

3 – The Community of the Godhead: ***Theography***

Relational Leadership Training

Developing Disciple Making Leaders

Session Three

Pre-Session Assignment:

In this part of this training session you will personally interact with new training concepts and prepare to work with others during the group instruction time. You are to complete the following activities before the group instruction time:

Step 1 – Read the articles “Theography – God’s Story” and “Living in an Upside-Down World”. As you read:

- A. Place the letter “N” in the margin near information that is “New” to you.
- B. Underline what strikes you as very significant.
- C. Circle terms or ideas you might need to have clarified.
- D. Write down any questions you might have in your Learning Journal for this session.

Step 2 – Take some time to think about the following aspects of the article you read for this session. Write your thoughts in your Learning Journal and be ready to discuss these during the group instruction time.

1. In an attempt to find God’s place in their life, many people ask questions such as “How does God fit into (the story of) my life?”
 - A. Have you ever asked yourself that type of question?
 - B. If so, what kinds of answers did you come up with?
2. In light of the biblical understanding of the “story of God,” a better question to ask ourselves is; “How does my little life fit into the great story of God?”
 - A. What is the difference between this question and the first one (in #1 above)?
 - B. How would you answer this second question?

Relational Leadership Training

Developing Disciple Making Leaders

Session Three

With Others – *During* Group Instruction

Step 1 (In Triads) – Pray together, asking God to graciously provide His direction, protection, and presence during the group instruction time.

Step 2 (In Triads) – Share experiences, outcomes, and “Aha Moments” from the personal application activities from the last session.

Step 3 (With the Whole Group) – Have someone from each triad summarize to the whole group:

- A. outcomes and experiences from the personal application activities from the last session.
- B. any questions or concerns that came out of the triad sharing time.

Step 4 (In Triads) – Read the article “Living in an Upside-Down World” out loud together and answer the following questions:

- A. How would you summarize the concept of “living in the upside-down world” to someone else who has not read the article?
- B. Create a list of ways you see the world as upside down today.
- C. Create a list of ways you see aspects of your own life as upside down.

Step 5 (With the Whole Group) – Using 2 Timothy 3:16 as a framework, analyze and interact with the articles for this session. Use the questions below as guidelines. Record your answers in your Learning Journal.

- A. Teaching (*What is true.*) – What are the key biblical truths of this session?
- B. Reproof (*What is not true.*) – What is something false or inaccurate that you personally have believed related to the topic of this session?
- C. Correction (*What not to do.*) – In relation to this session, what is something in your life that needs to change?
- D. Training in righteousness (*What to do.*) – What are some things you need to learn to do (or not do) in order to live in a way that reflects the truth of this session?

Step 6 (On Your Own) – Summarize what you have learned from this training session (so far). Record your personal summary in the Learning Journal.

Step 7 (With the Whole Group) – Continue discussing “Living in an Upside-Down World” and answer the following questions:

- A. How might you personally get your bearings and move towards being right-side up?
- B. How might each of you lead your families from upside-down thinking to right-side up thinking?
- C. How might you all as a church get your bearings and move towards being right-side up?
- D. How might you help people who are stuck seeing their life in an upside-down manner?

Step 8 (With the Whole Group) – Spend some time praying with each other and for each other. Pray specifically for God to guide you and enable you to integrate the truths of this session into your lives.

Relational Leadership Training

Developing Disciple Making Leaders

Session Three

Post Session Follow Up:

- 1) In this training session, the concept of learning to live right-side up in an upside down world was discussed. Another way to describe “right-side up” is “healthy”. Use the following categories to help you think through what it looks like for you to be “healthy” in the various aspects of your life.
 - Knowledge – your understanding, beliefs, and convictions about what is true and not true
 - Values – your priorities and the things of high worth or importance
 - Attitudes – your feelings, preferences, or points of view, especially towards others
 - Practices – your actions actually done, especially with regularity, including the routines you keep or habits you have
 - Relationships – your interpersonal interactions and connections with others, especially the people close to you (spouse and family) and those combined with you (church and work)
- 2) Then thoughtfully and honestly answer the following questions. Record your answers in your Learning Journal. Be ready to share your thoughts at the next group instruction session.
 - A. What do you look like when you are “healthy”?
 - B. What is hindering you from being that healthy man or woman?
 - C. What could the truth of this session look like in my life:
 - i. one month from now?
 - ii. one year from now?

What is at least one thing you can do that will enable you to integrate (apply) the truth of this session into your life?

- 3) **(With Your Spouse)** – Discuss with your wife the main ideas of this session. After you have done the assignment, ask your wife to answer the questions below as they pertain to you (not herself). Summarize the main points of your discussion in your Learning Journal.
 - A. What does your spouse look like when he is “healthy”?
 - B. What aspect(s) of your spouse’s life do you see as “healthy”?
 - C. What is hindering your spouse from being a “healthier” person?
- 4) Record any “Aha Moments” from this session (i.e. insights gained that are important for you to remember). Record these in your Learning Journal.
- 5) What is something you should research or talk about with someone else? Record this in your Learning Journal.
- 6) Read the section in Session 4, ““Why We Must Think Rightly About God” by A.W Tozer.

Theography – God’s Story

The overarching theme or storyline of the Bible as a whole can be summarized as “The Story of God.” It is God’s story, not our story. The word “story” is used not to indicate that it is fictional but to describe the unfolding sequence of events and actions with God as the main character throughout.

Whether or not we understand this distinction influences how we read and understand the Bible.

Misunderstandings about the Bible

There are two common misunderstandings about the Bible that influence how people read it. Some view the Bible as a collection of archaic religious stories and others view it as a text book of morals.

For many people, the Bible appears to be a collection of stories, many of which are odd or seem out-of-date. Some of the stories appear connected, but many feel random. Although these stories often talk about God, they seem to be “about” a variety of people’s experiences and ideas about God.

Other people view the Bible as a text book about moral behavior. It’s a list of “do’s and don’ts” that people are supposed to abide by in order to please God or at least to keep God from being angry with them. These people view the stories contained in the Bible as the accounts of various people’s success and failures in striving to please God.

Neither of these views is accurate according to the Bible itself.

The Story of God

The overarching theme or storyline of the Bible can be summarized as “The Story of God.” A theological term for this is “Theography.” This comes from the word *Theo*, which means God, and the word *graphy*, which means writing. This story of God is also sometimes referred to as the “meta-narrative” of the Bible. *Meta* means big or overarching and *narrative* is another word for story. So, the overarching story of the Bible is about God himself.

The story of God in the Bible is really one story broken up into a lot of smaller stories that occur over thousands of years. In this overarching story, and all the sub-stories, God is the “primary character,” not the people. This means that the Bible is the self-revelation of God to humanity. It is actually all about him; who he is, what he is like, what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. The story of God is the one true grand story which defines what is true and which gives meaning to all of life.

The story of God encompasses all other stories. Not just the stories that are told in the Bible, but all stories of all peoples, nations, civilizations, and cultures that have ever been or will ever be. All these national stories are included in the flow of God’s story.

Nothing is outside the scope or power of what God is doing, whether they recognize this or not. (See Genesis 17:1-14; Psalm 33:10; Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31; Philippians 2:9-11.)

The story of God also encompasses the stories of each individual. Everyone's life story is included in the flow of God's story. No one's life is outside the scope or power of what God is doing — whether or not he or she recognizes it. (See Job 12:10; Psalm 33:13-15; 139:13; Luke 12:7; 17:22-31; 2 Timothy 2:19.)

Think about the story of your life, including your heritage, childhood, growing to adulthood, and the milestones of your life. Your life story is contained within the story of God. Your life is directed by the current of the flow of the story of God. This is why understanding the story of God brings understanding to your life.

You would expect that if the Bible is really one story about one main character (God), then you should be able to see a “story line” develop and a direction to the story. When you think about the Bible as a whole, you can see these things.

The God of the Story

To see the overarching flow of the Bible, you need to think about the story of God first in how it relates to God himself. Understanding who God is and what he is like is necessary in order to understand the context or background for the story. The Bible does tell you about the God of the story.

From the Bible you come to understand God to be “eternally existing,” from eternity past (he has always existed and there has never been a time when he hasn't existed) to eternity future (he will always exist and there will never be a time when he won't exist).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelations 1:8). (See Psalm 90:2; Exodus 3:14; John 8:58; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17.)

You also need to understand that the Bible tells us that God is perfect and unchanging. God not only has no “faults” or “weaknesses” but he has all his attributes (qualities) to their full measure. So he is holy and cannot be more holy, he is all powerful and cannot be more powerful, he is present everywhere at all times and doesn't miss a thing. (See Psalm 33:11; 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Ephesians 3:11; 4:11; James 1:17.)

The Bookends to the Story

In the Bible, the “story” begins in the first two chapters (Genesis 1 and 2) with that which is perfect. God is perfect. God's creation is perfect. God's relationship to that creation is perfect.

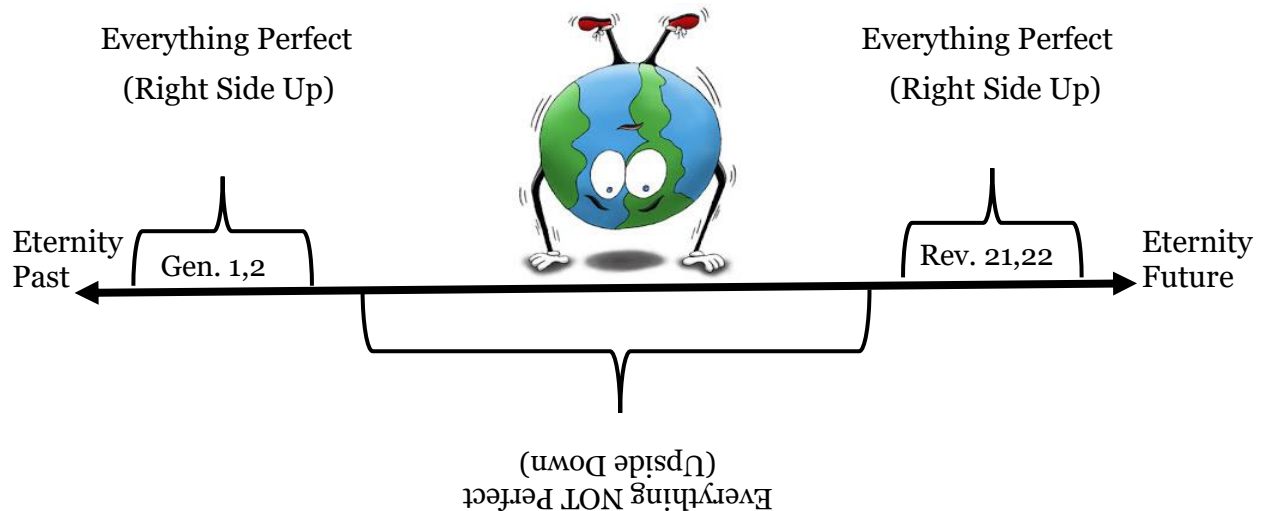
The next time you see everything perfect in the Bible is in the last two chapters (Revelations 21 & 22). In these chapters, you are told about the new heavens and the new earth.

So, the first two chapters and the last two chapters of the Bible describe what is perfect. These form literary bookends to the rest of the story contained in the Bible.

Now think about everything in your Bible in between these bookends. Is it perfect or not perfect? Everything, except God himself, in between these chapters is NOT perfect. Not even close. Everything from Genesis 3 through Revelations 20 is marred and corrupted by sin

This can be said another way. If being perfect is being “right-side up” — the way things were intended to be by God — then everything that is not perfect can be described as being “upside down.” Things are not just a little out of alignment, they are completely upside down.

This flow of the story can be diagramed in a simple timeline like this.



Living in an Upside-Down World

The Bible is talking to us about an upside-down world and how it relates to a right-side up God. So, when we received the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we embraced what is “good news.” The good news is that we who live in an upside-down world can enter into a relationship with a right-side up God.

A problem is that we have lived so long in an upside-down world, that it becomes “normal” for us. It is hard for us to conceive of it in another way. For example, as a simple analogy, let’s say we turn the buildings we live and work in upside down. We walk on the ceiling, the lighting is at our feet and shines up, we step over the door archways, etc. At first everything would seem weird and out of place. But if we live in this upside-down building for fifty years, then what would we think about the space? We would think that it is “normal”. What would our children think about living in these buildings? They would think that it has always been that way. The point is that when we live in an upside-down situation long enough, what is upside down is perceived to be right-side up.

And then someone comes along, who knows the real right-side up, and tells us that we are living in an upside-down world. We would think that they are crazy. A right-side up message in an upside-down world seems crazy and even foolish. However, in truth, what seems wise is really foolish and what seems foolish is really wise (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Until we can come to terms with what is real and what is not real, what is true and what is not true, what is right-side up and what is upside down, we will mistake what is wrong for what is right.

Remember the bookends of the story of God. When we talk about the story of God, we know that God created everything as perfect (Genesis 1 and 2) and he will restore everything to being perfect (Revelations 21 and 22). The story between these bookends tells us how God is going to restore the upside-down world to its perfect right-side up state. The good news of being re-created into what is right-side up and perfect is accomplished through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the right-side up message to an upside-down people, living in an upside-down world.

As leaders in the church, it is our responsibility to change the way we think and act so that we increasingly think and act in the right-side up way. This will not only dramatically change our own lives, but it will impact other people’s lives with this good news. And, as we will see, this gospel message also radically changes how we function as husbands, fathers, church members, and neighbors.

CAUTION – It is important to understand that even if you are a Christian and go to church you still need to change the way you think and act so that you increasingly think and act in the right-side up way. Christian growth and maturity involves (among other things) always evaluating and analyzing your life and my church through the lens of the gospel and God’s mission to ensure that you are more and more (a continual action) conformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:26-30; 12:1-2; Colossians 2:6-10; 3:1-17).

Living right-side up in an upside-down world is one of the themes we will be regularly referring to throughout this training.