

# The Discipleship Project-Winter 2018–2019

## Series 1: The Big Story

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**Series Big Idea:** The big story of Scripture shows us the importance of experiencing God’s divine plan and purpose.

### Lesson 1.1: God’s Divine Plan

**Lesson Big Idea:** The big story of Scripture shows us the necessity of yielding to God’s divine plan.

#### FOUNDATION

**Scripture Focus:** Ephesians 1:3–10 (PPT)

The darkness was suffocating. It was everywhere, overwhelming, incessant—the kind of darkness that would have disoriented and terrified us had we been around to witness the majesty of it. And in the middle of that nothingness was Him.

Our first glimpse into the grand story is that He existed. With no beginning and no “once upon a time” to unravel a mystery of origin, He simply was. And our first glimpse into this big story is an introduction to a Creator who speaks and fashions grandeur out of nothing.

At His declaration, “Let there be light,” something dramatic happened. It would have been amazing to have been there to bear witness—was it a spark or an explosion or a weak ember that magnified from one expanse of the cosmos to the other in rainbow fashion? Observing the universe meld to His command, He pushed the light and darkness apart and named His handiwork.

His plan now in motion, He began each day with an astounding galactic production. Water molecules split by the trillions in the millisecond that He spoke to water and sky to separate, directing the oceans in their course and announcing where their proud waves must stop. Seas and rivers gave way to black soil and ivory sands and brick clay; the largest of trees and the most microscopic of algae materialized. He established a path for the lightning, commanded infinite stars to materialize, and arranged their routes on His divine canvas.

“Come alive!” He declared exuberantly on day five. In obedience and celebration, the kokanee salmon leapt from the waters, its crimson scales glistening in the dawn’s rays. The toucan stretched its ebony wings, thrust out its turquoise beak, and glided to its perch overlooking the waters teeming with fish and the air alive with birds of every kind—all a trophy to the Creator’s unrivaled power and ingenuity.

And then the sun He had made tipped the horizon of day six. He surveyed the splendor of perfection in the universe. Then He spoke again, “Earth, bring forth life!” As if an explosive had been detonated, the land began to pulsate as elephants trumpeting their praise to their Maker thundered past microbial organisms swarming the soil.

Creatures of every kind paraded in glorious fashion—a seemingly incomparable feat.

Yet the conductor surveyed the magnificence and chose that moment to unveil the crescendo of the first act. The heavens bore witness as He installed the pièce de résistance of the grand plan. “Let us make man in our image,” He announced. And He did.

## FRAME

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. (William Shakespeare, As You Like It)*

Shakespeare could liken the human experience to the stage and the written world of tragedy and comedy because of his prodigious talent as a playwright. He also must have understood something about human nature and the way life seems to follow basic principles from the curtain rising, the action building, and the conflict resolving as the curtain falls. Shakespeare’s model was more complex than that to be sure, but his concept of stepping back and understanding life as part of a larger story is a way to put the human experience in perspective.

Perhaps the psalmist captured it better when he said, “We spend our years as a tale that is told” (Psalm 90:9, KJV). Consider your life as an individual story. You are born, you grow, and your life’s journey takes increasingly complex and sometimes surprising turns as you mature, build relationships, and give yourself to purposes. Each of us writes our life’s story with every new day and each decision.

But while billions of individual stories are being written, still a larger story is being acted out in which all the characters of time past and present act, ever how brief their role. It is to that story we turn, understanding this big story has one main character: God. This big story also has one rule you must grasp to understand the story: **God has always had a plan for relationship with His people. (PPT)** The very act of Creation reflects how humans would be a central part of His plan and that He has had that plan in place outside the bounds of our human constraints of time.

To tell this big story, we must start from the beginning. **Our infinite God exists beyond the expanse of time and has always been at work in ways our finite minds cannot comprehend. (PPT)** Moses declared God to be “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2, KJV), and Paul professed Him as “the King eternal, immortal” (I Timothy 1:17, KJV). God declares Himself timeless and everlasting (Revelation 1:8).

This self-existent God is not an immovable God distant and detached in the cosmos. Rather, He reigns in perfect, complete wisdom. His overarching plan across time launched with the genesis of humanity and His desire to bring humanity into eternal fellowship with Him.

Paul understood this grand plan and spoke of it as revelation.

*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy*

*and without fault in his eyes. (Ephesians 1:4, NLT) (PPT)*

And so we begin our exploration of the big story with appreciation for a big God with both infinite power and infinite mercy who could set in motion a plan of hope for us.

- **How does it feel to recognize God set into motion all that exists—a plan for all of the cosmos and for you?**

Our God of wonder made many majestic creations; however, **as His crowning act of Creation, He made people with free will and the choice to love Him. (PDG, PPT)** Even though God had angels to worship Him and creatures of every kind to reflect His craftsmanship, His final feat of Creation was to make us.

- **Why do you think God was not content without human beings?**

God's creation of humanity was a wondrous thing. In today's world, some people fail to see the majesty of that moment. In 2005, the London Zoo premiered a new exhibit with the sign: "Warning: Humans in their Natural Environment." Eight men and women chosen from an online contest were caged next to the ape habitat and entertained themselves as zoo visitors looked on. According to the Associated Press, one participant remarked, "When they see humans as animals, here, it kind of reminds us that we're not that special." Scripture gives a different sentiment:

*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. (Psalm 139:14, KJV) (PPT)*

While God does all things well and saw the results of His handiwork as good with each day of Creation, He wanted something more. God is not lacking or needy; He is not somehow incomplete without us, but out of His great love, He chose communion with those who could choose not to commune with Him.

Choice is a powerful thing. Gym teachers in schools witness dynamics of choice on a daily basis. New teaching techniques call for prearranging teams before class or counting off teams 1-2-3-4 down the line of students to spare the lackluster athletes the humiliation of being chosen last. Not to be outdone, kids frequently line up by arranging their friends in just the right order so they all wind up on teams together. Teachers are having to up the ante and switch up the counting techniques—all in an effort to prevent the devastating fate that awaits those chosen last.

Quite the opposite scenario happened in Creation. While humans were the final thing God created on day six, He saved the best for last. God chose us, and He still chooses us today. It is up to us, however, to choose to follow God. That is free will. Joshua called the Israelites to choose whether they would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15), and Jesus Himself emphasized each of us must choose how to respond to His knock at the door of our hearts (Revelation 3:20).

- **How does it feel to know God chooses you?**

- **How are you responding to God's desire to have a relationship with you?**

And so our big God made us in the dramatic opening act of the big story. He did not just make us as a trophy for a curio cabinet or a pet to perform parlor tricks. We were designed with relationship and purpose in view.

**God delights in communion with His people.** (PDG, PPT) The big story repeats this theme in every act. It is nowhere more evident than in the perfect paradise the first family inhabited.

The very act of God creating man illustrates intimacy. For every other creation, God spoke a word and the creature appeared. Humanity was different. Almighty God made His people with His own hands.

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* (Genesis 2:7, KJV) (PPT)

Picture the scene: lush gardens, fruit and flowers of every hue dotting a portrait complete with the most beautiful vista and the most exquisite animals. Onto this stage the King of kings reaches to the soil and sculpts a man from mere dust. Once fashioned to His liking, He breathed into this clay, and man became alive with a soul and emotions and the power to reason. And the power to choose.

- **What do you think it would have been like to walk with God in the Garden of Eden? How does that compare to our fellowship with God today?**

The first couple's first choice was to be with this loving Father. They walked through Paradise together—they were content to be in the presence of the one who gave life and the Giver was content simply to be with His children. In this act before the curtain dropped, the scene was replete as **God spent intimate time with His people each day.** (PPT)

- **Are you taking advantage of the privilege of communing with God daily? How?**

*Teacher Option: Give time for students to analyze their personal devotions. Encourage them to take time this week to look for ways to make their time with God more meaningful.*

**As part of His plan, God gave His people dominion and purpose.** (PDG, PPT) The most detailed zoology and botany textbooks cannot quantify the scope of God's creation. He made a stunning universe of living things. God placed His people as stewards over all those living things as well as the earth itself.

*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

(Genesis 1:28, KJV) (PPT)

God Himself began the big story with purpose and work in Creation, and He likewise endowed His newly created family with a purpose and with authority. As God and His people worked together and communed together, they were united in purpose.

- **Does the way you work, serve, and lead honor God’s design? In what ways?**

As the curtain falls on the first act, the happy couple enjoy the tranquility of the Garden and the intimacy with their Father. Because they yielded and joined in God’s plan, life was perfect. We conclude the first act with the deduction that even in our day, **our submission to God’s master plan brings abundant blessings**. (PDG, PPT)

**As part of His big story, we have a role as His children with an inheritance.** (PDG, PPT) Just as Adam and Eve enjoyed the blessings of their Father, we have privileges today. We are His children—made by Him, redeemed by His blood, and bearing His name. Children are heirs with privileges.

*Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* (Galatians 4:7, KJV) (PPT)

- **What inheritance and privileges do you have as a child of God?**

As His children, we have unfettered access to our God. Unlike the busy parent who is too preoccupied to respond to the child’s request, our God hears and responds to our cry (Psalm 145:18; Proverbs 15:29). Not only is God willing to respond to our prayers, but He responds to our ultimate prayer: the plea for salvation.

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.* (Ephesians 1:5–7, NLT) (PPT)

As equally astounding as God’s power, is God’s grace. He delights in forgiving our sins and making us His children. We have the invitation to choose Him and ask for His grace.

- **Have you experienced God’s grace—His undeserved mercy to you no matter your past? If so, how has His grace changed your life? If not, will you seek Him today?**

In addition to the blessings we have as God’s children, **God longs to include us in the big story with an active purpose.** (PDG, PPT) God immediately involved Adam and Eve in His grand design, giving them responsibility and authority to fulfill a purpose in His plan. Today God still gifts those who yield to His plan and purpose.

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10, KJV)*

Even our very life is a testimony to God's transformative power. In addition, God places us into the body of Christ with each of us carrying out a function to see that the body is unified and doing His work.

- **To what purpose do you feel God has called you?**
- **How can you develop your gifts to be more effective in that purpose?**

## **FINISH**

The delivery room was filled with the usual sights: a medical team in scrubs, gleaming surgical instruments, and two nervous parents. Boris stood by his wife, trying to encourage her despite the premonitions she had expressed about her pregnancy. "It'll be fine," he had no doubt coached numerous times.

But in the moment of truth, Boris's faith failed him. At his first glimpse of his infant son, the absence of arms triggered a gut-wrenching panic. Boris wilted, and nurses rushed him out to keep him from fainting.

Medical experts grappled to understand the baby's condition. It wasn't genetic and it didn't fit a specific syndrome. Baby Nick simply had no limbs.

Nick's overwhelmed mother struggled for months to come to terms with reality. And so Nick entered the world with more than his share of challenges. In addition to the obvious logistical limitations of not having arms nor legs, he was bullied in school. As a child young Nick fought against bitterness, loneliness, and depression, struggling with questions about why he was different.

At ten years old, he became suicidal. Nick reflects on that time, "I felt I had no value, and I thought I would always be a burden to my parents and never get married. That was until I saw a boy with no arms and legs like me, and I knew I could help him."

In that moment Nick realized he was part of a bigger plan and that God was the author of His story. As realization dawned that his life fit into a bigger story beyond the immediate challenges surrounding him, Nick surrendered to who God had made him to be. His life turned around.

Nick became increasingly independent as a teenager, learning to care for himself, swim, surf, and take on any number of personal adventures. But remembering he was part of a purpose, Nick also began to give back to others. At nineteen, Nick began his career as a motivational speaker. Within five years Nick had traveled to over fifty-eight countries to share how faith in God's plan can bring hope.

Perhaps you are facing a dire reality like Nick or maybe you are frustrated by less drastic circumstances that nevertheless cause you to question where God is and what He is doing with your life. No matter your situation, if you can yield to God's plan, He can bring purpose out of your life. He is our Creator, and even when we don't understand why He engineers the plan the way He does, if we can but trust Him and follow Him, He will bring beauty from our lives that contributes to the glorious master story He is

MANUSCRIPT

authoring. (Source: Susan Donaldson James, “‘Born without Limbs’ Star Inspires with Courage and ‘Trust in God,’” <https://www.today.com/health/born-without-limbs-star-nick-vujicic-lives-courage-t26796>)