

Worship - Worship God because He has given us His Word the Bible.

Welcome - What is your favorite Bible story?

Word - In the beginning God created all things, and declared all things good. He was and always will be in a communal relationship with himself – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created us to be relational as well and marked us with an identity as his image bearers and a missional calling to serve, care for, and cultivate the earth. God created humans in his image to live in fellowship with him, one another, our inner self, and creation. The enemy tempted the first humans, and darkness and evil entered the story through human sin and are now a part of the world. This devastating event resulted in our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and creation being fractured and in desperate need of redeeming. But God did not abandon his creation to destruction and decay; rather he promised to restore this broken world. As part of this purpose, God chose a people, Abraham and his descendants to represent him in the world. God promised to bless them as a nation so that through them all nations would be blessed. In time they became enslaved in Egypt and cried out to God because of their oppression. God heard their cry, liberated them from their oppressor, and brought them to Sinai where he gave them an identity and a mission as his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy people.

Throughout the story of Israel, God refused to give up on his people despite their frequent acts of unfaithfulness to him. God brought his people into the Promised Land. Their state of blessing from God was intimately bound to their calling to embody the living God to other nations. They made movement toward this missional calling, yet they disobeyed and allowed foreign gods into the land, overlooked the poor, and mistreated the foreigner. The prophetic voices that emerge from the Scriptures held the calling of Israel to the mirror of how they treated the oppressed and marginalized. Through the prophets, God's heart for the poor was made known that He cares deeply for the marginalized and oppressed. In Israel's disobedience, they became indifferent and in turn irrelevant to the purposes to which God had called them. For a time, they were sent into exile; yet a hopeful remnant was always looking ahead with longing and hope to a renewed reign of God, where peace and justice would prevail. These longings found their fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, mysteriously God having become flesh. Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted and set captives free, proclaiming a new arrival of the Kingdom of God, bringing about a New Exodus, and restoring our fractured world. He and his message were rejected by many as he confronted the oppressive nature of the religious elite and the empire of Rome. Yet his path of suffering, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection has brought hope to all creation. Jesus is our only hope for bringing peace and reconciliation between God and humans. Through Jesus we have been forgiven and brought into right relationship with God. God is now reconciling us to each other, ourselves, and creation. The Spirit of God affirms as children of God all

those who trust Jesus. The Spirit empowers us with gifts, convicts, guides, comforts, counsels, and leads us into truth through a communal life of worship and a missional expression of our faith. Jesus gave the church the task of caring on his mission. The church is rooted and grounded in Christ, practicing spiritual disciplines and celebrating baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church is a global and local expression of living out the way of Jesus through love, peace, sacrifice, and healing as we embody the resurrected Christ, who lives in and through us, to a broken and hurting world. Jesus promised that one day he would return to judge the world, bringing an end to injustice and restoring all things to God's original intent. God will reclaim this world and rule forever. The earth's groaning will cease and God will dwell with us here in a restored creation. On that day we will beat swords into tools for cultivating the earth, the wolf will lie down with the lamb, there will be no more death and God will wipe away all our tears. Our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and creation will be whole. All will flourish as God intends.

Great stories have the ability to inspire us and pull us into them. God gives us a story so that we are intrigued and pulled into his plot. The beautiful thing about entering into God's story is that no matter what mistakes we have made in our own personal story he redeems and uses to further his plan.

What is revealed about God in his story?

What character in the Bible do you relate to the most? & why?

What might God be speaking to you through his story?

What areas of your life may God be calling you to move forward in?

How do you think knowing God's story (the Bible) might cause you to more fully experience the healing, freedom and life Jesus came to offer?

Works - Pray for each other that you as a group/individuals will immerse yourselves in God's Word.