

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are



Lesson 1 – Understanding the Good News [I.e. the Gospel]

The “Red Thread”

“In Swedish the expression ‘*röd tråd*’ (literally ‘red thread’) is used to describe that something follows a theme. For instance, if a piece of text has a ‘red thread’, it’s written with a consistent thought throughout the text. The expression originates from the Greek mythology where king Theseus found his way out of Minotaur’s labyrinth by following a ‘red thread’. In a figurative sense [it was] first used by Goethe in his work *Wahlverwandschaften* [ENG *Kindred by Choice*].¹ Where he wrote, ‘We have heard about one particular custom of the British Navy. All the rope used by the Royal Fleet, from the thickest to the thinnest, is twined in such a way that a red thread runs through all of them; it is impossible to remove the thread without undoing the rope and that means that even the smallest piece of rope can be identified as property of the Crown’.”²

Such thinking as expressed above finds its footing from the *Scarlet Thread* running from Genesis 3:15 and 21 and all the way through every point of the biblical narrative. Who Jesus is and what He does is the theme of every *Story*. It is only as one follows this *thread* that they are able to make any coherent sense of the biblical parts. No matter where you “nick” the *Story*, Jesus is found.

As it relates to the study before you, each lesson is a strand making up the “rope” of our fellowship, Waukesha Bible Church. Jesus is the Scarlet Thread around which every biblical strand wraps. In addition, it is our desire that He is the one consistent element in every part, the leader in every quest, and the substance of every shadow. Thus, as you study each lesson, keep in mind JESUS. He will give meaning to each of our noted areas, He will lead you through various labyrinths, and He will verify the veracity of all attempts to understand. Now, enjoy the study and explore the profound hope that is for everyone who believes in Him as the beginning and end of their own story.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. JESUS is the Gospel.
2. The Biblical Story explains how JESUS is the fulfillment of the Seed Promise and the completion of the Blood Picture.
3. Humanity’s only hope is JESUS.

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

KEY PASSAGE(S):

Gen. 3:15, 21; Luke 24:44-47; 1 Cor. 15:3-5

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.” (1 Cor. 15:3-5)

INTRODUCTION:

The Bible is a *Story* of rescue and recovery. It tells the *Story* of one whose love is so vast that He is willing to sacrifice that who is most dear to Him to rescue and recover an object of great price but completely unworthy of such action taken by the one who sacrifices. Yet as significant as is the object of value, it pales in comparison to the action of the lover. This is that *Story*.

THE GOSPEL IS JESUS CHRIST

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Somehow within our thinking, we have reduced the gospel to a production or tract or system of presentation when the gospel *is* a person, NOT a presentation or program. First Corinthians 15:1-4 lays out the basic components of what constitutes the gospel. The gospel of grace of God and of Jesus Christ communicates a singular idea and that is . . . the gospel is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. The gospel is gracious because Jesus voluntarily took upon Himself human nature in order that by becoming the second Adam He might become humanity's race representative (Rom. 5:12-21). He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He became sin, who knew no sin (Heb. 4:15), in order that we might become righteous before His Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that He died in behalf of sin. The sin issue presupposes that a need was significant enough to warrant an action by God in our behalf. If sin was capable of resolution by human effort, then the incarnation and cross were unnecessary. But sin does exist. Like the presence of God, sin does not need verification. Its existence can be justifiably shown. What He did in His death was unattainable by any other death. His resolve secured our end.

However, His death is a part of a larger thought. Attached to His death is a confirming statement; He was buried. The burial of Jesus confirms that He was dead. The resurrection of Christ substantiates His death. In the absence of the resurrection, all bets are off. His resurrection stamps a “yes” to the promises of God. Resurrection says the grave is not the end. Resurrection continues a *Story* whose storyline reads, “The best is yet to come.”

Understanding the Good News [i.e. The Gospel]

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

In addition, there is another thought: He appeared to many. His appearance tells us these are not mere words unsupported by reality or fact. You can have the death of an idea, but we are not talking about theories or formulas or programs or hypothetical conjecture. We are talking about an individual, someone who possessed flesh and blood. This One died and was buried and rose on the third day and appeared to many.

When we speak of the gospel, we are not speaking of His church (which is a consequence of the gospel), or a method of presentation (which is perhaps necessary, but NOT the gospel). When we speak of the gospel, we are speaking of Jesus Christ. When we share the gospel, we share Christ. We might seek an indirect approach of sharing Christ when we invite people to a church service, but let us not confuse or dilute the gospel by thinking this is the gospel. Jesus Christ *is* the gospel. It is for this reason we say, "Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship, and this relationship is with a person and His name is Jesus." Jesus Christ is Christianity.

Although the need of man is great because of the sin issue and the penalty against it, the real attraction in Christianity is not our deliverance from sin, but our relationship to Christ. Christ is the attraction. He brings hope to the despairing, healing to the diseased, and wholeness to the dysfunctional. He is glorious and great. He is incapable of deficiency and sufficient for our inability. He is the light in darkness, the water that quenches thirst, and the food that satisfies hunger. He is an unfailing companion and faith-filled friend. The gospel is good news not simply because we are saved from sin. The gospel is good news because of who Christ is. He *is* the good news. It is when we see Him that evangelization becomes spontaneous because it comes from the overflow. Sharing anything other than Christ is empty and unfortunate. So . . . as we think of the gospel, let us begin to think biblically. Let us begin to think, "The Gospel *is* Jesus Christ." And let us in thinking this, see who He is and then what he has done. Let us make this the centerpiece of our verbal and visual "gospel" communication.

THE BIG PICTURE

Our initial study will consider the larger picture in which the simple gospel idea rests. To put this *Story* in its proper setting we would do well to look at the frame in which this picture sits. The *Story* has six acts or movements.

1 st	Act – God
2 nd	Act – Creation
3 rd	Act – Rejection/rebellion
4 th	Act – Redemption/rescue/recovery
5 th	Act – Re-creation/new birth
6 th	Act – Joy through Worship [i.e. new creation]

The telling of this *Story* through the six acts enable us to understand what God did and why He did it.

With *Story*, there is a beginning (Gen. 1:1).

Understanding the Good News [i.e. The Gospel]

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

I. God (Gen. 1:1)

- Gen. 1:1 **In the beginning God** created the heavens and the earth.

The biblical *Story* begins with God. Before there was anything else, there was God. God has neither beginning nor ending. He is self-sustaining, thus He needs nothing outside of Himself for the sustaining of His being.

God exists as one essence comprised of three persons. We know this as the Trinity. The Trinity or tri-unity of God speaks of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Within this Trinity, there exists perfect contentment, joy, and an overflowing satiation of unimaginable happiness.

God's graciousness is so vast as to move Him to create a world where His joy could be displayed (Ps. 19:1) and shared with those creatures made in His image (John 16:24). He desired for His joy within Himself to be known and experienced by those who are made in His image. Thus, He created.

II. Creation (Gen. 1:1, 2)

- Gen. 1:1 **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

Creation is the platform created by God for the displaying and experiencing of His glory.

- Psalm 19:1 **the heavens are telling of the glory of God**; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

God created humanity to know and experience the joy He has within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and for His people to declare and share this joy with others. The Book of Revelation teaches this idea.

- Rev. 14:7b "Fear God, and **give Him glory**, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."
- Rev. 16:9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and **they did not repent so as to give Him glory.**
- Rev. 19:7 "**Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him**, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

It becomes apparent from Revelation 16:9 that something went horribly wrong. Because of their pride, they rebelled against God's design and desire. In their rebellion, they rejected God's invitation for joy. In their rebellion, they rejected God and traded His joy for sin's sorrow.

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

III. Rejection (Gen. 3)

- Gen. 2:16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; 17 **but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."
- Gen. 3:6 when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, **she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.**

It is impossible to capture this act in words. We speak of it, but the movement from one of fellowship to separation is incomprehensible apart from shadow. We taste of such emotion when we feel unloved, rejected, or accused. We feel such emotion when we encounter shame, fear, and guilt.

Adam and Eve rejected God's means for their joy and chose their own by listening to the serpent's deception. Yet in God's presence lies their joy. **Apart From Him, there is no joy.** He made us for our joy to be full in His presence. It is unattainable in any other way.

Adam and Eve sought to remedy the situation by covering their shame, fear, and guilt with the work of their own hands, but such an effort was inadequate and fell woefully short (Gen. 3:7). Their rebellion went deeper than physical nakedness, as evidenced in what transpires in Genesis 3:21.

When my daughter was a preschooler, I asked her the question, "What does it mean to be lost?" Her response was actually deep, "You cannot find your way out." In many ways, being lost is not being able to find your way out.

Salvation is synonymous with deliverance (Romans 7:6; 8:21). We as believers have been delivered from our sin. The magnitude and glory of salvation can only be seen when contrasted with the hideousness and utter hopelessness of sin and its demanding penalty (Romans 6:23). God has saved us from the **penalty** of sin. He gives us victory from the **power** of sin (Romans 7:24, 25), and He will ultimately deliver us from the actual **presence** of sin (Romans 8:28, 29).

The Scripture is clear on how desperately lost humanity really is. Humanity is not intrinsically good, but evil. The biblical *Story* runs counter to the story taught by fallen humanity apart from God. Humanity rejects God's commentary on the human condition. Many fail to see the need of a Savior from sin since "sin" is relative. Yet the Bible speaks of humanity's condition. The Apostle Paul gives us perhaps one of the most graphic descriptions of humankind's sinful state in Romans 3:9-18. Let us not believe the devil's tongue as he hisses his deception through various medias currently pervading our world.

Thankfully, God wins.

Understanding the Good News [i.e. The Gospel]

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

IV. Redemption (Gen. 3:8, 15, 21, 24)

- Gen. 3:8 they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God** among the trees of the garden.
- Gen. 3:15 And **I will put enmity between you and the woman**, between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."
- Gen. 3:21 **The LORD God made garments** of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
- Gen. 3:24 So **He drove the man out**; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword, which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

When we go back to Genesis 3, we can pick up the *Story* of when Adam and Eve sinned against Him. Yet God graciously returns to the Garden and encounters them in their shame, fear, and guilt. From the depth of their descent, He speaks soaring words of hope. From a Promised Seed, He will bring ultimate victory. It will not be without cost, but the price paid and the sacrifice made will redeem their debt, rescue them from sin, and recover them into His family once more.

Genesis 3:21 speaks of the skin of an animal sacrificed in order to cover their physical nakedness. Yet this image is even more sobering than the killing of an innocent animal. In the killing of the animal, blood would be shed and it is through the shedding of blood that sin can be atoned.

- Lev. 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; **for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.**"
- Heb. 9:22 and according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and **without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

This pattern of blood shed through sacrifice will be seen with Cain and Abel and in the sacrificial system given to the nation of Israel. The overarching picture painted by the *Story* is a God who loves deeply. Again, the Apostle Paul clearly states that despite our unattractiveness and utter folly, God still loves us. Initially, let us look at Ephesians 2:1-3 and notice v4, ("But God"). Thank the Lord **He stepped in and rescued us from ourselves.**

- Eph. 2:1-3 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

When did He do this? According to Romans 5, He did this when our condition was three-fold.

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

A. God Stepped In While We Were Still **WEAK**

Romans 5:6 "For when we were yet **without strength** . . . Christ died for the ungodly"

The word "yet" means, "still." The idea of "without strength" is captured by various words within the New Testament ('**weak**' Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38; 1 Cor. 1:25, 27; '**sick**' Matt 25:39, 43, 44; Luke 10:9; Acts 5:15, 16; '**impotent**' Acts 4:9; and '**feeble**' 1 Cor. 12:22).

B. God Stepped In While We Were Still **WICKED**

Romans 5:8 "while we were **yet sinners**, Christ died for us."

C. God Stepped In While We Were Still **AT WAR**

Romans 5:10 "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son,"

While we hated God, He loved us. The animosity that the unsaved have toward God is such that they will kill His only begotten Son. **Our complete inability was met and conquered by God's total sufficiency.** This provision provides for us the basis for our security, acceptance, and worth.

Notice what the Scripture has to say about your present state in Christ. The gulf that lies between man's need and God's provision and ultimately the tremendous blessings that are ours in Christ can only be appropriated by faith. This is why we have two perfect word pictures to describe the act of faith in 1) an object believed and 2) a gift received.

"What is this decision that you have made? You have acknowledged that you were wrong and God is right. You have agreed with God that you yourself are spiritually bankrupt. You have told the Lord of the poverty of your soul."³

Notice two qualities about this salvation. First, it is **unique** (John 3:16, 17; 1 John 4:9, 10, 14). Second, it is **exclusive** (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom.1:16; 1 Tim. 2:5).

By unique, we mean it is the only one, it is without like or equal. There is no other salvation from sin's penalty, than that provided through Christ Jesus. **By exclusive**, we mean it has the power to bar from participation, consideration, or inclusion others that do not agree with its teaching.

Let us now consider the consequences of His work to the individual when the individual appropriates the provision by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

V. Re-creation (2 Cor. 5:17)

Through the gracious action of God, humanity's shame, fear, and guilt have been addressed. What is pictured in shadow form throughout the Old Testament is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and the work He undertook in obedience to His Father (John 19:30).

His people could never have done what He did for them. From this singular person and work, humanity is restored to what it once was.

For those who agree with God in the telling of this *Story*, He makes His children (John 1:11-13; 1 John 1:5-2:2). The consequences of this union for His children are vast. In fact, John calls the idea of re-creation "born-again."

The benefits of being born into a family of unlimited resources are vast. This is equally true and even more so when one is born into God's family. The apostle Paul in his Book to the Roman churches speaks to several of these "benefits."

- A. Romans 5:1 "We have **peace with God**"
- B. Romans 5:2 "We have **access** [into the very presence of God]"
- C. Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now **no condemnation** to them which are in Christ Jesus (c.f. Rom. 5:16, 18)."
- D. Romans 8:17 "We are **joint-heirs with Christ** [of heaven's riches, cf. Eph. 1:3]"
- E. Romans 8:28 "**All things are working together for good** [in our lives]"
- F. Romans 8:31 "Since **God is with us**, who can be against us?"
- G. Romans 8:35-39 "**Nothing can separate us** from the love of God."

Although we have only considered a handful of "benefits" of being born-again, there is more, much more. In another study, we consider the consequences of the gospel (cf. Lesson 5 and Grow 201). We will explore such wonderful words as redemption, justification, reconciliation, and adoption.

Until then, let us finish our final act.

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

VI. Joy through Worship [Rev. 21:1-8]

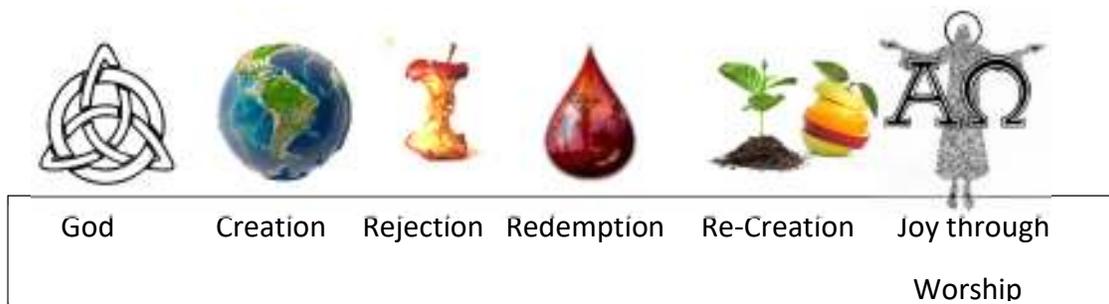
- ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶ Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. ⁸ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. 21:1-8)

When we "leap" all the way to the end of the *Story*, we find a picture of what life will be like when God turns the next page and we enter into the final chapter of His *Story*. What is described is staggering. What is of interest is the stark contrast between those who embrace God's *Story* and those who reject God's *Story*. Those who embrace God's *Story* see themselves in the same manner that God does and accepts His provision for their rescue and recovery. Those who reject God's *Story* refuse to see their sin for what it is and confess Jesus as God's sole remedy for their condition (v. 8).

¹ <http://english.stackexchange.com/questions/106430/does-english-use-red-thread-as-expression-for-theme>

² <http://focus.ie.edu/read-thread>

³ George Sweeting, *How To Begin The Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, c1976), 10.



CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

WORKSHEET – LESSON 1

Understanding THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

If you had a favorite movie series . . . what is your favorite part? Think of the greatest movie series ever . . . when we think of these, what is the common thread throughout all of them. Chances are it is the tension between good and evil. Why can the world recognize this struggle between good and evil? The Bible says, “Eternity is written on every man’s heart.” Man has a desire for the underdog that triumphs over all odds. One’s relationship with god (deity), the need for a savior, one’s ultimately peace with god (deity) and man. These are the common themes found throughout popular movie series. How is the gospel the answer to this God given struggle that even ungodly men recognize?

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

1. What does the word “gospel” mean?

2. What are the **SIX ACTS** of the biblical *Story*? What **biblical references** help us understand the biblical *Story* in **SIX ACTS**?

3. Think for a moment, “Why must our *Story* begin with **GOD**?”

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

4. According to Genesis 3:6, "What was our response to God's invitation for JOY?" Are you a part of this rebellion against God?

5. According to Genesis 3:15 and 21, "What did God do to restore us to JOY?"

6. What are your initial thoughts concerning God's provision for joy being unique and exclusive?

7. According to Romans 5:1, 2, "What does God give us when we accept **HIS GIFT in JESUS?**"

8. Where / when does God's *Story* end?

9. What is the simplest way of describing the **GOSPEL** [See further 1 Cor. 15:1-4]?

THE GOSPEL IS JESUS CHRIST

10. What or who is the GOSPEL?

CONNECT 101 - Who We Are

TODAY

11. How does knowing God created you for joy change your outlook on life?

12. On a separate sheet of paper, write out a statement describing when you first understood the gospel.

13. Make a list of five people who need the gospel and for whom you can pray.
