

The Story of EVERYTHING

Big Idea Discussion Guide / Session 1 - God

Series Introduction

Our lives are all part of a story—the greatest story ever written. It's a story that is still being written. It started before time began, and it will continue on forever and ever, long into eternity.

This is *The Story of Everything*. It is a true story. It is not simply doctrine or theology, but rather the backbone of our lives. It is a spiritual story that explains what we as Christ-followers believe and why we believe it.

The *Story of Everything* is not just a proposition or theory, but rather it explains how the spirituality we discover in the Bible (God's word to us) affects every part of our human existence.

Session 1 - God

Big Idea: God is relational to his very core. God is love; He created the world and each person in it out of love in order to love and be loved, and his deep desire is to have a personal relationship with each one of us.

Ice Breaker

What are your very first memories of life as a child?

Key Scripture

"In the beginning, God..." (Genesis 1:1)

"In the beginning was the Word..." (John 1:1)

The *Story of Everything* starts just where it should—in the beginning. In fact, the words used in Genesis 1 refer to a moment before the beginning of time as we know it: Genesis 1 explains where everything comes from. We believe everything originates with God.

John writes in his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." (John 1:1) God, described here as "the Word," has always been. He is the originator and focal point of the story. In a recent survey, less than 5% of Americans deny the existence of some sort of god. However, beliefs vary as to the nature of that god.

1. What three words would you use to best describe God? What words or phrases have you heard others use to describe God?

God Exists in Community

So what is the God like that Christ-followers believe in? "...the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." -Genesis 1:2
"...and the Word was God." - John 1:1
"...And God said 'Let us make man in our own image.'" - Genesis 1:26

God is described as "Spirit" and "Word," and is referred to in the first person plural form "our" in these verses. The Hebrew word "Elohim" used throughout scripture is a plural noun. This gives uniqueness to Christian theology in that we describe the Trinity, a one-in-three, three-in-one God.

NT Wright in *Simply Christian* said, "Only the Christian tradition, out of the great monotheistic faiths, has explored in any detail the belief that the Creator Himself contains within himself a multiple relationship."

2. How would you describe the Trinity? What helpful metaphors/analogies, if any, have you heard used to describe it?

While it may be easy to get bogged down in the logic of 1=3=1, Christ-followers will do well to understand the underlying principle of God as a trinity.

The *Story of Everything* starts with God in existence before the beginning of time, not alone, but in community. *This means that at the core of reality is a community of persons.* Therefore, for the members of that community, the point of existence has always been each other. This is a revolutionary idea that can impact every area of the Christ-follower's life. The story becomes a relational story.

God Has Wired Us Up to Live in Community

The creation of man in the first chapters of the Bible flows out of the community that is God. Creation is grounded in relationships. It is a reflection of God himself.

Tim Keller put it this way in his book *The Reason for God*:

"Christianity, alone among the world faiths, teaches that God is triune. The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one being who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son

and Holy Spirit. The Trinity means that God is, in essence relational. The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centeredness but by mutual self-giving love."

Many of us have been raised with the premise, "life is about getting what I want for me and mine." When this changes to the idea that life is about loving God and loving people, our whole reason for living is turned upside-down. A "me-and-mine" lifestyle is doomed because the measure of success or failure is based on the accumulation of wealth and honor. We are overwhelmed or underwhelmed, fantastically happy or bored and discouraged, and we are constantly waiting for the next high or low. However, if we change the focus of our lives to be on **relationships**, both with God and others, then hanging onto what we have is no longer important, and instead we can enjoy living life in community.

3. How would you describe your "reason for living?" What events in your life have shaped it? Is it bringing you the satisfaction you are looking for?

God is Love

"God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:8-10) God is love. It's not what he does, it's who he is. In John 10:10, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life and have it to the fullest."

4. Sometimes people think that life with God is one that is less joyful and fulfilling, yet Jesus claims that He came to give us life "to the fullest." What do you think He meant? Has following God made any sort of impact on your life?

God's Desire For Us

God has a dream for us. Life began with everything in wholeness and harmony. The Bible describes this as "Shalom," meaning everything as it is supposed to be. Our relationship with God and our relationships with each other were unbroken. Then sin showed up and fragmented this perfection. Truly, "all hell broke loose." ***It is God's dream that perfection will be restored.*** We believe that Jesus is actively working to restore God's dream for the world.

5. Do you have a dream for the future of your life? Does the idea of God having a dream for your life mean anything to you? Could the two dreams coincide?

God's Love For Us

The book of Hosea is a picture of God's love for us. God told Hosea to take Gomer as his wife even though he knew her to be a prostitute, incapable of fidelity. Even after they were married and had children, Gomer continued her immoral lifestyle while Hosea pursued her until he finally bought her back from her latest lover and they were reconciled.

In the same way, while we continue to rebel against the God who made us, He pursues us. He never stops coming after us. He is waiting to restore the original, deep, and personal relationship that initially existed between God and human beings before sin entered into the world. God is not a force to be reckoned with, or an authority figure to be dealt with, or even someone just to leverage with in time of need. He loves us and wants to be included in every part of our lives. *The Story of Everything* is essentially a story of love, a love that flows from and back to the God who always is, always was, and always *will* be love.

6. It can be easy to relate to God in so many inaccurate ways: a judge to fear, an authority figure to be reckoned with, a wealthy parent to get stuff from whenever we need it, etc. What can we do to get to know the true God and learn how to relate to Him in the way He wants for us?

What's Next

Take time to reflect on the following questions:

- Will I be open to the idea of a God who made me and who desires to be in community with me?
- Am I consciously aware of God as I go about my day?
- How would my life be different if I were more aware of God? What can I do throughout my day to become more aware of his presence?
- What would it look like if I were to join others in the work of restoring God's dream for the world?
- What changes would I need to make in my life in order to more intentionally engage in God's purpose for me to live in community?
- Take some time this week to think about these challenges and make a journal entry outlining your thoughts.

Welcome to The Story of Everything!

We are excited that this series at COMMUNITY will give your group the opportunity to:

1. Help people find their way back to God by engaging and clarifying core beliefs.
2. Realize the importance of "community" and how it is central to how we live out our faith.
3. Understand how The Story of Everything intersects with every area of our lives.
4. Allow people a safe place to ask questions about spirituality and life.
5. Encourage individuals to take their next steps in living out their faith in the context of community.

How to utilize the tools for The Story of Everything

We have provided three tools to help your group get the most out of this series:

1. **The Videocast Teaching.** Each week we record the weekend teaching so that groups and individuals can watch the video during the week or share it with their friends. This will be a great way for group members to engage with the discussion content, whether they have been to church over the weekend or have never been to church at all.
2. **Small Group Vignette.** This short video can be used during your group time to set the stage for your small group discussion times. The idea is not for the vignette to replace the videocast teaching, but to remind and clarify key points for your group's discussion.
3. **Discussion Guide.** The discussion guide is written so that members of the group can prepare for the discussion ahead of time if they like and follow along with group questions. The discussion guide includes next step questions that you can use with your group to encourage individuals to go deeper throughout the week with their own reflection.

As a leader, you will have the opportunity to ask what we believe to be very profound questions in your group time during this series. We believe that wrestling through these questions in a safe place will give members

of your group the opportunity to clarify what they believe. As a leader, give room for people to wrestle and explore. It will take patience for some leaders to avoid telling people what to believe. Rather, let's focus on how we can go deeper in our understanding of God during this series. Remember Jesus' words of, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life..." That means, Jesus is the truth, and truth is a person. Thus, truth is relational and nobody has a corner on him! We will all continue to grow in our understanding of truth as we relate to Jesus. Whenever we explore and discuss doctrinal topics, we must be careful that we aren't theologically correct and relationally wrong. Therefore, help guide your group's discussion so that relationships are strengthened during this series. The last thing we want is to have doctrinal arguments that derail a community from living out the Jesus mission.

Key Moments As A Leader You Won't Want To Miss

March 1 - 2 / 25th Anniversary. This weekend will also be an all-church baptism weekend. If there are people you know that are contemplating baptism, make sure to allow them time to talk about this, whether it's one-on-one or during the group discussion.

February 1 / All Campus Leadership Community
We will also celebrate 25 years as a church during our February 1 leadership community with two very special guests. Invite your apprentice or potential apprentice as we celebrate our new leaders with Eric Bramlett's latest New Leader Song!

Icebreaker: a great way to warm-up a group for discussion and get people sharing

1. Others" includes everybody, Christian or not.
2. Some might want to correct potentially incorrect ideas of the Trinity for theological correctness. While it is important to understand the Trinity, remember that the point of the Trinity is that God lives in Community. Point people back to that idea so you don't get lost in all the details.
3. Here is where we begin to intersect *The Story of Everything* with our lives. While the question may seem to veer away from God, the question ultimately reveals what we believe about God, life, and the purpose for living.
4. This is a great chance for people to celebrate the growth they have seen in their lives. Encourage people after they share to write these things down and email them to you as a leader because this is one of the reasons we lead small groups! You can never have too many stories like this to encourage you as a leader. Consider having the members of your group share what impactful moment they may have written down during the weekend service.
5. God certainly has a dream for restoring the world, and it includes incorporating the infinitely unique dreams that he has placed within his people. How exciting it is to consider that when we live out the dreams that God has given us, it contributes to God's work of restoring the world!
6. We believe the Bible is the best way to grow in our understanding of who God is. Encourage your group to read the Bible for themselves to grow in their understanding of God.

What's Next

Take some time this week to think about these challenges and make a journal entry outlining your thoughts.

Community Christian Church

Written by John Wentz, Dave Allendorph, Chris Chrisman and Angela Born

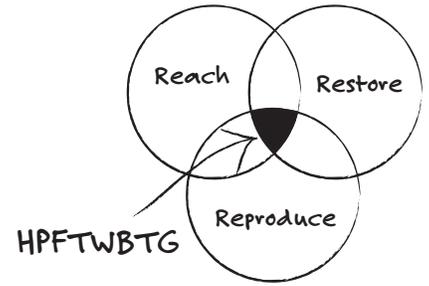
Small Group Mission

Helping People Find Their Way Back to God



Missional Practices: B.L.E.S.S.

- B - Begin with prayer:** We will pray for the people or place to which we are sent.
- L - Listen:** We will listen to the people or place to which we are sent.
- E - Eat:** We will share meals with those to whom we are sent.
- S - Serve:** We will respond to the needs we discover among those to whom we are sent.
- S - Story:** We will share the story of Jesus and what he is doing in our lives with those to whom we are sent.



Type of Small Group On Mission

- One Mission:** The entire small group commits to going after the same mission. This can be a new idea originating from the group, or it can involve plugging into an existing ministry or program in the community.

The place or people our group has been sent to is:

- Multiple Missions:** Each member of the group has a specific mission they are following God in. The group provides a place to celebrate individual stories, wrestle through questions and challenges and provide support and encouragement.

The place or people our group members have been sent to is:

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Group Dynamics

- Confidentiality: Everything shared in group stays in the group.
- Participation: Everyone participates in our discussions and our mission.
- Empty Chair: We always keep an "empty chair" as a sign of our openness to new people joining us.

Group Leadership

Coach _____

Leader _____

Apprentice Leader _____

Host _____