# Session 1: God’s BIG Story

***Objective:***

* View the Bible as a unified story about God, His passion to be worshiped by all peoples, and His ongoing work of redeeming all nations.
* Understand missions to be joining God in accomplishing His global purposes.

***Teaching Time:*** 35 minutes, 1 hour with translation

***Materials:***

* Bible
* Session 1 handout for each participant
* Session 1 teaching aid
* Thick string or clothesline
* Clothes pins
* Scissors

***Getting Ready:***

1. Hang up a thick string or clothesline in the front of the room. You will be adding people to this “timeline” during this session, as well as throughout later sessions.
2. Print out the Session 1 teaching aid. Cut out each person outline.
3. Pass out the Session 1 handout to participants before the session begins.

# Opening Discussion

When I say children and missions, what comes to your mind?

(Have participants share responses with the person sitting next to them. After about two minutes, gather a few responses from the group.)

# Introduction

Many of us have different thoughts, feelings, and ideas when we hear the word *children* and when we hear the word *missions*.

Some of us naturally think of them together; some of us do not.

Over the next few days, we are going to journey together to discover what God’s mission is, how God views children, and what their role is in God’s big story.

We do not believe anyone is here by accident, but that God wants to do a deep work in our hearts concerning this generation of children and the world.

This will be a fast-paced training where you will learn a lot of new things at once.

Please come talk to us and ask questions during any break, if needed.

It is our hope that the information presented will not only inspire but move deeply into your spiritual bloodstreams to produce lifelong, world changers for Christ!

# What is the Bible About?

This training will prepare you to teach children about and equip them to be a part of God’s big story.

Before we can talk about how kids fit into God’s big story, we have to know what God’s big story is.

Many of us have grown up learning the Bible one story at a time, with each story applied directly to our personal lives in some way.

On your handout, look towards the top of the page where it says, “Partner Discussion Question.” (Allow participants to find this section.)

Turn to the person sitting next to you and share which way you view and read the Bible.

*How do you view and read the Bible?*

1. *Rule Book: It tells me what to do and warns me about what not to do*
2. *Spiritual Protection: A verse a day keeps the devil away*
3. *Map: It helps me know God’s plan for my future, spouse, job, etc.*
4. *Spiritual cup of coffee: It helps me wake up and get the day started right*
5. *Family doctor: I turn to it when I need something to make me feel better*

(Allow participants to share with a partner. Then with the large group, have participants raise their hands for each one to see a general idea of where everyone stands.)

These are not all bad views, but the result is that many of us see the Bible as a random assortment of spiritual stories with no overriding theme or purpose.

However, the Bible is not a random collection of stories. It is one story.

And the reality is that the story is much more about God and His passion to be worshiped by all peoples than it is about us.

There are over 1,600 verses throughout the Bible that show God’s passion for His glory to be enjoyed by all peoples of the earth.

Let us journey from Genesis to Revelation and observe God’s heart for the world and the big story He invites us, and our children, into.

# Seeing God’s Big Story

Every good book contains three things: an *introduction*, *plot,* and *conclusion*.

The Bible follows this pattern.

The introduction can be found in Genesis 1-11. This sets the stage and acquaints us with the problem.

The plot runs from Genesis 12 to Jude. It introduces us to the Bible’s main characters.

We follow along as they work toward solving the dilemma created in the first 11 chapters.

The conclusion is found in Revelation, when God achieves the goal toward which He has been moving – the redemption of all nations.

The Introduction: Genesis 1-11

So let us start with the introduction beginning in Genesis 1.

Everything I will share is on your handouts for you to refer back to later.

For now, would you set your handouts aside and just listen to God’s big story unfold?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Day by day, He spoke all things into existence: land, water, the moon and stars, plants and animals of all kinds.

And He created man and woman. They were named Adam and Eve.

(Hang people outline #1 and #2 on the timeline.)

In Genesis 1:28 we read,

*God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth…”* (Genesis 1:28)

Adam and Eve were to populate physically, but God also intended they reproduce spiritually.

He wanted worshipers of Him all over the planet.

As humanity filled the earth, so would the glory of God.

Isaiah gives us this image in Isaiah 11:9:

*For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* (Isaiah 11:9)

From the beginning, God’s desire was that mankind would worship Him all over the globe in diverse ways.

However, by Genesis 3 man has sinned and by Genesis 6 we see that “every inclination of their hearts was evil.” (Genesis 6:5)

So in Genesis 7 and 8 God floods the earth. In Genesis 9, Noah steps off the ark. (Hang people cutout #3 on the timeline.)

In Genesis 9:1, God gives Noah the same command He gave to Adam,

*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.* (Genesis 9:1)

When we come to Genesis 10 and 11, one question should be on our minds: Does God get the earth filled?

The story continues.

Can someone read Genesis 11:1-4?

*Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there… Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”* (Genesis 11:1-4)

At this point there was only one language on the planet.

There was no *us* and *them* mentality.

Contrary to God’s command to fill the earth, they decided to settle and make a name for themselves.

Instead of trusting God and being a part of His story, they were more interested in their own.

So God responds in verses 7-9,

*“Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city.* (Genesis 11:7-9)

In seconds God touches their tongues and one nation is turned into 70, with over 70 languages created.

The creation of these nations brings the *introduction* of the Bible to a close and leaves the reader wondering:

How will God reach these nations scattered all over the globe that speak completely different languages?

Here the plot begins.

The Plot: Genesis 12 - Jude

In Genesis 12, God initiates a promise that will carry throughout all of human history.

God looks down on the 70 nations and chooses one man.

From this man, God’s mission is set into motion as He sets out to reach all nations.

Abraham is invited to trade his story for God’s. (Hang people cutout #4 on the timeline.)

Can someone read Genesis 12:3?

*The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*. (Genesis 12:1-3)

God is saying to Abraham, “I am going to bless you with everything under the heavens but it is not for you. It is for *all peoples* to be blessed through you.”

How did Abraham respond?

*So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.* (Genesis 12:4)

He left everything familiar and set out to join God’s big story.

John Stott, one of the foremost Christian thinkers in Europe, stated that Genesis 12 contains “perhaps the most unifying verses in the Bible; the whole of God’s purpose is encapsulated here.”

If you have your Bible with you, take hold of Genesis 12 and hold it up in the air like this.

(Hold the first several pages in your right fist, so that the rest of the Bible hangs down.)

In Genesis 1 through 11, the Bible covers 19 generations of people. The next 12 chapters will be on this one man, Abraham.

That says something significant!

All of Scripture and human history hangs on this promise God made to Abraham.

(Have participants put their Bibles back down.)

So paramount is this promise to reach the nations that it will be repeated to Abraham two more times in Genesis 18:18 and Genesis 22:17-18.

Then once to his son, Isaac: (Hang people cutout #5 on the timeline.)

*I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed...*   
(Genesis 26:2-4)

And once to his son, Jacob: (Hang people cutout #6 on the timeline.)

*Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.* (Genesis 28:13-14)

It is no coincidence that for the rest of Scripture, God will identify Himself as “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Why?

Why not the God of Moses or Joseph or David?

Because the deal was signed between God and these three in person.

These three - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - heard the mission of God stated to them directly.

Every time Jesus referred to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was a reminder to the children of Israel.

These were the people with whom God made that covenant: “I will bless you, and through you all nations will be blessed.”

As the nation of Israel was formed, they had to understand that they were blessed.

But with that blessing came a responsibility to pass it on to all nations.

This is the theme we will see throughout the rest of the Bible – God using people in His story to help carry out His promise to Abraham of blessing all nations.

As we turn the last pages of Genesis, we come to the exodus of the nation of Israel from Egypt.

God was interested in getting His people, the Israelites, out of Egypt and into the Promised Land but He was also just as interested that the Egyptians would know He was God.

(Hang people outline #7 on the timeline.)

Over and over, through each plague, God spoke to Pharaoh through Moses saying:

*But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.* (Exodus 9:15-17)

Throughout the story of the exodus, the phrase “that the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord” actually occurs more times than the phrase “that Israel may know.”

It seems that some of the Egyptians got the message, for in Exodus 12 we are told that as the nation of Israel left, many other people left with them.

This is referring to the believing Egyptians. (Exodus 12:37-38)

Many years later, Moses passed the leadership of the nation on to Joshua and Israel headed into the Promised Land. Their reputation as God’s people preceded them.

The parting of the Red Sea and the separating of the Jordan River had served their purpose of showing God’s glory to the nations.

Joshua understood this greater purpose. (Hang people outline #8 on the timeline.)

Can someone read for me what Joshua said to the Israelites in Joshua 4:23-24?

*The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful…*  (Joshua 4:23-24)

God’s motive behind such a dramatic display was that news of His greatness would spread abroad.

We know it worked because when Joshua sent spies into the land, Rahab, the Gentile woman who hid them stated,

*I know that the Lord has given this land to you… We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt…* (Joshua 2:9-10)

Rahab recognized the greatness of God and joined the Israelite people. The promise of the blessing of the nations continued through her life as she became part of the lineage of Jesus. (Hang people outline #9 on the timeline.)

When the nation of Israel was establishing itself in the land God gave them the Ten Commandments.

I always thought the purpose of the Ten Commandments was to simply restrain bad behavior.

However, there is a major mission component attached to the Law of God.

Can someone read Deuteronomy 4:5-6?

*See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”* (Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

As the Israelites came across the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amalakites, these nations would see Israel as different.

The individual blessings bestowed upon Israel were intended for universal praise. (Hang people outline #10 to timeline.)

The nation of Israel was to be the vessel God used to continue to fulfill His promise to Abraham.

At a Christian university, a professor asked his class, “Can anyone tell me what Psalm 46:10 says from memory?”

One of his students shot their hand up in the air. She thought, “I know the answer!”

In her most confident, prideful voice she quoted it: “Be still, and know that I am God…”

She waited patiently for her professor to applaud her for her excellent Bible memorization.

But no applause came. No praise.

The professor just looked at her, quiet.

“And?” he said.

The student stared at him perplexed.

And? And what?

Now she had seen this verse before. She had seen it in picture frames hanging on the walls of so many homes.

What was she missing?

For the first time she realized there was more to this verse.

What could possibly be the rest of the verse that it had to be cut and not included on the wall hangings?

While her professor moved on to see if another student could more accurately quote the verse, the student tracked down a Bible and looked it up to see what she missed.

She turned to Psalm 46:10 and read the whole verse,

*Be still, and know that I am God;* *I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth*. (Psalm 46:10)

How was it possible that after all those years of studying the Bible and seeing this passage written in various places, not once had she seen the complete verse?

She knew the first half by memory. She even had it underlined in her Bible – it was about her.

She had never heard the second half – the part about God. His exaltation among the nations never stood out to her.

Just like the Israelites, we tend to overlook lots of Scripture because we focus on the part about us.

Psalms is one of the greatest mission books in the Bible, though it is rarely seen that way.

It is clear the various authors understood God’s desire to bless all nations, because over and over, Psalms affirms God’s rule over all the earth. (Hang people outline #11 on the timeline.)

When the nations behold God’s deeds, they are called to acknowledge Him.

There are over 175 references to Israel and their testimony to the nations of the world.

As we go deeper into the Old Testament, we see the nation of Israel become more and more disobedient.

So God raised up the prophets to remind Israel of their calling.

We see them trying to steer the nation back on course with passages like these.

Can I have three volunteers read? (Assign each volunteer one of the verses below. Hang people outlines #12, #13, #14 as the read each verse.)

*Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.* (Isaiah 12:4-5)

*The Lord will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship him, everyone in its own land.* (Zephaniah 2:11)

*“My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord Almighty.* (Malachi 1:11)

Life of Jesus

The story of God making Himself known among the nations continues as we enter the New Testament.

It should be no surprise that we see Jesus picking up on the mission of God.

As Mary and Joseph present this new baby in the temple, an old prophet named Simeon sees the baby, raises Him up and says,

*For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people,* *a light for revelation to the Gentiles* *and for glory to your people Israel.* (Luke 2:30-32)

(Hang people outline #15 on the timeline.)

Jesus spent a great deal of His ministry doing just what He said He would do when He read from Isaiah 61 before the people in Nazareth.

He preached good news to the poor, proclaimed freedom for the prisoners, recovered the sight of the blind, and set the oppressed free. (Isaiah 61:1)

*Two-thirds* of the miracles recorded during Jesus’ ministry were not for the Jewish people, but for Gentiles!

Jesus praised the faith of a Roman centurion in Matthew 8, saying He had not found such great faith in all of Israel.

He continued by telling the Jewish people around him,

*I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.* (Matthew 8:11)

At the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the feast in Jerusalem.

Hearing about Jesus, they went to Philip and requested to see Him. Philip went and told Andrew, and then Philip and Andrew went to tell Jesus.

What was Jesus’ reply?

His first response was not to let them come in, or to even send them away.

Instead He replied,

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.* (John 12:23)

The deep interest of the Greeks in seeing Jesus was evidence that the world was now fully ready for His redemptive mission to be culminated in His death on the cross.

The hour had come.

When He had been lifted up from the earth, He would draw all men - both Jew, Gentile, and Greek - to Himself (John 12:32).

(Hang people outline #16 on timeline.)

This is who God was referring to….

Jesus would be the ultimate blessing for all the peoples of the earth.

A Big Commission

One of the great misconceptions of missions is that the Great Commission refers to a single verse.

Most Christians, when asked to name the Great Commission, point to Matthew 28:18-20.

Yet the term, *Great* *Commission* does not refer to one single passage; instead it refers to five specific passages, each spoken by Jesus near the end of His time on earth.

In Matthew 28:19-20*:*

*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19-20)

In Mark 16:15,

*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.* (Mark 16:15)

In Luke 24:44-49

*This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.* (Luke 24:44-49)

Over 40 times in the book of John, Jesus is referred to as the sent one.

On the 41st time Jesus looks at His disciples and says,

*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.* (John 20:21)

Finally, in Acts 1:8, Jesus speaks these final instructions:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*(Acts 1:8)

Not once. Not twice, but five times.

Five times Jesus commands the disciples.

These final words from Jesus were not an “Oh no! I almost forgot!” moment.

They were the culmination of everything Jesus had been teaching and showing them during His earthly ministry.

Jesus’ disciples would now lead the way in carrying the blessing of Jesus to all the nations of the earth.

(Hang people outline #17 on timeline.)

We look at missions in the early church as soon as we begin the book of Acts.

In Acts 2:5, we see the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost while Jewish men from every nation gathered in Jerusalem.

The people of God were filled with power.

They knew their marching orders given to them a chapter before in Acts 1:8:

*…you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8)

This is how those marching orders break down in the book of Acts.

In Acts 1-7 the gospel is in Jerusalem but the people were not leaving Jerusalem.

Through the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen, we see the gospel go to Judea in Acts 8 and Samaria in Acts 9.

In Acts 10, it breaks free to the ends of the earth with the conversion of Cornelius.

From Acts, we move into the epistles.

Remember, Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission five times.

Yet, guess how many times the apostles quote the Great Commission in the rest of the New Testament?

Zero.

Christ repeated the Great Commission at the end of every Gospel, yet the apostles never even refer to it from Acts 2 through Revelation. Why?

The reason is that the apostles did not see their commission as having its origin in those last words of Christ.

For the disciples, the mandate stretched further back. (Point to disciples on the timeline and trace backwards towards Abraham.)

They realized it began with Abraham!

Jesus did not *give* the Great Commission. He *repeated* it.

The original Great Commission was found in Genesis 12 with Abraham.

It was Genesis 12:1-4 that the disciples would refer back to over and over again for the rest of the New Testament.

They knew that God has one goal – all nations worshiping Jesus, the worthy Lamb.

And He had one method – all believers.

Peter says in Acts 3:25,

*And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”* (Acts 3:25)

Paul states in Galatians 3:18,

*The scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”* (Galatians 3:18)

How many of us define the gospel that way?

Paul continues to go all the way back to Abraham to show our purpose:

*He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles…* (Galatians 3:14)

We, the global Church, are called to carry the blessing of Jesus to all the nations of the earth. (Hang people outline #18 to timeline.)

The commission to reach the nations finds its foundation not in the life of Christ, not in the commissioning by Christ, nor in the establishment of the Church, but in the institution of God’s plan in Genesis - from the very beginning.

The authors of the New Testament stood on the solid ground of the Hebrew Scripture and on over two thousand years of history as they sought to prove to their readers the responsibility of all to bless the nations.

As we have seen, it was the driving force of Paul. (Hang people outline #19 to timeline.)

He clearly shared his vision with the church in Rome.

*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation...* (Romans 15:20)

For Paul the question was where had the gospel not gone yet. He was heading there.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end we see one book, one theme, one big story.

God drawing men and women from all nations to Himself.

This story has always been about God making His name great, wanting people from every nation, tribe, and tongue to know and worship Him.  
  
The Conclusion: Revelation

It should be no surprise that we see in Revelation the conclusion of this big story.

God is receiving worship from people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

*And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”* (Revelation 5:9-10)

This song echoes all the way back to the beginning of Scripture, testifying to the consistency of the worldwide purpose of salvation He initiated with Abraham.

# Defining Mission

God’s big story is God’s big mission.

From Genesis to Revelation, we see this global thread of God redeeming the nations to Himself.

Earlier, I asked you what came to your mind when I said the words *children* and *missions*.

There are one or two ideas that likely came to mind.

For most of us, we thought of mission*s* (with an s) as a verb. This is the activity of going to do missions work.

This is the most common mindset.

However, this is not the type of mission we just saw woven throughout all of Scripture.

When we say mis*sion* (no s) as a noun, we are talking about the overarching purpose of God.

God’s missi*on* is His desire to make His name great so that people from every nation, tribe, and tongue might know and worship Him.

That is what we capture through all these stories and saw beautifully foretold in Revelation 5:9.

Missi*ons* is the local and global activity we do to help carry out God’s miss*ion*.

Yes, we want our kids to do missions work, advancing God’s kingdom both locally and globally.

But bigger than that, we want God’s mission to be at the very core of who they are.

We want them to join with all the other characters in God’s story (point to timeline) in being a vessel God uses to carry out His promise to Abraham to the ends of the earth.

This is the story, His story, that we invite our children into.

# Conclusion

The Marketing Director for Coca-Cola was speaking at a conference.

He explained that the vision of Coke is stimulated by a catch phrase that helps them be strategic in decision-making.

“It is the goal of Coca-Cola to place a bottle of Coke within one kilometer of every person on the planet.”

What a vision!

What would it look like if the whole Church, children and adults, felt the same way about the gospel?

What if our lives were seen as part of God’s big story, not our own story?

What if our lives, our decision making, was driven by this picture of seeing people from every nation, tribe, and tongue standing before the throne of Jesus?

During our time together, we are going to dive deeper into how God has already been using children to make this vision a reality.

We are also going to explore how to grow this vision in your children through practical application both at home and at church.

Can we pray together that this would be our vision?

(Lead the participants in a prayer similar to this one.)

*Jesus, You truly are the Savior of the world.*

*I pray that each participant here will begin to understand who You are in greater ways from our time together.*

*Would You grow a vision and passion within each of us to see You worshiped and known among every nation of the earth?*

*Would You teach us how to pass this vision on to our children, so we might see a generation rise up here in [insert country name] that loves You and desires to join You in Your big story*.

*Amen.*