

GENERATIONS MINISTRIES – GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL



2015 Camp Curriculum

EPIC STORY

Based on the true story

Theme Scripture

“It wasn’t so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn’t know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It’s a wonder God didn’t lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

“Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”

(Ephesians 2:1-10 The Message)

Curriculum based on *EPIC, The Story God is Telling*, by John Eldredge and
A Million Miles in a Thousand Years, by Donald Miller.

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Welcome to Epic Story – 2015

God has invited us to participate in the greatest story ever told.

“There is a Larger Story. And you have a crucial role to play.” – John Eldridge in *EPIC*. Our goal is to help campers see they are part of something much bigger than themselves. The curriculum uses clips from several movies to help make the point of each lesson. We encourage you to view these clips ahead of time and familiarize yourself with the point each clip makes.

While we want campers to see themselves as part of a bigger story, we also want them to develop their own stories – knowing God is in the beginning, middle and end of their story. We help them see they have several chapters in their life stories. Some chapters are better than others – but God is in the midst of each chapter.

Our goal is to help the campers be better prepared to write the next chapters of their lives. We want the campers to go home from camp knowing they are never alone, their story is important, and they are part of the biggest and most exciting story of all time – the EPIC Story. We do this through six Chapel messages.

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|-----------------|---|----------------|
| Chapel 1 | Why are we drawn to a great story? | Page 1 |
| | Great stories include the themes of love, adventure, danger, sacrifice, a battle between good and evil, heroes, courage, struggle. Jesus is the greatest story. | |
| Chapel 2 | What’s Your Story? | Page 5 |
| | Everyone has a great story. That story needs to be rediscovered and seen in light of the story God is writing about us. | |
| Chapel 3 | One chapter doesn’t tell your whole story | Page 13 |
| | Our lives consist of good experiences and bad experiences – chapters. We are not defined by one chapter – no matter how bad it was. | |
| Chapel 4 | The backstory | Page 23 |
| | The backstory is “the rest of the story.” Our backstory started even before Father, Son and Spirit said “Let us make man in our image.” | |
| Chapel 5 | Reading the Epic story backwards | Page 29 |
| | We don’t usually recommend people reading the end of the story first, but in our story, we know we already have the victory. His name is Jesus. | |
| Chapel 6 | Writing the next chapter of your story | Page 35 |
| | With God inserted into the story of our lives, we are much better prepared to write the next chapter. | |

Epic Story

Why are we drawn to a great story?

Chapel #1

“Every story, great and small, shares the same essential structure because every story we tell borrows its power from a Larger Story, a Story woven into the fabric of our being.”

–John Eldredge

Introduction. What is your favorite story? It could be a movie, a book, a TV show, a story your camp counselor told at a dorm meeting...even a story your parents read to you when you were young. *(Have the campers respond out loud by naming their favorite.)*

What is it that makes a story great? What is it that makes you sit on the edge of your seat waiting for the conclusion of a terrific movie? What is it that keeps you smiling in the flickering light of a campfire as a friend tells a funny story? What is it about a well-spun story that causes us to lean in when we hear it? What makes stories fascinating and universally captivating?

Have you ever noticed most great stories have the same essential themes woven through them? Love. Adventure. Danger. Sacrifice. Romance. A battle between good and evil. Hope when there seems to be no hope. Unlikely heroes. Death or a near escape from death. Struggle. Courage. Overcoming incredible odds.

You may wonder what this has to do with Chapel messages at a church camp. During this time together, we want to share with you the most Epic story of all time – and even more than that – we want you to see your part in that Epic story. Because your personal epic story really is all about you, and those who love you and make the biggest impact in your life.

What makes a great story?

Great stories make us care.

The best stories draw on the sympathies of the audience. At the outset, the Ugly Duckling is rejected by his siblings. Harry Potter has no parents and is trying to find his way in Hogwarts. He’s not trying to be a hero, he’s trying to survive against “he who shall not be named”. Katniss Everdeen represents her district in the fight of life and death in the wilderness and leaves those she loves behind in *The Hunger Games*. Our hearts are captivated and we feel for the lead characters – the protagonists – as they face the struggle of their lives. We get swept up in the story as if somehow it becomes our own. Which leads us to another dynamic of a great story...

Great stories take us along for the ride.

At the heart of every great story is a promise – a journey, a mystery, a problem, a struggle to overcome – something that entices the audience and makes the story worth the listen. The Ugly Duckling ventures into the world alone. Frodo sets out on his quest in *The Lord of the Rings*. Captain America launches an offensive against the evil of Red Skull. As these captivating journeys begin, we're right there beside them. Notice how you hold your breath during really intense situations without realizing it only to breathe again when the danger is past. Notice how your muscles tense up while watching an intense scene in a movie where the protagonist is facing danger? You've been swept up in the story – you are engaged. We do this because deep within each of us we have a desire to be part of a fascinating journey, as arduous and difficult as the road may be, and we hope, just like the protagonist, that we are capable and found worthy of that journey. As we are taken along for the ride in the epic story, we realize this...

Great stories don't happen by accident.

In an epic story, the protagonist usually has an inner motivation driving them to an overarching goal they are constantly striving to achieve. The Ugly Duckling is in search of his identity and the acceptance of his peers. In *Braveheart*, William Wallace wants freedom from the rule of the tyrannical King Longshanks and will give his life in this quest. Rocky Balboa wants desperately to rise above the streets of Philadelphia to become a boxing champion and relentlessly works to pursue his dream. In every case, the main character is intentional in pursuing his or her passion.

But an interesting thing happens along the way. To reach their dreams, the protagonists face adversity, massive struggle, and sometimes even dangerous encounters with death. The journey is filled with challenges – some seeming insurmountable. Something curious happens though as our lead characters face the challenges: in the midst of the struggle they find an inner source of strength that carries them through the burdens. They become more than they thought they could be. As we see this take shape, we realize...

Great stories are captivating and motivating.

The best stories make you forget yourself, if only for a moment. It's easy to get lost in the momentum of the story as you are drawn to the protagonists and want to somehow be like them. In *The Lord of the Rings* when Galadriel tells Frodo, "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future," you not only find yourself cheering for the little Hobbit, you also may very well feel this desire to make a difference in your world like Frodo does in his. The story reminds us it's possible to have a great impact – even if we seem small and insignificant. When we see acts of bravery and courage, we too want to be

people that shine when faced with insurmountable odds. It's because of this reality that we are drawn to the following conclusion...

Great stories help us believe we can live a great life.

Think about it. Who doesn't want to live a life full of adventure, romance and a sense of daring generosity? Who doesn't want to feel their life had an impact on the world? How many people have you met that truly like being bored or timid and afraid to seek lofty heights in their life?

So what makes a great life? Here's where we need to be careful in how we label things. Western society says a great life is lived by someone who accomplishes a high-achieving career and accumulates lots of possessions. It's as if our identity is formed by the things we have. That's ridiculous. Having nice things and being promoted to more responsibility can be wonderful, but it is not who we are. Your identity is not about what you have, what you do or what others say about you. Your true identity can only come from the author of the Epic story we will be telling you during camp – the epic story about you. You are the main character the author wants in the story and the story wouldn't be nearly as good without you. This story has everything to make a good story – love, adventure, sacrifice, struggle, death and a hero. At the end of the story you – the main character – get to live forever with the author. Now that's a great story. But first, you need to know the story is about you. This leads us to the final point about great stories...

Great stories point us to the greatest story, the Gospel.

Listen to this quote: "What if all the great stories that have ever moved you, brought you joy or tears – what if they are telling you something about the *true* Story into which you were born, the Epic story into which you have been cast?" – J. Eldridge

Jesus is that True Story and the Greatest Story ever told. We look to Jesus to see a great life story, and his great life story is about you.

You see, Jesus isn't just about church attendance and good manners; he is about all that is good and beautiful and true. He is the greatest storyteller, for he is the greatest story. His story tells us that he has set all of our hearts' longings within us to live in and be part of his compelling story. His story reveals the loving heart of a Papa who adores his children – and that includes you. His story shares the mind-boggling tale (truth) that he died so that you would have life, and not just any life, but exciting, adventurous life in him. His story gets rubbed into our hearts by the one he sent to live in us, the Holy Spirit, our Helper.

Every story you've been drawn to finds its power from the larger story, the Gospel. All the elements we've discussed that make a great story – love, intrigue, suspense, struggle, romance, beauty, joy, fulfilling relationship, sacrifice, the victory of good over evil, heroism – all of it was written by the author of creation: God the Father, Jesus the Incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit!

And the best news is all the elements of the stories you love are also true about your life. Whether you know it or not and whether you believe it or not, your life is filled with meaning and purpose. Because God has brought you into his story – you're not just a spectator in this unfolding drama, but you are in the heartbeat of it all. You may think you're only living an ordinary, mundane life that doesn't really matter, but the truth is this – you have been swept up in the most epic adventure history has ever known!

Listen to the story from the pages of the book of Ephesians in the Bible – our theme passage for camp this year:

"It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

"Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."

(Ephesians 2:1-10 The Message)

What's Your Story?

Are you ready to discover key parts of your Epic Story?

Chapel #2

“For most of us, life feels like a movie we’ve arrived at forty-five minutes late.” – John Eldredge

[Introductory video clip *Jennifer Bricker’s Story* –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPdmXsQMmBc> Stop at 2:20]

Introduction. In our opening Chapel we learned that great stories.

- Make us care
- Take us along for the ride
- Don’t happen by accident
- Are captivating and motivating
- Help us believe we can live a great life
- Point us to the Greatest Story of all, the Gospel
- And we learned the story about Jesus is also about you.

Considering what we have seen so far in Jennifer’s story, you may say to yourself, “Of course all this is true of great stories like Jennifer’s! But I don’t have a great story.”

Yes you do! Believe it or not, you already have a great story. Sure your story is continuing to develop, but it already needs to be told! Today we are going to take the first steps in discovering the parts of the captivating and exciting story that God has been writing about you. We will begin to discover a story that already has your name all over it? The first thing we need is...

Your working title

“Rory’s First Kiss,” “The Intimidation Game,” “Paradox” and “Blue Harvest” are some of my favorite movies. I’d bet that for some of you “Rory’s” and another movie by the name of “Incident on 57th Street” were two of yours. If you are shaking your head thinking, “not in this lifetime,” let me share with you that these were merely *working titles* chosen by the director to keep the movie under wraps until shooting was complete.

You know “Rory’s First Kiss” as *The Dark Knight*. “The Intimidation Game” is *Batman Begins*. “Blue Harvest” is *Return of the Jedi*. And “Incident on 57th Street”? – none other than *Harry Potter and the*

Chamber of Secrets. “Paradox” is an older movie, but you can still see it on Netflix under its screen name, *Back to the Future*.

Sadly, many people hide behind working titles. You might know some: Teacher’s Pet, Class Brain, Bully, Jock, Bookworm, Class Clown, Ms. Shy, Shorty, Stretch, Mr. Friendly, Loner, Preppy, and on and on it goes. Sometimes we hide behind these names because they are comfortable; sometimes we hide behind them because we don’t want people to get a glimpse of the “real us.” Other times, they are simply the best descriptor we can come up with until our life picture gets clearer.

If you were to describe your life to this point, what would you choose as a working title? And remember, the working title is just that, a working title. Jesus changes those working titles into something pretty amazing. Let me give you an example...

The blind man

In John 9, there is a story of Jesus walking down the street near the temple with his disciples and they come across a man who had been blind since birth. Most people simply knew him as the blind man who would ask for spare change.

Some labeled him a poor man in need of help; others labeled him a sinner. “He must have done something wrong to be blind.” A third group had a different title because they assumed he was blind because a third person – perhaps a parent – had sinned and the blindness was God’s punishment. Sounds unfair, but it was how a lot of people thought at the time.

Even Jesus’ disciples thought sin was involved and asked the question.

Rabbi, who sinned. this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?(John 9:2).

The working title for this man’s life might have been “Blinded by Sin. a beggar’s story.” I can’t help but wonder how much judgment and hurt this man had gone through in his life. I also can’t help but wonder how he saw himself – knowing others were judging him.

While many obviously saw him as the beggar who was blinded because of sin, it was clear Jesus had a different title in mind for him. Before we see what title Jesus had in mind let me make a point. The blind man was truly blinded by sin, but it had nothing to do with his sight. He was blind to the truth of who he really was and to the truth of how God really saw him. Think about this quote as we continue the story...

*It’s like we are holding in our hands some pages torn out of a book...
if only we could find the book that contains the rest of the story. – John Eldredge*

Sight for Sore Eyes. when God showed up in my life

Let's notice how Jesus stepped in and changed the narrative of this blind man's story. He took the torn out pages of this man's life and showed how he was part of a much bigger story – the author's story.

Notice what Jesus said in response to his disciples:

You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light.

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam." The man went and washed—and saw. Soon the town was buzzing (John 9:3-8).

In one amazing moment, Jesus took some spit, mud and divine grace and changed this man's story – forever. An ordinary man had God show up in his life, connect some dots and transform his story into an Epic story of heavenly significance. What do you think this man did next? He started to rework the title and the content of his story to reflect this new amazing chapter.

Imagine how this man might start his story.

Once upon a time...

"I was born blind, but now I see." Not too many people can say that. His "once upon a time" began with people questioning his healing. What happened? Imagine how he responded. "I don't really know. I heard people talking about me; I heard someone say he was the light of the world and I felt the presence of someone kneeling in front of me; I heard this person spit and then I felt mud in my eyes. He told me to go wash the mud out of my eyes, so I did and now I see."

Let's read the biblical account...

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, "Why, isn't this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?"

Others said, "It's him all right!"

But others objected, "It's not the same man at all. It just looks like him."

He said, "It's me, the very one."

They said, "How did your eyes get opened?"

“A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ I did what he said. When I washed, I saw.”

John tells the rest of the story, which almost turned into a circus. The poor man was taken to the Pharisees who grilled him because he was healed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees asked him to tell them the whole story, which he did. Then they asked his parents to tell their side of the story. Then they came back to the man and tried to get him to call Jesus an imposter. He said, *“I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure. I was blind. I now see”* (Verse 25).

They asked him to tell his story again and, I love his response: *“Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to be his disciples?”*

He ran into opposition and people didn’t want to believe; they even threw him out into the street. But notice something: God was being glorified – just as Jesus said would happen. And Jesus didn’t leave him on his own; he wanted him to understand his true identity. Notice how the story continues:

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

The man said, “Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him.”

Jesus said, “You’re looking right at him. Don’t you recognize my voice?”

“Master, I believe,” the man said, and worshiped him (verses 35-38).

The blind man was given a new title: *Healed by the Messiah, I was blind, but now I see.*

Jennifer Bricker’s new working title

As we close, I’d like to show one more portion of Jennifer Bricker’s story. [pick up the story at 2:20] Jennifer went on to give motivational speeches around the world. Her primary speech is titled. “Never say I can’t.”

And the story isn’t just about Jennifer’s new title. Dominique Moceanu, Olympic Gold medalist and darling of the 1996 Olympic games, wrote a memoir after she met Jennifer. She called the memoir, “Off Balance” to show the contrast between her upbringing and her current life as a wife and mother and a sister to Jennifer.

Re-discovering your “Once upon a time...”

Are you ready to re-discover your personal “once upon a time”? Jesus wants to connect all the dots in your life – the pleasant ones and the painful ones – to help you see how he has always been there for

you. I believe you will be amazed at what you might feel you missed in your story – it will almost seem like you’ve shown up “late to the movie.” Well, if you are interested, just join me in this simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, I come to you asking that you help me see my life, my story, through your eyes. May I be blessed to see your glorious hand of grace all over my life and may I be filled with wonder and worship as you show me. In your name, Amen.

Debriefing Questions & Exercise

Re-discovering your new working title

Maybe the working title exercise is a little challenging right now. Here are a few additional options to see what we can learn about our story title.

1. If you could describe your life in a picture what would that picture be?
2. If you could choose your own nickname, what would it be and why?
3. What are your 5 favorite movies? What is one thing they all have in common?
4. What are two of the greatest days of your life? (And one can't be the day you were born because you don't remember it. ☺)
5. What is one of the most hurtful things someone has ever said to you?
6. Can you name 5 people who have had significant influence in your life?

Feel free to answer any or all of these questions and try to see what they show you about your view of your life to this point. Now let's take that exercise one more step

X _____ ● 2015

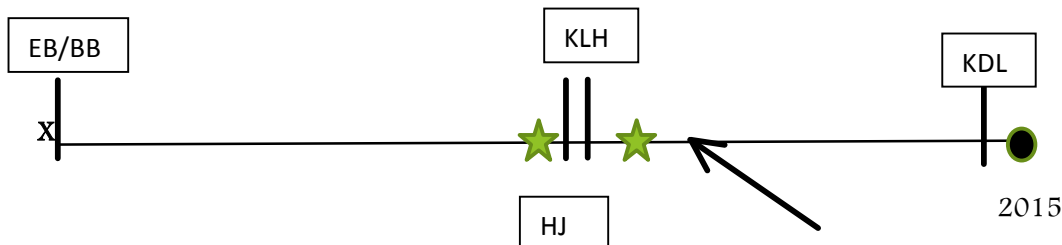
Imagine this line above is a timeline. The X represents the day of your birth and the O is for today. Draw a line like that in your notes. Think of the answers to questions 4, 5 and 6.

Question 6: Put the initials of the 5 most influential people in your life on that timeline at the moment they entered your life.

Question 5: Draw an arrow at the time on the line when that hurtful comment was made.

Question 4: Put a star at the places the 2 great days happened.

Your line might look something like this.



Think about why these dates, these people and these situations are the ones that came to mind so easily. These moments have likely made a major impression on how you see and define yourself, and likely impact how you interact with others. It may even give you a start on a "working title".

As you think about them a little more, I'd like you to ask a deeper question. Can you see God's involvement in any way that connects these moments, people and situations that can help you understand him better? The answer may be not yet, but take the time to ask him to "open the eyes of your heart" so that you can "see" him.

One Chapter Doesn't Tell Your Whole Story

What truly defines your story?

Chapel #3

"All of life is a story." – Madeline L'Engle

Theme Scripture.

Ephesians 2:1-5 It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah.

Introduction. Play 1-2 clips from movies that would reinforce the idea that "one chapter does not tell the whole story." Here are some suggested clips:

Hunger Games 1 Clip (play through 2:00) <http://youtu.be/iTyyKROkC3E>

Maleficent Clip (play through entire 1:03) <http://youtu.be/KmBJENof2OU>

The Hobbit Clip (play through entire :32) <http://youtu.be/cxmsbF35Kc>

How many of you know "the rest of the story" about (list the movie clip(s) you just showed)?

It's easy to misinterpret a story when we only know a part of it. Let me give you an example from the Bible about Peter denying Jesus. (Retell the story, or read the passage.)

All this time, Peter was sitting out in the courtyard. One servant girl came up to him and said, "You were with Jesus the Galilean."

In front of everybody there, he denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about."

As he moved over toward the gate, someone else said to the people there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene."

Again he denied it, salting his denial with an oath. "I swear, I never laid eyes on the man."

Shortly after that, some bystanders approached Peter. "You've got to be one of them. Your accent gives you away."

Then he got really nervous and swore. "I don't know the man!"

Just then a rooster crowed. Peter remembered what Jesus had said. "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and cried and cried and cried.

Do you know more of this story? (Have two to three share.) If this passage were all you read about Peter, you wouldn't think too highly of him. You wouldn't know that Jesus called Peter the rock upon which he would build his church. You wouldn't know that Peter was one of Jesus' closest friends and an apostle who influenced many, many people with the truth about Jesus.

Defining your story:

Just as one scene from a movie or one passage of scripture doesn't tell the whole story, one chapter in your life doesn't tell your whole story either. All the chapters you have lived so far make up a large part of your story, but even that isn't the whole story!

In the last 2 chapels we have explored the truth that you have a story and shared that we want to help you discover your story. Do you believe you have a story? Do you believe you have a story worth telling? I do. I believe each and every one of you has a story worth telling... and a story worth listening to. My wish is I had the time to listen to each one of your stories!

Some would be short stories because you've only been alive for a few years. Other stories would be novels because you've seen a few decades pass. Whether short or long, your story matters. Each chapter in your story matters.

Let me explain the concept of chapters. You've already gone through more than you realize in your life. Early childhood might be a chapter. Elementary school, entering high school, adding a new sibling to your family, learning to drive, playing a sport or joining a club might all be chapters. In fact, if you stop and think about it, you are in the middle of a chapter right here at camp.

Here's the thing you need to know: The chapter you are living in right now is part of your story, but it doesn't define your whole story – nor does a previous chapter that you've lived through totally define your story. Chapters certainly make up the parts of your story, but they don't define your whole story – just as one scene in a movie doesn't define the whole movie.

Some chapters in our lives are hard to make sense of – like the hurts we go through, the losses we face, or the questions that don't seem to have answers. The truth is your story – and all the chapters that it includes – sometimes only makes sense when you understand that your story is part of a bigger, Epic story. And it really starts to make sense when you get to know the author of that Epic story – who also happens to be the author of your story.

What is the Epic story?

The Epic story we keep referring to is a story about adventure, danger, sacrifice, good and evil, hope, heroes, struggles, death and love as we learned in our first chapel. It is a journey, a mystery, and a promise, as we learned in the second chapel. It's a meaningful story you are already a part of. You are already included in this story.

What is this incredible story? It's the story of Jesus.

It's the story of Jesus revealing the heart of his Papa – God the Father – toward all people, and helping you realize that his Father is your Papa too.

It's the story of Father, Son and Spirit living in eternal relationship from before time began and choosing to be our Papa, our big Brother, and our Teacher. It's a story of outgoing love, generosity and creativity. And it's a story about the incredible energy of love that flowed from the union and fellowship of the Trinity that created you. That's where you come into the story: you were created to be part of the story.

Our theme verse for camp this year is in Ephesians 2, but for just a moment I want to rewind and go back to Ephesians 1:3–6. Listen to this in *The Message* paraphrase:

*How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, **he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love**, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.*

Wow! Did you hear that?! He decided long, long ago in a land far, far away that you would be the focus of his love and that he would adopt you into his family. And who would he do this through? Through Jesus! You are chosen and you are adopted into his family through Jesus. You belong! You are part of the Epic story!

How does my story fit?

You fit because you were created to be part of the story. It's really that simple.

Unfortunately, there is a liar – the enemy – who constantly tries to convince you that you are not a part of the story. He loves to whisper negative things to you making you think your life is random, an accident, has no meaning, and doesn't matter. In the Bible, John 10:10 says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."

So the enemy will put thoughts in your mind that go something like this:

- "You really screwed up. It's all over."
- "You'll never amount to anything, why try?"
- "Your life is boring and meaningless. Nobody cares."
- "You'll never be perfect, so what's the point?"
- "Nobody cares about you. You're unlovable."

Have you ever had these thoughts or some like them? Most of us have. Have you ever wanted to just give up? Again, most of us have. But here's the interesting part. Even thoughts like these – lies like these – are part of the story but they do not define your story.

They are lies from the enemy – who is simply a bad angel who rebelled against God. You'll hear the lies, but recognize where they come from and realize they are the complete opposite of what Jesus is telling you through the power of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus is far more powerful than an angel – even a bad angel – he is the Son of God, and he has created you to be part of his story. Jesus wants you to know you are important; you are worthy of his love; your life has meaning; you are cared for and loved. And yes, you will mess up, but he is there with a message of forgiveness that is as vast as the ocean and love that is greater than the universe. Jesus' message is called the Gospel, which simply means Good News!

Let me share a biblical example that shows the power of the gospel – the Good News!

Woman caught in adultery (John 8)

There is a story in the Bible about a woman who desperately needed some good news – and she needed it quickly because she was about to die.

This woman was caught cheating on her spouse. We all agree that cheating is wrong. Cheating on a test can get you expelled. Cheating on your taxes can land you in jail. Cheating on your spouse can destroy a relationship or a family, and in the days of Jesus it was punishable by death.

We don't have all the details or the backstory of this woman, but what we do know is Jesus was teaching at the temple when the religious leaders and teachers brought a woman to him, and in front of everyone said,

Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?

The scripture goes on to say they were trying to trap him, but as Jesus always did, he flipped things upside down, and in a show of his own divinity he told them they were welcome to start stoning her as soon as they felt like they were without sin and did not deserve a stoning of their own. They dropped their rocks and walked away.

That is pretty dramatic. They must have known they were guilty of sin worthy of death or else they would have stuck around, don't you think?

Then Jesus asked the woman if there was anyone left to accuse her of her sin, she answered "No." And Jesus responded, *"Neither do I. Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."*

Keep in mind Jesus knew she would still sin, we all do. In essence he was saying: "Your sin almost got you killed. I love you too much to see you hurt yourself this way. Stop what you are doing and make better choices."

The message Jesus is giving us here is that this woman's mistake – her chapter of sinful adultery – did not define her life or make up the whole of her story. He did not condone the sin, but he knew everything about her and knew the sin was merely one chapter in a long life.

Jesus gave this woman the gospel – remember it means Good News – and helped her begin a fresh chapter in the story of her life.

Jesus has good news and he is good news

Jesus is the good news that each and every one of us needs – whether we've got small sins in our lives or big ones. Whether we've made some bad choices or whether we've been victims to other people's bad choices, Jesus is the good news that covers and heals it all.

Let's look at our Epic Story theme passage again, and read the first 5 verses together:

It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like

doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah (Eph. 2:1-5).

Jesus gave life to the woman caught in adultery. He redefined her story.

Jesus gave his life for you so you could be made alive in him. He defines your story. He defines your story on the good days when you're doing everything right, and he defines your story on the bad days, the hard days, the dark days when you just don't think you can go on.

Let's watch this scene from *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, where after an incredibly long and grueling journey, Frodo simply wants to give up. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdrOueZ3g2c>

Take note what Frodo's friend and travelling companion, Sam, says to him....

(The words will be on the screen, but we share the text for you to get the context.)

Frodo: *I can't do this, Sam.*

Sam: *I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding onto something.*

Frodo: *What are we holding onto, Sam?*

Sam: *That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo... and it's worth fighting for.*

There is some good in this world. And his name is Jesus. And what he is up to in this world – the work he is doing – is definitely worth fighting for.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we can't begin to express our gratitude for who you are (you are good!) and for what you've done (you laid down your life for each one of us). You came to us to show us the Father's heart. To make it so clear that you – Father, Son and Spirit – are for us, and not against us.

I pray you help us recognize the lies of the enemy and help us remember the truth – your truth – that our story matters because you created each one of us to be part of the Epic story. And I trust you that no matter how dark things may get, no matter how hard this chapter is that we might be in, you are the good news we can grab onto. A single chapter does not define our whole story; you define our story. And in that we take heart. Thank you, Jesus. In your most loving name we pray, Amen.

Debriefing Questions & Exercise

- 1) When you came to camp, did you believe you had a story? Did you believe you had a story worth telling?
- 2) After the last 3 chapels, has your opinion of your story changed?
- 3) Yesterday you did a timeline exercise during debriefing that identified 2 of the greatest days in your life, when one of the most hurtful things said to you happened, and 5 people who had a significant impact on your life. You also began developing your “Working Title.”

Today we are going to have you start identifying and naming the chapters in your story.

- Start by asking God to guide your thoughts as you do this exercise.
- Then think about all the seasons, sections, and times in your life that might be considered a “chapter” for you. There are no right or wrong answers. This is your story. No one else has your story. Your chapters might include some of the following:
 - **Baby stories:** Maybe you have an amazing birth story or a story about why you were given the name you have; maybe you were adopted.
 - **Different schools** you went to: preschool, elementary school, middle school, junior high School, high school, etc.
 - **Family dynamics:** Adding a new sibling to your family, moving to a new neighborhood, parents getting divorced or remarried, etc.
 - **Personal accomplishments:** Playing a sport, joining a club, giving a speech, passing a class, getting accepted to something you applied for, learning to drive, winning an award, etc.
 - **Friends / Mentors:** Times when significant people came into your life – friends, teachers, coaches, youth pastors, mentors, etc.
- Now on the Rough Draft Table of Contents page, start writing down some of these possible chapters. It doesn’t have to be perfect and it doesn’t have to be complete. This is the ‘Rough Draft’ version. You can scratch things out, add things, draw arrows or even draw pictures if you want. Later you can transfer your edited version onto the ‘Table of Contents’ page provided – but please know that you can still make edits at any time.

MY STORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS—ROUGH DRAFT



CHAPTER 1 -

CHAPTER 2 -

CHAPTER 3 -

CHAPTER 4 -

CHAPTER 5 -

CHAPTER 6 -

CHAPTER 7 -



CHAPTER 8 -

CHAPTER 9 -

CHAPTER 10 -

CHAPTER 11 -

CHAPTER 12 -

CHAPTER 13 -

CHAPTER 14 -

CHAPTER 15 -

CHAPTER 16 -



My Story Table of Contents

Chapter 1 -

Chapter 2 -

Chapter 3 -

Chapter 4 -

Chapter 5 -

Chapter 6 -

Chapter 7 -

Chapter 8 -

Chapter 9 -

Chapter 10 -

Chapter 11 -

Chapter 12 -

Chapter 13 -

Chapter 14 -

Chapter 15 -

Chapter 16 -

The Backstory

Do you know how far back your story goes and what that means for you today?

Chapel #4

Theme Scriptures.

John 17:24 "Father, I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am, so they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me, having loved me long before there ever was a world."

Ephesians 2:4-8 "Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role."

Introduction. Do you ever feel alone? Have you ever felt like no one “gets” you? Like no one understands your story? Do you sometimes get the sense that you are in this thing called life all by yourself? It's not unusual to have times of doubt, loneliness, or isolation. Especially if you have been abandoned at one time or another. Your life, your experience, your story may seem like it is disconnected from all others. You may feel alone right now, even while sitting in the midst of a lot of people. But as one famous poet put it, “no man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” In other words, we are all connected. And most importantly, no one's story sits outside of the grand story of God.

Yes, your story is unique and special. Yes, it is your story, but all of our stories are a part of the story God has been writing since the beginning of time. God's story is the backstory to your story. This backstory is common to us all, giving your life – your story – meaning and depth and truth and purpose.

Defining backstory

A backstory is like a prequel (the story or events that precedes the story). The backstory in a film or piece of literature is intended to give history, believability, a reference point and context to the plot of the story at hand. And your backstory is the grandest of them all.

Let me give you an example. In 1999, the Star Wars movie *Phantom Menace* was released. It was also known as Star Wars Episode 1. In 2002, Episode 2, *Attack of the Clones*, was released. *Revenge of the*

Sith, Episode 3, followed this in 2005. This year Episode 7, *The Force Awakens*, is being released. So what happened to Episodes 4, 5, and 6? Anyone know? They were released in 1977, 1980, and 1983. Your parents likely watched all three. So what does this have to do with a backstory?

The first movie, *Star Wars* – now called *A New Hope* – started with a lot of questions. What brought the world to this point? Who was Darth Vader and where did he come from? How did the Empire start and who were the rebels? We had to wait until 1999 – when Episode 1 – *Phantom Menace* – came out to start getting answers. Episodes 1-3 are the backstory. The series was a brilliant idea by George Lucas. Many of us waited 16 years to get the backstory. That's longer than some of you have been alive.

God's backstory – or prequel – is much more fascinating than George Lucas'. God's backstory – found in the Bible – shows that from the very beginning, God's intention has always been love, redemption, rescue and reconciliation. All of the stories in the Bible serve as the foundation, the fuel, the formation of your story. You may have never heard that before – you may have thought the Bible was simply God's story or Israel's story, or even an instruction book. But the Bible is God's backstory to help you see how precious and how important you are to God.

At various times in our lives we find ourselves asking some important questions. "Who am I really? Why am I here? Where will I find life? What does God want of me?" The incredible answers to these questions come only when we know the backstory – or as some might call it – the rest of the story. Knowing the backstory that leads to the start of your story helps you find your place, purpose, and part in the Epic story.

Our backstory

Many stories begin with, "Once upon a time, in a land far, far away..." or, "In a time long, long ago..." Your story, our story, God's story begins a little differently.

In a land far, far away, even before there was land... once upon a time, in a time long, long ago, even before time was measured, the Epic story began. In fact, your story is connected to a story that has always been and always will be. We know every great story has a beginning, but would you believe your story – the greatest love story of all time – is set with eternity as the back drop. That's hard to fathom, but it's true.

God has set eternity in your heart. Often we think of eternity only in going forward forever, but eternity is also back forever.

For example, when we think about "The beginning..." we often think of the front of the Bible and turn to Genesis, where we read.

First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared.

God saw that light was good and separated light from dark.

God named the light Day, he named the dark Night.

It was evening, it was morning—Day One.

And so on and so forth.

But Genesis isn't the beginning. When we look back on the story of God we need to look back before humans, before the earth, before anything. We have to start with John 1:1-5.

The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word.

The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one.

Everything was created through him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without him.

What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness; the darkness couldn't put it out.

Much happened prior to this life we humans are living, things you must understand. Something happened before our moment on this stage. Something came before us. Something preceded us. The backstory is vital to know because it means everything to us. Because that "something" is really someone!

John was peering back into the mystery of God's own life before anything else existed, and he was trying to unveil this so we could better understand. Before anything else, there was a fellowship, a heroic intimacy, something called the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – three in one amazingly perfect relationship. The Trinity isn't just a "thing" that was relational but the Trinity is the very essence of pure relationship. God – the Trinity – is a relationship. Father-Son-Spirit in the most loving, unified relationship you could ever imagine – in fact, much more than you could imagine.

And everything created was created out of that relationship. You were created out of that relationship. And as amazing as it may sound, you were created to be in that relationship. This is what you were created for. The heart of all things is a love relationship – a personality, a fellowship of hearts, a community, a Trinity. Your reality is relational to the core. The backstory is that God had you in mind all along.

The backstory – your story

You are made in the image and likeness of God, which is love and relationship.

Sure, there are times you feel like love has left you, like love has passed you over. But our feelings can disguise the truth. Feelings can lie to us. For example, when you were young and at the store and suddenly you couldn't see your mom, or dad, or sister and you felt scared and all alone, you weren't alone. You weren't abandoned. You just felt like it because your emotions took over.

Even when we feel like love has left us, it hasn't. Because love is God and God is love. You need to know love is real and you are loved. Love really does endure all things. A world of love has been planned for you and waits for you to recognize; it is something you can count on. Love is the backstory, the history behind our story. Love is the fuel for our future story. And love is here now, shaping your story today, and love's name is Jesus.

This reality of love existed before creation, it is the source of creation and one day it will put all creation back together. And it is never absent from the present, because Jesus is never absent from the present. In love, Jesus is right where he wants you. Love is the heart of the eternal story, the Epic story, and your story whether you know it or believe it. Note what Jesus said the night he was crucified...

Father, I want those you gave me to be with me, right where I am, so they can see my glory, the splendor you gave me, having loved me long before there ever was a world.

Righteous Father, the world has never known you, but I have known you, and these disciples know that you sent me on this mission.

I have made your very being known to them—who you are and what you do—and continue to make it known, so that your love for me might be in them exactly as I am in them (John 17:24-26).

The Father loved Jesus before time began. Jesus is with God and is at the heart of who God is – love. And Jesus longs for you to know where you belong, with him in that love. He says in John 15:9, *"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love."*

Similarly, in our theme text in Ephesians, we see what God has for you today, now, as the storyline for your life.

Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on his own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role (Eph. 2:4-8 MSG).

All the love in the universe – from the very beginning of the universe – is ready to fill your story. Trust him enough to let him do it. The most important part of our story is the role that he plays.

Prayer:

(Say a prayer in your own words here.)

Debriefing Questions

- 1) Do you think knowing the backstory is important and that it can influence your story? Explain how knowing and believing about God's love for you will shape or change your story?
- 4) Do you feel like love is present with you in your story? Do you feel like you are in the center of God's love? Why or why not?
- 5) What role is God playing in your story? A bit part, supporting actor, leading role, top billing, a minimum wage extra?

Reading the Epic Story Backwards

How does knowing the end of our story, affect how we live today? Chapel #5

"I used to be afraid of failing at something that really mattered to me, but now I am more afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter." – Bob Goff

Theme Scripture.

Ephesians 2:10, "He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."

Introduction. What great thing would you attempt if you knew you could not fail?

Fear is a paralyzing force. Fear of rejection, fear of failure, and fear of vulnerability are forces that prevent many people from jumping in and living out the epic story God has for them. It may be what is getting in your way. In our previous message we learned that our backstory is the greatest love story ever told. The Bible tells us perfect love casts out fear, so why do we allow fear to hold us back? It's because we are still getting to know the author of the story and the backstory. Because God's story of rescue and redemption is your backstory, let's look at how the backstory affects your story moving forward.

The end of your story is a victory

Jesus is the beginning and the ending of your story. In the Bible, the last book is called Revelation and it reminds us that the story is still continuing, that heaven will once again come down... permanently, and that all sadness and tears will be chased away forever. The story really doesn't have an ending; it has a new beginning. When we say yes to Jesus, we say yes to being a part of creating the continuation of his love story.

I love how it is phrased in the Jesus Storybook Bible. John 1:12-13 says.

For anyone who says yes to Jesus

For anyone who believes what Jesus said

For anyone who will just reach out to take it

Then God will give them this wonderful gift.

To be born into a whole new life

*To be who they really are
Who God always made them to be-
Their own true selves-
God's dear child.*

That's who you are – God's dear child. And the most amazingly wonderful thing about this story is that it is your story too! And it is your story because God is always saying yes to you.

Even in those times in your life when you say no to God, he says no to your no. In other words, he says, Nope, I love you too much to take that no answer for eternity. So I say no to your no, which is saying yes to you. Not because I'm forcing you to accept my love and be in the story, but because you are already in the story and I will never stop loving you. Jesus is God's yes to you, not only through his past actions, but by the fact that he is with you always – even when you don't feel or know his presence.

"Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus. In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God's Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

When we say yes to God, we say yes to leverage our interests, gifts, and whole person to be part of something bigger. When we say yes to God, we say yes to an adventure!

Merging your story with his

Let me read this quote to you.

All the great stories pretty much follow the same storyline. Things were once good, then something awful happened, and now a great battle must be fought or a journey taken. At just the right moment (which feels like the last possible moment), a hero comes and sets things right, and life is found again. – J. Eldridge

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection things have been set right. Life has been found again. However, we live in the tension of the already and not yet. While the finished work of the cross has given us victory over death (the already), we are still waiting on Jesus' return to experience the eternity that has been written in our hearts (the not yet).

As a result of the tension and brokenness we see and live in, it is easy to try and satisfy the longings of our heart by mimicking the culture that surrounds us and striving to build a kingdom of our own. We can be blinded by our circumstances and forget the bigger story, and fall into a story that is so much smaller and will not satisfy the longings written on our hearts. In the face of the culture's pressure we

may even develop habits and practices as ways of coping but such “coping mechanisms” only give temporary relief.

So let me rephrase the question I asked at the beginning. How would you live differently if you believed that your backstory was true – that you were created for your own Epic story fueled by God’s unending love?

The only way to break free of the tension you face is to turn your eyes to Jesus, who is the beginning and end of your story, whose life, death, and resurrection gives you victory in your own story. Continually remind yourself you are part of his story. Hebrews 12:2-3 says this.

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way. Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

Developing a life rhythm of positioning yourself before God helps you “keep your eyes on Jesus” when you are tempted to be distracted by the trappings of this world. Disciplines like reading about Jesus in regular Bible reading, thinking about what you read (meditation), and talking about what you read (engaging in small group communities) allow you to know Jesus, and the way he is God’s eternal yes to you. The sacrament of communion is a wonderful reminder of the finished work of the cross and the resulting victory in your life. It helps you to hear a sort of “proactive echo” of the big yes that you will hear when Jesus returns.

And now to him who can keep you on your feet, standing tall in his bright presence, fresh and celebrating—to our one God, our only Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Master, be glory, majesty, strength, and rule before all time, and now, and to the end of all time. Yes (Jude 24).

Taking the time to look to Jesus through prayers and sacraments helps you form your imaginations, and opens up your heart and mind to fathom that your story is part of God’s Epic story.

Your role in the Epic story

When we don’t see ourselves as part of the bigger story, or we believe the lie that God is holding out on us, the tendency is to try to write our own story. This story becomes all about me! We think we are building our own castle, but without God we are actually building a prison. The pressure of holding our own kingdom in order is too much for any one of us, and our coping mechanisms eventually crack

under the pressure. God's love is so big it gives us the freedom to choose, but when we choose our own small story we choose a life that will not satisfy the desires of our hearts. We literally miss out on the adventure God has prepared for us. It's important to remind ourselves that there are two stories playing around us, the one we see and the bigger story; and the bigger story is far more exciting, far more real, and far more satisfying than the one with just me.

Like many great stories, in the midst of this great love story God has invited you to be part of, there is a battle for your heart. The battle is waged between your "me" story, and your "us" story. The "us" being the bigger story with you and Jesus and others. And keep in mind, being a part of the bigger story isn't about knowing all the right stuff or following a list of rules, it's something more – much more. It involves being aware of the presence of Jesus and being present with him. It's also about making a sacrifice. Jesus is called "Emmanuel," God with us– Jesus is present with us and that's what he calls you to in the life of other people – to be with them, to be present in their lives. This can be costly because sometimes being present for others causes pain – especially as others are coming to terms with their own stories.

Here's the key: woven into the fabric of your being is the gospel – the Good News – and knowing the gospel is the larger story helps you figure out this life you are living. Knowing the gospel helps you say yes – on a daily basis. Saying yes is a call to share the love and compassion he has given to you. Saying yes is weaving your backstory (his story) into your present story. Whenever you say yes to communion with him, it leads to a yes to a commission to be empathetic to the people around you as you share his love. As our theme scripture says: *"He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing"* (Ephesians 2:10).

The invitation God offers you is relationship – relationship with him and with his children. When you commune with God, he rubs off on you and your heart becomes more like his. You start to have more compassion for the people around you. Just like Jesus' movement from heaven and his entrance into our world changed the ending of your story, his love fuels you with compassion to move and enter the stories of the people around you.

Weaving your story with God's Epic story, and the stories of the people he has placed in your life will drastically shift the trajectory of your story. This is another reason why saying yes is a practice and not an event. When you say yes to something, you are inevitably saying no to something else. The new outward movement of your life may cause you to say no to some things that you used to say yes to. Just as Jesus' ultimate yes was his prayer from the cross, "not my will but yours be done," your yes is also a yes of surrender and trust, knowing that what God has for you is always better than any story you could

dream up for yourself. So when you ask yourself the question, “What is most life-giving to me?”, it often helps clarify the areas of your life where you are being called to say yes.

Since God’s heart is for people, his love is made to freely flow, and you will often be energized by engaging with the world around you. An example of how this movement brings life is the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea received its name because it supports no life forms. Life cannot thrive there because the water enters through tributaries but because of its placement, no water ever flows out. The water is stagnant and the minerals that flow in never leave causing the salt level to be too high to support life. The same phenomenon occurs in our lives when we try to love God in isolation, we become stagnant and once again begin to look to write our own smaller stories. However, when you make the practice of saying yes to God, his love flows from you to others bringing growth and healing, both to you and to them.

Prayer:

Here is a different way to look at prayer. Just talk to God and say the following:

Living God I feel you are offering me...

(What do you feel God wants to give you? To what do you want to be receptive?)

I say yes. Living God, I believe you are asking me...

(What requests, invitations, or promptings do you feel arising in your soul?)

I say yes. Living God, I offer myself to you.

(Describe what it means for you to surrender yourself to God.)

Debriefing Questions

1. What in your life is most life giving to you? When do you feel most energized? What do you most look forward to?
2. What do you need to take a step toward Jesus today? What are you being called to say “yes” to? Is there anything that you feel you need to say no to, in order to respond to God?

Writing the Next Chapter of Your Story

Are you ready to retell your Epic story?

Chapel #6

“There is no greater story than bearing an untold story inside you.” – Maya Angelou

Theme Scripture.

*Ephesians 2:7-10 (MSG) “Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. **He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.**”*

Introduction. In yesterday’s chapel we looked at telling this Epic story backwards. In spite of pressure from our culture and our peers, we were reminded that the backstory is true and that we were created for our own epic adventure fueled by God’s unending love.

Throughout the camp chapels this week you have learned (or been reminded) that your epic story explodes from your identity as a child of the triune God. Out of that loving and trusting relationship, you are set to live out this epic adventure with hope and abundance. Our goal has been to help you tell your story with the knowledge it is a lot bigger than you ever imagined. Knowing that God firmly inserted himself into the beginning, middle and end of your story changes the fabric of your story.

So we pose a question: what is your next chapter going to look like?

How we see life today

We live in a culture that bombards us with constant communication and visual/audio stimulation. If we are not in sync with God we can easily lose sight of the world as he sees it. Without knowing the backstory, we simply see life through our human eyes. We miss the greater narrative because of all the sub-stories and distractions around us. Knowing the backstory helps us see God has more in store for us – so our goal is to help you learn to look at life, to look at your story, through godly lenses.

Imagine that you and your friends have just settled into a theater to watch the final installment of the Hobbit trilogy, *The Battle of the Five Armies*. You make your way through all the previews and wait with

heightened anticipation as the movie begins. It is at that very moment that you notice everyone else in the theater is putting on 3-D glasses. You panic because you thought you were in a 2-D showing of the movie. You hurry outside to find a movie attendant, only to discover that there are no more 3-D glasses. Dejectedly, you go back into the theater to rejoin your friends. As the movie progresses, you can hear the dialogue, music and sound effects, but try as you may, you can't make complete sense of what you are seeing on the screen. The story has lost its impact. You are distracted and are even starting to get a headache. Eventually, you lose the focus of the film. The excitement and passion are lost, and in the end, you can't even imagine that Bilbo Baggins would want to complete the journey and you wonder if the quest was truly worth Fili and Kili fighting until their deaths.

Your life story without the backstory is like that. It's easy to muddle through our daily lives and lose focus. You struggle to have a clear picture of the purpose for your life because you are only seeing things through human eyes. Soon you likely start to wonder if you are making any difference at all in life, or if it even matters.

Knowing the Good News reminds us to put on our 3-D Jesus glasses so we can look at life through his lenses and see life from his perspective. When you do this the world explodes before your eyes – in an exciting and very good way. It makes you want to allow for him to live in you and through you – so you get the most out of the life (and story) he has in mind for you. And this gets you excited for the next chapter in your story.

How Jesus sees your life

Here's an interesting quote.

I was watching the movie Star Wars recently and wondered what made that movie so good. Of course, there are thousands of reasons. But I also noticed that if I paused the DVD on any frame, I could point toward any major character and say exactly what that person wanted. No person had vague ambition. It made me wonder if the reasons our lives seem so muddled is because we keep walking into scenes in which we, along with the people around us, have no clear idea what we want.. – Donald Miller, A Million Miles in a Thousand Years

Could the story in your life be echoed in that quote from Donald Miller? God looks into your life and knows exactly where you are. He knows all the intricate parts of your story and he knows what is currently defining you as one of his beloved children. He knows your backstory; he knows your future story and he is ever present in you now. The question is this: Are you ready to move beyond "vague ambition" and prepare for greatness? Because greatness is what God wants for you. Not greatness as we might define it, but greatness because you are intimately connected to him.

We shared this Epic Story curriculum with you because we want you to be ready to say “yes” to living every day as his son or daughter. Not for us, but so you can have the most out of the life he desperately wants to share with you. He wants to be with you and help you make the hard choices and do the right things every hour of every day, even when it is tough. And he wants you to know he will always be there when you stumble – because we all stumble.

So again we ask: Are you ready to have Jesus as part of your story? If so, let’s write the next chapter!

But first let me make one more important point. God’s love is the framework for the purpose of your life, but he is not interested in replacing your story with his story. No, he wants to be part of your story. Then when you tell your story with God in it, your story will become even more amazing.

I know because my story, _____insert speaker’s name here_____’s, is great because of how God’s overflowing and generous love frames me. It’s great because God has called me by name to share that Epic tale of love, to share it in word and in deed.

In an interview with *Leadership Journal*, Mike Cospers, Pastor of Worship and Arts at Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, KY, put it this way:

In preaching [or living out] the Gospel, we have the opportunity to help people see their stories through the lenses of God’s story – Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation [speaker should explain consummation or say something like “being made perfect”]. “I was meant for a perfect world, but born fallen and condemned by my sins. By God’s grace, Jesus saves me. He sends me on His mission, and one day He’ll return to make all things new.”

I love how Mike finishes this off... [...pause...],

*“The Gospel doesn’t erase our stories; it **illuminates them and promises a happy ending.**”*

Let me say that again, the Gospel illuminates your story and promises a happy ending.

How profound is that? The personal aspects of your story are not pushed aside by including God in the narrative. Rather, with God in it your place in the story is brightly illuminated and bursts onto the scene like a spotlight in a darkened theatre.

Camper activity:

(Darken the hall or just talk about the dark if it is not possible to make the hall dark. Talk about how it feels to be in the dark. Cold? Lost? Scared? What else? Contrast that to how it feels being in the crisp sunlight of a spring day. If you have access to them, crack open some glow sticks.

Pass out glow sticks to each of the campers. If you have a spotlight, ask for a volunteer(s) to stand in front of the spotlight. If no spotlight is available, have the volunteer(s) stand on stage. Ask the volunteer(s) what they would say to this group around them if the spotlight were on them. What would they say about their story with the better understanding of how God is fully inserted into it? If the lights are down, bring them up and briefly talk about how the room feels now in comparison to when it was dark.)

As we have learned through this week's chapel messages, great stories have things in common and almost all of them will involve adversity. Along your journey, you will certainly encounter a Big Bad Wolf, a dragon, an Evil Witch, a Sith Lord or even the evil political powers of the Capitol as faced by Katniss Everdeen. But you are never on the journey alone. That's the backstory – that's the gospel. God is taking the journey with you and he will help you do great things in spite of the challenges.

With God inserted into your story, it is still OK to be fearful. But he will help you not stay fearful. We call that trust and faith.

So here's the question again: what will your next chapter be like? Are you up for playing a critical role in this Epic story?

(Play the following clip of Gandalf saying Bilbo Baggins, the Hobbit, the Halfling, brings the wizard courage.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VAF1YThcbc>

Or use this clip if you want to have the words to follow the video/audio tracks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbqnBBBeWNI>

Let God be in the next chapter of your story

Your Epic story comes down to this: God wants you to understand the essence of who he is – love – and he has lavishly shared that love with you. Your identity is firmly in him because you already are one of his chosen children. No matter what happens, that is who you are. And out of that father/child relationship you can live and share your story with hope. Yes, there are occasions when life will be difficult – sometimes extremely tough – but with Jesus by your side and intimately involved in your story, there is absolutely nothing you cannot overcome.

(Consider reading what Paul wrote in his Epistle to the church in Ephesus.)

My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a

glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you’ll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ’s love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God”
(Ephesians 3:14–19).

This is what God wants for you. He wants to be in your next chapter.

What will your next chapter look like with God helping develop your story?

Toward the end of his book *EPIC: the story God is telling*, John Eldridge writes this:

We have reached the moment where we, too, must find our courage and rise up to recover our hearts and fight for the hearts of others... Jesus calls you to be his intimate ally once more. There are great things to be done and great sacrifices to be made. You won’t lose heart if you really know what is going on here.

And here’s the really cool thing. Jesus invites you to be part of the Epic story not just for you and your life, but because he wants you to experience the joy in participating in what he is doing – sharing his love and his life with others. You have been created to make a difference in this crazy, mixed up world. And you have the ability to be absolutely amazing in this quest.

“He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do” Ephesians 2:10.

(At this point, consider playing one of the following clips☺)

For senior campers who may be familiar with the work of Robin Williams, this clip (two minutes) from *The Dead Poets Society* is from where his character, John Keating, implores them that they can make a difference. He says “words and ideas can change the world!” And then he goes on to explain and challenge the students with this: “You can contribute a verse” to this great dance of life. What will your verse be?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omveFR-2hmg>

We ask the question: What will your next chapter be?

For Junior or senior campers, you could play this motivational clip of Kid President (3.5 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-gQLqv9f4o>

As we leave camp and turn the page, what will your next chapter say? What will it be about? Are you going to leave this camp experience behind you, or are you going to use it to help you make a difference? God has prepared you for this moment, and for all future moments. What are you going to do with them? You can continue to let your life be marginalized by peer pressure, by culture and by the temptations of the dark side. Or you can live every day and live every moment knowing your awesome God unconditionally loves you. You are his child and he believes in you. He has called you by name and he wants you to do great things. Great everyday things!

Let's start writing your next chapter with your triune God firmly in the middle with you!

Prayer:

Close with prayer of thanksgiving and words of affirmation

Debrief Exercises

- 1) Let's pretend we are in July 2016. Tell me about your story over the last year. What are some of the best events/details in that yearlong journey? After leaving camp this week, what things did you specifically decide to do so that those events/details could come to pass over the next year?
- 2) Talk about a time when you felt successful before you fully understood how much God was involved in your life. Now, describe a time you felt successful when you more clearly understood God's love and His place in your day-to-day life.

Compare those two times. What is different, and what are some similarities?

If you use this chapel message and have one night left in the dorms, consider using this debrief question on the last night.

- 3) For senior campers, have them rehearse telling their story or parts of their story. How would they tell that story to a friend at school, a neighbor or a cousin? How does God being in that story, right alongside you, make it Epic?