

Our Story Faith Study

Session 1: God's Story, Our Story



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- What stories did you read or were read to you when you were growing up?
- What's one of your favorite stories from over the years (from a book, movie, podcast, family story...) What makes it a favorite?
- What is it about the theme of this series "Our Story" that intrigues you?

Opening Prayer

Dear God, thank you for this day and for the opportunity to gather with one another to contemplate the power of story. Help us learn how our own stories can change others. Help us learn our unique place in God's stories, and how we can do our part to share these stories with others. We pray that we will be energized through our discussion today. Amen.

Group Covenant

Take a few minutes to talk about your hopes and expectations for the group.

What Does the Bible Say?

When the Holy Spirit appeared on Pentecost, many heard the message of Jesus and were baptized. These followers of Jesus lived into a new way of thinking about themselves. They became a close community that, we are told, cared for each other and spent time together praising God. Their story of early Christian community has become our story.

Acts 2:42-47 (NRSV)

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- How does this Biblical story speak to you? What do you notice as you read it today?

- What do you wonder about as you read the story?
- What are the things in this story that we might find in our own stories? What is something from the text that you'd like to weave more fully into story?

“We read [the Bible], and we let it read us. We dive into *their* story, discovering *our* story in the process.”

– Rob Bell,
*What is the Bible?*¹

What Do Others Say?

An old Jewish parable probes God's reasoning for choosing Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants to be a blessing to the nations of the world (Genesis 12). In brief, “God is asked, ‘Why did you choose the Jews? You could have chosen the Greeks with their minds full of wisdom and some of the best philosophers the world has ever known. You could have chosen the Romans with their unperilled ability to build kingdoms and connected roads and aquifers to sustain their people. Why the Jews?’

God paused for a moment, then succinctly replied, ‘The Jews... they are great storytellers!’”

In the end, our lives are nothing but a conglomeration of the stories we have listened to, loathed, lived, and loved—for good or for ill. Which means the stories we immerse ourselves in have the capacity to change us and the world we inhabit. Think about the stories we...

- **Listen to:** So much of who we are is formed by the stories we listened to as we were growing up. Think about the stories you read or were read to you when you were growing up. What did they tell you about who you are and who you can be in the world? Whose voice did you listen to most intently? For good or for ill, what did that voice speak into you? Think about what you are reading, watching, and listening to today. Each voice embeds something into your story. The good news is that, in many cases, you have a choice. So, what are you listening to?
- **Loathe:** We are often shaped in opposition to someone or some idea or some destructive circumstance. If we pay attention to what we loathe and seek to be freed from it, we can tell a new story. If we are obsessed with what we loathe and are consumed by it, there is no freedom. What do you loathe? How are you allowing it to shape your story?
- **Live:** Fr. Richard Rohr, in many of his books, says this, “We don't think our way into new living; we live our way into new thinking.” Are you struggling with a destructive way of thinking? Choose a small step to take toward what you hope to become. Then do it again. Then take a bigger step until it becomes a more natural way for you to live. What story are you choosing to live?

- **Love:** God created the world in love, for love. Love is the first story. Love is the design of the universe. What we love motivates us. Who we love shapes us. How we love identifies who we are. “By this, everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 34) How does love energize your story?

Throughout these sessions, we hope you will discover the power of story—God's story, your story—to shape us, ground us, challenge us, comfort us. Throughout these sessions, we hope you will understand and experience the way that your story can change others. We are nothing, if we are not storytellers—of a God who created this world in love, for love; of Jesus whose generous, sacrificial love for all shows us the way; of a community whose future legacy will be birthed by the stories we tell and live now.

Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, committed his life to telling his story so that others might live a different story. “You must tell your story. This is because, if even one person learns from it how to be more human, you will have made your memories into a blessing. We must turn our suffering into a bridge so that others might suffer less.”¹

Our story is God's story. God's story is our story. Our story is our neighbor's story. Our neighbor's story is our story.

-Reflection by Pastor Kai Nilsen

Think About *(select one or more questions)*

- What stands out for you in this reflection?
- The writer says “...the stories we immerse ourselves in have the capacity to change us and the world we inhabit.” Share an example of an impactful story that changed you, and perhaps others.
- “Love is the first story. Love is the design of the universe.” How does love energize your story? *What* does love energize in your story?
- Reflect together on the statement “Our story is God's story.” How might your story be part of God's larger story? What does that tell you about your story? What does it tell you about God's story?
- How does what are you reading, watching and listening to today have an impact on your life, your story—for good or otherwise? Share an example.
- Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, committed his life to telling his story so that others might live a different story. He turns his suffering into a bridge so that others might suffer less. Where have you seen examples like this in the stories you've heard over the years? What kind of impact did it have on you?

Discovering Your Story –

If you were to draw your faith story, what would it look like?

(optional)

Spend a few minutes of silence jotting notes or drawing your story.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life (for individual reflection & action between gatherings)

- Read a biography or memoir and consider how the individual's story was part of God's Story.
- Listen to a story from *The Moth Radio Hour*. If you had the opportunity, which story from your own life would you want to tell in this format?
- Draw your faith story and see what you discover.
- Spend time with any or all of the "four L's" in the reflection. Meditate, journal, pray, or use your own practice to consider the questions. Re-read this section of the reflection or use this summary:
 - **Listen to:** Make a list of what you are reading, watching and listening to, and think about how each one embeds something into your story. If you find that there's something you'd like to change or remove from that list—or add to your list—make plans to give it a try.
 - **Loathe:** If you pay attention what you loathe and seek to be freed from it, you can tell a new story. What do you loathe? How are you allowing it to shape your story? What can you do to free yourself from this loathing?
 - **Live:** If you are struggling with a destructive way of thinking, choose a small step to take toward what you hope to become. Then do it again. Then take a bigger step until it becomes a more natural way for you to live. What story are you choosing to live?
 - **Love:** How does love energize your story?

Prayer (Read this blessing together. It is a blessing you offer to one another)

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen
-Numbers 6:24-26 (NRSV)

¹Bell, Rob. "What is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything." Page 80. HarperOne, 2017, New York.

www.harperone.com

²Wiesel, Elie as quoted in "Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom" by Ariel Burger, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH), 2019, New York.

© 2021 Incarnation Lutheran Church. All rights reserved. Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.

The Lord Bless You

(optional—for any session)

The blessing from Numbers 6:24-26 has also been used in Sunday worship with an illumination (artwork) from *The Saint John's Bible*. If time allows, view the illumination and use the guided questions. Both are available under "additional resources" at:
www.incarnationmn.org/our-story/