

CHAPTER 1, THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AS WE KNOW IT

TIMELESS TRUTH: SIN CHANGES EVERYTHING.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

In the beginning, God. God is the central character of the grand story of the Bible. It really is all about Him and His desire to be in relationship with people. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the Upper Story is in full view. God has a grand vision to be with us, and enjoy harmonious life with us on the newly created perfect earth. Man and woman together reflect God's image as community. As images of God, they are to rule as His benevolent representatives over the earth. In the garden, there is perfect communion with God, one another, and with the creation itself. It is all about relationships—relationship with God and relationship with each other.

But God doesn't force those relationships. When man and woman choose to listen to a creature rather than the Creator, the vision is ruined. Sin enters in and brings with it physical death and separation from God and expulsion from the garden. The whole earth is cursed and begins to die. The sin nature is inaugurated by Adam and Eve and its tragic consequences are passed on to their offspring. Cain killing Abel demonstrates that every human is infected with sin. But sin is more than what we do, it is what we are—it is now our very nature.

Relationship between God and man has now been broken as has the harmony between man and woman. Even the earth itself no longer relates well to man. Immediately, however, God begins His plan to get us back into a right relationship with Him; and that Upper Story never changes even to the last chapter of the Bible. Even after God brings judgment upon a wicked earth, Noah and his family still emerge from the ark with their sin nature. It is going to take something beyond people to solve the sin problem. A clue to the solution is subtly given to us in God's response to Adam and Eve. God Himself makes for them clothes from an animal's skin to cover their nakedness—blood is shed to cover their sin. And a promise is made that sin will one day ultimately be vanquished.

This first chapter of *The Story* is vital to understanding God's Upper Story. The major doctrines of our faith are rooted here, namely sin and redemption. In the Bible, only the first two chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation give us a glimpse into life in a world without sin, a world as God intended it to be. When we compare our world with what the world was like before sin, we learn that nothing is as it should be. Nothing. Sin changes everything. Since the fall in the garden, man exists in a fallen world under the dominion of Satan. But the believer's hope lies in knowing that one day the Messiah, promised from the beginning, will return to earth, conquer evil, and fully restore the relationships lost in the garden.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: We've all had prized possessions: gifts given to us as children, family heirlooms, and expensive purchases. And most likely, at one time or another, someone or something has ruined or broken something we cherish. Can you share such a time in your life and what was destroyed?

1. Chapter 1 shows that everything began with God creating and ordering. How is this different than other explanations you have heard of how the world began? How might knowing that life has purpose and direction affect your daily decisions?
2. What do think it means to be made in the image of God (page 2-3)?
3. Part of the meaning of being made in the image of God is that we were made for relationships and community. When sin entered the world relationships were destroyed. Describe the change in relationships that occurred between the following:
 - a. God and mankind
 - b. Adam and Eve
 - c. Mankind and the rest of creation
 - d. Mankind and everlasting life
4. After each event in the creation story, God said "It is good." Where does God say it is not good (p. 4)? What does this say about God's plan for the human family?
5. What do you think Eve's real sin was? What role did Adam play in the process?
6. Explain how Adam and Eve played the "blame game" (p. 5). Why is it so hard for us to accept the responsibility for our bad choices?
7. What can we learn about work from Chapter 1 of *The Story*?
8. Discuss the parallels between Noah's culture and our own. What attributes and actions of Noah can help us face the challenges of godly living in the world today?
9. Many people perceive God as vengeful and distant when they encounter an event such as the Flood in the Old Testament. While God clearly establishes Himself as Judge of His creation, chapter one is overflowing with examples of His love and grace. How many can you identify?
10. God made a promise to Noah never again to destroy mankind by a flood and He confirmed it with a rainbow. What promises has he made to you?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 2, GOD BUILDS A NATION

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, for two reasons: first, to test his faith and, second, to point to the future sacrifice of the heavenly Father's only Son. Is there an area of your life that God is calling you to "sacrifice" or entrust to Him? Identify the next step you need to take.
2. God's chosen people are both faithful and flawed. List the "faithful" attributes of either Abraham or Sarah that you want to follow. List the "flawed" attributes and mistakes of either Abraham or Sarah that you want to avoid.
3. When God does not deliver on his promise to provide offspring for Abram, he starts to take matters into his own hands (p. 15-16). Despite his good intentions, this caused several complications for him domestically. When have you tried to take things into your own hands or force God into action? What was the result?

DAY 2

1. The maidservant Hagar fled from Sarah's harsh treatment. Alone, hurting, and in despair, God saw her. But she also saw Him and declared, "*I have now seen the One who sees me*" (p. 16). When have you seen God most vividly acting in your life?
2. Esau and Jacob are prime examples of sibling rivals. We learn from the story that they were estranged for more than twenty years (p. 22). What life lessons can be gleaned from observing each character throughout their reconciliation? Can these life lessons be applied to an estranged relationship of your own?

DAY 3

1. In the midst of a deep, personal crisis in Jacob's life, we read about a curious struggle in the wilderness (p. 23-24). In the end, Jacob's name was changed to Israel because he struggled with God and man and overcame. (In the ancient world, a name represented the character of a person.) Identify a crisis in your own life that entailed "wrestling" with God. If God was to change your name to represent the outcome, what do you suppose it would be?
2. Nearly everyone has experienced the playground process of "choosing teams." Compare the way God chooses His "team" with the way you choose your "team." Who in your life do you need to see from God's perspective?