

## The Origin

1 of 11 in series - *The God Story*

Jan. 5, 2025

Gen. 1-2; Lk. 24:13-35

Happy New Year everyone!

We're excited to begin the year with a new sermon series called *The God Story*. The series is designed to provide you with a clear and compelling overview of the story of all stories, the story of the Bible.

Every time a new year rolls around, many followers of Jesus accept the challenge of reading through the entire Bible in one year's time. Perhaps some of you have resolved to do exactly that in 2025. If so, good on you!

While there are lots resources and plans available to help those who undertake such a challenge, the fact that it can take a full year of disciplined daily reading to get through the Bible from cover to cover speaks to the fact that it is one really *big* book.

Indeed, it's one big book made up of 66 smaller books spanning a variety of genres. It was composed over the course of about 1,500 years by more than 40 different authors. And it is, of course, an ancient text, written in periods and places and cultures far removed from our own.

These factors can make it hard for us to make sense of the Bible.

But when we begin to understand the Bible as *story*— God's Big Story that stretches back to the beginning of time and reaches forward into eternity— and when we become familiar with some of the main contours and key themes of that story— not only will the Bible start to make more sense to us. The Bible will start to make more sense of *our lives*.

Because your story and mine— not to mention the story of Cornerstone as a local church— make the most sense when understood in light of the overarching story of the Bible.

And that is what this series, *The God Story*, is all about. In the weeks to come, the meaning and purpose of our own lives and stories will come into sharper focus as we explore 11 main contours and key themes of the grand narrative of scripture, as you see listed on the screen:

### The God Story

The Origin | The Fall | The Seed of Promise

The Birth of a Nation | The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Israel | The Prophets and Exile

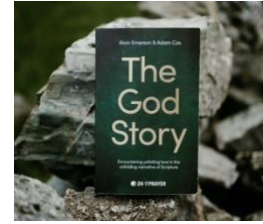
The Son | The King | The Passion

The Church | The Revelation

And as Dr. Tim Mackie of *The Bible Project* reminds us, the Bible doesn't point to itself. The Bible ultimately points us to Jesus. Accordingly, our prayer is that as this series unfolds over the course of 11 weeks, we will all experience real-time *encounters* with Jesus himself.

After all, the Story makes the most sense when you meet the One to whom the story points.

Our series outline is based on a book called [The God Story: Encountering Unfailing Love in the Unfolding Narrative of Scripture](#). [click title to get hyperlink for QR code—pls also show the adjacent photo—hi res version attached]. I highly encourage you to order a copy of this book and read the chapters week by week as they line up with the sermons in this series. You can get the book on Amazon in both print and Kindle format, and other booksellers carry it as well.



Also, for those who would like to discuss the book and this sermon series in your small group, there are free downloadable [small group study guides](#) available online. In fact, these guides will be emailed to all of our small group leaders within the next day or two.

Taking advantage of these extra resources will greatly enhance and enrich your learning and growth throughout this series.

In Tolkien’s epic tale *The Lord of the Rings*, two young hobbits named Frodo and Sam leave their home in the Shire, and encounter wonders and dangers beyond their wildest imagination. In the face of such adventure, at one point Sam asks Frodo: “I wonder what kind of tale we have fallen into?”

This is one of the most important questions we could ask about our own lives: What kind of tale have we fallen into? The question assumes that there is indeed a larger story going on— a story far greater than ourselves— and that our lives have somehow been swept up into it.

The premise of this series is that the story of scripture—*The God Story*— is that far greater story which we have been swept up into. And the more we understand and appreciate and live into this grand story, the more meaning, purpose, orientation and direction we will find for our lives.

Now that the series has been introduced, we can now dive into today’s main topic— **The Origin of The God Story**. We begin at the beginning, with the first two verses of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. <sup>1</sup>

The entire God Story— all that was and is and ever will be— hinges on those first four words of the Bible: “In the beginning God...” These words govern everything that follows. Before anything else had its beginning, God is there. And God is not just *there* in the beginning— God *is* the beginning— the one who himself has no beginning and no end.

With its first four words, the Bible tells us that God is the ultimate Author of the story of everything—including the story of your life and mine. Accordingly, the great preacher A.W. Tozer once said that, “What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” Authors Alain Emerson and Adam Cox explain:

Identity. Behaviour. Purpose. Meaning. EVERYTHING flows from what we believe about God. It’s that important. If we miss God, we miss everything; if we know God, we gain everything. The

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)

God Story, before it is anything else, is God's way of telling us who God is and who we are in light of God.<sup>2</sup>

Because, "In the beginning *God...*"

And if what we think about God is the most important thing about us, those first four words of the Bible point to something incredibly important about who God is, and by extension, who we are. They point to the fact that:

### **God is Love, the Eternal Family.**

The original Hebrew word for God in this opening verse of the Bible is *Elohim*. It's the plural form of the word *El*, which was the generic Hebrew term for a divine being. "In the beginning *Elohim*." Why use this plural term to speak of God?

To be clear, Christians are monotheists. We believe that God is One. The oneness of God is the great foundation of the Judeo-Christian faith. But by using the plural word *Elohim* to refer to God, the author of Genesis provides a vital clue about God's nature and character.

After a careful study of scripture, early Christian theologians articulated the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the doctrine which teaches us that God's oneness is not a oneness of singularity or solitariness. Rather, God's oneness is the oneness of loving *community*— of relational, interdependent unity between three divine persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The whispers of God's three-in-one nature that we hear in the early chapters of Genesis will become clearer and louder later, especially as we transition from Bible's Old Testament to the New. But the reality of the Triune God is nevertheless critical for our understanding of how the entire plot of the God Story unfolds.

Because before he created anything or anyone else, God himself exists as a three-in-one community— a divine family— of *love*. This is why scripture explicitly says that "God is love."<sup>3</sup> As theologian Peter Kreeft explains:

Love is God's essence. Nowhere else does Scripture express God's essence in this way. Scripture says God is just and merciful, but it does not say that God is justice itself or mercy itself. It does say that God *is* love, not just a *lover*. Love is God's very essence. Everything else is a manifestation of this essence to us...<sup>4</sup>

So, love isn't just something God *does*— love is who God *is*. Why? Because God—*Elohim*— exists in and of himself as a loving family of oneness— Father, Son, and Spirit.

And it is out of the overflow of the profound, loving community experienced in the Trinity that God says, "I want to broaden the circle, to expand my Eternal Family of Love. This idea of loving community is so

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Emerson and Adam Cox, *The God Story: Encountering Unfailing Love in the Unfolding Narrative of Scripture*, p. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John. 4:8, 16

<sup>4</sup> Peter Kreeft, as quoted in Greg Boyd, [A Brief Theology of God's Love](#), ReKNEW, 2016.

good, so rich, so beautiful, that I will create a marvelous world, and into that world I will create human beings in my own relational image, and invite them to become part of my Eternal Family— to dwell in loving, interdependent community with me and with each another— the many living as one.”

We will return to this idea later in the message. But for now, what we need to understand is that all things were created by Love, through Love, and for Love. And to this day, the God who is three-in-one and one-in-three has not given up on his dream of expanding his Eternal Family, and that includes his invitation to you to become a part of his Eternal Family of Love through Jesus Christ.

But for now, let’s go back to the first two verses of Genesis and notice that in creating the heavens and the earth:

### **God brings order out of chaos.**

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.<sup>5</sup>

In our text, the words “formless and empty” are a translation of a playful rhyming phrase in the original Hebrew: *tohu wa-bohu*. Let’s say that aloud together!

*Tohu* means “disordered” or “chaotic”; *bohu* means “empty” or “uninhabited”.

And the Spirit of God is hovering over all this *tohu wa-bohu*. In the Bible, the word for “spirit” is the same as the word for “breath”. So as Emerson and Cox, the authors of *The God Story* book, explain:

God’s own breath, the Holy Spirit, was there at the origin of all things, brooding over the emptiness, ready and waiting to burst forth with goodness, beautifying the world with creativity and holy design.<sup>6</sup>

And for our purposes this morning, what I would draw your attention to is this. God is not afraid of, nor does he distance himself from, the *tohu wa-bohu* parts of this world and of our lives. On the contrary, he is drawn to us in the midst of our emptiness, disorder and darkness.

Just as God’s Spirit made order out of chaos at the outset of creation, his Spirit still hovers and breathes over our *tohu wa-bohu* today, and through Jesus, he patiently seeks to re-create and renew us and the whole world into something more beautiful that we could ever imagine.

In your mind’s eye, I invite you now to picture God’s Spirit lovingly hovering over your *tohu wa-bohu* today, as he breathes his re-creative breath into you... into the people you love... into your situation...

As the story continues, we see God proceeding to bring order out of chaos across six days of creation.

Were they six literal 24-hour days? That’s a question the author of Genesis would not likely have been overly concerned about. Because from a literary perspective, the creation account is written in brilliant

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:1-2 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Emerson and Cox, *The God Story*, p. 8.

*poetic* fashion, rather than in the form of a precise historical or scientific account. When we get overly concerned with such questions, we can miss the genius of the way the text expresses how God creates sacred order out of chaos. As Genesis 1 unfolds, we see that by the power of the very word he speaks, on:

**Days 1-3: God orders the unordered**, separating and parting light from dark, day from night, and water from dry land. (Genesis 1:3-19)

**Days 4-6: God inhabits the uninhabited**, filling and populating what had been separated and parted— birds fill the skies, fish swarm the seas, animals populate the land, and humans inhabit the earth. (Genesis 1:20-31)

*Tohu wa-bohu* has been transformed into an order that God declares to be “very good.” <sup>7</sup>

Then, on day 7, the prose shifts. Whereas for each of the first six days of creation, we read the refrain, “And there was evening, and there was morning,” in Genesis 2 we are told instead that:

#### **Day 7**

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. <sup>8</sup>

The seventh day is called Sabbath, from the Hebrew *Shabbat*, which means “to stop.” Imagine that— God stopped his work for a day, and invites us to do so as well, once every seven days. For some of us the thought of stopping feels impossible, maybe even terrifying. But Emerson and Cox explain that in resting from his work on the seventh day:

The God who needs no rest is modelling something for humanity to follow. For six days, like our Maker, we are created to work, to tend to creation, to create, to populate. And then, we rest. We lay down our tools. We adore the Creator and attend to creation. Sabbath is a place to be restored and re-storied... We would do well to recalibrate our hearts around this sacred rhythm which has been all but eliminated in twenty-first-century Western society. <sup>9</sup>

Where endless cycles of consumerism and workaholism can fill our lives with *tohu wa-bohu*, Sabbath is a precious gift from the God of Love, and is one of the key means through which he still brings order out of our chaos today. The question is, will we embrace his gift?

Many years ago, after preaching a sermon on Sabbath, God convicted me about how I wasn’t practicing what I was preaching. And so, slowly and falteringly, I began a weekly, 24-hour Sabbath practice. Few practices have been more revolutionary for my life and ministry. Since then, I have encouraged others to practice Sabbath, and have even taught classes on it. Suffice it to say, I’m a big believer in Sabbath, even though, admittedly, I can still falter and stumble in my attempts to practice it.

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:2-3 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> Emerson and Cox, *The God Story*, p. 12.

While I don't have time to say more about it today, Cornerstone does offer a [Sabbath resource package](#) that you can download for free. Do avail yourself of it as the Lord leads. It includes FAQs, a Sabbath planning worksheet, special liturgies, and a recommended reading list on the subject.

With that, let's move on to our next main point. It constitutes the very pinnacle of the origin of *The God Story*, and it has massive implications for you, for me, and for all of us together as a local church family. I'm referring, of course, to:

### **The crown of creation – humankind made in God's image.**

When it comes to the creation of human beings in God's image, in Genesis 1 we read:

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground."

So God created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them...

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.<sup>10</sup>

Up until this point, God had declared each successive phase of creation to be "good." At the end of each day, we read the refrain, "And God saw that it was good."

But after the creation of human beings in his image, what does God do? He upgrades creation's status to "very good!" With this phrase, we learn that human beings, created in God's own image, are the crowning work of God's creation.

From this point, Genesis 2 zooms in on certain details of the creation story that we hadn't learned in Genesis 1. Whereas Genesis 1 speaks of the creation of human beings in God's image, male and female, as if a singular event, Genesis 2 goes into more detail, revealing that the man, Adam, was created first.

And with the refrain "and it was good... and it was good... and it was good" from Genesis 1 still reverberating in our minds, we suddenly come across this jarring phrase in Genesis 2:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone..."<sup>11</sup>

It is Adam's aloneness that precipitates the first crisis recorded in the Bible, and surprisingly, it's a crisis that takes place *before* humanity's fall into sin in Genesis 3.

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, 31 (NLT)

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 2:18a (NLT)

In response to this crisis, God creates a woman from the man's rib. And while the text does go on show us that God's creation of male and female as God's image has tremendous implications for marriage, there is something even more fundamental that we must understand.

Before humanity could be said to fully bear God's image, there needed to be more than one person. There needed to be at least two— a plurality —a *community*. Only then could God upgrade the status of his creation to *very good*, because human beings now fully reflected the loving, relational image of God, who as we've talked about, exists in Triune community—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And therefore:

**As divine image-bearers, we're made for loving relationships with God and each other.**

I love how philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard puts it:

God's aim in human history is the creation of an inclusive community of loving persons, with himself as its primary sustainer, and most glorious inhabitant.<sup>12</sup>

When you listen closely enough, don't the whispers, the pangs, the yearnings of your heart tell you that this is what you've been made for? You experience such longings because you've been made in God's relational image.

As *The God Story* continues to unfold, we will see how God's dream for loving community suffers a massive setback, but how in his boundless love he nonetheless continues to work so that one day his dream for an Eternal Family of Love on earth will become a glorious reality.

Continuing with the story, we note that Eden, where God had placed Adam and Eve, was like a garden Temple— a place where the distance between heaven and earth was so thin that the two realms essentially became one. There, God dwelled in loving community with the first human beings—his image-bearers. But he also gave them a job to do.

Not only did he have them tend the Garden of Eden itself.<sup>13</sup> God gave them—and by extension he gives us— a far more expansive vocation. Indeed:

**As divine image-bearers, we're made to be co-workers and co-creators with God for the flourishing of creation.**

Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."<sup>14</sup>

This sacred vocation can be expressed in thousands of ways, depending on our respective giftings, talents and particular callings. But it applies to all of us who have been made and are being redeemed in God's image. As Emerson and Cox put it:

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<sup>12</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2:15

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 1:28 (NLT)

The original glory of humankind's vocation involved nothing less than expanding the borders of Eden throughout the whole earth, multiplying the blessing of God and extending his loving reign. Adam and Eve, as God's vice-regents and trusted rulers, were delegated authority to work on God's behalf, co-creating in relationship with God for the flourishing of creation.<sup>15</sup>

Being co-workers and co-creators with God in expanding his rule and reign of love and goodness over all the earth is at the very heart of our mission as those who follow Jesus, both personally, and perhaps even more importantly, *together* as a local church family.

To put it another way, God allows us the sacred privilege of being *co-authors* with him as he continues to write *The God Story*.

With that in mind, just before we transition into our first Lord's Supper of 2025, allow me to conclude this message with some brief reflections:

In his book *Epic*, author John Eldredge writes:

Walk into any large mall, museum, amusement park, university, or hospital, and you will typically meet at once a very large map with the famous red star and the encouraging words, "You are here." These maps are offered to visitors as ways to orient themselves to their situation, to get some perspective on things. This is the Big Picture. This is where you are in that picture. Hopefully you now know where to go. You have your bearings. Oh, that we had something like this for our lives.<sup>16</sup>

The amazing news is that those who follow Jesus *do!* As you become familiar with the big picture of *The God Story*, you find your bearings, not unlike you find your bearings as you stand before the big map at the mall. And as you live into the fact that you get to be a co-author with God of your own small but eternally significant part of *The God Story*, you'll move ever closer to discovering and fulfilling the purposes for which God put you on this earth.

We're only one message into the series, and already, we've been reminded of some incredibly orienting truths for our lives—that as image-bearers *we're made for loving relationships with God and each other*, and that *we're made to be co-workers and co-creators with God for the flourishing of creation*.

And these things also have tremendous implications for Cornerstone's ongoing mission. God has brought us so far over our 26-year history, and we've come to a point where we're now seeking him for fresh direction as to the next key missional moves that he would have us make as a church.

How do we find our way into the longer-term future God has in mind for Cornerstone? We find our way in God's Story. In fact, that's the Ministry Theme for 2025 that Cornerstone's leadership has collectively discerned— **Cornerstone 2025 Ministry Theme: FINDING OUR WAY IN GOD'S STORY**

That's what 2025 is going to be all about here at Cornerstone. It will be a year of:

- Revisiting the biblical foundations for the mission of the church

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<sup>15</sup> Emerson and Cox, *The God Story*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> John Eldredge, *Epic: The Story God is Telling*, p. 10-11.



- Seeking God together in prayer
- Bringing this congregation—which has expanded so much that it’s essentially a “new” congregation— on a journey through which God will envision and prepare us all to become co-authors with God in writing the next chapters that he has in store for Cornerstone.

With all this in mind, we now come to the Lord’s Table. We come to the One to whom the Bible ultimately points—*Jesus*.

And we remember that in Luke’s gospel, after Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead, he encountered two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, but they didn’t recognize him. They just took him to be a stranger.<sup>17</sup>

They were shocked that this stranger didn’t seem to realize what had recently happened in Jerusalem. So, they told him about the death three days earlier of a prophet they had been following—Jesus of Nazareth. And as they walked and talked, this Stranger became a Storyteller. He opened the scriptures to them, masterfully explaining how from beginning to end, the scriptures found their ultimate fulfillment in this Jesus whom they had followed.

Their hearts burned within them as they listened to this Storyteller open the scriptures on the road to Emmaus. Only when they stopped for a meal and the Stranger broke the bread did they recognize him. All along, the Stranger they had been walking with was the risen Jesus himself!

May we find our hearts burning within us as by his Spirit, the risen Lord Jesus opens the scriptures to us as we journey through *The God Story*. And may your eyes be opened to the risen Jesus who is with us, here and now. May you meet him anew today in the breaking of bread. Because the bigger story, and your part in it, will make the most sense when you meet the one to whom the story points— when you meet the Storyteller himself.

### **The Lord’s Supper**

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 24:13-33