

Welcome to The Story!

The Bible tells one story. Now, it's a long and complicated story that takes place over thousands of years, but it is one big story, nonetheless.

Those of us who grew up going to church probably have some familiarity with various Bible stories. Depending on your age and church experience, you may have seen Moses parting the Red Sea on a flannel graph, colored a cartoon of Daniel in the lions' den, or watched a video where singing vegetables told the story of Esther. Your Sunday School teachers probably used those stories to teach you about loving, trusting, and obeying God (all good things!). But what they may not have done is help you connect the dots between the stories. What does Daniel have to do with King David and what does the story of Abraham have to do with the story of Elisha? And what do any of them have to do with the "star" of the Bible, Jesus?

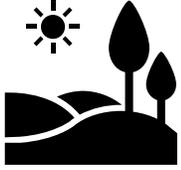
If you didn't grow up with the Bible, it may be even more mysterious to you. Open to any random page and you may find a poem, a list of laws, a story, a letter, or a vision. How do you make sense of what you're reading? Does the Old Testament even matter? What does it all mean? Knowing the overarching story of the Bible helps the whole thing make sense.

With this series, we're going to focus on understanding the Bible's core narrative. Our purpose is to better understand God's word so that we can know God more deeply. Because in the Bible God reveals to us who he is and how he's acted to redeem humanity and restore his creation. That is something we all need to know.

Each week in the Engage God Daily, we'll focus on major events in the Bible's overall story and look at a key passage and a key verse from that time. In this ten-week series we'll follow the plot from the creation story in Genesis all the way to the last chapter in Revelation. We'll see how the events of the Old Testament point to Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and return. Jesus will be our hero at every point in the story.

Each week of this guide will have a familiar pattern. In Days 1–3 we'll examine the Scriptures and answer some key questions. On Day 4 we'll spend some time reflecting on Jesus and think about how he's at the center of every episode. On Day 5, we'll put the story together, consider our key verse, and ask God to show us how we fit into his story.

Let's pray that this journey through God's word will grow our understanding of the Bible, deepen our love for God, and strengthen our faith!



Episode 1: God Creates

Genesis 1–2

Key Verse:

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

If the Bible is one story, then like all good stories, it must have a beginning, lots of twists and turns in the middle, and a satisfying ending. And since this is the *best* story (because it is true), we’ll need to start at the very beginning.

This week we’re going to focus on the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2. We’ll see how God is introduced as the story’s main actor — the one who begins and sustains it all.

Day 1

If you’ve spent much time with the Bible, this passage may be familiar to you. Try and read it as if it’s the first time. You might even try putting yourself in the sandals of one of the ancient Israelites, the first people to ever hear this account. Who is God? How would you describe him based on what he does in this passage?

Read the Word

Genesis 1:1–27 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² 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.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

- What stands out to you in this passage?
- What do you learn about God and what he created?

Reflect

If you were an ancient Israelite, it's likely you would have never seen this story in writing. You would have heard it. Your parents could recite it from memory and would have told it to you as you sat together around a fire or walked to the next town. Even in our English translations, we can appreciate the lyrical beauty of this story — the simple elegance of its repetition and phrasing. In each of the six days, God speaks, his words create, and what he creates is good. There is no question that God is the central figure in this tale.

Archeologists have discovered other creation stories from around the same time in history, and the contrast is clear. The author of Genesis carefully dismantles those myths at every turn. Here creation is not born of conflict between the gods but comes from the will of the one true God who speaks creation into existence. It is not a story of violence, battle, or bloodshed. It is a story of life, order, and goodness because the Creator is life-giving, peace-giving, and good.

In pagan societies, the sun and the moon were often worshipped as deities. In Genesis they aren't even named. They are called the "great lights" and set in place by the powerful Creator who rules over them and gives them their purpose. In many ancient myths, humanity was created to serve the gods and make them happy. Here God creates human beings in his likeness and gives them the right to reign over his creation.

The beginning of the story was unique in the ancient world. It is unique in our world too where many people believe the universe is the result of impersonal forces and random chance. Genesis depicts a powerful and creative God who brings light from darkness, and order from chaos — a beautiful mind who designs an intricately beautiful world full of life. A God who lovingly creates humanity to have meaning and purpose in a world he designed as good.

Christians in our day can miss the beauty and wonder of the creation account if they are fixated on finding answers to modern questions about *how*. Today, take some time to praise the great *who* — God who reveals himself to us in Genesis 1.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I am in awe of you as Creator. Humanity is always learning more and more about your amazing creation, from chromosomes packed with genetic material to galaxies packed with stars. I stand humbly before you in awe knowing that I can trust you with my life because you are the Creator of all life.

Day 2

When you hear the words, “Once upon a time” you know a fairytale is coming. When a movie starts with “Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away” you know you’re about to see a Star Wars film.

Beginnings matter. They set the tone for whatever comes next. In Genesis, we can tell from the first few words whose story this is. “In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth.” God is one who sets the story in motion, and it’s his actions that we will continue to trace throughout the story.

This week we are starting our exploration of God’s big story at creation. Yesterday we praised God for his amazing and beautiful design. Today we’ll continue reading from Genesis 1. Notice what he gives humanity, and what he does next.

Read the Word

Genesis 1:26–2:3 (NIV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. ¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ 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.

- What does God give to humanity? How does he describe them?

- What does God do when he is done creating?

Reflect

The first image painted for us by Genesis 1 is a dark and formless emptiness and the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters. As we saw in yesterday's reading, God's first activity is to give form and structure to the world by separating light from dark, the sky from the waters, and dry land from the chaos of the sea. The Creator makes a home for all his creatures where they can live and thrive. Then he fills his world with life — trees and plants, birds and fish, and animals of all kinds. And then he creates humanity.

Over all of creation, God places his image-bearers. While he is the ultimate ruler, he willingly shares his reign with those he created in his likeness. Like their Creator, these creatures have the capacity to think, create, and labor for the good. Similar to the way God brought order to the world, humanity is charged with subduing the creation, harnessing its potential and bringing order. Like God filling the new world with life, the joining of male and female allows them to multiply and fill the earth. Humanity was created to reflect the image of God.

God also lovingly provides the first humans with all they need. They are blessed with an environment perfectly suited to them and ample food to sustain them. God will be with them and his love, guidance, and protection are theirs.

Having accomplished all that he has set out to do, and finding satisfaction in what he created, God rests on the seventh day. He establishes the earth as the place of his rest — his home where he will dwell with humanity — and offers to share his rest with them. This rest is a space of *shalom*, or peace and wholeness, and with it, the assurance of the Creator's care and the opportunity to enjoy his bountiful provision.

Even today we can take the opportunity to enjoy Sabbath rest. United with Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God makes his home with us today. We can take a break from our labors because we can trust in God's provision and find *shalom* in his presence.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, you created humanity with purpose and meaning. We were given meaningful, creative work to do under your guidance and care. Help me think of my life now in those terms. Though I live in a fallen world, I have been given your Spirit to guide me. Show me how to glorify you and bless others through my labor. Prompt me to take time to rest in you and find peace in your presence.

Day 3

And with the conclusion of the seventh day, the creation account comes to an end. God has created the ideal world for humanity, his special creation. What is clear from this account is the goodness of God and his love for those whom he created.

Yet, Genesis has more to show us as it focuses in on the creation of humanity. As you read the second account of creation provided by Genesis, what do you notice about how the first human beings are created?

Read the Word

Genesis 2:4–25 (NIV)

⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵ Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. ⁷ Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

⁸ Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

- What do you notice about the creation of man and woman and their relationship to God and to each other?

Reflect

In the ancient world, only kings were thought to be in the likeness of the gods. Genesis communicates the special dignity given to all human beings as the bearer of God's image.

The first man was formed by God himself. A master sculptor, the Creator molds the first human from the earth and animates the man with his own breath. Inside the beautiful world he has created, God designates a special place for man to live with God. God has supplied everything he needs; yet one thing is missing. Although God is with him, Adam has no companion who is like him, and it "is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). He has no one to work alongside him, helping him fulfill his God-given role.

Having been given the authority to reign, Adam is given the task of naming all the animals. They are brought before him, but there is not one like him. So, God creates a "suitable helper." After putting him in a deep sleep, God takes part of Adam's side and from it, forms the woman. She is different and distinct, but she is like him. Together, they share the same flesh and the same bones. She is his necessary ally, the one he needs by his side as they reign together. In every way, she complements him as he complements her. Adam is overjoyed at the sight of his companion and gives her a name, "woman" because she comes from him. Together they can "fill the earth and subdue it."

Genesis tells us that as the man and woman stood before each other, they were “naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). There was complete trust between the two. Secure in the love of their Creator, and in a time before sin entered the world, there was no fear or insecurity, no selfishness or envy, no hurt or anger. There was only love.

Our opening scene is now set. Created with meaning and purpose, with the capacity to love and be loved, humanity was ready to flourish under the guidance and care of the Creator. But only if they chose to. For inside the garden, God planted two trees, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam and Eve not to eat from the latter. God wanted his people to live in a loving relationship with him, trusting him, and working with him. After all, who better to ensure their flourishing than the one who created them? They didn't need to discern between good and evil, because they should have only known and experienced good.

The man and woman had a choice. They could rely completely on God's wisdom and act only according to his will, or, grab power for themselves, rely on their own knowledge and pursue their own will. I think we all know what they chose.

But before we leave this idyllic scene for what comes next, let's stop and ponder one more time the world that our gracious God first created. Because (spoiler alert) we will return to this view again, or at least one very similar, at the end of our story. Praise God for a happy ending!

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you that we are created in your image. Help me remember that every person is your image-bearer and worthy of love. Thank you that you desire to guide me to what is good. Teach me to be obedient to your will. Thank you for the way you've created men and women, different and distinct, yet complementing each other. May we work together according to your will to honor and glorify you.

Day 4

This week we've enjoyed a glorious beginning to our story — the world before the fall. It's a beautiful opening scene, isn't it?

Part of our goal in this series is to not only grasp the Bible's grand narrative, but to discover that Jesus is part of every episode. As we build to his immanent arrival as our Lord and Savior, we'll find the Bible points to him at every point along the way.

The Bible depicts God as three in one. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed together for all eternity in the godhead. One God in three persons. Our finite human minds can't fully grasp our God, but we can worship in awe.

Today, we'll let a couple of New Testament authors help us see Jesus Christ at the moment of creation. Meditate on these passages as you reflect on the beginning of our story.

Read the Word

John 1:1–5; 14 (NIV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

- What similarities do you see between John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1?
- What claim is John making about Jesus?

Colossians 1:15–20 (NIV)

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

- What claims about Jesus is Paul making in this passage?
- What role did Jesus play in creation?

Jesus Christ is not only a man; he is God incarnate. Amazing, isn't it? The same God who spoke the world into existence and lovingly created the first human being, also came to earth to die for all human beings. We owe him everything. Take some time today to praise and thank him in prayer.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Lord Jesus, I am in awe of you. Your love and care for me is overwhelming. Thank you for revealing yourself in your Word. Remind me of who you are and teach me to trust you more and more. You know me inside and out. As my creator, you are also my healer. I lift up to you any sickness or disease I am currently experiencing. If it is your will, please heal me and make me whole.

Day 5

Happy Friday! On Fridays during this series, we will summarize our story from the week and reflect on our key verse. We'll build on our knowledge each week so that by the end, we should have a good understanding of God's big story. We'll also want to reflect on how we fit into God's big story and invite the Spirit to use God's Word to grow our faith.

The Story

Episode 1: God Creates

In the beginning, there was God and only God. But God was not lonely because God is not alone. The triune God is three in one. Now a solitary god might have created out of need, and a pantheon of many gods out of conflict. But the Father, Son, and Spirit, eternally existing in the Godhead, have always known and experienced love, and desired to share it.

So, the very first words in the Bible tell us that in the beginning, God creates the heavens and the earth. At the dawn of time, over a formless world, the Spirit of God hovers. And then God speaks. "Let there be light" and there was light.

That's all it took. The voice of God is powerful, and the Bible tells us that the words of God created, shaped, and formed our world according to his beautiful design. God separates light from darkness, the sky from the waters, and dry land from the chaos of the sea. He makes a home where all his creatures could live and thrive.

God creates a beautiful world full of life, and inside that world designates a very special place — a garden where he would dwell with his very special creation. In his own image God creates the first human. He forms man from the earth and breathes life into him. And because it is not good to be alone, he makes male and female. From the side of man God forms woman. The same flesh and the same bones. Alike, yet distinct. Separate, but dependent on the other.

And God loves them. And these humans are lovely, because he loves them.

In some ancient myths conjured by human minds, humanity was created to serve the gods. But the Bible tells us that humanity was created in God's image with the ability to think and create, love and be loved, all to fulfill a sacred purpose — to rule his beautiful world on his behalf. The first humans were to use their abilities to care for and cultivate the creation and from their relationship there would come new life. God's world was to be filled with even more of his goodness because God's love and guidance would always be welcomed. Acting against his character or his will would have been unthinkable. It should have been unthinkable.

Of course, as we look around our world today, we know that something must have gone terribly wrong. And it did. But that's next week's episode, and we're not there yet.

Key Verse

Meditate on our key verse for the week. Read each phrase slowly and prayerfully. Allow the Spirit to speak to you through God's Word.

“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

Finding your place in God's story

Ask the Spirit to guide you, then consider these questions:

- As you reflect on what you've read this week, what's your biggest takeaway? For example, what did you learn about God (Father, Son, Spirit)? The significance of being created in God's image? God's design and intent for the created world?
- For what do you want to praise and thank God?
- How are your thoughts and actions challenged by what you studied this week?
- What requests do you want to bring to your loving Creator?

Record your thoughts and finish your time with prayer.

Tune in next week...

Paradise is lost when Adam and Eve make a terrible choice that affects the entire creation. Will God respond with judgment or undeserved mercy? Join us next week and find out!