

The Story of EVERYTHING

Big Idea Discussion Guide / Session 6 - Never Ending Story

Big Idea

The final chapter of the story is when “Time as we know it” comes to an end at the second coming of Jesus. This is the point in the story where each person’s story becomes never-ending, leading to an eternity with Jesus or without Him.

Icebreaker

What is one of your favorite movie endings (one you can watch over and over and never get tired of)? What is it about the ending that you love?

The Story of Everything started with God and His created reality in a harmonious oneness. This relationship was broken by sin. The story will end in the future when perfection is restored. The beginning and the end will come together as the community of oneness with God comes to a glorious, full expression and existence.

1. In the past, how have you imagined eternity? What experiences or teachings have influenced your thoughts?

The never-ending story is the final chapter in our story. It explains what will happen after Jesus returns. It talks of Heaven and Hell. Though we do not know all the answers about what the final chapter of time will look like (and couldn’t comprehend them all anyway), let’s examine what God does reveal to us about this through His Word:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”” (Revelation 21:1-4)

Scripture teaches that Heaven will come to us. At the end of time as we know it, the earth will be recreated. Heaven and earth will be reunited and God will once again live with mankind. All pain and suffering will cease. We believe there will be a bodily resurrection in the same way that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. We know that Jesus could be seen and touched, His wounds were still visible, and yet He wasn’t bound by the laws of physics.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Great Divorce*, described our new bodies that we will receive in this new era as “more solid, more real, and more substantial” than our present bodies. He meant that they will be more consistent with God’s original intent. They will not be subject to disease, deterioration, decay, or suffering. They will represent the ultimate restoration of God’s creative reality that existed in the first chapter of our story. We will not be sitting around on the new earth.

The Bible says we will be “reigning with God.” We will have the responsibility of stewarding God’s creation. There is continuity between God’s original creation and His final creation. At this time God’s story comes to fulfillment. God’s dream returns to where it began and will continue on into eternity.

The first chapters of Genesis come full circle in the last chapters of Revelation. The perfect garden community in Genesis is restored as the perfect city community in Revelation. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard describes it this way,

“The aim of God in history is the formation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant.”

Heaven is the ultimate restoration of God’s perfect community.

2. Life in heaven is described in Revelation in various ways (e.g. “a recreated earth,” “new bodies,” “responsibility of stewarding God’s creation”). How do you feel when you think about Heaven in this way?

But what about hell? We believe hell is a reality. The Bible does not say a lot about it, but we do know that Hell is real, it is really bad, and it is really final. People have many misconceptions

about hell. It is thought of as the place where God sends people who don't do what He wants them to do, an abyss where people are sent screaming to their end, while God looks on and tells them they blew it.

3. How do you picture hell? Who do you think should be there?

C.S. Lewis said, "Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom". Tim Keller, in his book, *The Reason For God* wrote, "Hell, then is the trajectory of a soul, living a self-centered life going on forever and ever."

We need to remember what we have already learned about the relational nature of sin. If we use our freedom to pursue other things, we put a distance between God and ourselves. We understand that hell is a self-chosen trajectory. It is not God's plan for anyone to end up there.

"The Lord is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone would come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9)

4. If God really doesn't want anyone to spend their eternity in Hell, why do you think people end up there?

We read in Revelation 20:15,

"Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Does this mean that God sends people to hell? It would be more accurate to understand this verse in terms of a Judo contest where the best practitioners know that successful throws are really an extension of the opponent's loss of balance. Anyone "cast into the lake" was already headed in that direction as a result of his own actions. Hell is not the punishment for making the wrong choice: Hell is the culmination and fulfillment of the choice we have made in this life. If we choose to center our life on God, then we will be with Him forever. We will be part of The Story of Everything that never ends. The community of loving persons with God as its Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant will be how the story never ends.

5. How can having an increased awareness of eternity affect your present day-to-day life?

What's Next

What we believe about heaven and hell will impact the way we live our lives here and now. When we understand God's dream for us, we realize that we were created by love, for love, to love. We can experience the beginning of our forever life in this world.

You have heard the truth. You know the choices set before you. If you have chosen to enter into a relationship with Christ, what will you do to help other people enter into that relationship? What will be the next chapter in your spiritual story?

This week we celebrate 25 years at COMMUNITY!

What a great week to celebrate with so many in baptism as well. As you prepare to lead your group, consider having someone share their story of what led them to be baptized. If you haven't shared your story as a small group leader, this would be a great week!

1. Answers may vary.
2. What a great discussion to have. Consider posing the scenario of a new earth not unlike our own, yet without death, decay, or sin in any way. What would people want to do for enjoyment? What would they want to do for purpose and meaning? What types of jobs would they want to have? Any plans for the small group to get together for a million year reunion?
3. There is a moment in the original Batman movie when Batman runs around a pier with a bomb trying to get rid of it, only to find that there is nowhere to throw the bomb. He turns around and in a calm, but frustrated tone says, "Some days you just can't get rid of a bomb." That would be this question. Good luck. Try not to blow anyone up with it.
4. Help people understand that God does not want anyone to perish. He pleads with people to come into the light and find life and forgiveness. He even sent his son to die so they would have the chance to live. Andy Stanley makes a point in a recent North Point message when he says that we have to help people understand that just because something isn't fair doesn't mean it isn't true. There are lots of things that happen every day that aren't fair, but they are true. Helping people understand this difference may help some. Also remind them that if there was anyone that we know who could be trusted with this power, it would be an all-loving God who was willing to lay his life down so that people would not have to live an eternity in hell.
5. Answers may vary. Remind people that in every arena of life, having a long-term perspective will always be helpful. When you picture your marriage lasting 60 years, it impacts how you and your spouse live and talk to each other today. Having a long-term view can help you get you through the tough times in the middle. Remind people that the decisions they make today will determine the stories they tell in the future, long into eternity.

Community Christian Church

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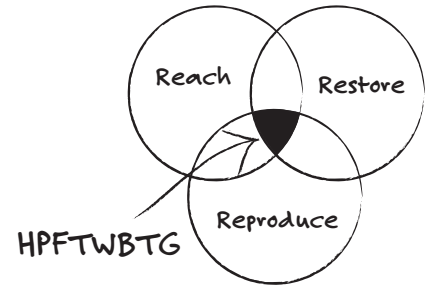
Small Group Mission

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: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

Name: _____ Sent to: _____

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 _____