone in the group to share the best vacation they have ever experienced. Where was it? Why was it the best? Would you go back?

Read, or have someone read, Genesis 2. Be sure to also point out Genesis 3.8—that part of the garden experience appeared to include walking in the cool of the afternoon with God.

Go through the discussion questions

Ask your group to do the “Living the Story” activity this week.

Introduce the concept of a group covenant with your group.

Close in prayer.

Discussion Questions:

After hearing the reading of Genesis 2, how would you describe the Garden of Eden? What do you think it would have been like to live in that Garden? Would you like it there? Would it be a place you would like to vacation?

Genesis 2 begins with a description of God taking Sabbath rest. Why did God take Sabbath? How do you see this Sabbath related to your picture of what the Garden was like?

The end of chapter (2.25) describes Adam and Eve as being “naked, and they felt no shame.” What does that tell us about how God created humankind and the relationship they had with one another? What implication does that have for how we live today? Was this just an interesting tidbit the author threw in or does it have some deeper meaning for us?

We have talked about your favorite vacation and also about what it might have been like to live in the Garden of Eden. If you were to describe your own Garden of Eden as you experience it today, what would it be? In other words, where is that place—both physically but also perhaps emotionally and spiritually—where you experience being in relationship with God in its fullness?

What prevents you from enjoying your garden, as you have described here?

What helps you maintain and stay within your garden, that is, that place where you are in a healthy, rich relationship with God and with those closest to you? What are ways this group can help encourage you to remain in your “garden?”

For the Children:

Each One Group at South Plains is made up differently and have different ages mixed together. Those groups that have children always wrestle with the question: What do we do with the children? My hope is that you allow your time

together as a group to be inclusive of the children. I will attempt to find ways to include children within the lesson and opportunities for them to participate in ways that are meaningful to them. Living out the story in front of our children is one of the most powerful ways we as parents (both literally and spiritually) have to help our children understand how to live the story in their own lives.

I would encourage you this week to allow the children to introduce themselves. This makes them feel a part of the group from the start. I would also slow down a little bit during the discussion and ask the children to tell about their favorite vacation as well as what they think the Garden might have been like. I think you will be pleasantly surprised to hear their perceptions of this story.

Try this in Group:

Throughout the year, I will have different exercise to do during group to help communicate living out the story as we see in Scripture. I am not including anything this week because of our focus on getting to know one another.

Living the Story:

Encourage your group to spend time this week living within their “garden.” The last discussion question introduces this idea and hopefully you will have some good discussion from this. The idea is that people cultivate time with God and with other followers of Jesus. Some suggestions of possible ways to do this include:

- Set aside a time each day for prayer and Scripture reading. Instead of trying to get through a text, just read a small portion of Scripture slowly, perhaps repeating it for emphasis.
- Spend some “Sabbath” time everyday with your family. Turn off the TV or get off the computer and just enjoy being together as a family discussing the day and events of everyone’s life.
- Plan a block of time on a Saturday for Sabbath with the family.
- Make plans to go grab a cup of coffee with someone in the group this week. Spend time sharing with one another ways to help each other grow closer to God and other followers of Jesus.
- Read a devotional book. (Henri Nouwen’s *The Way of the Heart* is a great one.)
- Instead of working through lunch, find a quiet place to pause and spend time in prayer.
- Write a note to someone thanking him or her for his or her encouragement to you in your spiritual walk.

The point of this exercise is to help us remember that the fall pulls us away from that relationship with God and fellow followers we were designed to be in. We were created to walk in the cool of the afternoon with God. For many of us, however, this is not our first reaction, but the thing we find ourselves most distracted from.

What’s Next:

The congregational reading for this upcoming week (September 16) is Genesis 12-22, 28, 32-35. This is covered in *The Story* chapter 2. We will focus on Genesis 15 in group next week, although will make some references to some of the other texts we will read.