



## Reading Biblical Narrative<sup>1</sup>

### Overview:

This series will focus on how we got the Bible, why we can trust it, and what's most important as we study, interpret, and apply what we read. While the series will be topical in nature, our weekly discussion and reflection guides will each center around a *genre* of scripture...each one a unique type of literature to be read and understood in a unique way.

God chose to communicate eternal truths through events within the flow of history. Because of this, God can use these words to speak again in our own time, and within our historical particularity. Knowing what genre is used in each Biblical text helps us to understand the author's intent and manage expectations about **what** and **how** a text and its author are trying to communicate. In daily life, readers switch easily between various types of literature – most don't, for example, read *The New York Times* in the same way they would read *Lord of the Rings*.

As you learn about each genre, we'll provide sample texts that illustrate some of the uniquenesses about that genre. We hope this study helps you go deeper in your bible study skills and provides helpful context and application for the broader topics discussed in the sermon series.

### Group Objectives:

***Relationships and Life Transformation are the primary purpose of community groups.***

- Reflect on this week's texts and other devotional reading.
- Pray together and provide encouragement for other group members.
- Practice reading and interpreting narrative accounts in the Bible.

### DNA statement(s) tie-in:

- *We encounter the Father daily.* God the Father speaks to us through the Bible, and we commune with him through prayer.

### Conversation Starters:

- What stories have been influential in your life?
- What stood out to you from this week's sermon?

### Listening to God

- Where did you see God at work last week? How were you able to join him?

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<sup>1</sup> This discussion guide was written by Cameron Booze and Karl Pagenkemper and edited by Dawn Gentry.

## Learning about God's word: Narrative

The Bible contains more literature called “narrative” than any other genre. Narrative is characterized by sequential action and includes plot, setting, and characters. The meaning of most stories typically derives from the experiences of their characters. In many Biblical narratives, the primary character or hero of the story is God's own self – the ultimate hero of the “big story” of the Bible.

Narratives are highly selective and focus on what best serves the author's themes. When God wanted us to see his faithfulness and provision, he didn't just tell us about it – he gave us the story of Abraham to illustrate it. In this regard, narratives may teach in an indirect fashion. They may not answer all our questions, but they will illustrate a truth that God wants God's people to know.

Some grand narratives focus on all humanity (creation and fall). Others recount stories of God's people over time (slavery in Egypt, conquests, kings, exile). Sometimes individual stories combine elements of both (Joseph, Gideon, Ruth, etc). Stories fire our imagination and invite us to join God's grand story through history. While the Bible is not about you or me, it does speak to us all.

## Learning from God's Word: Bible Study Discussion

*At the beginning of the book of Exodus, the Israelites have been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. The Egyptians are cruel taskmasters and have enslaved the Israelites out of a fear of being overthrown. In a horrible act of power, Pharaoh commands that all Israelite boys be killed at birth to prevent the nation of Israel from growing. One boy, named Moses, is saved from this evil command and, through the God's provision, is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal courts.*

*Seeing an Egyptian beating an Israelite, Moses kills the Egyptian and hides the body only to be shunned by both the Israelites and the Egyptians. After fleeing the consequences of the murder, Moses comes face-to-face with God through the flames of a burning bush. God had heard the cries of his people and now he would work through Moses to rescue them from the hands of Pharaoh and judge the Egyptian gods. Moses returns to Egypt and asks Pharaoh to let the Israelite people go, but Pharaoh refuses. God then sends a series of ten plagues in judgment against the Egyptian gods. Our story picks up just before the final plague begins.*

- **Read Exodus 12:1-15:21**
  - What do you notice about the plot? How are the characters described in this section? How is God described in this section?
  - Now, as a group, summarize what is happening in your own words.
  - This is a story of victory and rescue. In what ways are you crying out for Jesus to rescue you? In what ways has Jesus already rescued you?
- **Read Exodus 15:22-20:21**
  - What do you notice about the plot and characters? What do you notice about God?
  - How does this part of the narrative build on the previous section?
  - Now, as a group, summarize what is happening in your own words.
  - This is a story of covenant (or commitment). Have you committed to following Jesus in your life? What are some commitments that Jesus makes to us?

### **Leaning into Obedience:**

- Take a faith-filled risk. This could be volunteering at a non-profit, talking to someone at a coffee shop, going back to school, or following the Holy Spirit in countless other ways. Moses took many faith-filled risks, and these enabled him to know God as a friend.
- Care for the weak, sick, poor, and oppressed people in our city. As we saw in the story of the exodus, God cares for the poor and powerless people in our communities. When we commit to following God, we commit to living like Jesus did. Pray about how God would have you care for the people around you. Maybe you can take someone a meal, visit someone in a hospital or prison, or show Jesus' love to a refugee family in our city.
- Study the New Covenant. Just before Jesus was arrested by the religious leaders, he celebrated Passover with his disciples. During their Passover meal, Jesus explains to them that he is creating a new covenant with them. Read John 14-17 where Jesus explains what this new covenant looks like for those who follow Jesus.

### **Prayer Prompts:**

- Invite members of the group to share requests.
- Reflect on and thank God for any victories or stories of God's faithfulness.
- Now spend a few minutes asking the Holy Spirit how he would have you respond to today's lesson.

### **For further study:**

- See our online resource, a **Reading Guide on *Ruth***, to go deeper studying another example of Biblical narrative.
- Jeffrey & Maillet, *Christianity and Literature: Philosophical Foundations and Critical Practice*. (IVP, 2011)
- O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*. (Johns Hopkins, 2005)
- Wright, NT. *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (HarperOne, 2014)
- The Bible Project
  - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/category/how-to-read-bible-introduction/>
  - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/category/how-to-read-biblical-narrative/>
  - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/literary-styles-bible/>