



SMALL GROUP LEADERS NOTES: Mission and the Story of God – week 1

As you engage with this material and study the story of God, I want to encourage you to help people view God's story as the unfolding of His rescue plan for His creation. Our default starting point can often be to begin with our story and then try to make sense of God's story. However, I'd like to suggest the story of our lives only makes sense as we understand that our story is found in His story! Nevertheless, what does this have to do with Mission?

Everything!

Our understanding of God's grand narrative is critical to inviting others in participating in His story. If we simply invite people to believe in Jesus, be forgiven of their sin and they'll be in heaven with Jesus, I think we sell them short of the greatest invitation; to join with the Spirit in being sent into the world on mission. As we discover this grand story of God together, you will grow in your sense of identity and security as a child of God, be invited to journey in community as disciples and be compelled to communicate God's story to others.

In this session, I don't want you to get bogged down with the different theories regarding the creation account but rather dive into the idea ideas of God's character and dynamic relationship between God and his creation.

Before we start: Does everything appear as it should? If you could imagine the world the way it should be, what would it be like?

There was a day when the world was very much like you described . . . and a day when it will be again. Let's jump in to our first story.

CREATION (SHARE OUT THE READING OF THIS STORY):

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. God, the main character of this story, is the personal, all-powerful being who made everything that exists. He is the true ruler of the universe—lovingly providing for all that is under His care.

The kingdom, or sphere of authority, that God set up was not restricted to the heavens, but God powerfully, intentionally, and creatively spoke all of creation into existence:

- He precisely laid the foundations of the earth.
- He intentionally separated the waters from the land, filling that land with beautiful flowers and unique animals.
- He splashed His creative canvas with many colours and fragrances that all declared His worth.

In five days, God masterfully set up a physical kingdom that was separate from Him, yet uniquely and personally cared for by Him. At the end of each day, God reflected on His work, saying, "It is good."

On the sixth day, God created the first people. God said, "Let us make man in our image," and He formed the dust of the ground together and breathed into it the breath of life. Thus, the first humans were created and placed in a perfect garden, where they could enjoy the good reign of this God. The people were decidedly different than the rest of creation, in that they were given the responsibility of caring for the creation. God spoke to this first man, Adam, and told him to enjoy all He had created: the animals, the flavours, the sights, and the work. Adam, and all humans, were created with the ability to enjoy this wonderful environment God had fashioned. They were also created with the great task of reflecting the King's goodness and greatness throughout all of creation.

God made it clear to Adam there were two trees in the centre of the garden. One was the Tree of Life. The fruit from this tree was to be enjoyed and eaten just like the rest of the trees. The other tree, known as the Knowledge of Good and Evil, was the only tree they were not to eat from. If Adam ate of this tree, he would surely die. This conversation between Adam and God continued as God described what it should look like for Adam to live in this garden. Adam had responsibilities to cultivate the garden and name the animals, operating under God's authority to cultivate the world.

Adam went about the work God gave him to do. As he worked God said it was not good for man to be alone — he needed a helper. So, God caused a deep sleep to come over Adam, and by taking a rib from his side he created a woman named Eve for Adam to enjoy, love, protect, care for, and work alongside in relationship. When Adam woke up he broke into poetry and declared how amazed he was by what God had created. This first marriage was enjoyed without shame and guilt; they were naked in every sense and not the least bit afraid of rejection. God commissioned both the man and the woman with the tasks of cultivating the potential in His creation and multiplying their family by having kids. After the sixth day and the creation of man in His own image, God reflected, "It is very good!"

Then on the seventh day God rested and reflected on the goodness of His creation. This was not the end of God's relationship with His creation, but rather it was only the beginning.

Each day God would come down in the cool of the day and talk with Adam and Eve, teaching them the best possible way to live life and showing them how to live under His good reign. Adam and Eve were able to enjoy both the goodness and greatness of their Creator and His creation. They worked faithfully in the garden, cultivating it and developing its potential to bring glory to God. They lived in perfect harmony in their relationships with God, His world, and each other. This truly was a good Kingdom!

RETELL THE STORY: Retell the story as a group, see if you can retell the events of this story in the order they happened.

DIALOGUE:

This is a dialogue, not a quiz or a monologue. This is not asking one person all the questions to get their answers - Use the following four questions to help lead discussions. Try to keep within this part of the story and not jump ahead, and seek to relate this to your life and your experiences:

Observe: WHO IS GOD?

Reflect: WHAT HAS GOD DONE?

Discuss: WHO ARE WE?

Act: HOW DO WE GET TO LIVE?

To help your discussion on the above questions there are some discussion starters below:

1. What was God's relationship to His creation?
2. How did God make humans unique in His creation?
3. What was the humans' vocation or job in the creation? What are the implications for the mission of God?
4. What kind of relationship did God have with the humans? Why does this matter when sharing the good news?
5. What kind of relationship did Adam & Eve have with each other? What does this reveal about God's purposes and is there significance for how we think about the mission of God?
6. What do you think is significant about the two trees in the centre of the garden?
7. What did God want from the humans? What does this reveal about God's view of humanity and how might you communicate this to those who don't know Jesus?

RESPONSE: Re-read the story this week and as you do share with each other via your chat how this story is impacting your life this week – who God is, what God has done, who we are and how we get to live.

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