

user's Guide

If you choose to read the book aloud with others, here are some suggestions for ways to interact with the Story together.

SETTING THE SCENE

When we first read the Story aloud with Community in Lexington, Kentucky, we wanted to find a way to place ourselves in the setting in which the people of God found themselves during exile in Babylon. We met indoors instead of around a campfire under the stars, so we put a bunch of candles in the middle of the room and strung Christmas lights across the ceiling. As we listened to “On the Willows” from the musical *Godspell*, we dimmed the lights, lit the candles, and plugged in the Christmas lights, and prepared ourselves to hear the Story of God with the exiles. That ritual has been our pattern for reading the Story with others ever since.

INTERACTING WITH THE STORY

After completing each week’s story, we would extinguish the candles. Everyone would be given a 3x5 card and a pen, and we would sit in silence for a few minutes, writing down our answers to two questions:

What was something that struck me as I heard the Story?

What question(s) came up for me as I heard the Story?

When the size of the group or the space where we were gathered allowed for it, we would break into groups of three or four. Using various media (markers, paint, modeling clay, pipe cleaners, etc.), each person would create a piece of artwork inspired by the Story, and then share it (along with their responses to the questions) with the other members of their group. Each group would then choose one piece of art and one question or observation to share with the wider group. As ostensibly simple as these interactions are, we find that each gathering invariably yields new insights for the whole group.

After we've completed all twelve chapters, we gather for a final time together to talk about our experience of the Story. We place multiple copies of the following questions in a hat:

- Which was your favorite chapter? Why?
- Which was your least favorite chapter? Why?
- Describe an "Aha!" moment you had from hearing the Story.
- What really challenged you from hearing the Story?
- What surprised you in the Story?
- Describe something that is really sticking with you from the Story.

The hat is passed around the room; each person draws a question, and then the group takes turns answering the question they drew out. The hat is passed again, and each person answers a question until it's time to end. (If someone draws the same question more than once, simply return it to the hat and draw again.)

SPECIFIC IDEAS FOR EACH CHAPTER

The following are ways we have interacted with the Story using various artistic media. We offer them here as a springboard for your own creativity.

Creation. Draw a picture of something that struck you from hearing the Story.

Catastrophe. Think of five or six words, phrases or pictures that describe the movement from the man and the woman being “naked and unashamed” to life lived outside the garden. Paint a picture to illustrate what you come up with.

Covenant. Build an “altar” (we used Styrofoam “stones”) in a separate space from where the Story is being told. After hearing the Story, draw pictures to illustrate how God blessed Abraham and how God has blessed you. On a separate card, write down what you are relying on to secure your future. Then take a prayerful walk to the “altar” to lay down the card and what it names.

Community (Part One): Exodus. Using modeling clay, sculpt a response to one of these questions:

- Where have I experienced God’s liberating power in my own life?
- Where have I seen God’s liberating power at work in the world?
- Where do I still see the need for God’s liberation in my life?
- Where do I still see the need for God’s liberation in the world?

Community (Part Two): Sinai. Make a collage from magazine pictures that depicts the ways in which the world has shaped your identity. Discuss with the group how the Story of God is shaping your identity.

Conquest. Draw a picture of something that struck you from the Story.

Crown. As a group, discuss each of the three kings’ stories; try to find a phrase, theme or event that sums up their individual reigns. Then draw three pictures that illustrate those phrases, themes or events.

Conceit. If the group is large enough, divide into eight smaller groups (of three or more people) and assign one chapter to each group. Groups have fifteen minutes to come up with a two-minute skit that portrays the major themes or highlights of their chapter. (We had a basket of props groups could use, including one prop that was mandatory for all eight groups to incorporate—in our case, a piñata sun.)

Christ. Using pipe cleaners, sculpt something that represents one of the major themes from the Story thus far that shows up in the life of Jesus.

Cross. This is a special week for us. We tell the Story in the context of a three-course meal, the Story punctuated by each of the three courses. We also watch the crucifixion scene from Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (www.imdb.com/title/tt0075520/)—beginning from his carrying the cross through the streets of Jerusalem and ending with the silence after Jesus says, “It is accomplished.” When we read about the meal on pages 185-86, we pass the cup and the bread in communion with Jesus and each other.

Church. As a small group, discuss the mission of the church, and then draw a picture of it together. Then describe where you see yourself participating in that mission (or where you would like to see yourself doing so).

Consummation. As a small group, create two collages from magazine pictures that depict the following:

- What “Babylon” looks like in our culture.
- What the kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven” looks like.

OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES

Over the years the Story has been shared by all kinds of groups, in all kinds of places and in all kinds of ways. We have been inspired by people's creativity. One group hiked part of the Appalachian Trail together, pausing in various places to read the Story aloud. They began at a beautiful scenic overlook and heard the story of creation. They stopped at the top of a cliff to hear the catastrophe of the choices made by the first humans. After dinner they lay on their backs under the stars to hear the story of the covenant God made with Abraham. The next morning they crammed into a concrete outhouse to hear the story of oppression in Egypt. And so on.

Something to consider. What might an urban version of this kind of journey look like?

Another group, who met on a college campus, used 8' x 4' cardboard boxes as vessels for art for each week of the Story. As they heard the story of community, suspended from the ceiling above them was a box, a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud painted on opposite sides. Each person was given a small box, on which they painted those things that they were tempted to make an idol in their life. Those small boxes were used to create a 10' tall "golden calf." When the group arrived at week ten, using several of the boxes they had painted during the weeks before, they built a 20' tall cross on the university quad.

Something to consider. How can you incorporate your group's unique talents and creative interests into your experience of the Story?

We've created a Facebook page where we hope you will share your experience of hearing the Story with others, along with creative ideas for telling the Story. Stop by www.facebook.com/storyofgod to interact with others about *The Story of God, the Story of Us*.

THE STORY OF GOD, THE STORY OF US

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