

Study Notes for Story Teachers

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These teacher notes are offered to prepare you for potential discussion if your group members take the discussion in a particular direction. They will give you some background information to help answer questions that may arise.

If questions arise that you think would benefit from some background notes, let me know. I'll see what I can find that might be helpful.

Lesson 1 – Questions 1 & 2

1) The Bible says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. What have you been taught about how the world began? What are the sources of your knowledge in this area?

2) Some people think science teaches that we are the outcome of matter, plus time, plus chance. Others think that science indicates that there isn't enough time for life to have developed this way. Does it impact you personally if you were created by a craftsman?

Creation

The Story of creation is perhaps one of the most challenging topics in The Story. Many, if not most of your participants will have been exposed to teaching on evolution and may have the misunderstanding that science and the Bible are incompatible.

Nothing could be further from the truth. An old-earth creationist perspective lines up precisely with current scientific evidence. Despite what the media presents, the science of evolutionary origins is at a stand-still. The overwhelming evidence of contemporary science establishes that there is not enough time for a single cell to become a human. The most generous estimates indicate that it would take more than 200 billion years for this to happen (if it even can, which has never been established), yet it is well established that the Big Bang took place only 13.8 billion years ago.

Let's establish a few terms:

- Young earth creation: the belief that the book of Genesis teaches that the earth was created in six 24-hour days by God, making the earth less than 10,000 years old. This view does not line up with science and there are many good reasons to think that the word Day used in Genesis chapter 1 does not mean 24-hour days.
- Old earth creation: the belief that the book of Genesis teaches that the earth was created in six spans of time by God. These spans of time are not limited to a clock or to the rotation of the earth around the sun. There are many other places in the Bible where the same Hebrew word used for Day in Genesis 1 is used to describe long undefined spans of time. This approach provides a strong alignment of science with the Bible.
- Evolution: the belief that all matter in the universe was created with no intervention of any entity outside of nature. Life on earth evolved in a step-by-step process from a few basic chemicals being acted upon by nature. Through random changes in these chemicals a cell evolved and through random changes in this cell all life on earth came into existence.
- Theistic evolution: the belief that life on earth was started by God, but He used evolution to let life develop according to the laws of nature.

There are two main arguments working against both evolution and theistic evolution in contemporary science. The first is the time problem mentioned above. The second is the intricacy of the cell and the universe. The cell is a finely tuned instrument replete with an information coding system called DNA. Most of the functions of the cell could not have been developed in a step-by-step fashion. If you don't have all the parts in place all at once, the cell dies and cannot reproduce itself. Evolution stops before it begins. And the only source of information that we know about is a mind. There is no pathway for information to evolve, it always comes from a mind. Then there is the fine tuning of the universe. Up to 60 factors (gravity, our distance from the sun, our atmosphere, and the list goes on, and more are being established all the time) are so finely turned, that if any of them were even slightly different, life would not be possible. The whole system points to design.

One other objection to the creation story is the creation of the sun, moon and stars on day 4. This is a problem if plants were created on day 3 and there was no sunlight until day 4. It is also inconsistent with a big bang beginning to the universe, a scientific fact that is pretty well established. The key to aligning science with this verse from the Bible is linguistic. Genesis uses different verbs for the days of creation. When it speaks of creating birds, mammals and humans it uses a Hebrew word that means "create," "make," "fashion." But when it speaks of light on day 1 and the expanse of the sky on day 4 it uses a Hebrew word that means "exist," "be," "happen" or "come to pass." I'm getting this information from Hugh Ross' book *A Matter of Days*, page 70. According to Dr. Ross and others, the sun, moon and stars were created at the big bang. Light existed on day 1 and on day 4 God transformed the Earth's atmosphere from translucent to transparent. That's when the sun, moon and stars became visible from earth.

Most of your participants will not know any of this because they get their science from PBS and from their science high school and college textbooks that are saturated with old information committed to a neo-Darwinian materialistic worldview. This information is provided so that you can offer a reasonable defense of the Biblical story of creation. You should probably only bring this up if they question the Bible story. Use your own judgement about how to use this material. Don't overwhelm them with details they don't need. But if they ask questions, you've got answers.

Lesson 1 – Question 3

God did not want man to be alone so He created a suitable "helper" for him – Eve (page 4). The Hebrew word for helper is used 18 times in the Old Testament. Apart from the two times in this chapter, every other reference is to God helping Israel. What was God doing when He made Eve to be Adam's helper?

The intent of this question is to get the participant to think "If the word for Eve's role in Adam's life is the same word for God's role in Israel's life, then Eve is to Adam what God is to Israel." It seems that participants are not making that connection. They are answering that Eve's role was to be Adam's helper, as in his assistant, his subordinate. In the other verses that I put in the footnote, most of them have a context of God being Israel's rescuer or Israel's protector.

Go back to The Story page 4 and read together the section near the top beginning with "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden . . ." and stop at "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." Then ask "What was the problem that caused God to create Eve?" It is stated where God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." Ask them, "If God is Israel's rescuer, how is Eve Adam's rescuer?" She was created to rescue Adam from loneliness. Lead them in a discussion about how that might differ from a subordinate role.

Lesson 1 – Question 4

Why didn't God just make Eve when He determined that it was not good for Adam to be alone? Why make Adam look at each animal and name it before He created Eve (page 4)?

People are coming up empty on this question, which is fine. It gives you the opportunity to explain exactly what we think God's intention was in His actions. The previous question leads right into this discussion. God had just declared that it was not good for man to be alone. Whether He said this to Adam is unclear, but it is clear that He wanted Adam to have a partner. But God wanted him to go through an exercise before solving Adam's problem. The key to understanding God's intent, I believe, is in the statement, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found."

How would Adam have felt toward his partner if she had been found among the animals who already existed? In light of the fact that no suitable helper (rescuer, protector) was found, how might Adam have felt? He just saw that all the other animals had a counterpart, but he does not? How would that make you feel? God knew that Adam should not be alone, and now Adam is acutely aware that he is alone. After this exercise, when God creates Eve, do you think that Adam thought of her as a subordinate? How was he likely to feel about her? This exercise God took him through – was it important?

Lesson 1 – Question 7

God used the word "cursed" two times in this incident (pages 5-6). What gets cursed and what does not?

In your discussion about this question, it may come up that, while men and women were not cursed, they did have consequences for their action. Eve was to have, not only pain in childbearing, but her "desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." The Hebrew word for "desire" in this verse is the same word that is used on page 7 where God tells Cain, "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." This gives incredible insight into the consequences of Eve's sin. Sin wants to control us, to take over our lives. Eve, and all those women who follow after her are tempted to want to control their husband, but he will rule over them, as Cain should have ruled over sin. The consequence of Eve's sin is that age old tug-of-war between men and women. The good news is, this curse was destroyed at the cross. This tug-of-war has no place in Christian marriage. Ephesians 5: 21 tells husbands and wives to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

I would only bring this up if your participants take the discussion in this direction, or if your participants are all already believers. Seekers probably shouldn't have the New Testament brought into the discussion at this point in their journey. But Christians really should be reading the Old Testament in light of the New.

Lesson 1 – Question 10

There is controversy within the church and within the scientific community about the flood Noah experienced. Was it global or was it limited to the known world of the time? What are your thoughts or questions on the matter? It's okay if you don't have any.

Noah's Flood

Less controversial than creation, the flood story may still raise some questions with science-minded participants, largely because there is no scientific evidence to support a global flood. It is generally

Young Earth Creationist who posit a global flood and there are considerable challenges to most of their science, not least of which is the amount of water that would be needed. Old earth creationists believe that when the Bible speaks of the water covering the earth it refers to the known world, the world where men resided. There are multiple texts in the Bible where this phrase is used and the context clearly means the known world. In the flood story in Genesis, water covered the earth for 150 days covering all the mountains that could be seen. While this is a considerable amount of water, 150 days is not a long time for an enormous flood to remain in one area. From Hugh Ross again, this time from the book *Navigating Genesis* page 157 he says that taking all the factors into account, the latest scholarship proposes that the Genesis flood covered all of Mesopotamia, the entire Persian Gulf region, and much of southern Arabia. This is still a pretty large area.

This is a simple explanation for a problem that some may have with the Biblical story. Again, I would only bring it up if someone asks a question.

Lesson 7 – Question 8

These two incidents happened 400 years before the events of this chapter. These people had 400 years to change their ways for the better, and instead they only got worse. In addition to predatory sexual sin, they had even embraced a religion that required them to kill their children by burning them on an altar to their god Molek, while the children were still alive. It is not hard to believe that a prostitute may have been the most righteous person in any of these communities. God uses Joshua and his army to rid the land of these people. Was that fair? Is it likely that anything would have made them change, so that they could become good neighbors to the Israelites?

The Genocides in Joshua and 1 Samuel

The genocides recorded in Joshua and 1 Samuel are a moral quandary. Why would a good God require the Israelites to kill every man, woman and child in the communities they came to possess? I tried to build a case for the reasons within the questions I ask in chapter 7 on page 21 (questions 6 & 7). But questions may still arise, since what God required is so repugnant to 21st Century sensibilities. Pastor Joey sent me a tremendously helpful article by a guy named Dr. Paul Coulter that is available at my website <https://www.bestbibletobuy.com/is-it-true/>. I'd like to encourage you to read the whole article. It's called Old Testament Massacres. It's quite long, but well worth the read.

His main argument can be summarized as follows:

1. From the time of Abraham's testimony of the true God (and Melchizedek's presence as a God follower) the Canaanite's had ample time to repent and seek the true God.
2. When the Israelites left Egypt, it was well known that the true God had acted miraculously on their behalf. Rahab makes it very clear that everyone in Jericho knew about these things. They had 40 years, while the Israelites wandered in the desert, to investigate and repent.
3. By the time the Israelites were on the east coast of the Jordan river the Canaanites knew that they were going to be attacked. Like the Jews in Nazi Germany, those who were smart, ran. Any of the Canaanites who were smart, and not so proud as to think they could withstand a God who can part the Red Sea, were not annihilated. God's imperative to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 9:3 was "you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly." Driving them out was a viable option for the Canaanites smart enough to take it.
4. If the people chose not to save themselves and their families by leaving of their own accord, they chose to put themselves in harm's way. God came down with judgement on their detestable culture and religions. As I point out in the questions, there is no way they could have

been rehabilitated to become good neighbors to Israel. They were too proud and too far down the path of destruction to change.

Dr. Coulter makes many more excellent points. This should be enough information to, at least deflect any question that may arise. If some of your participants are still unsettled, read the whole of Dr. Coulter's excellent article. Heck, read it anyway . . . it's really good.

Lesson 8 – Question 4

The incident with Gideon and the fleece was curious and is easily misunderstood. In the paragraph just before he speaks to God about the fleece, what had Gideon done?

So many people misunderstand what is going on with Gideon and the fleece and then apply their misunderstanding to their own lives. It's very important that we realize that Gideon had already rallied the troops before this incident. He was not using this incident to try to determine what he should do. He was committed to going to war. Acting within the makeup of his personality, that has been firmly established earlier in the chapter, he is asking for God's assurance that He will be with them. He is, once again, expressing his insecurity and looking for God to prove that He will be faithful.

So many Christian's talk about having a fleece moment, inspired by this passage. They are usually trying to get a sense of direction about which of two options to pursue. That isn't what Gideon was doing. His course was set. Nor is it what we should do. James 1:5 says that if we lack wisdom, all we need to do is ask God for it. If we ask with a faithful heart, He will give us direction. We no longer need to be insecure about God's faithfulness to us, as Gideon did. The cross has put an end to discussions about the length God is willing to go to take care of us.

Lesson 11 – Question 6

It's a little disturbing to read that God sent an evil spirit to come forcefully on Saul. Why would God do such a thing and, why would this cause Saul to prophesy? Go back to page 137 in The Story and read the paragraph at the bottom of the page onto the next page and the next sentence after that. Does that give you any insights? Write down your thoughts, even if they're only questions. Ask your leader to tell you how God let the devil test Job, Jesus and Paul. Saul didn't have to respond as he did.

People who are unfamiliar with the Bible may have all kinds of ideas about Satan and evil spirits. This incident with Saul, where an evil spirit from God came forcefully on him gives us a chance to bring some clarity to their thinking. I ask the participant to go back and read the previous chapter where we learn that God's spirit came powerfully on Saul and he prophesied. When an evil spirit came forcefully on him, he also prophesizes. There is such a strong parallel. Prophets speak for God. Just as evil spirits who encountered Jesus spoke about Him, this evil spirit from God caused Saul to speak of God. This should have been a wake-up call for Saul, but he didn't heed the warning.

I ask your participants to ask you about Job, Jesus and Paul. Here are some verses you can have ready to help clarify why God might use evil to test people: Job 1: 6-12, Matthew 4:1-11 and 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10. In every case God let Satan (or a messenger of Satan for Paul) provide a test and in every case the person being tested spoke for God and became stronger in their faith. Saul could have had the same experience, but he let his envy, jealousy and anger rule the day and slipped further into madness. Help

your participants see that even evil spirits and Satan himself are subject to God and can be used for His purposes. When we are tested by evil we can run to God.

Lesson 14 – Question 9

There is a curious phrase on page 195. It says, “So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.” “To this day” indicates that this was not written by contemporaries of the events. On page 200 it indicates that all of Asa’s accomplishments are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah. Christians believe that the Bible was written by God through men. Yet the men who wrote this history also had historical documents at hand. What are your thoughts (or questions) about how the Bible was written?

When we specifically invite people to ask questions, it’s best to be prepared with some information. Regarding Scripture, 2 Peter 1:21 says that Godly men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke for God. 2 Timothy concurs saying that Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. The fact that the Bible is also grounded in history and that the writers of some of the Bible history books used other history books as reference material adds to the reliability and verifiability of our Bibles.

Lesson 17 – Question 9

The siege of Jerusalem lasted for two years and was so bad that people were eating the dead, just to have food. So much blood and death. Yet God says that He did all of this for the sake of His holy name, that He would be proved holy. How could such carnage prove that God is holy? Is He too good to be around the sinfulness of these people or is something else at work here?

Once again God’s character may be questioned by your participants because of the carnage that He allows. This carnage did not happen because God is too good to be around sinful people. Something else is at work in God’s actions, which can be seen in hindsight. It is only because they went through such a horrific experience that the people of Judah changed their ways. God is holy. But He was not seen as Holy by or through the people He had chosen, people who had willingly entered into a covenant with Him. It was only as a result of this terrible discipline and God’s protection in keeping them together and safe during their 70 years of captivity that they began to take the covenant seriously. Your students will learn more about that in the next few chapters.

When the Jews return to their homeland, they are a different people, committed to keeping the law. (In fact, they were so committed about keeping the law that they made laws about keeping the laws, which is where they’re at when Jesus arrives. They went overboard to their detriment.) After returning home, all the nations knew that they were God’s people and that they followed Him. To some extent God was seen as holy through them. Help your student to see that God is holy and He will stop at nothing to make His people holy, for their benefit, not for His.

Lesson 21 – Question 4

What do you think of Nehemiah’s prayer on page 297? Do you think it is appropriate to pray this kind of prayer? Did Nehemiah take any actions to realize what he is asking God to do? Does that have any bearing on your answer?

Some students are answering that Nehemiah was being vindictive, that his attitude only added to the tension between Israel and her neighbors. This question is meant to generate a discussion about prayer.

All Nehemiah did was pray his thoughts and frustrations to God, as David had done before him in the Psalms. Nehemiah didn't do anything to try to get even for the ridicule they were experiencing. He prayed about his feelings and left the results to God. His prayer is genuine and to the point. Help your students to see that It's okay to say anything to God, anything that's on your heart. If your attitude is inappropriate, God will help you see that. In Nehemiah's case, as we see later in the chapter, he was never rude or disrespectful to his enemies. When they tried to trap him, he politely told them that he did not have time to meet with them. He kept working and posted a guard and left the outcome to God. This is a model for all of us.

The New Testament

The questions for the chapters in the New Testament were calibrated to a particular end. At the end of the six chapters from the Gospels, participants are asked to write down who they think Jesus is, and what they need to do about that, given where they are in their spiritual journey.

Confession of Faith

For the Gospel lessons (22 through 27) the focus was this: 22 introductory; 23 Jesus' miracles; 24 Jesus' teaching; 25 we start to focus on the close of Jesus' ministry and the seriousness of what will happen in the next lesson; 26 Jesus' crucifixion and how it impacts those who were around Him; 27 the resurrection, what it means and its implications. This is where the participants are asked to say who Jesus is, giving you an opportunity to lead them to confessing their faith in Christ, if that is needed.

Baptism

The next chapter turns to the book of Acts. Peter preaches the first Christian sermon and is asked, "What must we do?" He says repent and be baptized, and the participants of your group are asked about baptism, giving you an opportunity to answer their questions about baptism. Some of your participants may have a Catholic background. Since they were baptized as an infant, they may think they have this covered. They don't. You need to find the courage to challenge them with the fact that while their parents made a decision on their behalf, they themselves need to repent and be baptized as a conscious decision to follow Jesus.

This doesn't need to be confrontive. Ask them who made the decision for their baptism. When they say it was their parents, praise their parents for being good parents. God bless them. They were acting in a way that showed love for them and devotion to God. There is no need to go into differences of doctrine between Catholics and Protestants. Focus on the fact that it was their parents who made this decision, and it is now their turn to make the decision. Their parent could not repent for them. They need to repent and be baptized as Peter instructs. Be ready with Romans 6:1-4 as a picture of what baptism is. This may still be a bridge too far for some of your participants. Be sensitive to their feelings and backoff if it gets too tense. Challenge their thinking without pushing them so hard that you push them away.

In the rest of chapter 28 we meet the characters who move the story forward, particularly the Apostle Paul. In chapter 29 we focus on the church and what it's like to be part of a church family. We talk about the fruits of the Spirit and spiritual gifts, serving and living a holy life. Chapter 30 addresses the cost of discipleship in almost every question. And in Chapter 31 we look at heaven, our new home. The chapter is mostly about hope, but you have one last opportunity to make sure that your participant are Christians. They are asked about the Book of Life and how you get your name into it. I ask them to go back to John 3:16 from Chapter 23 if they need help with the answer. As best you can, ensure that all of your participants have made a commitment to follow Christ. The real work there is between them and

the Holy Spirit, but we can make sure they know everything they need to know and understand the implications of their choices.

There are some individual questions that might need your attention in advance.

Chapter 22 – Question 1

The next six lessons come from the Gospels in the New Testament. The four Gospels are about Jesus, His life, His ministry, His death and resurrection. They are biographies if you will. Yet this chapter starts in an unusual way for a biography. Why do you suppose that is?

This gives you a chance to explain a bit about how the gospels were written. Two of them are eyewitness accounts (Matthew and John). Luke indicates that he did extensive research before writing his, and Mark, the first gospel to be written is thought to have the Apostle Peter as the main source. But Matthew, Mark and Luke were written very near the same time and about 20 years after Jesus returned to heaven. They are very similar and in fact are called the Synoptic Gospels because they are so synonymous. This chapter begins with material from the Gospel of John. It was written when John was an old man, after all the other apostles had died. He is intentionally providing stories the other Gospels didn't include. Since the other gospels were already well established by this time, he was able to begin with a more philosophical opening, which is consistent with the tone of his whole Gospel account.

Chapter 23 – Question 3

The three temptations of Jesus seem a bit remote to us. We can relate to being hungry, but it's hard to even picture the other two. But they were very real to Jesus, and they give us a unique insight into His frame of mind. James 1:14 says that every person (including Jesus) is tempted when they are dragged away by their desires. What desires might Jesus have held that allowed Him to be tempted in the way He was? Could He have failed these tests? How does He respond?

Turns out the question about whether Jesus could have failed these tests might lead to some interesting conversation. I was surprised how strongly my participants felt about it. Whatever your own position about what it meant for Jesus to be fully God and fully man at the same time, you may need to agree to disagree during this discussion. The important thing is that He turned to scripture to counter these temptations.

Chapter 26 – Question 6

Pilate questioned Jesus then had Him flogged. But when he heard from the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the Son of God, he was afraid. Is there anything about Jesus that makes you afraid?

I was a bit surprised when two gals in my group, one a new believer, one a seasoned Christian, both indicated that they were afraid of God's wrath. But it allowed for a great teaching moment. I was able to reassure both of them that, since they had asked Jesus to be the Lord of their lives, they did not need to fear His wrath. God's wrath was poured out on Jesus at the cross. By putting our faith in Him we are not appointed to wrath. We should be in fear of His holiness. We will only be able to stand in His presence because He will give us a new kind of life. On our own, we would not be able to stand before Him. Everyone who had a vision of heaven was unable to stand without help. Holiness, not wrath is what we are appointed for.

Chapter 27 – Question 9

Peter denied Jesus three times, and three times, Jesus asked him to confess his devotion. That doesn't seem like a coincidence. But Jesus' commission to Peter seems a bit strange. Why do you think He told Peter to "feed my lambs/sheep?" Peter was a fisherman.

When Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these," I think He was asking, do you love me more than these fish, more than this life you have come back to? Jesus in commissioning Peter to stop being a fisherman and to become a shepherd. And Peter does essentially become the shepherd of the early church. And isn't it interesting that in 1 Peter 5:2 Peter tells the elders of the church to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ that has been entrusted to their care. We don't have any reason to think that Peter ever went fishing after his return to Jerusalem and the start of the church.

Chapter 27 – Question 10

As mentioned above, this is probably the most important question in The Story curriculum. This is your opportunity to call on each of your participants to declare their allegiance to Christ. If they aren't there yet, ask why. The last chapter will give them another opportunity when we talk about the Lamb's Book of Life. But try to discern their resistance and give them any information or assurance they may need to cross over into faith.

Chapter 28 – Question 4

Those listening to the sermon were so convicted that after the first sermon they asked, "What shall we do?" Peter's response is "Repent and be baptized . . ." Have you been baptized? If not, what do you think of Peter's response? If yes, did repentance precede your baptism? Write down how you came to be baptized or questions you may have about baptism.

Again, try to get all of your participants to answer this question and then resolve any questions or concerns they might have. If a person indicates that they were baptized as an infant, I think it's very important that you affirm, rather than criticize what happened to them as an infant. God bless their parents for taking that step. They were acting in their child's best interest and doing what they thought was best for their child's spiritual well-being. But it is also very important to emphasize that they are no longer a child. Their infant baptism was a choice their parents made. It is now time for them to make a choice. They did not have the opportunity to repent before their infant baptism. In order to be obedient to Christ, they need to choose to repent and be baptized as an adult.

Chapter 29 – Question 4

From page 416 to 419 we have excerpts from Paul's letter to the church at Thessalonica. Throughout this letter, beginning with the first line on page 417, he uses many words that reference family relationships. List all of them that you can find. Do you go to church? If not, why not? If you do, is it like family to you? How did that happen or not happen?

Walk carefully when discussing this question. There may be participants in your group who have deeply wounded, even traumatized by church experiences. If they need to tell a story when they say why they don't go to church, or why their church experience is not like a family, give them as much time as you can. You may be the first person they have been able to tell about their church experience.

Chapter 29 – Question 6

In addressing sexual immorality in the church, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to remember that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit whom we have received from God. We are not our own, we were bought with a price. Does knowing that Jesus has purchased you with His own blood and that

the Holy Spirit is living in you help you to remain sexually pure, or are there struggles with that in your life?

Another delicate question. If there is someone in your group that needs to talk, give them as much time as you can. If the topic become too indelicate, offer to speak with them after your meeting.

Chapter 30 – Question 4

Paul was such a faithful servant of God. Yet he was almost beaten to death by the Jews, arrested (which probably saved his life), narrowly escaped a plot to kill him, kept in custody in a palace for two years in Caesarea, then sent to Rome, once again to save him from the Jews. The trip to Rome was no pleasure cruise. He's counted among the prisoners, shipwrecked, bitten by a poisonous snake and kept under house arrest in Rome, again for two years. Why would God let such challenging things happen to one of His most faithful servants?

No doubt about it, this is a difficult question. Some things you can bring to bear upon this question. At that time and in that place, Paul's experience was not unusual. All the Christians from the 1st Century were persecuted to the extreme. We have it so easy now, we can hardly appreciate what it cost them to live out their faith. We are the benefactors of their strong faith. The church would not have survived had they not been strong. Also, you can look at all these bad things that happened to Paul and see how good things came from them. During his imprisonments he was able to write some of the letters that we treasure today. His shipwreck and snake bite open doors for evangelism. And his house arrest in Rome gave him the opportunity to visit with members of the church he wanted to visit and have an important ministry there.

Chapter 31 – Question 3

We took a look at some of the important parts of Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the last lesson. It is such an encouraging letter and recounts many of the blessings we have in Christ. But 30 to 40 years later when John recorded this revelation, the Ephesians had developed a problem. What was it? How do you suppose that happened to this exemplary church?

The Ephesians lost their first love. While they still had the appearance of being a healthy church, they had actually stopped loving Jesus, their first love. Bring this home to your participants. Jesus is the central of our faith. Our love for Him is first and foremost. If we keep that strong, we will be in a good place to address any other problems that might arise.

Chapter 31 – Question 4

The Laodiceans were guilty of being lukewarm in their faith. What does it mean to be hot, to be cold and to be lukewarm in faith? Why do you suppose having lukewarm faith is just as bad as having cold faith?

I actually think that being lukewarm is worse than being cold. Someone with lukewarm faith is someone who is in denial. They have all the trappings of Christianity but, like the Ephesians, they've lost their first love. They can actually be dangerous to the church. Their sin can be so subtle that they sew dissention, can spread false doctrine, and really harm people. Someone whose faith is cold can much more easily be reasoned with about faith. But someone who is in denial, is harder to reach.

Chapter 31 – Question 8

This is the question referenced above about the Book of Life. This is your last opportunity during The Story to help your participants cross over into faith.