THE STORY

Prologue – Week 1

The One Story of God

August 6-7, 2016

Appearing on the Big Screen…

The **Bible** is like a **mural** that tells a single **story**.

But…the **Bible** doesn’t read like a **story**.

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your unfailing love;

according to your great compassion

blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity

and cleanse me from my sin.

*Psalm 51:1-2 NIV*

Once you see the **story, it will change your life.**

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. **10**Then Moses commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, **11**when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. **12**Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. **13**Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

*Deuteronomy 31:9-13 NIV*

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Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, TX

August 6-7, 2016

**To view The Story Prologue Week 1 sermon video, [CLICK HERE](http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=536).**

**Opener**

Bible knowledge testing questions:

1. What time of day was Adam born? *Just a little before Eve.*
2. Why didn’t Cain bring an acceptable offering to the Lord? *Because he wasn’t Abel.*
3. What kind of man was Boaz before he got married? *Ruthless.*

Here’s a serious question…

1. What is the one and only manmade thing in heaven? *The scars in Jesus’ hands and feet.*

How many would say “I would like to understand the Bible better”?

I congratulate you! The Bible contains the very words of God. Understanding the Bible unlocks the secrets to give you access to the most amazing life possible, the one God wants you to have.

How many would be willing to say “I would like to understand the Bible better, but I find it challenging”? You are not alone. My job is to help you over this next ministry season to gain personal access to the Word of God so that what you want you can actually grab hold of.

I think a little virtual trip to two famous works of art might give us some insight into how the most powerful book in the world is also one of the toughest for us to get our arms around.

**Introduction: The Art Gallery & The Mural**

First, our plane takes us to Paris, France, to the renowned Louvre Museum. You are excited to see paintings by Rembrandt, van Gogh and Monet but you are the most eager to gaze at arguably the most famous painting of all time – The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci– worth an estimated $700 million dollars.

*Show the painting of the Mona Lisa*

When you first enter the room you are stunned at how small the painting actually is. Based on the legend of the painting you expected it to be two stories high. But, it is only 20”x30” – about the size of an oven door.

As you probe deeper into the story behind Ms. Lisa you discover she was born on June 15, 1479 during the Italian Renaissance. Her husband was a wealthy Florentine merchant who supposedly commissioned the painting for their home to celebrate the birth of their second son, Andrea.

You then catch a flight to Rome, grab a taxi, and use your best Italian to ask the driver to take you to the Vatican. You walk across the magnificent plaza and enter the Sistine Chapel to see arguably the second most famous painting in the world – The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo.

*Show the fresco of the Creation of Adam (cropped to make it PG!)*

The strong finger of God is reaching out to give life to the limp finger of Adam.

Both paintings are stunning, and interestingly, Da Vinci and Michelangelo were painted them at the same time. But there is one very obvious difference. The Mona Lisa is sitting in a room (recently renovated for $6 million) all by itself completely isolated from the other paintings. The story of Mona’s life is completely disconnected to the stories behind the other paintings in the building.

But The Creation of Adam is connected to paintings of over 300 characters, like Noah and Jacob, Moses and David, Abraham and Ruth.

*Show 2 pictures of the entire ceiling*

The Louvre is an art gallery. The Sistine Chapel is a mural that tells one grand story of redemption.

**The One Story of God**

The **Bible** is like a **mural** that tells a single **story**.

But…the **Bible** doesn’t read like a **story**.

I have here in my hand a copy of a novel I read entitled *At Home in Mitford* by Jan Karon. It is a story and reads like a story. It starts at the beginning and goes in chronological order until the end, about a man named Father Tim.

The Bible is a story but it is not organized quite like a story. If you have your Bibles, let me show you how the Bible is arranged, and why it might be a bit frustrating for you. Turn to the Table of Contents. If you don’t have one with you, I have reproduced it here.

*Refer to poster listing the books of the Old Testament in sequence, placed on an easel.*

Here’s how the 39 books of the Old Testament are organized:

* **The Law** – The first five books in your Bible are the Pentateuch (*penta* means “five”) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As you read through Genesis, it’s a chronological history, as is Exodus, Leviticus is a bit tough, Numbers goes along in order, then you get to Deuteronomy, and you realize Moses is repeating himself. The name “Deuteronomy” is a compound word “Deuter” meaning second; Nomos meaning law. It is the second of the law or a repetition of stories you already read about in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Good to know.
* **The Historical Books** – The next twelve books in your Bible from Joshua to Esther are the historical books and read pretty much in chronological order until you get halfway in and land on 1 Kings. 1 Kings begins with the story of Solomon’s reign over the united Israel and describes the demise of Solomon and the dividing of the nation into two weaker nations – Israel to the north and Judah to the south. The book of 2 Kings goes back and forth between the kings and prophets to the north and the kings and prophets to the south all the way up to their destruction and exiles. This is starting to get confusing because of the names mothers were giving their kids back then – Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin. Then when you get to 1 Chronicles you think the story is going to go on, but we’re back to the story of Solomon again! Except then in 2 Chronicles this time it leaves out all the kings to the north that were mentioned in 2 Kings, because they are not the remnant that God is going to use to bring us Jesus.
* **Poetry books** – Next you come to the five books of poetry from Job to Song of Songs, and they are not necessarily in chronological order. Now, Job’s story is believed to have taken place somewhere back around the time of Abraham which is back in the first book of the Bible – Genesis. These books contain writings by David and Solomon, primarily, and there’s even a psalm by Moses. Let me give you an example of how confusing this all can be if you are not literate in the Bible. Back in 2 Samuel 11, King David has an affair with Bathsheba, gets her pregnant, then has her husband Uriah killed. In the next chapter David is confronted by the prophet Nathan and David confesses his sin. His full confession to God is not found in 2 Samuel but all the way over in Psalms 51.

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* **The Prophetic Books** – the last 17 books of the Old Testament are prophetic books, but they are talking about things that happened at the beginning of the Old Testament, so you have to learn how they all line up, and here’s a hint: they don’t go in chronological order. The first 5 prophetic books are called the *Major Prophets* and rest are called the *Minor Prophets*. Does anyone know the difference between the Major and Minor Prophets? The major prophet’s books are longer – that’s it. (That’s my expensive seminary education being put to good use!) So, the last major prophet is Daniel. We just studied his life which took place during the **southern** **kingdom’s** exile to Babylon. The next book in your Table of Contents is Hosea – the first minor prophet. His story takes us back 145 years before the Daniel, and he is prophesying to the **northern** **kingdom** of Israel before they were overtaken by the Assyrians. If this is getting confusing, I am accomplishing my purpose! And I haven’t even gotten to the New Testament yet.

*Refer to poster listing the books of the New Testament in sequence, placed on a second easel.*

Surely the New Testament has to get easier, right? Not so much.

* **Gospels** – Now we turn the page to the 27 New Testament books. The first four are the gospels or the story of the life of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the same story of Jesus over three times but from their point of view. Then you get to the book of John, and it seems as though things are all out of order. It’s not that John has it wrong, it’s that he recalls the life of Jesus in a topical fashion, to prove a very important point.
* **Acts** – We have one history book in the New Testament and that is the book of Acts. It tells the story of the church from ascension of Jesus back to heaven to about AD 63. When we come to the end of this book we turn the page and come to the book of Romans.
* **Epistles** – Romans, logically, should pick up where Acts left off. What do you think? Not so much. That would be too easy. Romans is a letter to the church of Rome and not a history book. It is the first of 21 letters written to churches or individuals. Do you think they are arranged in chronological order? That would have been helpful, but of course, they’re not. They’re arranged by author. The first 13 are from Paul. The next 8 letters are by various authors.
* **Prophecy** – that last book is the only prophecy book in the New Testament, the book of Revelation.

Actually, the first two New Testament books to be written are James and Galatians. Matthew was actually one of the last books written. Someone shoot me now!

Do you see why people *revere* the Bible but don’t *read* it?

Can you imagine if I took the book *At Home in Mitford* and mixed up all the chapters and said, “Good luck reading this and finding the story!” But God wants you to read it…and he wants you to see the one story he has been telling since the beginning of time.

**The Story Will Change Your Life**

Once you **see the story it will change your life**.

This is what The Story experience is all about. It is meant to unravel all of this and allow some of you for the first time to see the one story God has been telling. It is an abridged chronology of the Bible. It is not designed to replace the Bible, but to be a gateway to the Bible. It moves things around so it reads like a novel. It does things like move the heartfelt confession of David’s Psalm 51 and puts it right after Nathan confronts him in 2 Samuel 12, so you see the broken and contrite heart of King David right after he is caught red-handed in his sin.

Seeing God’s story, the mural is very important to God.

Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 31. Moses comes to the end of his life and gathers Israel together. He first passes the mantle of leadership to Joshua and then he establishes a very important pattern for them to follow to ensure their success.

Look at verses 9-13 –

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. **10**Then Moses commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, **11**when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. **12**Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. **13**Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”

Deuteronomy 31:9-13 NIV

Every seven years Israel was to get together, men, women, children and even outsiders, to read through the law. Why? Not just so they would become smarter, but so that they would *live* the story. The phrase that’s used is to “fear God,” which simply means that you need to know the story God is writing so you will see what he is up to, and you will be compelled to take him more seriously. A huge concern for Moses is making sure the next generation understands the story. Moses knew they were only one generation away from losing their identity and going back into captivity.

I have heard a few people say, “We are doing The Story again? Why, we did that eight years ago.” My response – “I am sorry we didn’t do it again last year when the seven years were up. Please forgive me.” We are doing The Story again, because God wants his people to know his story. We are doing the story again because there are people here, about two-thirds, who weren’t here eight years ago and they desperately need to know God’s story.

We are doing it again because there are children who weren’t born eight years ago and they desperately need to know God’s story. And we know this to be true: if our children don’t know the story, and live the story, there’s no hope for this nation to turn around.

But not only that, each time you read the story, it doesn’t change, but you have. Here’s how the Scripture works as a living book: every time you go back to it, you are going to experience fresh discoveries, unlocking secrets you couldn’t see then, that will lead you into the life God wants for you.

I was golfing with a friend who said to me, “Randy, my wife and I read a lot of books. When we read a novel, we’re done with it. But the church is interesting; 2.2 billion people gather together every week for two thousand years, and you keep talking about the same book. Haven’t you figured it out yet? Tell me honestly: are you truly seeing anything new in that book after all these years?” I told him, “It just so happens I came across something new this morning, something I had read many times before but I saw something new today, and I am excited about this discovery and what it means!” That’s the power of the Word of God.

I think it is interesting that Moses decreed that the reading of the Law would coincide with the year they cancelled all of the debts. I don’t think this is accidental. You see, when you see the one story of God from beginning to end, what you are going to discover is just how far God has gone to get you back. You were overwhelmed in a pile of spiritual debt that was leading you straight to hell. But God through Christ came and cancelled all of your debts and credited your spiritual bank account with the righteousness of Christ so that through a personal decision of faith to believe in him you are destined for Heaven and God’s wealth. You will see that the Gospel story didn’t begin in Matthew, it began in Genesis, and you will see from The Story the great lengths to which God has gone to get us back.

This will be my sixth time through The Story, and personally, I am more excited about this time than any of the others. I think God is going to show me something I have never seen before, something that will take my life to a new level. Jesus said, the Word of God is like a seed, planted in the soil of the heart. If the seed falls on hard soil, it doesn’t grow, but if the seed falls on soft soil, it is implanted, and it produces fruit upon fruit. The deciding factor for whether or not The Story will be a good experience for you is not the factor of doing it again, but the condition of your heart. Soften up your heart and prepare for something God has not revealed to you yet, and be changed for the better.

*PRAY*