

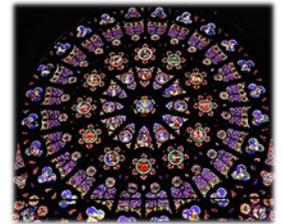
## Student Lesson 1.1

## What Did God Say?

Stories are everywhere. We love stories. Stories speak to our innermost self, some obviously better than others. Stories can inspire and shape our dreams. Stories can sometimes leave us in fear and cause us to question the safety and security of our environment. Some stories intrigue us through mystery and suspense. Other stories become our form of escape from the mess of our own lives. Then there are those stories that are small tales and teach us little snippets of truth. Some stories are large and overarching, spanning centuries, shared by communities of people that shape our understanding and interpretation of the world and life experiences. We like stories and we tell and listen to them with regularity.

Movies tell stories. Television tells stories. Music tells a story. Theater tells a story. So does poetry. There are endless stories in local and global news, stories which attempt to educate society about current events, both positive and negative. Yet there are still more variations of storytelling.

U2 singer and activist Bono calls stained glass “the first cinemas.” This stained glass window is from an ancient cathedral in France known as the Cathedral Basilica of St. Denis. In the center is God the Creator surrounded by the days and works of creation.



The history of storytelling is difficult to pin to any particular date. The Lascaux cave paintings, said to have been discovered in southwestern France by four teenagers in September of 1940, are believed to be as old as 16,000 years. Each picture provoking the imagination to guess what story was being told.



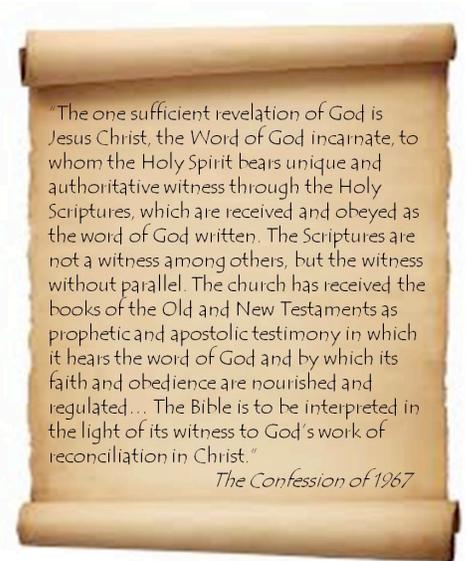
Stories are also told by way of oral tradition, passing narratives down from generation to generation by word-of-mouth. Each time the story may be told in a new and fresh way. The art of storytelling has transcended time and medium.

There is power in story. Stories illustrate life and experience in a way that sparks the imagination and tugs on our creative energies.

**Q1: What are some of your favorite stories? (ex. Books, movies, TV shows, poems, art, etc.)**

## The Bible as Story

The Bible is also an example of story or narrative. In fact, about 75% of it is narrative (story, history, parables), 15% is poetic (songs, psalms, prophecy) and 10% is overtly instructional (laws, instruction). The Bible is a large and beautiful story with the plot of God making the world whole again through Jesus. It is a story that incorporates poetry, history, narrative, parables, prophecy, song, and reflections on things to come. Even more, in order to get the fullest picture of why Jesus matters, we have to read and engage the whole story, both what happened before (Old Testament) and what has continued to happen after (beginning with the New Testament). In other words, how do we read Scripture? We read Scripture as a story of God's past, present, and on-going activity in the world that centers on the life, death, and resurrection of the person of Jesus.



**Q2: What makes reading the Bible so hard? How does reading the Bible as a large story help you to understand what God has said and continues to say to us? Are there other ways you have read the Bible that have been helpful?**

**Q3: What are some of your favorite stories in the Bible? What do you think they are about and how do they illustrate what God is up to in the world?**

It is important to be reminded that just because we say the Bible is a story does not mean we are talking about something fictional, say Harry Potter or Twilight. Stories can be fictional or non-fictional. Stories serve as a way of viewing events with some sense of organization that breathes fresh meanings and understandings of the world. We love stories and we can relate to stories. And stories are everywhere...and God has written a story to and for us through the Bible.

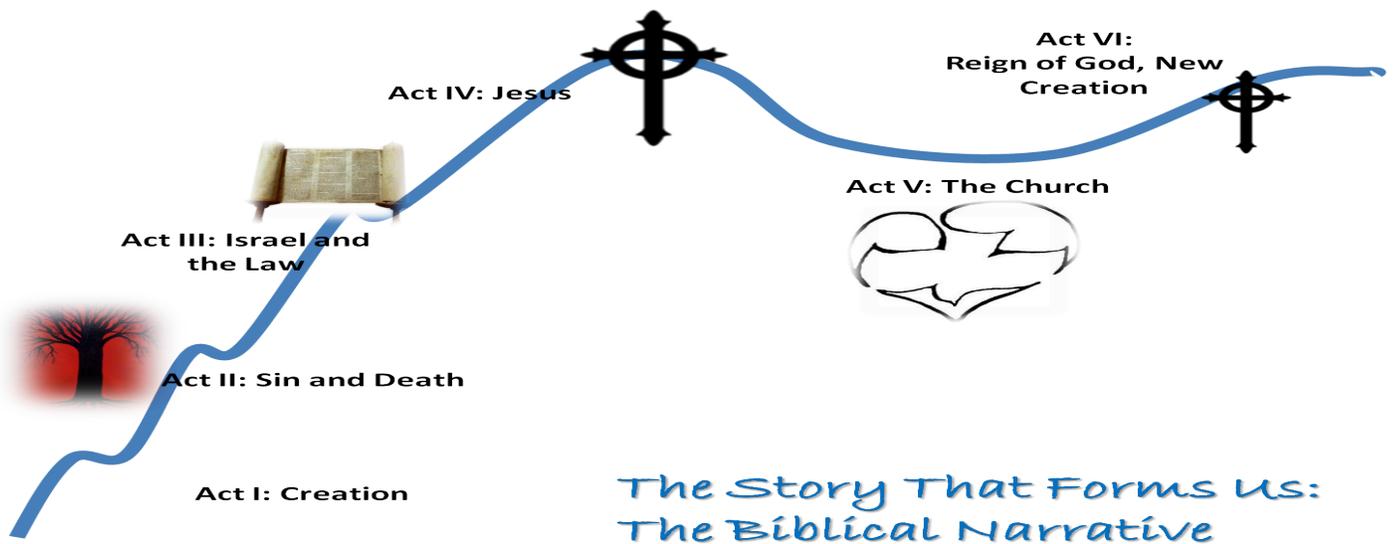
And it is our story.

**READ Romans 5: 12-21 // *The Message* offers a helpful translation:**

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%205:12-21&version=MSG>

**Q4: How does Romans illustrate the biblical story? What are some of the significant parts of the story and what is the turning point of the story?**

Some of you like theater, another form of storytelling. A theatrical performance is usually broken down into scenes and acts. N.T. Wright, a writer and theologian, describes the biblical story as a six-act Shakespearean play. Check out the figure below to see what he means:



Wright says that we as followers of Jesus, readers of Scripture, and members of the Church are living in the middle of the fifth act. He even takes it a step farther and says we live as though members of a six-act Shakespearean play whose latter portions of Act V and the whole of Act VI have been left undiscovered. But the play is too brilliant not to be performed. So, actors and actresses carefully read the first four and portions of the fifth act, reflect on other Shakespearean plays, and then faithfully improvise the ending in light of their discoveries as a team of actors.<sup>1</sup>

This is who we are, caught up in the biblical story. We are captivated and transformed by the fourth and decisive act of Jesus and his death and resurrection that has allowed us to move into the fifth act of participation in his work of bringing wholeness to the world. We are not sure of the ending, but we carefully read and discuss the story, Old and New Testaments, as we have it, in community, and then live into it as best we can, faithfully improvising as a community of Jesus followers and actors within the gospel story.

That leads to our final element: We read the biblical story as a community because each of us plays a role in the faithful improvisation of it. Author Scot McKnight describes the whole Bible as a “Wiki-Story”, a compilation of books by different authors telling God’s story in unique ways that point to God making all things new through Jesus. If we want to understand how God might be speaking through these various bible stories, we need to engage in “Wiki-reading” – reading Bible stories in community – so we find richer and fuller understandings of the stories that we wouldn’t find through reading on our own. Each of us has a gift, a call, and a way to live into the gospel, to be like Jesus, and to follow him in your schools, communities, homes, circle of friends, sports teams, the list goes on. However, sometimes we need to begin with reading the script together....

**Q5: What’s your role? What gifts, talents, and passions has God given you to use as you participate in the biblical story?**

<sup>1</sup>N.T. Wright, “How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?” [www.ntwrightpage.com](http://www.ntwrightpage.com). Brian Walsh also discusses this in *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, p. 192.



**Q1: What are some of your favorite stories? (ex. Books, movies, TV shows, poems, art, etc.)**

**Q2: What makes reading the Bible so hard? How does reading the Bible as a large story help you to understand what God has said and continues to say to us? Are there other ways you have read the Bible that have been helpful?**

**Q3: What are some of your favorite stories in the Bible? What do you think they are about and how do they illustrate what God is up to in the world?**

**Q4: How does Romans illustrate the biblical story? What are some of the significant events and what is the primary turning point in the story?**

**Q5: What's your role? What gifts, talents, and passions has God given you to use as you participate in the biblical story?**

**CREDO CHALLENGE: Open up to the Table of Contents in your Bible. Read over the books of the Bible. Maybe come up with a clever way to memorize the order 😊**



**The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.**

**Continue to read and begin to memorize the Apostles Creeds. Maybe even pray through it...**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hell.  
On the third day he rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.