



DISCIPLESHIP ON THE MOVE

The Big Story



Introduction to the Series

Hello Bridge family,

I've had conversations with many of you in the last six months. Conversations about faith and doubt, conversations about longings and losses, and conversations about the complexities of following Jesus in a busy world that feels more complicated every day.

Through those conversations, I've realized that many of you want to learn and keep going deeper in following Jesus and your understanding of the Bible. Still, schedules are crazy, and consistency in meeting for classes or small groups can often be a challenge.

That's why, for the rest of this year, we're going to bring some mini-teachings to you via email to help you understand scripture better.

If we want to know God and follow God well in the world, we need to know his story, and know his Word, and practice appropriately applying his word to our lives.

So, for the rest of the year, you're going to get one email from me each week. I'll keep it brief, I promise! The e-mails are going to be organized into three parts:

- **Reading the Big Story of the Bible:** In this section we will explore the important story arcs of God's relationship to humanity through scripture.

The Big Story



- **Reading the History of the Bible:** In this section we will focus on what was happening historically through scripture to help us understand different books of the Bible in their context.

The Context of the Story

Genres	Origins	Patriarchs
Nomads	Conquest	United Kingdom
Divided Kingdom	Fall of Israel	Fall of Judah
Exile in Babylon	Return	Intertestamental
NT Judaism	Roman Culture	Early Church

- **Applying the Story to Your Life:** In this section, we will explore the kinds of questions we need to ask of the scripture text, it's context, and the context we find ourselves in if we are going to faithfully interpret and apply the Bible to our lives.

Applying the Story



to your life

So, I hope you join me for this journey. If, as you are reading, you have any questions that arise, or want to go deeper, please feel free to reach out to me. I am deeply passionate about helping our church learn about God and explore his Word and then live it out in wholehearted ways in the world – for the glory of God and the good of his creation.

With joyful expectation for the journey,

Pastor Sara Gregory

The Big Story of the Bible

The Bible is a collection of books. These books are written in different genres (history, poetry, prophecy, letters to churches, etc.) And the books are organized into what we call the biblical “canon.”

The purpose of this collection of books is **to tell us about the character of God and his relationship to the world and humanity.**

However, when we pick up the Bible, it can be hard to follow the story of God through all the different books it contains.

This first section of our Discipleship-On-The-Go series is going to help us identify the main parts of that big story of God. That way, when you open the Bible to Deuteronomy, or Isaiah, or John, or Phillipians, you can locate what part of the story that book is trying to talk about. When we do that - situate what we are reading in it's bigger context - we will get to both a better picture of God, and a better application of the passage.

Over the next few weeks we'll follow the topics on the timeline below and learn about the Big Story of God. Each week, I will also share at least one portion of scripture that you can read to guide your time with God in that topic for the week.

For this week, I'd invite you to spend time in **Psalm 119** (buckle up... it's a long one). This Psalm invites us to hunger and thirst for the word/law of the Lord.

My prayer is that God would give us a hunger and thirst to know Him more as we learn about his word together.

With joyful expectation for the journey,

Pastor Sara Gregory

Creation

Most versions of the biblical storyline start at Creation. We'll get to that in a minute, but first, we need to talk about the uncreated, Triune God.

The witness of scripture and the bulk of church tradition tell us that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were in perfect relationship with each other before the universe was formed. There was perfect love and mutual submission amongst the three-in-one God. (Look at the picture below to see the artist Andrei Rubliev's interpretation of this love- each member of the Trinity bowing their head to honor the other.)



As an outpouring of this perfectly sufficient love, God created humanity and all of the cosmos.

While God calls all of his creation “good,” the creation of humanity was unique. Humanity was made to contain the image or likeness (Hebrew: *Tzelem*) of the Triune God.

God's intention was that the humans he created would live in perfect harmony and intimacy with God and with each other. In short, humans would live in the beautiful garden with God and with each other and would get to experience a taste of the perfect relationship that existed within the Trinity.

The original intention of the Triune God was to create a cosmos that was full of plants, creatures, and image bears who experienced delight, flourishing, love, peace, intimacy, and a sense of purpose without pain and struggle because these things best represent the character of their Creator.

Action Steps:

- Spend some time reflecting this week on **Genesis 1-2**.
- What does God's good creation say about the character of the God we worship?
- Take a moment to listen to the song "Garden" by Matt Maher, and reflect on God's relationship with humanity at creation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzGxHouOm7Y>

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. When you think about creation, do you think about the Trinity? How?
2. What does the original state of creation show us about God?
3. Where in the world have you seen evidence of the original goodness of creation?
4. What feels significant about humanity being made in the image of God?
5. How might this picture of the original creation animate our faith now, post-fall?

The Fall

Last week we talked about God's perfect creation, and I wrote this:

“The original intention of the Triune God was to create a cosmos that was full of plants, creatures, and image bearers who experienced delight, flourishing, love, peace, intimacy, and a sense of purpose without pain and struggle because these things best represent the character of their Creator.”

Obviously, we look around us now and see very little evidence of that utopian dream. Instead, we see disease, broken relationships, natural disasters, abuse, and a feeling of disconnection from God. So, what happened?

To understand the answer to that question, we have to understand one of the gifts that God gave to the humans he created: free will.

God could have chosen to force humanity to do everything God wanted them to do. He could have programmed humanity like robots, to ensure that his desires would be carried out perfectly. But, God wanted real relationships, not ones based on coercion. So he gave humanity the power to choose how they lived.

Pretty immediately, the enemy of God tempted humanity to *lose trust* in the God who created them. The enemy tempted them with *more power and control*. And both Adam and Eve *actively chose to disobey God*.



When Adam and Eve chose disobedience, their choice came with consequences.

Instead of the flourishing, fullness of life, and joy that God intended, the entire cosmos no longer looked like what God wanted.

Death became a reality. Decay infiltrated cells. Systems that one brought flourishing now perpetuated sin, death, injustice, and brokenness.

Yet, even then, God put into motion a plan for how he would continue walking with his creation and ultimately offer them restoration and redemption again.

Action steps:

- Read Genesis 3 and Romans 5: 12-17
- Spend time lamenting the effects of the fall, both in the world and large and in your own life.
- Listen to this song by Gungor entitled “The Fall.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EccGm1JQ8E>

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. How were you first taught about “the fall”?
2. When you read the Genesis 3 text again, does anything stand out to you or surprise you?
3. How have you understood the concept of free will and the fall?
4. Where do you see the impacts of the fall in the world around us right now?
5. Where do you notice the impacts of the fall in yourself?

Covenant

When humanity chose to stop trusting and stop obeying God, God could have chosen to leave them to the consequences of their own destructive actions.

But God is love, and love leans in when things start falling apart. Love works to bring restoration to that which is broken.

So rather than moving away from humanity when they disobeyed, God united himself with a group of people - the family of Abraham, the nation of Israel. Through this group of people, God intended to bless every nation (Gen. 12:3). Through this group of people, God intended to give the whole world a picture of what their Creator was like.

So God made a covenant with a man, Abraham, and his descendants. Not because Abraham had done anything to merit his favor, but because God decided to choose him. God promised the descendants of Abraham his presence, provision, and protection.

And when God makes a promise, nothing can make him go back on that promise.

For the rest of the story of scripture, we will watch humans reject the God who chose them. We will watch people fail to keep their promises to God. We will watch opposing nations rise up to overpower, overthrow, and oppress the people God has chosen.

And, we will watch God keep his promises to Israel and renew his promises over and over again to different generations. He will stay present with them. He will rescue them. He will offer them his presence, and provision, and protection through deserts and abundant lands, in tents and in palaces, when they are in power or in exile.

Though the fulfillment of God's covenant with his people looked different in different seasons, God always kept his promises. And through that covenant, God was always working to restore humanity's relationship to himself, their relationship with each other, and their relationship to the world.

Action Steps:

- Read Genesis 12: 1-9, Exodus 6: 1-8, 2 Samuel 7
- Spend some time reflecting on the love of God- that would choose to commit himself to us even when we lack trust or choose to disobey him.
- Worship with the song "Promises" by Maverick City Music

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQV9uS3g_IM

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What stories of covenant in the Bible are you most familiar with? What sticks out to you about those stories?
2. How is a covenant different from a promise?
3. How is covenantal love different from other kinds of love we experience?
4. How has the knowledge of God's committed love held you through hard seasons of your life and faith journey?

Rescue

After God made his initial covenant with Abraham, God continued to commit himself to Abraham's descendants: Issac, Jacob (re-named Israel), and Israel's 12 sons.

However, the effects of the Fall were still active in the world. A famine hit the area where God's people lived. Amid the famine, humans hoarded resources and consolidated power rather than giving generously to others. And ultimately, those who had the most resources decided that the safest way to protect and provide for themselves was to oppress others.

Egypt enslaved the people of Israel- the descendants of Abraham. Egypt removed their freedom and forced them into harsh working and living conditions. The Israelites were vulnerable.

Remembering God's covenant with them, the Israelites cried out to God in their distress, and God initiated a rescue plan.

God chose to work through Moses, a descendant of Abraham who was raised by Egyptians, to deliver his chosen people out of their captivity. Through Moses, God displayed his power and authority over all creation through miraculous intervention on behalf of his people.

This story of the Exodus is one of the most prominent and revisited stories in the history of God's people. It is foundational for Israel's understanding of who God is. It is a visible enactment of God maintaining his covenant promise with his people.



*Artwork about the Exodus by artist Raphael Abecassis

In the Old Testament, when the Israelites talk about God, they often describe him as the “God who rescued us from the hands of our oppressors.” The “God who brought us up out of slavery.” The “God who delivered us from Egypt.” Their experience of being rescued by God shaped their picture of Him throughout their whole history.

Action Steps:

- If you're feeling ambitious, you could read the whole exodus story: Exodus 1-15. Or, if you don't have time for that entire chunk, just read through Miriam's testimony song in Exodus 15.
- Spend some time reflecting on what experiences of God have shaped your picture of who He is.
- Listen to and worship along with this song “Came to my Rescue” covered by Ebin George and the Acoustic Project.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE46CS2_8Wk

Small Group Discussion Questions:

- What is your favorite part of the Moses story in scripture? Why?
- What characteristics of God are displayed in this story?
- What parts of the Exodus story are challenging for you, and how have you processed that?
- How do you think the story of the Exodus relates to the current church? How do you think different parts of the church have applied this story throughout history in different contexts?
- How have you seen this theme of God rescuing people out of bondage play out in your life?

The Law

After God rescued the Israelites from slavery, they needed to learn a few things. As people who had spent generations being mistreated by harsh slave masters, the Israelites needed to first learn how to love and trust a gracious and compassionate God. They also needed to learn how to function and flourish together in a free society with other imperfect people.

In order to teach the Israelites both of these things, God gave the Israelites the “halakhah.” We often translate this word “law” but a more literal interpretation of this word would be “the path that one walks.”

The Law contained *instructions that helped the people learn about the God who rescued them*. Laws such as the command to keep the Sabbath and to observe the Passover are intended to help remind the Israelites about the character of the God who brought them out of slavery into rest.

The Law also *showed the Israelites how to walk in ways that honor that God*. Laws such as the instructions for sacrifices and purification rituals are intended to help the Israelites rightly approach a God who is perfect and holy.

The Law also *showed the Israelites how to love their neighbors and how to engage the world around them in ways that led to flourishing*. Instructions about how to handle property disputes, and how to interact with your spouse or your neighbor’s spouse, and what foods were clean and unclean were all intended to keep peace and maintain health in the society. And ultimately, the way that this society functioned was supposed to show surrounding nations about the kindness, and justness, and holiness of God.

The Law was meant to be a guide to help the Israelites live in a broken and imperfect world in the best way possible, but the law was never meant to fix the world. In fact, in some ways, the law mostly served to show the world just how broken it was.

The law was never going to restore humanity to God. God himself would have to do that.

Action steps:

- Read Exodus 20:1-21 and Deuteronomy 11: 1-21
- Spend some time reflecting on how you think about God’s instructions. Do they seem like a list of “do’s and don’ts” or like a pathway that leads to understanding God and living in a flourishing community?
- Meditate on the “Greatest Commandment” song by The Porter’s Gate:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pEIUWTNsYXU&list=RDpEIUWTNsYXU&start_radio=1

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever read through large sections of the Old Testament law? What was that like?
2. How have you thought about the purpose of the law in Scripture?
3. What do you think our relationship is with the law as Christians?
4. Are there particular laws or commandments in scripture that have helped you love God?
5. How do we determine if we are loving our neighbor well or are doing things that lead to flourishing in the world around us?

Failure

God gave the Israelites the Law in order to 1) teach Israel about himself 2) help Israel live in ways that are honoring to God 3) teach Israel how to love their neighbor and promote flourishing in a world that had been infiltrated with sin. However, the Israelites could not and did not keep every aspect of the law.

The bulk of the Old Testament after the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) is a recounting of Israel's failure to obey the whole law, juxtaposed with God's covenantal commitment to stick with them anyways.

After the law is given, the people turn away from God's instructions. They build and worship idols. They murder, lie, and neglect the needs of their neighbors and the foreigners in their midst. They bring sacrifices to the Lord while worshipping other gods. They fail to follow the straight path that the Lord placed before them. A quick read of any of the major or minor prophets will give you some insight into this failure.

Even those leaders and members of the nation of Israel who tried to faithfully pursue righteousness and tried to keep the law, failed. Moses disobeyed God's instructions. Eli allowed his family members to profane the temple. David committed adultery and murder. Solomon gave in to greed and lust.

All throughout the Old Testament, humanity continued to run away from God and from the path he set before them. The pervasiveness of our brokenness and sin was not something we could fix by being given the right instructions.

It was a problem humanity kept demonstrating that they could not solve.

Action steps:

- Read Jeremiah 2: 5-13 and Zechariah 7: 8-14
- Listen to the song "Runaway" by Jess Ray below and reflect on the ways that you fail to follow God perfectly- running to other sources of comfort. As you listen, be encouraged by the fact that God commits to stay with you and love you even when you mess up, and even if you run away from Him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7PEXQMr9Wo>

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. When have you felt unable to do what you know you should do?
2. What Old Testament stories can you think of where Israel failed to obey God's commands?

3. How did God show grace and mercy in the Old Testament when his people failed?
4. How have you experienced grace and mercy from God when you've failed?
5. How do you practice showing grace and mercy to others when they fail?

Redemption

Even though humanity has kept using their freedom to disobey God, God has continued to choose to pursue humanity. Through the rescue from slavery in the Exodus, through the giving of the law, through the sending of the prophets, God continued to pursue his people.

But ultimately, God took the ultimate step of pursuit and solidarity when God chose to become human.

In the person of Jesus, we see the perfect picture of what God is like. In Jesus we see divinity and humanity intermingled. In Jesus, we see grace and truth embodied together. In Jesus, we see the law fulfilled, the covenant kept, and perfect freedom lived out. Jesus is our picture of God and our example of perfect love.

But Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are also the way that our relationship with God is mended. Jesus' giving up of his life is the way that all of creation gets restored.

Scripture utilized a lot of metaphors to talk about the work of Jesus:

- A ransom: that Jesus paid our debts and bought us back from the evil one (Mark 10:45, 1 Tim 2:5-6)
- A sacrificial substitution: that Jesus gave his life in exchange for ours (John 1:29, Romans 3:23-26)
- A victory: that Jesus defeated the powers of sin and death (Colossians 1:13)

Ultimately, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection removed all of the obstacles that kept us far from God: sin, shame, and death. We have access to a full relationship with God now. Not because of anything we have done. Not because we obeyed the law, or but only through the work of Jesus.

Action steps:

- Spend some time reflecting on the reality that all barriers between you and God have been forever removed. Confess the ways that you still try to earn your way to God's favor.
- Read Isaiah 53 and Romans 8: 1-17
- Spend some time worshiping to this familiar hymn, "Jesus Paid it All"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU2qoxCl4u4>

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. When did you first hear about the redemption offered through Jesus?

2. How was the work of Jesus explained to you? (i.e. what metaphors were used)
3. Does it feel like there are still obstacles to being in right-relationship with God (even if you mentally know that there are not?)
4. What helps you remember the joy of this truth the most (Worship? Evangelism? Personal reflection? etc.?)
5. How does the truth of your redemption and freedom from sin impact your daily life?

Participation

Jesus completed his redemptive work.
All barriers to God have been removed.
But the world around us doesn't look like Eden.

So what happened?

I had a professor explain it to me this way:

There was a time in World War II when the definitive battle in the war (D-Day) had been won, but there were parts of Europe that were still under Nazi occupation and rule. The Allies were sure to win the war, but the fullness of their victory was yet to be seen. People in the area had to decide if they were going to fearfully live under the old regime or start living as if the Nazi's were defeated.

That's the part of the big story that we're currently in.
The definitive battle has been fought and won. Jesus was victorious!
The Kingdom of God **will be** the ruling kingdom.
But right now, we still see evidence of the rule of sin and death around us.

After Jesus defeated death, he ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to be our companion. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live under the rule and authority of the Kingdom of God, to proclaim the good news of Jesus's victory, and to participate in His Kingdom coming in the world.

We do this by exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit,
actively pursuing peace and justice and righteousness,
praying for and healing the sick,
caring for the poor,
and loving the lonely.

We do this by using our freedom in Christ to serve others.

We do this by moving towards people that most others would move away from.

We do this by clinging to the hope that one day the fullness of the Kingdom of God will be known in every corner of creation.

Action steps:

- Read: Matthew 28: 16-20, Acts 4: 31-37, and Ephesians 1-3
- Reflect: What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit like? How might God be inviting you to become more dependent on the Holy Spirit's empowerment rather than on your own strength?

- Worship and pray with the song “Build Your Kingdom Here” by Rend Collective:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcSWpVKKMcs>

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What did you think about the WWII metaphor?
2. In what ways do you see God’s kingdom coming now?
3. In what ways do you see the “not yet” of the kingdom coming?
4. What spiritual gifts do you feel like you bring to the Body as we participate in God’s coming kingdom?
5. How have you felt called to participate in the realities of the coming kingdom?

Restoration

The Story ends with joy, and peace, and restored relationship with our God.

When Jesus ascended and gave us the Holy Spirit as our companion, he promised to come back and establish the fullness of his Kingdom, and we are waiting with hope for the fulfillment of that promise. We wait with hope for the coming day when...

We will live in union together with our God who is spoken about in scripture as our creator, our parent, our spouse, and our friend. He will make his home among us.

There will be an end to the end to pain, grief, and death.

Tears will be wiped away,
divisions will cease,
disease will disappear,
relationships will be mended,
Earth will be made new,
hunger will be satisfied,
injustices will be made right.
Loneliness, and shame, and fear,
and accusations, and anxiety, and depression
will be fully overrun by the fruit of the Spirit.

The Kingdom of God will be our home, and our God will receive the glory he is due.

Our hope for this future is sure, because it has been promised by the One who has faithfully pursued us through the whole story.

He is a God who keeps his promises.

Action steps:

- Read and meditate on Revelation 21: 1-5
- Reflect on what part of this hope for the future sounds especially like good news to you right now.

- Worship with hope to the song “You Hold Me Now” by Hillsong

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWsxPk9kzdg&list=RDNWsxPk9kzdg&start_radio=1

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What areas of your life are you most in need of hope right now?
2. What would restoration look like for areas in your life that feel broken or hopeless?
3. What areas of the world around you feel the most hopeless right now?
4. What would restoration look like for those places in the world that are broken?
5. What spiritual practices or rhythms might help ground you in this future hope?

My Small Story- A Digression

As I write this e-mail, I am sitting in my room, surrounded by thrifted furniture and amateur watercolor paintings. One of my roommates - an aspiring ballerina- is singing along with an early 2000's pop song downstairs. When I leave my house today, I will see Drake University students walking to class. I will listen to a news podcast that updates me on the war in Ukraine. I will have a few silly meme texts from my fiance. I will feel the dull pain from a lingering migraine. And I will drive the 20 minutes to the MDRC at the Bridge building in Johnston to send e-mails and plan small groups and hear stories about people's weekends with their grandchildren.

These are snapshots of the story I live in.

We spent the last few weeks talking about the Big Story of God that is told in scripture. It is the story that provides the frame for our lives and our understanding of the world. It is the story that helps us know who God is and what God is up to in the world.

And that Big Story intersects with our day-to-day realities.

The vision that **God wants shalom for his creation** across the whole world gives me boldness to pray for peace and justice and wholeness in Ukraine, and Afghanistan, and Ethiopia.

The promise of **God's covenant faithfulness to pursue us and love us in every season** anchors me when I feel lonely or distant from God in my thrifted furniture surroundings.

The examples in scripture of **God's grace, forgiveness, and patience** helps direct me when I have conflict with my ballerina roommate, or my fiance.

The hope of restoration, and the healing power of God's Spirit give me hope and tenacity in prayer when I wrestle with yet another migraine.

The Big Story intersects with our story all the time. God interacts with us in our story all the time.

But, it takes some practice to pay attention. I'd invite you this week to practice paying attention.

Action Steps:

1. Make a list of some of your daily or weekly realities, and practice naming how God, and the arches of the Big Story intersect with you there.
2. Use this video from Fuller Seminary, which is full of videos of seemingly mundane activities, to guide you through the steps of a reflective Christian practice called the Examen. (this video is about 20 minutes long) : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZFulbBMGnM&t=2s>