

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.
- Overview the spiritual state of our world today-how many know Jesus?
- Understand missions to be joining God in accomplishing His global purposes.

Teaching Time: 60 minutes, 1 hour 10 minutes with translation

Materials:

- Bible
- Session 1 handout for each participant
- Session 1 People Outlines from Teaching Aids folder
- Session 1 Scripture References from Teaching Aids folder
- Thick string or clothesline
- Clothes pins

Getting Ready:

1. Print out the Session 1 teaching aids. Cut out scripture references. Distribute to seven participants before the session begins. Invite them to look up their verses and be ready to read them aloud to the group when you come to their verses in the session.
2. Cut out each person outline before the session begins.
3. 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.
4. Pass out the Session 1 handout to participants before the session begins.

Opening Discussion

When I say the word *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 *missions*.

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

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

Before we can talk about how your family 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.

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 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 His mission, 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.

Several people have been assigned verses to read for this session. If that's you, please have your verse ready to read when we get to your passage.

For now, I would encourage you to 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 that they reproduce spiritually. 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 there would be worshipers of Him all over the planet.

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.

Who was assigned Genesis 11:1-4? Can you read it aloud for us?

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.

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

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's glory be known throughout the earth when there are 70 different nations with over 70 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 bless all nations.

Abraham is invited to join God in His story. (Hang people cutout #4 on the timeline.)

Who was assigned Genesis 12:3? Can you read it aloud for us?

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 just 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.

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!

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."

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 covenant was made between God and these three men.

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 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 interested in the Egyptians knowing 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)

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

Many people think that the purpose of the Ten Commandments was to restrain bad behavior. However, there is a major mission component attached to the Law of God.

Who was assigned Deuteronomy 4:5-6? Can you read it aloud for us?

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 Amalakitites, these nations would see Israel and their God as different.

The individual blessings bestowed upon Israel were intended for universal praise. (Hang people outline #8 to timeline.)

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

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 had served its purpose of showing God's glory to the nations.

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 blessing of the nations continued through her life as she became part of the lineage of Jesus. (Hang people outline #9 on the timeline.)

Joshua understood they have been blessed for a greater purpose. We see it in what he tells the Israelites before the separating of the Jordan River.

Who was assigned Joshua 4:23-24? Can you read it aloud for us what Joshua told the people?

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)

Joshua knew God's motive behind such a dramatic display was that news of His greatness would continue to spread to the surrounding nations. (Hang people outline #10 on the timeline.)

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 her 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 opened 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 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 noticed the second half – the part about God. His exaltation among the nations never stood out to her.

We tend to overlook lots of Scripture when we only focus on the parts 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 more than 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 prophets to remind Israel of their calling.

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

Who was assigned Isaiah 12:4-5, Zephaniah 2:11, and Malachi 1:11? Can you each read your verse allowed for us? Lets start with Isaiah 12:4-5.

(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 and God sends Jesus to earth.

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)

Many of the miracles performed 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 in His promise to Abraham.

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 passage of Scripture.

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)

In the book of John, Jesus is referred to as the sent one more than 40 times.

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 see God’s mission carried out in the early church as soon as we begin the book of Acts.

In Acts 2:5, 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 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)

Here is how those marching orders unfold 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, the gospel 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.

A Great Commission statement is found 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 as believers:

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.)

This commission finds its foundation in the institution of God's plan in Genesis.

The New Testament authors simply stood on the Hebrew Scripture and on over two thousand years of history as they proved the church's responsibility to bless all nations.

As we have seen, blessing all nations 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 big story with one theme. 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 initiated with Abraham.

Defining Mission

God's big story is God's big mission.

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

Earlier, I asked you what came to mind when I said the word "missions".

When many of us think of missions, we think of the activity of going and doing missions work.

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

When we say mission, we are talking about the overarching purpose of God. We are talking about God's desire to make His name great so that every nation, tribe and tongue might know and worship Him.

This is the story that we are inviting our families into.

If our families are going to play our part in this story, we must know a little bit about the "nations, tribes, and tongues" that live all over the Earth.

While we will learn more about the world in Session 6, let's take a look at the current state of the world and how close we are to seeing Revelation 7:9, the end of the story, realized. .

(Invite 10 participants to come to the front and stand in a line facing the group.)

There are currently over 7 billion people on Earth. Of this 7 billion, how many believe in Jesus? How many do not?

These 10 people represent today's world – 7 billion people!

One is a committed follower of Jesus. (Have the first person in line cross both of his hands over his heart.)

Two are believers by name. If asked what religion they follow, they would say Christianity rather than Hinduism or Islam. But they may not be true disciples of Jesus. (Have the next two people in line put only one hand over their heart.)

Three have heard about Jesus, but so far they have rejected the message. (Have the next three people put their hands out in front of them as if they are pushing away the message.)

We would call these groups of two and of three people "lost" or "unsaved".

Four have never heard the gospel message. These four people are called "unreached" (Have the last four people cover their ears with their hands.)^[i]

While we can rejoice that almost 2/3 of the people on earth have had the opportunity to hear about Jesus, it remains true that more than 1/3 of the world's population, 2.7 billion people, is still unreached with the Gospel.^[ii]

(Invite participants to sit down.)

What if God has put your family right where you are for such a time as this in His big story?

What if your family could play a vital role in seeing God's mission made known to the remaining 2.7 billion people on earth who do not know the goodness of God?

What if your children could join with all the other characters in God's story (point to timeline) in being vessels God uses to carry out His promise to Abraham to the ends of the earth?

God wants to use your family to carry out His promise to Abraham in this current generation.

Your family has a part in extending the blessing of Jesus to the ends of the earth as defined in our day.

Not to the Egyptians, Canaanites, Samaritans, Greeks, or Romans-but to the unreached peoples of today-the third of our world who are still waiting to hear about Jesus for the very first time (Place your hands over your ears to associate you are referring to unreached peoples.)

Conclusion

God's big story is God's mission.

Yes, we want our children 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 (point to timeline), stepping into the part God has for each of them in His mission.

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

During our time together, we are going to dive deeper into God's vision for your family in light of His mission and how He has already been using children to make this vision a reality.

We are also going to explore practical ways to disciple your children at home and how to mobilize other families in your church or community to be a part of His big story.

Before we continue on, can we pray together?

(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 own children, so we might see a generations of families rise up here in [insert country name] that love You and desires to join You in Your big story.

Amen.

[i] Joshua Project (joshuaproject.net).

[ii] Joshua Project (joshuaproject.net).