

12 Conclusion: Stepping into the Story

This is the twelfth talk outline in The God Story Sermon Series. The related chapter in The God Story book is Chapter 12, *Conclusion: Stepping into the Story*.

Teaching Outline

Key aims

To reflect on three hopeful outcomes from a journey through The God Story - to grow in knowledge and love for God, to experience more purpose and meaning in our lives as we understand our place God's big purposes for creation, to participate in retelling of The God Story.

Key Bible passages

Luke 24:13-35

Continue to the sermon 

Introduction

Recap of previous session(s)

take some time to rehearse the main chapters explored in The God Story and the key themes which stood out as you taught through it in your context. You may want to use the three sacred narrative threads - Presence, Family, Kingdom - which form a summary at the end of each chapter in The God Story book as a way of recapping.

Talk Overview

This session will involve a summary of The God Story learning and three main ways we hope teaching through The God Story will impact people's lives. Returning to Luke's account of the two walking on the road to Emmaus directly after Jesus' resurrection, we want to encourage people to think about the encounter these two travellers had with the Risen Lord and how it changed them forever. As we reflect on how everything changed for these two disciples after they heard The God Story told by the Author himself we want to explore what this means for our lives and how it will move us from story-listeners to story-tellers.

1 That you will know and love the author

Emphasise the main aim of this book is not simply to grow in knowledge of the Bible nor simply is it an attempt to reduce the Bible to a neat theological document. Rather the great hope for this creative retelling of the biblical story is to provoke a longing for God.

- + Highlight how the two on the road to Emmaus would have known a version of The God Story before, familiar with its content and many of its themes. But everything changed for them the day they met the Author.

≡ Key quote:

*"The God Story affirms this primal longing within each human being but teaches us that first and foremost we are not the seekers or the lovers, rather we are the sought and the beloved. God's invitation to communion with him is the heart of The God Story. An invitation not primarily to intellectual ascent or behaviour modification but an invitation to relationship, to fall into his arms in loving surrender."*¹

Pause and reflect

Encourage people to take some time to reflect upon this fresh (or first time!) journey through the biblical story. Ask them to reflect on what ways they may have come to know God better and how it has renewed love for God - the Author of The God Story.

2 That you might find your story in God's big story

Take some time to explain how as human beings we are meaning-making creatures. And this search for meaning seems to draw us towards a narrative which will help make sense of our lives. The fundamental nature of 'story' appears to be hardwired into our beings.

≡ Key quote

*"Alasdair MacIntyre famously said in his seminal book After Virtue: 'I can only answer the question, "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question, "Of what story or stories do I find myself part?"' MacIntyre's profound statement above proposes that 'story' is hardwired into us as human beings."*²

- + Take some time to encourage people to reflect on MacIntyre's argument. What if he is right? Focus on the statement that our stories only really find meaning in a bigger story - a story that we don't just read but participate in.

≡ Key quote

*"Each one of our lives is a splendid never-to-be-repeated story of grace. Each one of our stories is precious and worthy of being told, shared and experienced. Yet none of our stories will make sense in isolation, disconnected from a wider plot. Think about all the best movies. The roles of the individual characters, whether they are brilliant or broken, can only be understood within a bigger plot or storyboard. In a not dissimilar way, our real-life stories only truly find meaning when they are connected to the very source of our lives and the wider unfolding drama into which we were born."*³

- + Reflect on the two on the road to Emmaus as Jesus walked beside them and how, *"beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself"* (Luke 24:27). Emphasise how Jesus retelling these two disciples The God Story was a way of drawing them into their own story. Their hearts began burning when they heard The God Story taught this way and as a result their own lives had never felt more meaningful.

Pause and reflect

Encourage people to take time to think about the invitation held out to each of us to participate in The God Story. In what ways have you been encouraged and challenged to find your place in God's unfolding story? How does this help your life find fresh meaning and purpose?

3 That you would tell and embody The God Story

Describe the moment, around the table, the two disciples recognised their companion on the road had been Jesus and emphasise their immediate response. (Luke 24:31-35)

≡ Key quote

*"Hearts burning and minds renewed, their feet ran with resurrection, telling their own story of encounter with the risen Jesus."*⁴

- + Reemphasise the effect this encounter with Jesus had on the disciples and the impact The God Story had on them. Not only did their own hearts burn they had to run and tell others!

- + Take some time to highlight how many of the big problems in our current cultural moment are a result of many people believing 'lesser stories' about their lives and the world they live within.

≡ Key quote

*"Each one of these 'stories' offers a different worldview. When we absorb these alternative scripts into our hearts and minds, even subconsciously, we become characters in a counterfeit story. Despite their best efforts these narratives are now proving to be built upon empty promises unable to deal with humanity's most fundamental problem: sin. The self-determining freedom which characterizes many of the world's big stories is not delivering the human flourishing it assured us it would."*⁵

» Application opportunity

take some time to reflect on what these alternative stories are within your context as well as at a more macro level. Discuss the often tragic implications this is having on the current generations.

- + In light of this, emphasize the opportunity we have to tell an anxious and fractured culture, the greatest story ever.

≡ Key quote

*"What if we never had a better chance to compassionately and confidently tell The God Story to a tired, anxious and disillusioned generation? What if, like those two on the Emmaus Road, teaching The God Story could lead our culture to a table, where bread will be broken and wine will be poured out? Through the words of the Scriptures the Spirit is wooing them there, ready to open their eyes to see Jesus and welcome them home."*⁶

- + Focus on how the two on the road to Emmaus moved from story-listeners to story-tellers after their encounter with Jesus. Emphasise it is now our turn!

≡ Key quote

*"We have an opportunity not just to be a part of history but to shape history. Which means as you close the final page of this book you have an opportunity to step further into the story. The next words you speak, the next move you make, could help define the next chapters of God's eternal purposes still unfolding throughout history. Everything we do matters because everyone matters to the God who holds it all together in unfailing love. Before this day is through you could be participating in the inbreaking of new creation on the earth. Why not spend the rest of your days living for this? For as we yield our hearts to the Spirit our lives too are woven into the pages of The God Story still being written."*⁷

End of sermon

¹ Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, *The God Story*; Encountering unfailing love in the unfolding narrative of scripture; (London, Form SPCK Group 2024), p.214-215

² Ibid, p.215

³ Ibid, p.215-216

⁴ Ibid, p.217

⁵ Ibid, p.217

⁶ Ibid, p.217

⁷ Ibid, p.217-218

*All Bible passages quoted are taken from NIV unless stated.