

LIVE A

BETTER STORY

FULLER PICTURES FROM FRAGMENTED PIECES

In some ways, we have become a people who are story-less. We look at scripture as a series of individual accounts and narratives and fail to see the big picture God has been creating since the beginning. However, every story, every character, from Samson, to Mary, to Timothy, they are all a part of the grand story that God is writing on Earth. The master author is at work. We may not know how OUR chapter ends but we do know that it is far greater than we could hope or imagine. While it may seem like your story is one fragmented piece, it is a part of something bigger. God is inviting us into HIS story...and it is a story of significance!

It is our prayer that over the course of these prayer stations you would begin to see God's grand story...that you would see themes of rescue, redemption, and restoration woven throughout scripture and also woven into the fabric of your life!

At each station you'll see a QR code that will take you to a video that explains this chapter of the story a little more in depth. To scan the code, just open the camera on your phone and hold it over the code. Just tap the notification that pops up on your screen. If you have an Android phone, you'll need to download a QR reader app and use that.



CREATION

BY THE WORD OF THE LORD THE HEAVENS WERE MADE, THEIR STARRY HOST BY THE BREATH OF HIS MOUTH. HE GATHERS THE WATERS OF THE SEA INTO JARS; HE PUTS THE DEEP INTO STOREHOUSES. LET ALL THE EARTH FEAR THE LORD; LET ALL THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD REVERE HIM. FOR HE SPOKE, AND IT CAME TO BE; HE COMMANDED, AND IT STOOD FIRM.

PSALM 33:6-9

Nothing displays God's power + splendor like the creation account found in Genesis. However, sometimes we get so wrapped up in the details + debate of it, that we miss the whole point of it; and that point is the character + nature of the Creator. When we read the creation story, we find that there are two acts in this play and each gives us a different glimpse into the character of God.

In the first act God creates everything out of nothing. Many of us are creative (after all we are made in His image...more on that later). Many of you are gifted painters or architects or coders, etc...but have you ever tried to create a beautiful mural without any paints or materials, or even a canvas or wall? Imagine just standing in an empty room yelling at the empty space to become something of splendor. The absurdity of it all only shouts of God's glory more and more. When we look around at the majesty of His creation, everything was created to bring Him glory...from the magnificence of the galaxies to the beauty of Big Sur to the uniqueness of every species of animal (I'm looking at YOU duck-billed platypus...did you know they lay eggs!?) The wonder of it all is enough to make the hardest of hearts sit back in amazement.

Then, after He had SPOKEN everything into existence, God switches gears to begin His second act. This giant, amazing, glorious God starts to play in the dirt (which He created). He forms humans by hand and breaths His life + heart + soul + eternity itself into them. God goes from speaking creation to intimately forming us with parts of Himself. Think about that for a minute. The power + eternity of God dwelling within your finite body. God created you intimately and purposefully! You are infinitely known and deeply loved!

So here we have this two-act play of creation to show us who God is. Powerful + intimate. Glorious + personal. Creative + relational. He is both at the same time! The truth of it all should cause us to fall on our knees in reverence and crawl into His lap and call Him Daddy.



DEAR GOD:

You are amazing! I stand in humble admiration of Your glory! Thank you for making me and for knowing me. Help me to know you more intimately. Help me to see myself as a unique creation, loved by you!

AMEN

FALL

WE KNOW THAT OUR OLD SINFUL SELVES WERE CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST SO THAT SIN MIGHT LOSE ITS POWER IN OUR LIVES. WE ARE NO LONGER SLAVES TO SIN. FOR WHEN WE DIED WITH CHRIST WE WERE SET FREE FROM THE POWER OF SIN.

ROMANS 6:6-7

Sin is a real problem. The Bible says that it separates us from God. However, the Bible also says that we've been set free from the power of sin. But freedom doesn't come easy. The New Testament uses war language to talk about how we deal with our sinful nature - that we are to "put it to death!"

Have you ever had an ant infestation? I have. It's the worst. And the thing is, it starts off innocent enough. You see one or two ants roaming around the kitchen, but you don't do anything about it, because it's only one or two ants. What could go wrong, right? But then you wake up the next morning and you've got a full blown infestation! There's just something devious about those little scout ants.

And that's the way sin works. Because our hearts seem to be bent towards sin, even giving sin a small foothold can lead to a sin infestation. We need to kill the scout ant! The beautiful thing about being Christ followers is that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, we inherit His power over sin. But again, we have to fight for it.

The Apostle Paul says in the book of Romans that you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And living by the Spirit leads to life and peace, but it's a daily process that won't be made perfect until Jesus comes back to make all things right. In the meantime, as we follow the Spirit's lead, we can look back and see that we're becoming more and more like Jesus every day. No more sin infestations, only life and peace.

So let's focus today on putting to death our sinful nature so we can be alive to Christ. Kill the scout ant!



JESUS:

Help me to put to death my sinful nature through the power of your Spirit so I can be filled with peace. Help me to identify the areas in my life that haven't been crucified to Christ.

AMEN

ISRAEL

UNDERSTAND, THEREFORE, THAT THE LORD YOUR GOD IS INDEED GOD. HE IS THE FAITHFUL GOD WHO KEEPS HIS COVENANT FOR A THOUSAND GENERATIONS AND LAVISHES HIS UNFAILING LOVE ON THOSE WHO LOVE HIM AND OBEY HIS COMMANDS.

ROMANS 6:6-7

The story of the ancient Israelites is one of God's faithfulness to a people who just can't seem to get it right. This story actually begins in a garden with God and humanity, a tree and a talking snake. God tells humanity that they should obey a single commandment. He does this, not to restrict humanity, but to make us fully human - alive in unbroken relationship with our Creator. That unbroken relationship lasts about two pages in the Bible before humanity seizes control and decides that God is holding out on them.

Adam and Eve were naked in the garden with nothing to hide, no guilt. But when they disobeyed God, they felt shame for the first time. However, God's punishment usually comes with a promise. God exiled humanity from the garden, but in His kindness, made clothing from animal skins to cover them and their shame. It was the first sacrifice to cover our sin, but eventually, God would have the last word and send Jesus, the ultimate sacrifice to deal with our sin once and for all.

So humanity is exiled from the garden. Things go from bad to worse, ending in a massive flood, and a restart for humanity. Eventually God chooses a man, Abram, and a people, Israel. He chooses them to show His faithfulness, and that through His faithfulness, Israel would be a blessing to all people. God tells His people not to have any other gods but Him. Again, one commandment that would give them life. But humanity strikes again and Israel blows it. And again, God's people are exiled - this time to Babylon. And again, God's punishment comes with a promise. That one day, he would bring His people "back to the garden," back to an unbroken relationship with Him.

GOD:

Thank you for offering us adoption into Your family. Thank you for your kindness and faithfulness, even when I try to do things my own way. Help me to live in unbroken relationship with You.

AMEN

Time and time again, God would prove Himself faithful to His people, the ancient Israelites, and time and time again, they would turn their back on the God who loved them. And we've been doing the same thing ever since - because Israel's story is our story. We've been "grafted in" to the family of God, but in some sense, we are exiles as well - exiled to a land that is not our own. But one day, God's ultimate sacrifice will fully cover our shame and bring us back into an unbroken relationship with our Creator.





**IF YOU OPENLY DECLARE THAT JESUS IS
LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART
THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD,
YOU WILL BE SAVED.
ROMANS 10:9**

Ok, so you just read about how the story of Israel is also our story. But put yourself in the shoes of the ancient Israelites. After the exile to Babylon, you get prophet after prophet, pleading with you to turn back to Yahweh, the true God. You get a prophet promising that one would come to “restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” And then.....

Nothing

Silence, for 400 years. When all of the sudden a voice rises up, out of the Judean wilderness saying, “prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!” Finally, they thought. We’ve been exiled into other nations, beaten down and enslaved. Finally, our God will trample the kingdoms of the earth and establish His people as rulers over the nations.

But then they saw John, the baptizer, wearing clothes made of camel hair - eating grasshoppers and wild honey. Maybe they thought, “fair enough...the prophets of old were kind of weird, so this guy fits right in.” But then they saw Jesus, the human fully alive. The human living in unbroken relationship with God. The prototype of what would be the new human. However, this man, Jesus, wasn’t interested in trampling down the kingdoms of the earth - or at least in the way the Hebrew people thought it should be done. We wanted to seize control again, even over God himself become human.

But Jesus showed us a new way of living fully alive. That it was through dying that we would actually live. That through surrender, humility, peacemaking and acknowledging our need for Him -THAT is how we would return from exile into His kingdom. Ezekiel the prophet told about a time when God would take out our stony, stubborn heart and give us a tender, responsive heart. Jesus came to offer us this new heart - to show us that our hearts are bent towards sin, but that faith in Him would give us the strength to bring some of the garden back into exile. And Jesus called it “the kingdom of heaven.”

JESUS:

Would you remove my stubborn heart, and replace it with a tender heart that hears your voice. Thank you for showing us a new way of living fully alive.

AMEN



THE NEW KINGDOM

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A TREASURE THAT A MAN DISCOVERED HIDDEN IN A FIELD. IN HIS EXCITEMENT, HE HID IT AGAIN AND SOLD EVERYTHING HE OWNED TO GET ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY THE FIELD.

MATTHEW 13:44

As we've already learned, the Israelites had been waiting for a king, a messiah, to come and to kick out their enemies and establish a new kingdom that would be strong, and powerful...and earthly. However, God had bigger things in mind. When Jesus walked the Earth He actually talked a lot about this kingdom and it seemed to be very, very different than what people were expecting. He talked about it in parables and metaphors. It is like a buried treasure. It is like a mustard seed. It is like yeast. Much to the chagrin of the religious elite, he never said, the kingdom is like a powerful fortress, full of super-strong muscular warriors. No, the kingdom that Jesus talked about, that he was establishing, was pretty much the upside down version of that...where the first are last, and the meek and the broken inherit it. Even stranger, when Jesus talked about the new kingdom, he almost always talked about it in the present tense. In fact, when the Pharisees tried to corner him and straight up asked Him when the kingdom would come He said, "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Luke 17:21)

So where is this strange upside down kingdom and what does it look like? Well, it's like Jesus said... It is here and now among us. The kingdom of God is wherever Jesus is king. If you have decided to follow Jesus and call him "Lord," then you are a part of this new kingdom. And while Jesus is the king, it really is up to us to set the culture of the kingdom. So who are we as citizens of this kingdom? Well, we are people of the Good News. We are light. We bring wisdom, hope and guidance. We are salt. We preserve goodness and add flavor. We love and serve others, even those who may not want to be a part of the kingdom. We welcome the broken, the dirty, the grieving and the needy. We get a front row seat to watch them be transformed by our upside down King.

While it is pretty cool to be a part of a great nation, earthly nations and kingdoms come and go. In fact, the powerful empire the Israelites wanted to defeat...it doesn't exist anymore.

We are foremost citizens of an eternal kingdom that transcends borders and governments and leaders, united by our one true King. THAT is really cool.



JESUS:

You are my King. Remind me where my citizenship lies. Help me to be a person of the Good News. Unite my heart with my fellow citizens of your upside down kingdom. May we represent you, our King, well.

AMEN

NEW CREATION

THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH. FOR THE OLD HEAVEN AND THE OLD EARTH HAD DISAPPEARED. AND THE SEA WAS ALSO GONE. AND I SAW THE HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM, COMING DOWN FROM GOD OUT OF HEAVEN LIKE A BRIDE BEAUTIFULLY DRESSED FOR HER HUSBAND. I HEARD A LOUD SHOUT FROM THE THRONE, SAYING, "LOOK, GOD'S HOME IS NOW AMONG HIS PEOPLE! HE WILL LIVE WITH THEM, AND THEY WILL BE HIS PEOPLE. GOD HIMSELF WILL BE WITH THEM. HE WILL WIPE EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES, AND THERE WILL BE NO MORE DEATH OR SORROW OR CRYING OR PAIN. ALL THESE THINGS ARE GONE FOREVER.

REVELATION 21:1-4

JESUS:

Jesus help me to love like you loved, and in doing so, show people the beauty of Your new creation.

AMEN

When God made the world, He said it was good. In fact, He says it seven times. And on the seventh time, God actually says His creation is VERY good. In the first book of the Bible, God's space and human space completely overlap - at least for the first two pages. Then sin enters the world through man's desire to call the shots and the two spaces are ripped apart.

Throughout the Bible, we see moments where the spaces overlap - but they're not perfect, and they're temporary. That is, until Jesus comes on the scene. In Jesus, God's space and human space overlap again, but not fully - at least not yet.

2 Corinthians says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Believing in Jesus and loving the way He loved is like infecting the world with the antidote to sin and death. And everywhere this antidote is injected, God's space and human space overlap. This is the commission that Jesus has given us - to tell everyone that the new kingdom has come and they can become a new creation.

One day, Jesus will complete the work that He began and God's space will fully and forever overlap with our space. We will enjoy unbroken relationship with God for eternity. But until then, we've been given the privilege of creating "heaven pockets" wherever we go. Giving people a glimpse into the new creation when we love like Jesus.

Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him in order to advance the kingdom of heaven here on earth. He gave us the responsibility to tell the story of this new kingdom through our own lives. So, what's your story?



Your Story

BE READY TO SPEAK UP AND TELL ANYONE WHO ASKS WHY YOU'RE LIVING THE WAY YOU ARE, AND ALWAYS WITH THE UTMOST COURTESY.

1 PETER 3:15

Do you have a favorite book? What about a movie?

Are you a Star Wars fan? Maybe you were lucky enough to see the original trilogy in the theaters. The Empire Strikes Back was released 2 years before I was born, but I've always thought it would be so cool to have been able to see it without the knowledge of what happens in Return of the Jedi. Did the whole theater walk out angry and disappointed, thinking that evil had prevailed? Sometimes it feels like we are living in "Empire Strikes Back" kind of times. We can look at the circumstances of our lives and think that hope is lost. But take heart the story isn't over...and YOUR story isn't over either!

God is the master Author, way better than even George Lucas! He is at work writing the story of your life. Not only is it not over, it is a part of something way bigger than you and your circumstances. We just finished learning about God's grand story written in the Scriptures. It is full of twists and turns and unexpected outcomes...and God is still writing it! The story of God is full of minor characters like Noah and David and Rahab, who were deeply flawed...however God took their polluted stories and used them for His glory. He wove their crooked paths into his mighty story of redemption. And He is doing the same today. Your story is the same story that was being told through Moses' life, through Paul's life, through Mary Magdalene's life. How is God shaping your story?

Take a few moments of reflection. Think about the story that is being written with your life. Are you happy with the message it is giving? Think about where you've been, what God has brought you through. Think of the times you've cried uncontrollable tears of joy. Think of the times you've hid in shame or experienced deep loss. Each of these moments is a small fragment in the mosaic of your life. In addition, your story is a part of an even bigger mosaic. It might seem broken or rough around the edges, but it is telling the story of God's hope and redemption in this world. When we take a step back and stop focusing on our small broken fragment, we can see how they all fit together into something beautiful. And...the more and more of us who share our stories the clearer that grand picture becomes! Your story matters and we want to hear it!

If you scan this code it will take you to a page where you'll have a chance to share your story with us! Can't wait to read it!



GOD:

Thank you for being the author of my story. Use every chapter of my story for your glory and give me the courage to share it!

AMEN