



SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON ONE:

WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN STORY?

FACILITATOR NOTE

This lesson centers on the unity of God’s Word by exposing the overarching story of redemption found in the Bible. Spend time reading through and praying over this lesson. Consider the ways in which you have struggled viewing the Bible and where you fit in the grand scheme of God’s Story. Spend time expressing to the class that God has always had a plan to redeem His people and that they are a part of that plan and have an important part in God’s Story.

PRAYER

Spend time in prayer with the class. Allow for requests and center your prayer on this lesson.

LESSON

I. WHAT BASIC ELEMENTS MAKE UP A STORY?

Five Essential Elements of a Story

1. **Characters** – Characters are the individuals that the story is about. In most stories the author provides a detailed description of each of the characters so that the reader can visualize each person. There is typically a main character that determines the way the plot will grow and develop. The main character usually solves the problem that the story centers around. However, the other characters play a part in either creating the problem or helping to solve it. The author typically develops the characters through the entire story, yet they remain true to their parts throughout.
2. **Setting** – Setting is where the story takes place. The author usually describes the environment that the characters find themselves in so that the readers can visualize where the characters are and what they see around them. Describing the setting helps the readers feel connected with the characters and the plot.
3. **Plot** – The plot is the story itself. The entire book is based on the plot. With any plot there must be a very clear beginning, middle, and end. The author must make clear each part of the plot by providing the necessary descriptions. This helps the reader make sense of the actions of the characters and helps them follow along from start to finish.
4. **Conflict** – Conflict is found in every story. The plot centers on this conflict and how the characters work to resolve the problem. The story becomes most exciting right before the resolution. This is called the *climax* of the story.
5. **Resolution** – Resolution happens when the characters (usually the main character) discover the solution to the conflict. The resolution must fit the rest of the story and solve all parts of the conflict.



II. WHY ARE STORIES IMPORTANT?

All of us find ourselves intrigued by a good story. Think about all the books we read, TV shows we watch, and the movies and plays we see. Since people began drawing pictures on cave walls we have been drawn to stories.

- Why do stories matter? What is it that pulls us into a story?
 - Stories provide us meaning. This meaning helps us understand the world around us. Otherwise, what does it all matter? What would be worth fighting for? Why get up in the morning if there is no meaning in life?
 - People want to know that things matter and have purpose. More importantly, people want to know that they matter and that they have a purpose. This is woven in our DNA.
 - Our life is a story and we want to know that our story has meaning and purpose. But our story is but one in the midst of many and that often leaves us confused. We wonder how we fit into the larger story and whether or not we matter in the grand scheme of things.
 - Yet, what we think and how we live is largely determined by the larger story in which we interpret our lives. The real question is, which larger story do we choose to find ourselves in?

III. IS THERE ONE CHRISTIAN STORY OR A BUNCH OF UNRELATED STORIES?

Many people believe that there is no grand story for our lives that binds everything together. Instead, they believe we all just live our lives and one day we die and that is it. With this lens (or should I say story?) they view God's story as a bunch of unrelated stories that provide no meaning for lives today. They do not believe there is one story in the Bible.

Others believe that the Bible is from God, but would agree that the Bible is filled with unrelated books that can give us some insight into God and give us some examples of what God expects and how to live, but it is often confusing and even seemingly contradictory. They approach the Bible looking for answers for how to live, but don't believe that it can possibly tell us one story because it was written by many authors over many years.

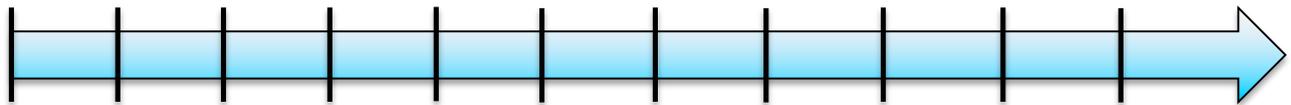
However, there are others who firmly believe that the God's Word did not come to us by chance and in an unrelated fashion. Instead, they believe the Bible communicates one story from God that spans the centuries of human existence (a story that binds all the stories together). To borrow and adapt a quote from "Lord of the Rings": ***"One Story to rule them all, One Story to find them, One Story to bring them all and in God's love bind them."***



Biblical Theology

This approach to God's Word is called *Biblical Theology* and it assumes there is unity in the Bible and that God is communicating a coherent story of redemption to His children. This approach allows the Bible (God) to tell the story and to define the terms that will control our reading of it. *Biblical theology* seeks to put individual texts in their historical context since what came before them is the foundation on which they are laid and what comes after is what they anticipate. Everything is connected and a part of a greater story and plan.

However, our typical approach to reading the Bible often does not allow for that. Usually, we approach the Bible from a sequential and chronological perspective. We simply follow the timeline of God's story and try to determine what God is teaching us from the particular point in history.



Doing so, we find ourselves opening up to a part of Scripture and trying to discover what it is saying to us without recognizing it within the framework of the larger story of redemption. With this approach, everything is contained within its context without a notion as to how it fits into God's overall plan.

This leads us to look to the different stories and characters in Scripture as an example to us in some way. This is because we believe that the Bible is about us and therefore its use of these many stories and characters are present to teach us how we are to live. While there is some truth in that the stories and characters in God's Word can be examples to us, that is not God's primary objective in telling us these stories. Instead, He is trying to lead us to Him by showing us His plan to redeem us as He works it out through all of Scripture. You see, the Bible is not about us; it's about God and His plan to save us.

Instead of taking this usual approach to Scripture, *Biblical Theology* seeks to open up the unity of the Bible by exposing and collecting its major themes. It demonstrates the many ways in which the character of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unite the diverse books and materials revealing to us a greater plan that was set forth by God since before time began. Jesus Himself used *Biblical Theology* to demonstrate how all of Scripture pointed to Him in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus and to His disciples (read Luke 24:13-49).

There, Jesus pointed forward and pointed backward in Scripture demonstrating how the whole of the Bible was God's revelation of His story of redemption carried out through His Son and finds fulfillment when Jesus comes again. That is why *Biblical Theology* is important. It's important because:



- It gives us the means of dealing with problematic passages in the Bible by relating them to the one message of the Bible.
- It enables us to relate any Bible story to the whole message of the Bible, and therefore to ourselves.
- It shows the relationship of all parts of the Old Testament to the person and work of Jesus Christ and, therefore, to the Christian.
- It enables us to map out the unity of the Bible by looking at its message as a whole.
- It provides the basis for the interpretation of any part of the Bible as God's Word to us.¹
- It understands all things as leading to and from something. **Ultimately, Christ as center.**

The Metanarrative: The Story Above the Stories

With the new lens of *Biblical Theology*, we are able to understand God's ultimate purpose as He gives us insight into the true meaning of all things. This Story above the stories allows us to approach and interpret Scripture and life as God intended. It allows us to discover how His plan has been worked out since before creation. Each and every story of the Bible and our own lives begin to make sense and we see what part we play in that story.

Let's consider God's Story of Redemption in light of the essential elements we see in most every story.

Five Essential Elements of God's Story

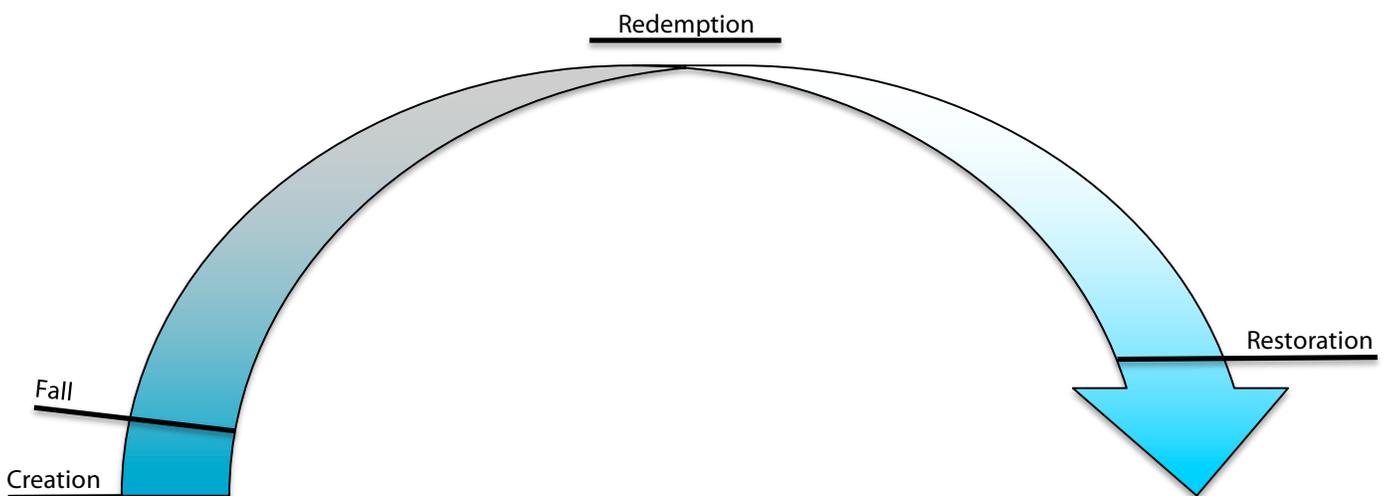
1. **Characters** – The author and main character of God's Story is GOD. Therefore, God determines the way the plot will grow and develop. In the end (and from the beginning) God solves the problem that the entire story centers around. However, the other characters of the Bible play a part in either creating the problem or helping to solve it. God develops the characters through the entire story, yet they remain true to their parts throughout.
2. **Setting** – The Bible's setting is the world, as we know it. While much of the Story happens on the three bodies of land around the Mediterranean Sea, the Story is in the whole world in which we live. God has provided the setting that gets at the meaning and purpose of this world, which He created, and the meaning and purpose of our lives. The world is God's theater and temple in which He demonstrates and displays His glory. God creates and describes this setting to help us feel connected with Him, the characters and their stories, and the plot of His Story.

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1991), 21-25.



3. **Plot** – The plot of God’s Story will be describes in more detail below. However, it can be summarized in four words: **Creation, Fall, Redemption,** and **Restoration.** God’s entire Story is based on this plot. With this plot line, we are able to make sense of the actions of the Biblical stories and characters as we follow along with them from start to finish.
4. **Conflict** – The conflict is centered on the war that Satan (the Devil) is waging against God to unseat Him as Lord of the universe. Therefore, Satan constantly works to convince humankind that they do not need God, but instead they can become their owns gods by disregarding God and taking control of their own lives. The plot of God’s Story centers on this conflict and how God works to resolve this problem. God’s Story becomes most exciting at the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that takes place right before God fully restores all things unto Him. This is the *climax* of God’s Story.
5. **Resolution** – Resolution happens in God’s Story when God sends His Son to return to earth to restore all God’s faithful children to Him by bringing them from exile back into His presence for all eternity. This resolution fits the rest of God’s Story as it solves all parts of the conflict from the beginning of time until its end.

As mentioned in number three above, the plot of God’s Story has four acts: **Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration.** These acts constitute the umbrella over everything.



These acts are the “Plays within the play.” Trevin Wax looks at each of these acts in this way...

- **Creation:** One Hebrew word sums up the picture of Genesis 1 and 2: *shalom*. Peace. Earth was full of God's shalom, the kind of peace in which everything works according to God's intention. The world was made for human flourishing, there we could live in joy in the presence of our Maker, worshiping God by loving Him and one another forever.



- **Fall:** Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. We refer to their rebellious choice as “the fall,” and because they represented all of humanity, their action affects us too. We have-- through our attitudes and actions-- declared ourselves to be God's enemies. This rebellion results in physical and spiritual death.
- **Redemption:** Thankfully the loving Creator who rightly shows Himself to be wrathful toward our sin is determined to turn evil and suffering we have caused into good that will be to His ultimate glory. So the next movement shows God implementing a master plan for redeeming His world and rescuing fallen sinners. In the Person of Jesus Christ, God Himself comes to renew the world and restore His people. The grand narrative of Scripture climaxes with the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- **Restoration:** The story doesn't end with redemption. God has promised to renew the whole world, and the Bible gives us a peak into this glorious future. The restoration of all things will take place in two ways. Christ will return to judge sin and evil, and He will usher in righteousness and peace. God will purge this world of evil once and for all.²

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING! Not just how you read the Bible, but how you view the world, the people in it, and your place in God's Story (an insight gained from Timothy Paul Jones):

- In light of the **creation**, you are a gift of God.
- In light of the **fall**, you are a sinner.
- In light of the **redemption**, you need a Savior.
- In light of the **restoration**, you are forever.

This also changes how you interact and view others:

- In light of the **creation**, this person is a gift of God.
- In light of the **fall**, this person is a sinner.
- In light of the **redemption**, this person needs a Savior.
- In light of the **restoration**, this person is forever.

² Trevin Wax and Matt Chandler, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope*, New Edition (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 30-39.



IV. WHAT IS MY PLACE IN GOD'S STORY?

"What is my place in God's Story?" This is a fundamental question that all of us face in our journey with Christ. We often feel so small in the grand scheme of things and wonder if God really needs us. We look at people who have written books on God, are great orators of the Gospel message, are well-known missionaries in the farthest regions of the world, or are professors at Christian universities and we wonder "what do I matter?" YOU MATTER! So much so that God sent His only Son to die and be raised again in order to save you. That's a big deal!

In order to find our place in God's story we have to listen with the ears of our heart. We often ask why God won't speak more clearly to us like He did with people in the Bible? But He does. He's given us His Word, telling us His Story of who He is and who we are and the enormous lengths He's been willing to go in order to bring us back home to Him. From the beginning of the Bible, God's Word (spoken and Incarnate) brought all things into existence (Genesis 1, John 1, Colossians 1:15-20). That same word spoke you into existence (Genesis 1:26). You are a word of God!!! God's breath gives us life in the same way all Scripture is God breathed (Genesis 2:7; 2 Timothy 3:14-17). God not only spoke us into existence, He breathed us into being. The "word" that God is breathing us forth is to be His image, that is, Christ's image. We are created to be God's incarnate (in the flesh) "words."

As a part of God's Story, you are the living 67th book of the Bible. But in order to be that living 67th book, you must understand what the other 66 books are trying to communicate. Yes, there are many stories in the Bible. However, there is one story that binds them all together. This is the story above the stories, the Christian story, God's Story that is seamlessly woven throughout the entire Bible. It defines and describes His will and purpose and it is the story that draws all humankind to Him. It is in the framework of this overarching story that we find our place in God's Story.

V. THE END OF THE STORY

God's will for your life is to reconcile (reunite) you to Him. His purpose for your life is that you glorify Him in all that you do as you live out your part in HIS Story. What a blessing! How wonderful to know that God sees us this way and has done everything to make it possible for us to be with Him. We are called to go and proclaim and live this message to everyone. What a privilege it is to be loved by God and commissioned to be His instruments of righteousness. Now, GO and make disciples in light of God's Story. He's waiting for you!