



Study Guide #2

God's Story: A Story of Salvation!

Welcome to our second study in VISION 2020. We're getting into God's Word to learn of His Story. We're seeking to know and understand the time and season in which we live, and to share the Hope so desperately needed in these last days.

Going forward, each study guide is divided into parts, providing you good stopping places if you choose to study over the course of several days. Complete one part at a time or dig into several! I pray you are blessed as you get into God's Word!

Part 1:

What is the greatest story ever told? What is the greatest story in your own personal life? If you had only 10 minutes to live and could speak to the entire world, what story would you tell?

If you are a believer and follower of Christ Jesus, I bet your answer is "salvation!" The redeeming work of Jesus Christ in a person's life is ultimately the greatest story ever told! But think about this: it is one single story, played out in millions of different ways through lives who believe in Him!

So, I ask...whose story is it? Did millions of people manage to accomplish salvation in their own lives, or did God do it? I believe it is **God's Story**...His ultimate story...written upon each of our lives and given to us to share!

Having said that, we must not be dogmatic about semantics. Having the perspective of it being God's Story, rather than "my story" may or may not resonate with you, but let's focus on that possibility for now. For perspective, turn in your Bible to [Luke 15](#) and read the entire chapter.

Jesus often taught in parables, "a simple story to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson." In Luke 15 Jesus teaches three parables. In each, something was lost, then found. What was lost in each, and what was the reaction when it was found?

In a word (or a few), what do you believe is the theme of all three parables? (Hint: verses 7 and 10 contain a key word, and the principle is also illustrated in verses 21-24.)

In any of the parables, did the lost item “find itself?” Yes No

Now, focus on verses 11-24. Many of us have been prodigals to some degree in certain seasons of life. Describe a time you were rebellious (knowingly or unknowingly) toward God and His best for you. (It doesn't have to be some “big bad sin,” but a time when you went astray of God's plan.)

Read verse 20 carefully. We learn that the father saw the wayward son a long way off. The father was looking for him (though not chasing him down), then ran and embraced him BEFORE the prodigal even repented! Have you ever returned from a rebellious stint? Did God the Father make you “clean up your act” before He would take you back? Yes No

In each parable, who takes the initiative? Who rejoiced, celebrated and threw the big party?

Is either the coin, the sheep or the prodigal son the hero in any of those parables? Who is?

Despite headings in our Bibles (not the inspired Word of God!), whose story do you believe it is?

How about one more “salvation story.” Read [John 3:1-8](#).

A religious leader, Nicodemus, came to Jesus because there was something about Jesus that drew him. Immediately, Jesus told him he must be “born again,” and Nicodemus asked the logical question, “How on earth is THAT supposed to happen?” (My paraphrase!) The discussion continued and, in verse 16, Jesus provided a very clear answer. Write that familiar verse here:

Just as in the parables of Luke 15, this man could do nothing to save himself. How was he supposed to crawl back into the womb? He was doomed! Yet the Savior made a way. That's what salvation is: the Savior making a way when we cannot make our own.

Considering this, does it provide a perspective as to whose story it really is? Yes No

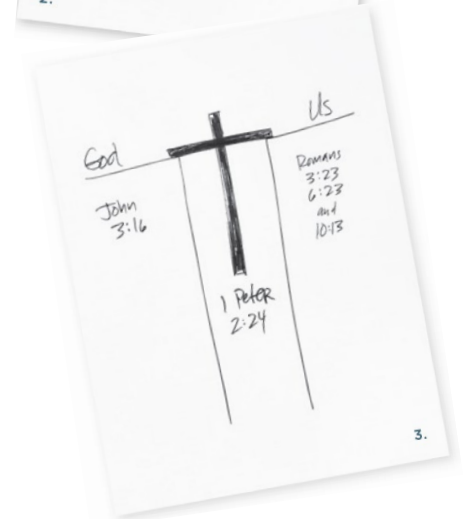
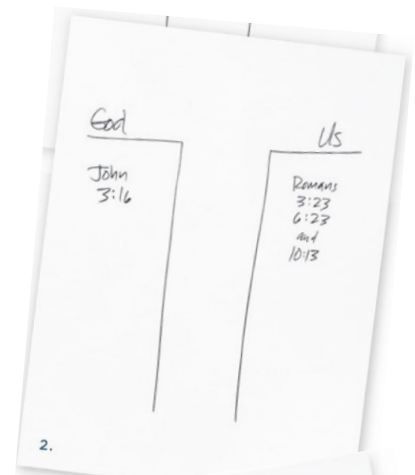
Semantics aside, if you view salvation as “my story,” that's okay. What you call it is not a salvation issue. The key thing here is to realize that we are all in desperate need of a Savior, and we cannot save ourselves! By His grace He must save us! Personally, though, when I begin seeing salvation as “my story,” I am tempted to take credit for “earning” salvation. Not that it is intentional, but I'm prone to forget about grace. How about you?

In Part 2, we'll fully reveal what God's grace story of salvation is and how to apply it in real life! Take a break and come back to it, or dive right in!

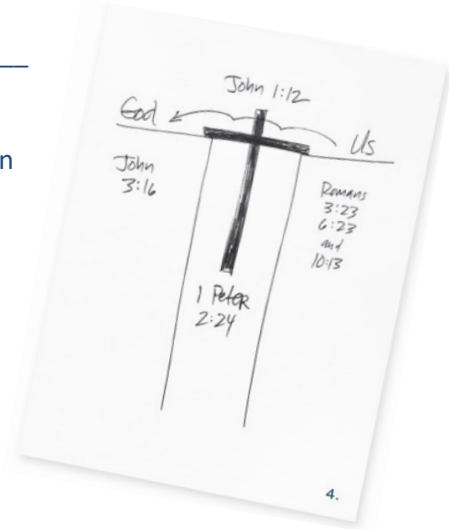
Part 2:

If you have not entered into salvation, that saving grace of God, you may be wondering what in the world we're talking about. Like Nicodemus, you may wonder how a person can be "born again." Like the prodigal son, you may wonder how to overcome a messy life and dwell in a place of love and acceptance. Perhaps chaos reigns in your life right now and you are in search of peace. Or maybe your life seems comfortable and easy, but you know something is missing. No matter your situation, the solution to each is to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. There are 4 principles that will lead you into that relationship, so let's get into God's Word to find them

1. God loves you and wants you to experience His love and peace. In Part 1 you wrote out John 3:16. Read it again.
 - a. How did God show His love to the world?
 - b. God's plan for you is "everlasting life." That means you can spend eternity with Him rather than eternity in hell. Do you believe heaven and hell are real places? Yes No
2. Despite God's love for us, sin separates us from Him.
 - a. Read Romans 3:23. We have all sinned, therefore, we are all in need of God's forgiveness. Have you sinned today? Yes No
What about yesterday...or the day before? Yes No
 - b. Read Romans 6:23. The wages (payment) of sin is _____, but the _____ gift of God is _____ in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - c. Sin results in death, and it separates us from God. That is illustrated by the diagram on the right. However, good news! There is a free gift...a remedy...
3. God provided a remedy for sin: the cross.
 - a. Read 1 Peter 2:24. He Himself (Jesus) bore our _____ in His body on the _____ so that we might die to _____ and live to _____, for by His wounds you were _____.
 - b. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What did Jesus do so that His righteousness can be imparted to you?



4. You must respond to Him and receive Christ.
- Read John 1:12. But as many as _____ Him, to them He gave the right to become _____ of _____, even to those who _____ in His name.
 - You “cross the bridge” into God’s family when you accept the free gift He promises. Would you like to cross that bridge?



To cross the bridge:

- Admit you are a sinner in need of the Savior.
- Be willing to accept God’s forgiveness of all your sin.
- Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
- Invite Jesus to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:13 says whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. **Are you ready to call upon His name?** You do that by praying to Him. Pray something like this:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner. I want to turn from my sins, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died for my sins and that You raised Him to life. I want Him to come into my heart and to take control of my life. I want to trust Jesus as my Savior and follow Him as my Lord from this day forward. In Jesus’ Name, amen.

Welcome to the family of God! The Bible says the angels in heaven are rejoicing! You may or may not have been a “bad” person, but just as the prodigal son was greeted warmly by the father, your Heaven Father greets you with the same rejoicing!

I am so happy for you, but your journey has just begun. You are “born again,” which means you are a baby Christian, and you may face challenges. To grow, take these steps:

- Tell someone...a friend, a pastor, a Bible teacher...about your decision to be “born again.” God did not call anyone to be a lone ranger or a silent believer, so make it known so others can help you grow! (Don’t know who to tell? Email Looking4theBlessedHope@gmail.com!)
- Read God’s Word. Somehow you found your way to this Bible study. Good job! This is a start, but stay in God’s Word every day. (Start in Psalms, Proverbs or the New Testament and try reading a chapter every day.)
- Communicate with God. That’s prayer...and you just did it! Begin to talk to God as you would a friend. As you talk to Him, you will find that He answers you as you read His Word!
- Get involved in a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching church. If God’s Word is not opened regularly and taught clearly, find another church where it is. The teaching of God’s Word (not man’s ideas) is important for your growth.
- If you need help finding a church or figuring out what to do, email Looking4theBlessedHope@gmail.com and I will be thrilled to guide you to resources.

Part 3:

Salvation is God's love story to the world, and He offered it through the Jewish people! Consider this: Jesus was Jewish! If not for the Jews, we Gentiles would be without a Savior. Praise God for that gift!

Let's dig into that amazing God Story!

As Gentiles, we tend to look at salvation as "our" thing. After all, in large part, the Jewish people have rejected salvation through Jesus the Messiah. However, salvation is a *Jewish thing*. In fact, there is nothing more *Jewish* than a Jewish person putting his faith in the Jewish Messiah! Jesus came to save His own. Read [John 1:1-12](#).

Verses 1-5 declare the deity of Jesus. Jesus is the personification of the Word. Write out [John 1:14](#).

That verse tells us the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. According to verse 1, the Word was from the beginning, and verse 14 tells us He became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, one with the Father, humbled Himself to come and dwell among us. He personified the Word of God. He is also the Creator! All things came into being through Him!

Verses 7-9 tells us of one (John) who came to testify about the Light (Jesus) who was coming into the world to enlighten all. According to verses 10-11, who did He come to and what was the outcome?

Jesus came to the Jewish people! He wanted to save His own! What does [Romans 1:16](#) say?

Jew first! They had priority! Jesus came as THEIR Messiah, their Savior! Yet, peculiar things happened. In fact, Jesus said an interesting thing to a Samaritan woman at a well. Again, John records the account and you can find it in [John 4:7-26](#), but pay close attention to the end of verse 22. What does He say?

The Gospel was to the Jew first, but Jesus stated it slightly different to the Samaritan woman. Carefully notice the subtle different in John 4:22. He did not say to this non-Jewish woman that salvation was TO the Jew, He said salvation is _____ the Jews! He gave salvation TO the Jews, so that the blessing of salvation would come FROM the Jews! By God's grace, He allowed salvation to flow from the Jews to us Gentiles! (Is that awesome or what!)

We Gentiles were second in line, and it required a very special plan! So, how did it happen? For that, turn in your Bible to a familiar passage. Read [Genesis 12:1-3](#) slowly and deliberately, then write the very last sentence here:

God chose Abram (later known as Abraham) out of the pagan culture in Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him a very specific assignment. You just wrote it down! He was to become the vehicle of world redemption!

How was he to do that? God better have a plan because that is humanly impossible! At this point, Abram had no clue, he was simply obedient! Has God ever called you to something, yet didn't give you all the information up front? You simply had to step out and follow where He led. If you've never had that experience, it can be one of the most amazing experiences in life. Ask God to give you that kind of faith, then step out the next time He prompts you to do something beyond your comfort zone and without full explanation. I assure you, you will be blessed!

If that experience has happened to you, erect a memorial stone by recording it here:

So, Abram's calling was to bless the entire world. What do you suppose the blessing was? Let's turn to [Galatians 3:6-9](#) for the answer. Paul is writing to "foolish Galatians" (verse 1) who, though they were saved by grace and grace alone, were now trying to live by the law. Beginning in verse 6, he points them back to Abraham (Abram) and introduces him as the father of faith. According to verse 8, what do you think that blessing to all the nations (all the families of the earth) is, and how did God make it possible?

My friends, as Christians, we often think of the Gospel as a New Testament thing. After all, Jesus died, was buried and rose again, and we've come to know that as the Gospel, so eloquently displayed in the New Testament. Yet, God is not bound by time! He Himself preached the Gospel first to Abraham!

Take a break for now and mull over what you have learned today, then come back to God's Word for more of God's Story, written on the pages of Abraham's life, in Part 4!

Part 4:

Let's go back to a point we introduced but didn't linger toward the end of Part 3. If someone asked you to provide the best explanation of the Gospel, where would you turn? There are several places you could go in Scripture, but perhaps the clearest, most concise passage might be [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#). Either repeat all or part of that passage, or summarize in your own words what you believe the Gospel to be:

One thing for certain, you cannot explain the Gospel without the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the essence of the Gospel. So, if it wasn't until years after Abraham (first called "Abram") that Jesus came to this earth to die, be buried and resurrect, exactly how did God preach the Gospel to Abraham?

No question, God brought Abram into a very unique relationship, and it was passed down through generations. That relationship centered around a covenant God made with Abram (and ratified with

Isaac and Jacob). Read the introduction of that covenant in [Genesis 12:1-3](#). Based on what you read in verse 1, describe what you believe it may have been like for Abram when he heard God speak to him.

God made many promises to Abram in verses 2-3. How many can you list:

Again, notice the last phrase of verse 3. That is not just a promise, but a unique calling upon Abram. God would have to do something on Abram's behalf in order to bless the entire world. That is exactly what God did!

By Genesis 15, Abram had sojourned from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land we know today as Israel, retreated to Egypt because of a famine, returned only to split with his nephew Lot, endured and then defeated a group of kings and their armies, rescued Lot and his family, and was blessed by Melchizedek (a priest-king and foreshadow of Jesus). Busy guy! But where were the blessings God had promised?

Pick it up in [Genesis 15:1-6](#). According to verses 1-5, God made another grand promise. What was it?

What was Abram's response (verse 6)?

God was already at work establishing the lineage through which that blessing would flow to all the families of the earth! Abram needed descendants and God was delivering! But what would be passed down through Isaac and future descendants? Ah, good question. God was about to answer that one also, by making a covenant with Abram! Read [Genesis 15:7-12](#).

The description of that covenant seems odd to us in our 21st century American eyes, and this brief study is not the forum in which to unwind the symbolism of splitting animals in two and walking between them! Instead, understand that God was initiating all this, not Abram. Isn't that just like God! When He gives us a special calling, He does the work. We may or may not understand His methods, we simply need to obey!

Now, focus on verses 11-12. When this passage refers to birds of prey, it is referring to some of the biggest, baddest birds imaginable! These weren't seagulls beachgoers shoo away when the picnic lunches come out. Those carnivorous birds were likely ancient vulture-type birds with beaks and talons as sharp as steak knives, and wingspans of over 10'! They were monstrous and fierce. When Abram "drove them away," he may have been fighting for his very life!

What was Abram's state of mind once deep sleep fell upon him?

What do you suppose was so dark and terrifying to Abram? Was God up to something? The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what Abram was seeing, hearing, feeling or experiencing, except that it was terrifying. So, we can't be dogmatic. But we can wonder.

I wonder if God threw back the curtain to allow Abram to see the future. Did he see the conflict of darkness his descendants would endure? Did he see Haman's evil plot to wipe out all the Jews? Did he see the crusades and the Spanish Inquisition, meant to destroy his very own descendants? What about the Holocaust...did he see that? Those things would certainly be terrifying, and perhaps they are characterized as scavengerous vultures.

But why? If that's the case, why would God throw such tragic, terrifying pictures on to the screen of Abram's mind? Perhaps it was God's way of showing Abram exactly what he was signing up for by accepting God's invitation to join Him in covenant. It would be costly to be God's vehicle through which the entire world would be blessed. Salvation would come through Abram and his descendants, but it would not be an easy path.

But friends, there was another part of God's covenant with Abram as well. We've come to an appropriate stopping place, so forge ahead if you'd like or take some time to carefully study the passages that were shared. Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant is vital to understanding God's plan of salvation for us! Don't rush through this!

Part 5:

Abram encountered a very dark and terrifying experience as God cut covenant with him in Genesis 15. But God wasn't done establishing His covenant. There is another portion, and it is had to do with the sacrifice of his son. You will find the account in [Genesis 22:1-14](#), so please turn there.

By this time, God had changed Abram's name ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude"); and has changed Abram's wife Sarai's name ("my princess") to Sarah ("mother of nations").

God had promised a son, but they were getting old and decided to "help God out." Abram slept with Sarai's handmaiden, who bore him a son, Ishmael. However, he was not the son of promise. In fact, we are still seeing the consequences of that, as the descendants of Ishmael represent much of the Muslim world today...still at odds with descendants of the promised son.

Later, at age 90, Sarah miraculously bore Abraham's son, Isaac, the son of promise.

As we pick it up in [Genesis 22](#), God called Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, that son of promise. Read verses 1-14 slowly and carefully, looking for detail.

For those who have studied this passage, several things stick out. For those not as familiar with the passage, consider these points:

- Verse 2: Abraham was asked to take his beloved son and offer him as a sacrifice. Who else offered their beloved son as a sacrifice?

- Verse 2 God told Abraham to go up to the land of Moriah to make the sacrifice. The land of Moriah encompasses an area where the Temple was later built and includes a hill later called Golgotha. What sacrifice was later made on Golgotha?
- Verse 5: Abraham promised the servants who were with them that he and Isaac would return. Who else has gone away, but promised to return?
- Verses 8: God provided a ram as a sacrifice, in place of Isaac. Rams and lambs were sacrificial animals. What did John say in [John 1:29](#), and who was he referring to?
- Verse 13: The ram God provided was “caught in the thicket by his horns.” Thickets are thorny, entangled brambles, and those encircled the ram’s head and horns. The sacrificial animal wore a crown of thorns. Who else wore a crown of thorns?

Obviously, Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is a typology of God the Father offering His own Son as a sacrifice. But let’s jump back into the idea that God preached the Gospel to Abraham long before Jesus was on the scene. Just as God may have pulled back the curtain to allow Abram to see the dark and terrifying things his people would face, could God have also pulled back the veil to allow Abraham to see the clear picture of Jesus’ sacrifice for the sins of the world?

Physically, Abraham saw Isaac. But could he have been supernaturally transported spiritually to see Calvary’s hill, the wooden cross, the crown of thorns?

Now, let’s go full circle. Look up, and write out, [Galatians 3:8](#):

Look up, and write out, [John 8:56](#):

As Jesus shared the truth that would set His people free, He stated, *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad!”* In context, what happened on “My day” if not the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus! Abraham saw it! Indeed, God preached the Gospel first to Abraham!

God’s Story! It is written through Abraham, but it is also written on the parchment of your life! Have you told the Story?

If you’re on Facebook, please find our [VISION 2020 group](#) and join in the discussion! Meanwhile, we’ve got one more part of this study guide so stick with it!

Part 6:

Short and sweet...have you told the Story God has written upon the pages of your life? Will you tell the Story? To whom will you tell the Story?

Over the next few weeks and months, we will study Bible prophecy, look at current events and discuss the immanency of Christ's return.

Do you believe Jesus is coming soon? There are many reasons to believe He is, but let's focus on two. First, the world stage has never in history been set for His coming as it is now. For example, Israel has to be back in her land in order to invite the Messiah's return. "Baruch haba B'Shem Adonai." (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.)

Those words are found in [Mathew 23:39](#) when Jesus says to His disciples, "From now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" We'll look at that and many other signs in the coming weeks but understand that Israel's return to the land was perhaps the key prophecy for the rest of end time prophecies to unfold, and the Jews have to be there to shout the invitation!

Secondly, as I've heard it so perfectly illustrated: In the fall, when you go into stores and begin to see Christmas decorations, brightly colored lights and Christmas trees on display, you know [Thanksgiving](#) is right around the corner! You see, though the end time signs are "decoration" for the Tribulation, we know another event (Rapture) takes place prior to that! The signs of the times today all point toward the soon-coming Tribulation, yet Jesus promises to take us out of here before that!

Some would say, "Well, if the return of Jesus is so soon, why go to work? Why go to school? Why engage the culture? Let's just shout 'Maranatha' and await His return!" But, if that is our mentality, we miss the mark on what He has clearly instructed us! Let's dig into God's Word to determine how He wants us to live in these last days.

Read [Titus 2:11-14](#). Spend a few minutes meditating on what you just read. Are you denying ungodliness and worldly desires? Are you living sensibly, righteously and Godly? Are you actively looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus? Let's make some personal application. Write out at least one specific thing you believe God is gently leading and guiding you to do that would fulfill one of those instructions from the Lord.

Now read [Luke 2:41-52](#). Jesus understood the time and season in which He lived. He knew as a very young man that He must not waste time but must be about His Father's business. He also understood His Father's business had eternal consequences. In what ways are you "about your Father's business" right now?

As you go about that business, does it have eternal impact? Yes No

Thinking the Kingdom of God was going to appear soon, Jesus' disciples listened intently to a parable recorded for us in [Luke 19:11-27](#). There, Jesus provided very clear teaching on how they (and we) are to live as we await the Kingdom of God. Read the passage slowly and deliberately. The "currency" of the parable is minas, but it seems safe to say Jesus can use our money, talents, skills, time and willingness to

accomplish much. Those who do much with what they are given, will be given much in return. It doesn't matter how much "currency" you have, but rather what you do with what He has given you.

Are you using everything God has given you for His glory? Yes No Take a moment or two to write down any "currency" you've been given (money, talent, skills, desire), but is not currently in the service of the Lord. Then, take two minutes to pray, dedicating that "currency" to the Lord and asking Him to use it.

In that passage, I like [verse 13 from the King James Version](#), where Jesus tells us to "*Occupy till I come.*" In your own life, what does it look like to occupy till He comes?

Friends, God the Father knows the day and the hour He will send His Son, Jesus, to snatch us away to be with Him forever! That's what salvation is all about. It is that blessing through Abraham to every family on earth.

If you are married, do you remember your wedding day, when you just could not contain yourself as you awaited your bride or groom? I believe Jesus longs for His bride (the church...us!) every bit as much, if not more! However, every moment He tarries, He's up to something! He's writing His Story upon the lives of those who are available to Him! Stop to consider what He is writing in your life.

Consider this: what will you be caught doing when He returns? Here is a suggestion: tell His Story, and tell it often! There is no greater testimony than one who believes Jesus is coming back! Take the truth God has entrusted to you and give it away every chance you get! Whether it is a salvation story or the latest Story He is writing upon your heart, tell it in whatever form He has given you.

Why not take a moment now to go to the [VISION 2020 group](#) page and share a Story God has etched upon your life? It will bless others, and you will be found faithful in that moment!

God bless you as you share His Story!