



LESSON

1

GOD'S STORY
gospel fluency

1. SERMON NOTES

2. OPENING QUESTION

What is the greatest story you have ever read or movie you have ever watched? Why was it so great?

3. BIG IDEA

Understanding God's story is crucial to understanding your story.

4. SCRIPTURE MEMORY

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth in him. **Ephesians 1:7-10**

5. BIBLE CONVERSATION

Let's begin with the big picture. Let me share the vision, mission, and values that I believe God has called us to live out together as a church family.

OUR VISION

To see Fort Lauderdale and South Florida redeemed by the power of the gospel for the glory of God.

OUR MISSION

We exist to help people become so captivated by Jesus and what He accomplished for them on the cross that they reorient their entire lives toward Him and His mission.

OUR VALUES

We value story. We are story-formed people who worship a storytelling God. The Bible is made up of 66 books, written by at least 40 different authors over the course of a millennium, telling one unified story about Jesus. Story is the language of the heart. We learn our most important lessons through story, and story deepens those lessons in profound ways. It is the best way to reflect the glory of our Creator. We have four values:

- **GOD'S STORY:** gospel fluency
- **MY STORY:** gospel identity
- **OUR STORY:** gospel community
- **SHARED STORY:** gospel mission

GOD'S STORY: gospel fluency

The great reformer Martin Luther wrote, "Most necessary is it that we know [the gospel] well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually!" So we must begin with God's story, because it is the most important truth. We must know it well—well enough to understand our own story and to share it with others so they can see how God's story can inform and transform the story of their lives. That's what it means to be fluent in the gospel.

"In the beginning, God..." God is the author of your story and my story. He is the author of the ultimate story. We worship a storytelling God. The Bible is His story that He has shared with us. It is the inspired, inerrant Word of God and the ultimate authority for Christian belief and practice. We need to know it well and allow it to shape the story of our lives. We value knowing God's story and letting it inform and transform every aspect of our lives.

Many people start with their personal story. When asked about the identity of Jesus, they respond, "He is my best friend," "He lives in my heart," or "He has changed my life." These are wonderful truths. But it is history—*His* story—before it is *my* story.

What he did for us all two millennia ago in a land far away from us is the headline. Jesus is not swept into your story. You are swept into his. When we start with God's big story, the fact that we can actually have a personal relationship with him becomes even more meaningful.¹ So let's begin looking at God's

¹ Horton, Michael Scott. Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God's Story (p. 24). (Function). Kindle Edition.

story by asking, “who is God?”

Who Is God?

God is three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one God, the same in substance and equal in power and glory. The unfolding of God’s story is an eternal agreement between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the author of salvation, the Son accomplished salvation and the Spirit applies salvation. “In the doctrine of the Trinity,” wrote Herman Bavinck, “beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of humanity.” As the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, “our God is above us, before us, and within us.” The doctrine of the Trinity—God as one in essence and three in person—shapes and structures all of Christian faith and practice.²

- How are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit described in relation to one another?
- What role does each person of the Trinity play in the story of salvation?
- What challenges or questions do you have when trying to understand the Trinity?

GOSPEL IN THE AIR, GOSPEL ON THE GROUND

The Bible can be read through two lenses: the gospel in the air and the gospel on the ground. The gospel in the air is the overarching, unfolding plan of salvation throughout history. It reveals the purpose of the gospel. The gospel on the ground is how we personally experience salvation. It reveals the power of the gospel. We must know both the gospel purpose (creation, fall, redemption, restoration) and the gospel power (regeneration, justification, sanctification, glorification) and see them together as God’s story.

Gospel in the Air

The gospel in the air refers to the redemptive storyline of Scripture and its historical implications. Through this lens, we come to understand the reason for salvation—the gospel purpose (Ephesians 2:10, 14-22). Understanding the gospel in the air helps us understand all of Scripture. So let’s begin—well, at the beginning—with creation.

a. Creation (Genesis 1-2)

The beauty of God’s original creation is described in Genesis 1 and 2. The world was as God intended it to be, with humans made in His image—full of value, worth, and dignity, in perfect relationship with Him and with one another. Deep within all of us is a desire for the world to be as it was originally intended. We all know that we were created for so much more.

² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:260.

b. Fall (Genesis 3)

The Bible clearly acknowledges that humanity has been separated from God through the rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve. From that point on, the entire world has lived in rebellion against God. We live in a broken world—and we all know this intuitively.

c. Redemption (Genesis 3 - Revelation 19)

In His infinite mercy and grace, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus lived the perfect life we could never live and died the death we all deserve. He bore our punishment so that, by believing in Him, we could be made right with God. Trusting in His literal life, death, and resurrection—and surrendering our lives to Him—is the only means of salvation.

d. Restoration (Revelation 21)

One day, Jesus will return to fully establish His Kingdom and reign. At that time, He will usher in a new heaven and a new earth. There will be a final, consummate judgment where Jesus sets the world right. Until that day, we are His agents of good and change in this world.

That's the big picture—that's the gospel in the air. The gospel in the air shows us our need for a Savior. Answering the following questions will help you understand your own story in light of God's story:

- Creation: What area of your life do you intuitively sense you were created for so much more?
- Fall: How does that longing lead to frustration or create relational fractures in your life?
- Redemption: In what ways are you trying to resolve or cope with that frustration?
- Restoration: What might that area of your life look like if it were fully healed or restored?

Gospel on the Ground

The gospel on the ground is the personal redemptive implication of the gospel. Through this lens, we come to understand the means of salvation—the gospel power (Ephesians 2:8-9). The *ordo salutis* describes the process by which the work of salvation, through the work of Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of sinners.³

In this case, the good news is that God, in and through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit (regeneration), accepts us (justification), changes us (sanctification), and ultimately glorifies

³ While different theological traditions may order or define the steps slightly differently, a common Reformed or evangelical *ordo salutis* looks like this: election, effectual calling, regeneration, conversion (faith and repentance), justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance and glorification.

Himself in every aspect of our lives (glorification) (Romans 8:29-30). So let's unpack these beautiful facets of the gospel:

a. Regeneration (new life)

A secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us, bringing us into a living union with Christ (John 3:3-8; cf. also John 1:13; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Ephesians 2:8-9). **Note:** Regeneration precedes faith and repentance.

b. Justification (right legal standing)

An act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone (Romans 3:24; 4:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). The hard work of the Christian life is learning to rest fully in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

c. Sanctification (the victorious life)

The work of God's free grace by which we are renewed in our whole person in the image of God, and by which we are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness (Ezekiel 36:27; 2 Corinthians 5:17). **Note:** Many people switch the order of salvation here. They think they have to clean themselves up before God will accept them.

d. Glorification (receiving a resurrected body)

The final step in the application of redemption will occur when Christ returns and raises the bodies of all believers who have died, reuniting them with their souls, and transforms the bodies of those still alive—giving all believers perfect resurrection bodies like His own (Romans 8:30; 8:17, 19-25). Note: some people will be tempted to think they can be perfect on this side of eternity. This causes condemnation rather than a life of relying on God's grace to walk in repentance, faith and obedience.

The gospel on the ground shows us what a glorious Savior we have in Christ Jesus. Answering the following questions will help you understand your own story in light of God's story: :

- Regeneration: How does it make you feel knowing that God initiated your salvation—that He pursued you?
- Justification: In what ways do you try to justify yourself apart from Christ?
- Sanctification: Knowing that God's Spirit is making you more and more like Christ, how does that motivate you to follow Him in faith, repentance and obedience?
- Glorification: How does knowing that you will not be perfect until you see Jesus face to face impact your relationship with God and with others?

TWO REMINDERS: BAPTISM AND COMMUNION

We have a propensity to forget what is most important. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus gave the Church two visible symbols (ordinances) as reminders of His life, death, and resurrection. These two ordinances are baptism and communion. Both are means of grace—outward signs by which Christ communicates the truths of redemption to His people. As we celebrate these sacraments in community, we remind one another of who Christ is and what He accomplished for us on the cross, so that we may live each day in full view of the Cross.

a. Baptism

Baptism is a sign pointing to the grace of God made known at the cross of Jesus—for both adults and children.

Sign and Seal of the Covenant:

Baptism is a visible sign and seal of God's covenant of grace, signifying the promises of salvation and membership in the visible church. It is understood to be a visible sign of an invisible reality, representing a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and serving as a seal that confirms God's promises to them.

Sign: Baptism is a visible representation of the gospel and a person's identification with Christ. Romans 6:3-4: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." This passage shows baptism as a visual symbol of dying to sin and being raised to new life in Christ.

Colossians 2:12: "...having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." This verse highlights the connection between baptism and the believer's union with Christ's death and resurrection.

Seal: Baptism also serves as a confirmation of God's promises to the believer—much like a seal on a legal document. Ephesians 1:13-14: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." While not explicitly referring to baptism, this passage speaks of being "marked with a seal" by the Holy Spirit—often linked to the experience and significance of baptism.

Not a Requirement for Salvation: While we emphasize the importance of baptism, we affirm that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and not dependent on baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9). Baptism is to be administered only once.

2. Communion

The second reminder of the gospel is communion. Jesus instructed His disciples to remember His life, death, and resurrection. This is done through communion, which is a tangible means of grace—whereby we see, taste, hold, smell, and hear the promises of redemption in Christ. There is a real and special spiritual presence of the glorified Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit, which strengthens the believer's faith and points toward the future and full redemption of God's people when Christ returns.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said,

'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

6. DIGGING DEEPER

So how are we to respond to the gospel?

- First, if you have never put your faith in Jesus Christ, why not do it now?

- Secondly, if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ, the next step is to declare that publicly through baptism. What is keeping you from being baptized?

- Thirdly, for all who have put their faith in Christ, we have the privilege of coming to the Lord's table, where we are reminded of what a glorious Savior we have in Him by taking the bread and the cup.

7. MISSION

Have you ever wondered why God has you living in Fort Lauderdale? In Broward County? This is your mission field. It's where God has called you to make His name known. Over the next seven weeks, I want to help you answer that call. It's called the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. God is calling you. Who's your PLUS one? Who is the one person God is calling you to share the Good News of the gospel with? Write their name down now. Don't run from this assignment.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Here are 3 simple steps of obedience to answer God's call to be on mission with Him:

- **Intercede** - Who is ONE person that you can be praying for that needs to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ?
- **Invest** - How can you invest in them relationally?
- **Invite** - Begin praying for courage to invite to them church.

Don't say, "But God, you don't know my neighbor." Answer God's call. Join Him in this great redemptive mission of rescuing sinners so that they may know the riches of God's grace, mercy, and salvation.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRAYER

- What is one thing you need to remember from this lesson that you can apply to your life this week?

- How can your group pray for you personally?

- How can you pray for your group members?