



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Your Chapter In God's Never-ending Story

Week 3

Today's Theme:

- Sometimes God seems hidden, even in great stories

Scripture Verses:

- Exodus 3:1-15
- The Book of Ruth

Supplies:

- Ambiguous Image Pages (included at the end of this weeks study – print copies of the pages WITHOUT the explanation of the 2 images)
- Pen and paper

Opening Everyone Answers Question: (10min)

You want to get everyone talking here. This will set the tone for the meeting and introduce the theme.

- Did you like playing hide and seek as a child? Why or why not?

Scripture Exploration: (25 minutes)

This is the part of the study where you'll dig into Scripture so as to draw out the day's theme.

1. Read Exodus 3:1-15. In contrast to being hidden, the Burning Bush is a story of God's visible manifestation. Describe how Moses reacts to God being in such a strange place.

Moses doesn't flee from such a strange situation, but actually moves closer. This event is part of his story, and he actively chooses to live into it. When a situation gets a little strange, as long as you aren't putting yourself in physical danger, try diving into the crazy instead of running from it. Say "yes" to scary things. Don't run from the outcast at the party, engage with him/her. Don't cop out on your life or you'll have no stories to tell.

2. Describe a time when, if ever, you experienced a burning bush moment where you sensed God was trying to get your attention in a spectacular way. In that moment, did you move closer and say “yes” to something scary or did you try to stand back? Why?
3. Read this overview of Ruth:

The book of Ruth starts off in the time of the Judges. It is a wretched time of famine and drought where people are doing what is right in their own eyes. In this context, it seems like God has abandoned his people but God is silently working in amazing ways. After Naomi loses her husband and two sons, one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth (who was not an Israelite) decides to return to Naomi’s homeland with her. One of the most well-known passages from Ruth is:

"But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’"

When Naomi and Ruth come to Bethlehem, Ruth collects grain in the field of Boaz, who happens to be a relative (or kinsman). He takes notice of Ruth and marries her in time. All of this seems like chance, but it is under the providence of God. This is important because Ruth bears a son Obed. Obed bears Jessie, and Jessie will be the father of David, Israel's great king.

Finally, through Jewish law, Boaz “redeems” Ruth. In Jewish tradition this is called a kinsman redeemer and this was done so that the family of the deceased would not lose all of their land. Ruth appears before Boaz empty-handed, humble and an ethnic outcast. He receives her with respect as a woman worthy of redeeming. This union, then, leads to a new epoch in Israel's history, the kings and foreshadows the redemptive work of Jesus. All this in a time when God was seemingly silent.

4. In the beginning of the story of Ruth, describe how God seems hidden.
5. In the absence of direct interaction and conversation with God, what God-honoring behaviors do Naomi and Ruth display in this story?
 - a. How can we honor God, even during the times in our stories when God seems hidden?
6. What do you think of the idea that God brings both good and bad things into the world? How does that play out in the story of Ruth? In yours?
7. How does this story end? Is it happy? Why or why not?

- a. Should we expect all stories in our lives to end well (at least in our eyes)? Why or why not? If not, how do you think God calls us to live in response to the events of our lives?

Storytelling Practices (20 minutes):

Each week, we'll provide you with different storytelling practices designed to help your small group practice sharing their stories.

Storytelling Practice #1: Finding the hidden God in or with the help of other people

Look at the pages of drawings that your small group leader passes around. Think about the image you see. After studying the drawings answer the following questions.

Pass around several pages of ambiguous pictures. Ask the group what they see. Find one page where about half of the people see one image and half see the other. Ask those who see the image to help the people who can't see it. Give people time to "find the image".

Debrief questions –

1. How does it feel to not be able to see an image that others can see?
2. What is and isn't helpful when people are trying to show you how to see an image?
3. For the people who could see an image, what's difficult about helping others see the image?
4. What does it look like to support others well? Do different approaches to seeing the images help different people? Why or why not?
5. How is this process similar or different to when God seems hidden from all or part of your story?

God is not always as tangible as human relationships. Part of God's plan is to interact with you through others. Sometimes God's hands and feet are most visible in human form.

Think about a time when it felt like God was absent in your life. Looking back, where might God have been present through other people? Where might other people have helped you see God's role in your story? Write down a few thoughts to share with the group during the Storytelling time.

Storytelling Practice #2: Finding God in the Unexpected

Some of you are old enough to remember the radio show ***The Rest of the Story***. It was a short daily segment where Paul Harvey would share stories that consisted of little known or forgotten facts on a variety of subjects with an unexpected twist held back until the very end of the story. The broadcasts always concluded with the tagline "And now you know the rest of the story".

When have you experienced an unexpected twist? Here are a few prompts to help you reflect. Think of a time when:

- You expected one thing and experienced something completely different
- You were proven wrong
- You were surprised by another person.
- You planned something but nothing went as planned
- A sad event led to something joyful (or a joyous event led to something sad)
- One of your worst days became one of your best (or the opposite).

Choose one of these prompts and write out your answer in the form of a story with a twist. As you do, make sure you answer the question, “How was God involved in the unexpected result?”

Storytelling (20 Minutes):

Your small group leader will direct you in sharing the stories you reflected on during the practices. Consider sharing all or part of your faith story at our ***What’s Your Story?*** storytelling event on November 17.

After giving your small group a few minutes to reflect on their stories, invite people to share their story using whatever storytelling practice they experimented with. Make sure people know they can share as much or as little of what they came up with as they’d like.

As people share, encourage them to think about sharing all or part of their faith story at our Storytelling Event on November 17.

Processing / Wrap-Up (10 minutes):

1. How easy or difficult was it for you to participate in tonight’s storytelling practices?
2. What was scary or intimidating to you about tonight’s storytelling practices?
3. What did you learn about yourself from tonight’s storytelling practices? About others in our small group?
4. As you thought about your own story, where did you see God at work?
5. Where did you encounter God during tonight’s small group?

Closing Prayer: