

STUDY GUIDE

31 SESSIONS

THE STORY

GETTING TO THE HEART OF GOD'S STORY



RANDY FRAZEE

WITH TOM ANTHONY

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The Story Study Guide

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A Word from the Authors

As we journey through *The Story* in the days and weeks ahead, we will learn that heaven and earth are woven more closely together than we ever dreamed. All through the story of the Bible we see two parallel and beautiful dramas unfold.

There is the **Lower Story**. Humans live on earth and see things from a horizontal perspective. We can't see what is around the bend but must make a decision on which way to go, where we will live, and how we will respond to what happens to us. We focus on getting through the day as best we can. We interpret why we think other people do what they do. We struggle to know why certain things happen and why others things don't happen.

Then there is the **Upper Story**. This is how the story is unfolding from God's perspective—from above. Heaven is breaking into our world more than we recognize, and the story of God's seeking love, perpetual grace, and longing for relationship with ordinary people is breathtaking.

In the beginning of *The Story*, God walked with his first children in a beautiful garden ... in harmonious relationship. At the end of *The Story*, he will walk with us again, in a beautiful garden.

The question is: what will happen in the pages in between? As we walk through *The Story* together, we will see how God is weaving all of our Lower Stories to tell his one grand Upper Story.

Best of all, we can walk closely with him in every situation of life. As we recognize how close the Upper Story and the Lower Story fit together, we will learn to experience God's love and grace and be guided by his wisdom.

God wants to be with us; with you, with me. This is the refrain that rings true through *The Story*. As you read each chapter, this will become clearer and more personal and will fill your life with greater purpose, meaning, and understanding.

So, let God's Story become Your Story.

The Study Guide: Getting the Most from Your Journey

WITH GOD AND WITH OTHERS

The best ways for you to learn how the Upper Story and Lower Story are intertwined are to spend time seeking God on your own and to spend time seeking him with others. It's not an either/or. It's a both/and. *The Story Study Guide* is designed to help you spend important time each week with God and to help a biblical community seek God together. Using this study guide (and the related video) as tools for growth will help you fully embrace the Upper Story of God and your Lower Story role in his Upper Story.

SESSION OUTLINE

Each of the thirty-one sessions is divided into two parts. The first part, Personal Time, is for your own personal study, to be done prior to your group meetings. In this section you will *Know the Story* by reading one chapter from *The Story* and testing and expanding your Bible knowledge. You will *Understand the Story* by digging deeper into the passages. You will *Live the Story* by taking action on what you have learned. You will also *Tell the Story* by learning the five movements, discussing the chapter with those in your home, and praying together with those in your home. The Personal Time section can be completed in about one hour.

The second part of each session, Group Time, encourages you to seek God with others. You will *Know the Story* by sharing insights from your Personal Time. You will *Understand the Story* by using the note-taking outline to help you follow along with Randy Frazee's video teaching. You will *Live the Story* as you discuss your responses to several discussion questions and real-life scenarios of people who are growing in their faith. You will also *Tell the Story* as you use the movements to learn to tell the story together. The Group Time section can be completed in about one hour.

Finally, you will have the opportunity to pray for each other and for those not yet a part of your group. Use this section to record prayer requests to see how God works. Don't rush through or shorten this important part of developing the health of your group.

GROUP SIZE

The thirty-one-week *The Story* video curriculum is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small group gathering. To ensure everyone has enough time to participate in discussions, it is recommended that large groups watch the video together and then break up into smaller groups of four to six people for discussion.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Each participant should have his or her own study guide, which includes notes for video segments, memorization activities, and discussion questions. Simply coming to Group Time unprepared will still yield some benefit, but the maximum growth in your faith will occur as you engage *The Story* personally and with others in your home prior to meeting with your group. Although the course can be fully experienced with just the video and study guide, participants are also encouraged to have a copy of *The Story* book. Reading the book along with the full use of *The Story Study Guide* provides your best opportunity to make the journey richer and more meaningful.

FACILITATION

Each group should appoint a facilitator who is responsible for starting the video and for keeping track of time during discussions and activities. Facilitators may also read questions aloud and monitor discussions, prompting participants to respond and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate. The best groups share the role of facilitator between several people over the course of the thirty-one weeks. Since some may be less comfortable in the role of facilitator, more thorough instructions are provided in the “Facilitator Tips for a Great Group” section that follows.

Group Time: Facilitator Tips for a Great Group

To ensure a successful group experience, read the following information before beginning.

—WHAT MAKES A GROUP DISCUSSION SUCCESSFUL?—

As a group's facilitator, you might be asking yourself, "What am I supposed to accomplish with this study?" Here are a few goals you might keep in mind for your group:

1. *Discovery.* The Bible is an amazing teacher. Don't underestimate the power of God as he reveals truth to those who read and discuss his Word. A successful group wrestles with Scripture in order to encourage these truths to come out.
2. *Relationship.* It takes time to develop meaningful relationships, but these relationships are incredible catalysts for spiritual growth. Encourage the group to share and enjoy building friendships. A successful group is more than just a Bible study.
3. *Authenticity.* Many people feel pressure to act "spiritual" when they are in religious environments, masking their true thoughts and feelings. This behavior stunts spiritual growth. Set the example for authenticity and honesty.
4. *Participation.* Groups that seek to include everyone in the conversation experience the most growth. Encourage the quieter members of the group with statements like, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet" or "Does anyone who hasn't shared yet have anything to add?" Successful groups engage all their members in their discussions.

At the end of each group meeting, ask yourself these questions: Did we learn something new about God and ourselves? Did we grow in our relationships with each other? Did we see honesty and authenticity in our discussion? Have we engaged all members of the group in the discussion? If you can answer yes to these questions, you are facilitating successfully.

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

Leading a group doesn't have to be overwhelming. Consider these tips to help you create a successful group environment:

Pray: As you prepare for your group meeting, ask God to give you wisdom in choosing discussion questions, courage in creating an authentic environment, and insight into the truths he wants to reveal to your group.

Prepare: Spend time before group preparing which sections of the study guide you will use and which questions work for your group. If you are struggling through the study guide and seem unprepared, people will feel more anxiety.

Prime: Your group will be as honest and authentic as you are willing to be. Courageously, set the tone for the group by being open about the strengths and weaknesses of your faith. You will prime the group by setting the example and letting them follow your lead.

Punctual: Start and stop on time. No matter how long your group meets, it's your job to keep things on track. Make a budget of time for each section of the study and stick to it. It might be uncomfortable to cut people off and move on, but the group will respect you for doing so.

SPECIFICS FOR THIS STUDY

Design your own discussion. You will not be able to use all of the group materials found in this study guide during the allotted time, so don't feel pressured to do so. Pick and choose the activities and questions that seem to fit your group the best.

Your group might gravitate to one or two of the discussion segments but not another; that's fine. Choose one or two questions from the segments that your group will benefit from most. Don't skip the section where people offer insights from their Personal Time. This will encourage them each week to study on their own ahead of your Group Time.

The case studies in every other session are based on actual situations. Use them as a creative vehicle to discuss the applications of the session's theme to real life.






Getting Started: The Heart of the Story and Our Story

Before the rise of the printing press in the sixteenth century, stories were passed down orally. The older people in a community shared the important stories of their history—all the principles and values of life woven within these gripping narratives. They shared these stories with each other, and with the next generation. It was a part of their culture ... their lives.

For the past few centuries, though, our communication primarily has been written—people sitting alone with a book open on their lap.

Now, however, with the explosive rise of technology (TV, movies, YouTube, and other visual communication tools), the world is returning to pictures and stories. We are once again becoming an oral culture. Indeed, many people learn best by hearing and telling stories.

With this in mind, we desire to capture this ancient/modern form of oral communication and weave it into your experience of *The Story*. To accomplish this, we have come up with five icons to help as you hear and tell the story. These simple pictures will put an image in your mind to help you remember the movements of God's story. They will also help as you tell your own story. Here are the images and the portion, or movement, of *The Story* that they represent:

Picture	Portion of The Story	Portion of the Bible
	The Story of the Garden	Genesis 1–11
	The Story of Israel	Genesis 12–Malachi
	The Story of Jesus	Matthew–John (Gospels)
	The Story of the Church	Acts–Jude
	The Story of a New Garden	Revelation

Over our thirty-one-week journey through *The Story*, we will spend a portion of both our Personal Time and Group Time focusing on one of these five movements, as indicated by the icon(s). Each one captures the Upper Story

of God's work and also points to God's desire to encounter us in the Lower Story. Each session of your small group gathering will provide a brief time for your group to grow in your understanding of God's story as well as help you learn to articulate his story and your own journey of faith. Please don't skip this important part of the study.

Our prayer is that each person who walks through the thirty-one sessions of *The Story Study Guide* will be able to do three things.

1. Identify the five movements listed above and how they shape *The Story*.
2. Articulate a short statement that captures the heart of each of the five sections of *The Story* (see below).
3. Connect the themes of God's story with your personal story. This will release you to naturally tell your story of faith in a way that intertwines with God's story.

Here are the five movements of *The Story*. As you become familiar with the themes and reflect on how they connect to God's story, they will help you articulate your own story of faith.



Movement 1: The Story of the Garden (Genesis 1–11)

In the Upper Story, God creates the Lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God's vision and are escorted from paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God's story of how he kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with him.



Movement 2: The Story of Israel (Genesis 12–Malachi)

God builds a brand-new nation called Israel. Through this nation, he will reveal his presence, power, and plan to get us back. Every story of Israel will point to the first coming of Jesus—the One who will provide the way back to God.

Movement 3: The Story of Jesus (Matthew–John)

Jesus left the Upper Story to come down into our Lower Story to be with us and to provide the way for us to be made right with God. Through faith in Christ's work on the cross, we can now overturn Adam's choice and have a personal relationship with God.

Movement 4: The Story of the Church (Acts–Jude)

Everyone who comes into a relationship with God through faith in Christ belongs to the new community God is building called the church. The church is commissioned to be the presence of Christ in the Lower Story—telling his story by the way we live and the words we speak. Every story of the church points people to the second coming of Christ, when he will return to restore God's original vision.

Movement 5: The Story of a New Garden (Revelation)

God will one day create a new earth and a new garden and once again come down to be with us. All who placed their faith in Christ in this life will be eternal residents in the life to come.



May this journey through *The Story* inspire you to share God's story freely, because he wants to make his story your story.

SESSION 1

Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

“In the beginning God created
the heavens and the earth.”

GENESIS 1:1



Personal Time

Every session in *The Story* contains a section for your Personal Time with God. This section is divided into four parts: Know the Story, Understand the Story, Live the Story, and finally Tell the Story, which is an opportunity to have a conversation about the chapter with those living in your home or with a friend. In total, the Personal Time section should take about one hour to complete, but you may want to use Tell the Story each day to help drive these truths deeper into your heart and life. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to do this. You are simply choosing a plan that fits you best as you try to embrace *The Story* in your life.

This week before your Group Time and your weekend worship experience, spend time using the Personal Time section of your study guide to allow the story of creation to take root in your heart.

KNOW THE STORY

Before reading Chapter 1 of *The Story*, answer the questions below to test your knowledge of this week's Scripture. Enter your answers in the column marked "1st Time."

Question	1st Time	2nd Time
1		
2		
3		
4		

1. Why did God create man in his image and likeness?
 - a. He wanted us to be little gods.
 - b. He wanted us to look like gods.
 - c. He wanted us to have his character traits.
 - d. He wanted us to rule over the creation.

2. Why did God banish Adam and Eve from the garden?
 - a. God was angry with them.
 - b. They had lost the privilege of the easy life.
 - c. They could not be allowed to eat from the tree of life.
 - d. God was trying to teach them a lesson about sin.

3. Why was God not pleased with Cain's offering?
 - a. Cain did not do what was right.
 - b. Abel had brought a better offering.
 - c. God preferred an offering from the flocks.
 - d. Cain's offering was too small.

4. Why did God send the flood?
 - a. God regretted making human beings on the earth.
 - b. God wanted to start over with Noah and his family.
 - c. The human race had become evil.
 - d. All of the above.

Now read Chapter 1 of *The Story*. After reading, revisit the questions to check your answers. Put your new answers in the column marked "2nd Time." (The answer key is found at the end of the session.)

UNDERSTAND THE STORY

As you read Chapter 1 of *The Story* during the week, allow the story of creation to help you see God's unchanging plan from the beginning.

1. Several verses begin simply with "God said." In what ways does this impact your view of God and his authority?

2. What do you think it means to be created "in the image of God"?

3. What led to the exile from the garden?

4. How does the rescue of Noah and his family along with the flood of the earth affect your understanding of the true nature of God?

5. After reading Chapter 1, what is one question you wish you could ask God about what you have read?

LIVE THE STORY

TAKE ACTION

We don't want to simply be hearers of the Word but also doers of the Word. Take some time to reflect on what you have read and studied this week.

1. Did you have a new discovery from your reading and study this week? If so, what was it?

2. Is there something you need to do based on what you learned?

3. Who can you tell about what you learned? Make a plan right now to share with that person.

TELL THE STORY

As we go through *The Story* together, we want to learn how to tell the story. This week we will begin to focus on Movement 1. Read through Movement 1 below several times, beginning to commit it to memory.



Movement 1: The Story of the Garden (Genesis 1–11)

In the Upper Story, God creates the Lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God's vision and are escorted from paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God's story of how he kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with him.

CONVERSATION

One day around a meal or your dinner table, have an intentional conversation about this week's topic. During the meal, read Genesis 1:1 found at the beginning of this session. Use the following question for discussion:

Of all the things God has created, what is the one you find most interesting and why?

PRAY TOGETHER

Focusing the last thoughts of our day on God can help us rest — truly rest — in him. Each night read and reflect on Genesis 1:1, either on your own or with others if there are others living in your home. Pray and ask God to help you fully embrace the story of creation. As you do this each night before bed, let the power of the verse impact both heart and mind.



Group Time

Welcome

Welcome to Session 1 of *The Story*. If this is your first meeting together, take some time to introduce yourselves and tell just a bit about how you came to be a part of this group.

KNOW THE STORY

Use one or both of these questions before you watch the video together.

1. How did you do on the quiz in the Know the Story section before you read the chapter?

2. What was your most interesting insight or question from your Personal Time this week?

UNDERSTAND THE STORY

As you watch the video for Session 1 of The Story, use the section below to record some of the main points. (The answer key is found at the end of the session.)

- The Bible is a _____ knitted together to tell the story of God's great love.
- What is the apple of God's eye? The magnum opus of his work?

- God took _____ with them in the cool of the day.
- God's Big Idea: The point of his story is to be _____ us!
- Every one of us is born with a _____ nature.

LIVE THE STORY

TAKE ACTION

1. What part of Randy's teaching encouraged or challenged you the most? Why?

2. Did anything from your Personal Time jump out, calling you to action?
Did anyone have an "aha" moment?

CONVERSATION

Use one or two of the questions below (depending on time) to have a conversation in community.

1. What in the story of the garden gives you the most encouragement and why?

2. How does the story of Cain and Abel unsettle you or challenge you?

3. What hope and promise do you find in the story of Noah?

4. As you reflect on what you learned this week in Chapter 1, what is your biggest takeaway?

TELL THE STORY

As we go through *The Story* together, we want to learn how to tell the story. This week we will focus on Movement 1. Read it aloud together to start committing it to memory.



Movement 1: The Story of the Garden (Genesis 1–11)

In the Upper Story, God creates the Lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God's vision and are escorted from paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God's story of how he kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with him.

PRAY TOGETHER

One of the most important things we can do together in community is to pray for each other. This is not simply a closing prayer to end Group Time but a portion of time to share prayer requests and life, to review how God has answered past prayers, and to actually pray for one another. Use the space below to record prayer requests and praises. Also, make sure to pray by name for people God might add to your group — especially your neighbors.

Name

Request/Praise

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

NEXT WEEK

Next week we'll look at the story of how of God's covenant promise with Abraham would accomplish his Upper Story plan through building the nation of Israel.

Know the Story Answer Key — d / c / a / d

Video Notes Answer Key — mural / people / walks / with / sin