

*Use this format for family group discussions, as a couple or with a small group. For maximum effectiveness we recommend that you complete this Group Study Guide after the lesson is taught in New Community.

Message Summary

The Bible contains an Upper Story and a Lower Story. The Upper Story tells the big picture, the grand narrative of God unfolding throughout history. The Lower Story contains the sometimes delightful other times appalling particulars of human experience. Without the lens of the Upper Story, the Lower Story seems out of focus and perplexing. As we make our way through the Bible—The Story—we will be mindful of both the temporal, easily seen events, and the not so obvious yet truly eternal realities. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the two stories are virtually one. God, who is love, creates the universe, and places humanity at the crown of all he brings into existence. Man and woman, as individuals and also in their collective, reflect God's image. People are both the objects of God's love and lovers in return. But when the first man and woman choose to reject rather than respond, the Upper Story transitions to God's relentless pursuit and restoration of what was lost. That Upper Story never changes even to the last chapter of the Bible. The details in the Lower Story describe the many ways people mostly—with a few notable exceptions—resist God, and wreak havoc with themselves and each other. In trying to be God, people ruin what God has made, and pass that curse to their offspring. In one dramatic episode, God decides to “start over” by destroying all life through a flood except for eight people: Noah and his family. In the Lower Story, those few given that second chance fail miserably to build the new world God envisioned, and evil continues to hold sway. But in the Upper Story, God makes the promise that he won't ever flood the earth, thus teaching every generation that he is intent redeeming what's broken, not destroying it.

Opening Question

In all of nature, what most amazes you and why?

Group Discussion

Note: All page numbers below are from *The Story*, 2008 edition (pgs 1-10) along with Bible scripture references (Genesis 1-9). Additional group discussion questions for this chapter can be found on page 390 of that book.

Have someone open the group meeting with prayer.

1. The opening verses of the Bible (page 1 or Genesis 1:1-2) make the powerful point that nature is in fact not “natural”—Someone willed it into existence. What difference does it make to know you were created with purpose rather than that you are a cosmic accident?
2. Based on old translations, some have misread Genesis to teach only the man—not the woman—was made in God's image. Yet the text says that they both were (page 2 or Genesis 1:26-27), and that their union (community) is in fact also part of God's image (the Trinity). Why do you think it is so important for both men and women to understand their image-bearing role?
3. Our separation from God came about as a result of Adam and Eve's succumbing to the lure to “be like God” (page 4 or Genesis 3:1-5). What is the difference between being like God in a good sense and being like God as the serpent tempted them? How do both of those show up in your life today?
4. People often talk about “going on a spiritual search” when they refer to wanting a relationship with God. Yet just after humans sin, the text says they hid and God came to them, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (page 4 or Genesis 3:8-10)— apparently something he did as a matter of course. What do you suppose is the point of that detail? What is the analogy to that in our own day?
5. The story of Cain and Abel (page 6 or Genesis 4:1-8)) shows us, among other things, that evil is being passed on to the next generation. Why do you think God made humanity so inter-connected: that our birth takes place only through human action, and our very natures are shaped by what our parents and others do for us (genetically and environmentally)?
6. We often want God to do away with all evil—as if we would escape his judgment and are not part of the problem. Yet when he actually did that through the Flood (page 7–10 or Genesis 6-9), sin didn't go away. Why do you think we all tend to focus on the evil “out there” instead of “in us”? How are you sometimes tempted to make others the problem, and not you? Be specific, using a current example.
7. God made a covenant—an unconditional agreement about future action—to never flood the earth and destroy all life again. Though we don't know it from anything written about in this chapter, what is the alternative God has chosen for human history?

As a final question, you can ask group members who did the personal reflection assignment if there is anything from that material they would like to share or ask the group about. Close in prayer.