

**“Flourish”:** Creating a Culture of Transformation  
A Culture of Discovery  
1 John 5:20  
4.15.18



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

**Discovery:** We are a people who are being informed and formed by the biblical narrative and who are developing both a strong sense of identity (*who we are*), and a deep sense of purpose (*why we are*) within the Story of a loving and faithful God.

***“Revelation” and “Incarnation”***

[Isaiah 30:21; Deuteronomy 29:29; John 20:30-31; Psalm 119:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Share with the others what you believe to be the best vacation you have ever taken.

*“As you shared, did you notice that you were telling a story and not just stating the facts? What are some of the elements of a good story?”*

How would you respond to the following:

I would describe my experience of the Bible as (circle one that best applies):

- Non-existent
- Frustrating
- Rewarding
- Mixed-emotions

I tend to... (check the one that best applies)

- read the Bible in longer sittings and larger portions
- read the Bible in brief devotionals and smaller excerpts
- not read much at all

[Perhaps you might take a moment and discuss the implications of each.]

*“What would you say are some of the key elements of the God-story found in the Bible? Why do you consider them important?”*

*“Would you say that the Bible has an over-arching theme? If so, what would you propose it to be?”*

Read Matthew 13:10-13. *“What do you make of Jesus’ response to the disciple’s questions about his teaching methods?”*

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### Teaching Notes...

**Our initiation into relationship with Christ meant being incorporated into a community of people who share a common Story, a common passion (new heart), a common vision of what life in the Kingdom would look like if it happened right here and right now, and a common set of values which provide meaningful-direction to our pursuits.**

I think as vital as it is to have a healthy vision, it is our values that remind us of *who we are* and *why we are* as we navigate the way toward the vision. Our values sustain us when either our vision lacks clarity or what we are experiencing calls into question our vision.

We believe the biblical narrative reveals **(6) key values** that portrays both the movements of God toward us and the nature of our responses. They are captured in the acronym, **DESIRE**.

The word, “desire”, means *‘will; that in which you delight’*. Our conviction is that the will, properly directed toward God allows us to love the right things and pursue the right things so that we live “humanly”.

**Christianity is offered to us as a “prophetic” faith, in that it always seeks to ‘engage’ rather than ‘escape’ the culture. Prophetic faith requires (2) movements: reception---** God desires to be known and the way he is known is through *“revelation”*. This is not simply the exchange of information, but the revealing of his person.

*“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’”*  
Isaiah 65:1 [Romans 10:20]

**replication**--- we begin to assimilate and embody such revelation in order to best reflect his purposes for us in the world.

*“Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did”.* 1 John 2:6

The significance of the **reception** moment is only to be realized in the **replication** movement. Early rabbis insisted that the primary body part for receiving revelation was not the ears, but the feet. You love God by following him.

***If we fail in the reception movement***, we proceed with no clear understanding of who we are and why we are except our own evaluations and conclusions. We become “self-explanatory”.

***If we fail in the replication movement***, faith becomes mere superstition. We descend the mountain with an undeniable spiritual experience, but no means of transferring that into our eating, sleeping, working, recreating lives.

*“I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story, there is a story-teller”.* G.K. Chesterton

The stories in the Bible, offered to us as revelation, are not really meant to be proved or disproved. They are simply to be believed (trusted) or rejected. Trust it. Live into it or come up with our own story.

The Bible is not so much a set of disconnected stories, each including a tidy set of principles for how to conduct yourself. It is not simply a *“Best of” God*. It is a ‘meta-narrative’--- a ‘single story’ which encompasses all other stories. It looks at the ***“story behind the story”***.

Many of us think of the Bible as a “book”, but it’s really a collection of books (66), written over hundreds of years, with a number of contributors, in varying cultures, and utilizing a variety of literary styles [e.g. poetry, history, prophecy, personal letters] but all, presumably, telling a coherent story that continues to unfold.

### **God is unapologetically committed to his own glory.**

*“In the beginning, God...”* Genesis 1:1

*“For the Lord is God, and he created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos. ‘I am the Lord’, he says, and there is no other”.* Isaiah 45:18

The phrase, “his glory”, is used over (300) times. Virtually everything hinges on God. His first commandment (directive) is, *“No other gods”* (Exodus 21). It means that we don’t start with our own desires and needs, then attempt to construct a “designer god”,

tailored to meet those needs. We start with God, then we consider our response, based on his revelation.

It is because this is a story about God that it involves us! We don't get to decide where the plot is leading, but we do get to allow it to transform us, so that we are better living into the storyline.

The OT is primarily a story about God's interaction with a specific people. The nation of Israel. The NT directs its attention toward how the story reaches its apex--- it's climax--- in Jesus. He was not travelling town to town, village to village, offering a lecture series on divinity but was announcing and inviting people into the Kingdom.

Jesus is the "*wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:30). Finding life in Jesus and learning life from him are fundamental to the life well-lived.

The first people who were reading the Bible didn't know they were reading the Bible. They were hearing ancestral stories around campfires, or on long walks, or in communal gathering. People felt that what they were encountering had a transcendence to it. It was saying something to them... in deeper, even more meaningful ways. People felt the need to write these things down.

At times, they even declared that God told them to "*write this down*" (Jeremiah 22:30; 30:2; Habakkuk 2:2). • • They were convinced that God was somehow watching over the process. "inspiration"- a trust that the Spirit was guiding the listening and writing.

2 Peter 1:16-21 [read]

**Because they somehow believed God to be involved in the process, they considered the writings "authoritative". It provided "*meaningful grounds for action*".**

It is apparent that we are living in a culture that struggles to embrace the idea of anything "authoritative"; any over-arching story in which all our stories are understood.

We are mostly encouraged to interpret what we believe to be "real" through the lens of our own experience. We are prone to read it in a way that accommodates our own position, rather than submitting honestly to it.

**The Bible not only reveals God, it reveals us.**

Ezekiel, Jeremiah and John were all asked to not only "read" the book, but to "*eat it*" (Ezekiel 2:8; Jeremiah 15:16).

"*Taste and see...*", the Psalmist said (34:8).

St. Bonaventure said, "*To know much and taste nothing--- of what use is that?*"

It is the word of God being *metabolized* in our system [metabolize: to change (food) into a form that can be used by your body]. It means that the "words" (the

“word”) are only life-giving as they are taken in, digested, and metabolized to sustain a life well-lived.

Interestingly, in Revelation 10:10, John says that when he ate the scroll, “... *it was sweet in my mouth, but when I swallowed it, it turned sour in my stomach.*”

It tastes good, going down, but sometimes it just doesn’t “sit well”. Often, the way it sits with it (we sit with it), is unsettling. While we often mine the scriptures for nuggets of comfort or affirmation, we avoid the texts that challenge our prejudices, our lusts, our attitudes toward money and possessions, our desire for retaliation, our\_\_\_\_\_.

I think it’s why, at times, the reactions to Jesus were so strong. It’s a story that defines us, that invites us, that confronts us. This book certainly validates us and affirms our participation, but it never seeks to flatter us or please us.

**The idea is not simply to “know your Bible”, but to “know God, who is revealed in your Bible”.**

I would suggest that you read the Bible with (2) themes in mind:

- 1) “*What is my relationship to God?*”
- 2) “*What is my responsibility? For whom or what should I be taking responsibility?*”

**People who have a right relationship with God and to his word are able to worry less about arguing its authority because their lives are so convincing.**

“... *let us show the truth by our actions.*” 1 John 3:18

“... *if [others] speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*” 1 Peter 3:16