



THE STORY



Date: September 9-10, 2017
Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: The Story – Chapter 1

This first week after Labour Day is always a special time in our culture. Don't you find that to be true? School has started for another year. I loved seeing all the pictures on Facebook and Instagram of the little ones headed off to begin a new year, a new grade. Parents dropping their children off for the first time at college or university. Plenty of angst for sure but also, can you feel it? Excitement is in the air. New beginnings.

For some of you, music and dance lessons start up again, for others, a new sports season. NFL football is back this weekend! The Toronto Maple Leafs are on the cusp of a hope filled season. But this time, it's legit! It is a wonderful time of the year. Even in the church. Especially in the church.

If you had a chance to check out the Going Deeper Guide, hot off the press last weekend, you will have seen many exciting opportunities to deepen your faith here at North Park. The Children, youth and young adult ministries all kick off a new year this week. I love September.

And today marks the beginning of a new teaching series for us. And this one is particularly special. Today we launch a 31 week journey that will take us from the beginning of God's story right through to the end. It is the greatest story ever told. And our primary resource through this series will be this book, entitled, THE STORY. Now let me just clarify.

In the pages of this book is scripture. It is all scripture, with some passages omitted so it flows a little smoother chronologically. From Genesis, right through to Revelation. It all comes together to present one overarching message. It's the Story of God and his people, us. This is a Story about us. And let's face it, when it is about us, it becomes a

little more meaningful doesn't it? And this is what makes our journey extra special. We are not just studying THE STORY in here. Almost every other ministry of the church, the children, the youth, the young adults, the small groups, bible studies will also be following along. So, parents when you go home after the service, you can engage your children in conversations about what they are learning because it is what you will be learning too. This promises to be a great time of unity and continuity for us all.

One final thing, we are encouraging you all to buy a book. They are available for \$10 at the Welcome Centre. And we are inviting you to follow although with us each week. Reading the chapter in advance of the weekend. So, this week, you can read chapter 2 in preparation for next weekend's message. We will teach on a chapter a week for 31 weeks. So does that set the stage for what we are doing? We are anticipating God to do great things in our midst this season. I want to invite you to stand as I pray and we begin this adventure together.

As a way of a visual, let me just lay out for you where we are going, the timeline of our 31 weeks together studying THE STORY. The larger story is actually broken down into 5 smaller movements. Over the next 31 weeks together, we will look a little closer at each of these movements.

They are:

1. The story of the Garden
2. The story of Israel
3. The story of Jesus
4. The story of the Church
5. The story of the New Garden (back where we started)

Today we begin with **Movement 1.**
The Story of the Garden

If you have your books, The Story, open them at Chapter 1 or if you have your bible, turn to the very beginning, to Genesis, as we observe that THE STORY starts with..... Creation. And the opening line of the bible is one of those powerful introductions isn't it. Many of us know it from memory,

Genesis 1:1
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Isn't that a great line?

There are other well-known books that have classic opening lines as well. Let me try a few out for you and see if you can name the book with these opening lines. Are you ready? Shout out the answers if you know it.

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.
The Opening line from the book,
The Hobbit, J. R. R. Tolkien

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
The Opening line from
A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens.

If music be the food of love, play on,
The Opening line of
William Shakespeare's classic, Twelfth Night.

All well-known first lines, but nothing tops the opening of the bible.

Genesis 1:1.
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Did you know that the name Genesis comes from the Hebrew word meaning, beginning? Genesis is a book about beginnings. And almost immediately we are introduced to the main character in this story. It's God. And everything and everybody else has their life and breath and being in him. *God created the heavens and the earth.*

Now here's the thing, creation has caused a bit of controversy hasn't it? Maybe you hold a young earth creationism point of view which means you believe that God created the earth in six, 24 hour days. Or maybe you are on the other end of the spectrum, believing in theistic evolution which suggests there was a gap of perhaps millions of years in God's creation. From my perspective and what reading and research I have done on this topic, neither view has to undermine the purpose or authority of scripture. The main point that has to be grasped is that God is behind creation. God started with nothing and created all that we see and even that which we cannot see.

Once we agree with that, quite frankly, God can do what he wants whether it is over a million years or a split second. Genesis chapters 1-2 has less to do with the science of creation and more to do with embracing the view of God as creator. Do you see that? And beginning at Genesis 1:3, we see God's process of creation presented poetically and artistically. Day 1, God created Light and dark. Day 2, he created Sky and water. Day 3, he created land. Day 4, the sun, moon and stars. Day 5, the birds and sea creatures. Day 6 Animals and human beings and on Day 7, he rested. And if you read through Genesis chapter 1, you will notice a repetitive phrase used to describe each act of God's creation? *And God saw that it was good.* Seven times this phrase is used to describe God's creative works in the first chapter of Genesis. *It was good.* Do you know the only time, the text says, that creation was not good?

Genesis 2:18
The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

So listen to this wonderful account of how the creator God once again, goes to work to solve man's loneliness.

Genesis 2:21-25
So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ *The man said,
“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.”*

²⁴ *That is why a man leaves his father and
mother and is united to his wife, and they
become one flesh.*

²⁵ *Adam and his wife were both naked, and
they felt no shame.*

The first human beings, Adam, which comes from the Hebrew word meaning Humanity and Eve which comes from the Hebrew word meaning life. Adam and Eve, humanity and life. The only created things, we are told in Genesis 1:27 that are made in the image of God. What does that mean? To be made in the image of God? To be an image bearer of something means to reflect it, like a mirror. Humanity from the beginning was made to reflect the creativity, the goodness and the character of God back out to the world that he made. That is what we were made for. If there was an instruction manual attached to us the day we were born it would say, in my case, Paul was made to reflect the creativity, the goodness and the character of his creator God back out into the world. Image bearers. Is that what you did this week? Reflect the creativity, goodness and character of God to the world through your life and actions? That is a challenge isn't it? Which leads us nicely into the whole point of creation. Why did God do all of this? Have you ever asked yourself that? Why did God create all of this in the first place? Was he just bored one day, looking for something to do?

Have you ever seen one of those dominos courses that people set up? Where it starts a chain reaction, one dominos falls, knocks the next one, and some of them can be pretty elaborate. I watched one on YouTube a few weeks ago, that was this massive creation of falling dominos, going up inclines and down, side to side, launching mini cars carrying objects that triggered other chain reactions. Things going in a hundred different directions. It was incredible. It took several people, weeks to set up this course. Was that God, one day, just nothing to do, so he thought up this massive creation of chain reactions? I don't think so. God's intention begins with a garden. The Story of the Garden.

What do you think of when you hear the word, Garden? Back in my hometown of Kitchener, we had something called Rockway Gardens. A scenic landscape of colourful flowers and shrubbery. In fact, it was a popular place to gather for wedding and prom pictures. I am not quite sure the London equivalent, maybe Springbank Park or Storybook Gardens.

Maybe for some of you, gardens bring to mind, plots of land set aside for growing fruits and vegetables. At North Park's 1750 Huron Street location we have over 40 lush garden plots, tended to by almost 50 families. Producing food for these families and some is donated to those in need. Imagine these beautiful gardens that come to our mind and it gives us only a glimmer of the magnificent garden that God created called Eden. The Garden of Eden.

The bible tells us that it was located where the Tigris and Euphrates River intersect, in what today is the country of Iraq. Eden, a beautiful oasis filled with vegetation and trees that were not only pleasing to the eye but also good for food. Into this garden, God places his crowning achievement. Human beings. Adam and Eve. And they had everything they needed. A place to live, protection, and a purpose to live for. Of all that he created, God singled out two humans to build a relationship with- Adam and Eve. His vision was to come and be with humanity in a beautiful garden of his creation. The triune God, simply desires to do life with humanity. Isn't that amazing? The Almighty God wants to be in relationship with us. That is what matters most to him. Relationship.

And it would only make sense that God would want to ensure that Adam and Eve embrace that same vision and passion as well. That they too, desired to be in relationship with him. So he instilled something deep within their DNA that is different from the rest of creation. God gave humanity the freedom to choose. To make a decision to be in relationship with him. To trust him and to love him.

DTR. Have you heard of this acronym? DTR stands for “define the relationship”. Some of you have been in these DTR “define the relationship” moments. When you are connected to someone, maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend and you come to a

point where you have to determine whether or not to take the relationship to the next level. So you put out a feeler, a bit of a test.

For Carolyn and I, I remember this DTR moment vividly. We had been good friends a long time, since grade 4. She was one of my best friends. Then came that fateful May long weekend of 1980, we were both 17, in grade 11. We had been invited to a friend's cottage. On one of the nights, we were all around a camp fire, but one by one, the others retired for the evening, leaving Carolyn and I, alone. Oh it started with harmless chatter and good natured joking as friends do. But, with the darkened sky filling with stars, the warm glow of the crackling fire, and the serenading of hoot, hoot, hoot of the night owl. That can take you places you don't expect to go! If memory serves me, I think Carolyn was the first to put out a feeler, to test the waters, *why haven't we ever dated each other*. She asked. I responded in my typical cool and collected manner, *wwwhat?!* But that is all it took. We stayed up most of the night "Defining The Relationship." The next day we were dating and the rest, as they say is history. We are growing old together. Well I am, she hasn't changed since that moonlit night.

DTR. To define the relationship means to declare a decision and it can be a little risky if you are not quite sure what the other person's response will be. Some of you know what I am talking about because you may have had a DTR moment that didn't go as expected. It can be heart breaking.

In a sense, God has a DTR, "define the relationship" moment in the garden with Adam and Eve. He gave them a way to declare their decision. Will they trust in Him totally? Will they choose to take their relationship with him to the next level? Let me set the scene for the test, the feeler God puts out to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:9

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So, God places two significant trees in the middle of the garden.

Genesis 2:15-17

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

God gives Adam and Eve a way to declare their decision. DTR, to define their relationship with him. Will they trust him completely? And he does it by placing two trees in the middle of the garden – The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. With only one instruction. Do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. All other trees, go for it. It was a test, a feeler. If they obey God, it will signify to him that they trust him and embrace his vision of it means to do life together in relationship. But if they disobey, they would be declaring to God that they are rejecting his vision. Do you see that? They would be rebelling against his instructions. And instead choosing to go out on their own. Believing they know what is best for their lives. Does that make sense?

See, up until this point, God as the creator was the one that defined what was good. His creation, the sky, water, land, humanity, *It was good, it was good, it was good*, and he was the one defining what was not good. *It was not good* for man to be alone. But now this tree situation represents the freedom to choose. Will Adam and Eve trust God's definition of good and evil or will they seize the opportunity to define it for themselves? What will they do? And this leads us to the second part of the story of the Garden. The Fall.

Because we all know what happened don't we? Something about a snake and an apple, Eve caved first and then as only a woman can do, she led the clueless man astray. They both ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The one tree God commanded them not to touch. And when they bit into that piece of fruit, they declared their decision, they defined their relationship with God. With that one seemingly harmless gesture of plucking the fruit and taking a bite, they proclaimed their desire to call the shots themselves. To live independent of God. At that moment, something changed in their

nature. Sin was now running through their bloodstream and one of the best definitions of sin is, Adam and Eve are now faced with a battle, a war within themselves between good and evil.

But, you and I know that feeling well, don't we? That internal battle between what is good and what is evil. We face it every day.

Can I ask you something? Do you think my pants are floods? Do you even know what that means? My generation in high school, you didn't want floods, pants that were too short. On Wednesday of this week, the staff were sitting around during lunch and I had put these pants in the dryer the night before, I thought maybe I had shrunk them. So I thought I would ask our resident style expert, worship leader Jordan, what he thought of my pants. So, I stood up in front of him. It was a bit of a risk. Jordan have worked together for four years, thought I would have DTR, "define the relationship" moment with him. I was putting out a test, a feeler to see if I could trust him with this delicate issue. As I was standing there in front of him, I said, *hey man, do you think my pants are floods.*

Now in that moment he had a choice, he could have responded with good or with evil. There is battle going on within us. He just looked at me and said, *Paul, it doesn't matter. You are too old, nobody cares what your pants look like.* Well, maybe those weren't his exact words, but that is what I heard. Continue to pray for Jordan, okay? I don't know why I would take advice from him anyway, he rolls his pants up! This is a silly example but, good and evil battles within us every day.

It is something that we all deal with and the origin goes all the way back to the garden. Adam and Eve defined the relationship with God by disobeying him and going their own way. Evil entered their lives. The hard truth is that humanity is horrible at defining what is good and what is evil apart from God. If you don't believe me, check out the latest print, television or social media news feeds. Or simply look back on some of the life decisions you have made apart from God.

Isn't it interesting the first thing that happens after Adam and Eve bite into the fruit and eat from the tree that God told them not to.

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The Bible says the first thing they did after disobeying God was to cover themselves. Why? Didn't it say just before this in,

Genesis 2:25 that,

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Why the change? It's sin. This warring internal battle of good and evil. Shame has now come to humanity. Now Adam and Eve are looking at each other, and instead of having just good thoughts about each other, frolicking in the buff with not a care in the world, like a new born baby. Now an evil thought emerges. For the first time Adam and Eve feel shame and they feel vulnerable. They cover up to protect themselves from the other person, and we, humanity have been in this defensive mode ever since. Protecting ourselves, specifically interestingly enough, around body image and identity. It has lingered with us since the garden.

The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God in the Garden of Eden had consequences. The Lord curses the serpent that tempted Eve to forever crawl on its belly and eat dust. To the woman he increases her pain in childbirth. Which some of you have experienced firsthand. It is not pleasant, or so I have been told. By my wife. When she was giving birth. *Are you okay? No I'm not okay, (breath, breath) get this thing out of me!!* To the man, he condemned him to toil and labour over the land. Almost like childbirth!!

But perhaps the greatest consequence of all, God banished Adam and Eve from the garden. From the place of relationship and community with God. Sin, always has consequences. Some of you are living with those even now. Which takes us to Genesis 4, where we are introduced to Adam and Eve's offspring, their two sons, Cain and Abel.

Genesis 4: 2-5

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

Offerings were an important way to honour and worship God in this time. The text says the Lord was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's. Now Cain has a decision to make doesn't he? He has two choices on the way he can respond to the disapproval of God. Good or evil. Some of you students in here. You have just started a new school year. Perhaps you have already received some homework or even an assignment. Imagine you hand in this work to your teacher and you get a mediocre grade because she didn't like your "offering". You have a decision to make don't you? You can use the mark from your teacher to motivate you to bring a better "offering" to her next time or, you can get angry. And defensive and blame the teacher's lousy marking. Two choices. Which would you choose? Which choice do you think Cain went with in reacting to God?

Genesis 4:5-7

So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Cain chose to get angry. And sin did rule over him that day, as he chose evil over good. He killed his brother out of spite and jealousy which signifies something very important. The sin nature, the internal battle between good and evil did not end with Adam and Eve in the garden. They passed it on to the next generation and it has been passed down to every generation ever since.

And that is a difficult biblical principal to wrap our heads around because we all like to think that we are good at heart. But just as my dad passed on to

me the colour of my eyes, he also gave me his sin nature which he got from his dad, who got it from his dad, who got it from his dad, all the way back to Adam. It is this sin nature that separates us from God and life in the garden, life in relationship with our Creator. And this is a theme we will see repeated over and over in the story of the bible, in our story. When humanity chooses to live apart from God, the expressions of evil get worse and worse.

That is what is unfolding in these first few pages of the bible. From Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God and eat from the tree, to Cain killing his own brother until it finally reaches a breaking point in Genesis 6 when things had gotten so outside the design and pattern God had in mind for his people, that he just has to step in. To intervene.

Genesis 6:5-6

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

Can you possibly hear anything more disturbing than this? That the creator looked upon his creation and declared, *I regret that I ever made you.* It would be like a parent looking upon a child and declaring, *I wish you had never been born!*

I love my four children immensely. They are wonderful kids. But they each have had some less than stellar moments, remember, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. I passed on that sinful nature. But never have I ever come anywhere close to regretting that they had been born. That just tells you how far humanity had fallen away from God. The depravity of humanity had sunk so low at this point in time, that God regretted that he had ever made human beings at all. And it wasn't so much anger that prompted this declaration as it was a deep sadness and grief at the state of his world.

All hope seems lost. Have you ever lost hope? That a better reality was impossible? With God, hope is never lost. A better future is always possible in him. Because thankfully, the story doesn't end there. If it

had, we wouldn't be here. God wants us back. Back in relationship with him. God loves us so much that he will stop at nothing, he pursues us which leads to the next part of the story. The Flood.

Genesis 6:7-8

So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

All hope is not lost. God puts into motion a plan to start over. Have you ever done that? Created something and then not satisfied, you wiped it all out and started again. I did it just this week, about 20x with this message.

Evil had gotten so pervasive and had corrupted every person and area of earthly life, that God decides to use a mulligan, a do over. A reboot. Out of his desire to preserve the goodness of the world, he washes it clean and starts fresh. With one exception. A guy named Noah. The lone human being on earth at this time that had actually found favour in the eyes of the Lord. God has Noah build this humungous ark, which you have to admit, would have been a conversation starter in his neighbourhood. Then has him collect his family and a cross section of animals into the ark, the door slams shut and God brings a massive flood.

In recent days, we have seen footage of the devastation of Hurricane Harvey with the flooding in Houston. We've seen the catastrophic damage and flooding caused by Hurricane Irma throughout much of the Caribbean and even now working its way up the Florida coastline. But lost in these major stories, there has also been severe flooding in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, and even in Windsor. Devastating. Causing billions of dollars of damage and the loss of many lives. But this flood in Genesis 6, it wiped out everyone and everything. Total annihilation, except Noah, his family and those animals.

When the flood waters receded, the door of the Ark sprang open and Noah stepped out to begin the God given task of rebuilding and repopulating the earth. But there is just one itsy bitsy problem that remains

outstanding. Do you know it? See if you have been paying attention. This is the quiz. Do you remember, the garden and the fall? Do you remember, the sinful nature that Adam passed on to his children and their children and all the way down to you and me? Noah found favour in the Lord's eyes but he wasn't perfect nor was his family. They took their sinful nature into the ark and they walk out with it, all those months later. It was only a matter of time until sin reared its ugly head again and sure enough we see it in Noah's life right after the flood.

But again, all hope is not lost. God was already at work setting into motion a plan to save humanity from themselves. What will it take to get us back into relationship with God. What will God do next? Well perhaps we were given a bit of a clue back in Genesis 3. Do you remember what happened immediately after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

They sewed fig leaves to cover up their shame. But in Genesis 3:21, God does something different.

Genesis 3:21

the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

God replaced the fig leaves with the skin of animals to cover their shame. A clue perhaps that the solution to covering humanity's sin and restoring us back in relationship with God would have to involve the shedding of blood, something had to die. Do you see where this is going? Oh but, The Story is just beginning. God's plan to rescue his people from their sin is starting to unfold. I want to invite you to stick around for it, come back each week, follow along with the readings and be prepared to see the extent in which God will go to bring you and me back to him. But, the big question is, will we receive him? Will we choose to be in relationship with the Creator of the world?

Amen? Amen.

Points to Ponder

THE STORY

Creation- The Beginning of Life as We Know It

Chapter 1

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. In what ways was life in the original creation different from life as we know it today?
2. Why did God create humans in his own image? What does this mean?
3. What was the root cause of Adam and Eve's sin against God?
4. Why did God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden?
5. Why did God bring the flood upon the earth?
6. What does this act of judgement tell us about God?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray that God would open each of your hearts to this journey through THE STORY. That you would gain a greater personal understanding of the magnitude of God's redeeming work to bring humanity back to him.