

Community-Developed

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The Story

The Bible in 30 Minutes

- Reader 1 In the beginning God created a lot of stuff. All the stuff, actually. But God gave *you* some extra power and responsibility, and as a result, you got to be in on this whole thing with God in a special way.
- Reader 2 Still, it was never all about you. You humans got special responsibility, but there was a special *relationship* that included everything. Plants. Animals. You. Earth. God. All of it. The relationship was perfectly balanced.
- 1 Enter Adam and Eve, stage right. Like I said, everything's in balance. Paradise. But there's this tree, and, well, you know, they're just not supposed to eat from it. But they do. Maybe it represents disobedience. Maybe it represents vanity.
- 2 Either way, it represents a choice made. God gave Adam and Eve choices. And they mess it up, just like you all do. It's kind of a depressing start to the story, but that's how stories start. There's an initial conflict, and yours is the granddaddy of all initial conflicts. People do what they know they shouldn't, and they don't do what they know they should. And paradise isn't paradise anymore when people do what they shouldn't. That's just common sense.
- 1 And sure, God's disappointed, but God doesn't stay behind in paradise. God walks out with you into the muck of life after bad decisions.
- 2 And God hatches a plan. God works in this personal, intimate way, so God hatches a plan with one guy - Abraham.

- 1 God says, "Abraham, I'm putting together a team that will heal the whole world. I'm the owner, but you're the general manager. You gotta find a place for this team to play, and you've gotta start finding players."
- 2 So Abraham secures his team some land, and he starts growing the team. Not perfectly, mind you, but he grows the team organically. Makes babies. It's the nucleus of the team - family. For God so loved the world that he told this one guy, "Go ahead and start a family."
- 1 That family grows a little. Enter Joseph. Joseph is the all-star on the team for a generation, the clear MVP. But he wears his all-star jersey around the clubhouse, and his brothers sell him into slavery, bound for Egypt.
- 2 But he's an all-star, so he rises to the top in Egypt too. And then, years later, his brothers show up.
- 1 The team hasn't been doing so well.
- 2 Without their MVP, they didn't see this famine coming.
- 1 They need food - food that Joseph's been stockpiling.
- 2 He gives them everything they need.
- 1 Hugs.
- 2 Tears.
- 1 They make up.
- 2 And as a result, we all get a little glimpse of God's big plan fighting its way to the surface for a moment. Plain and simple, it's a taste of the way God's kingdom's gonna be some day.
- 1 Everyone's feeling so good about it that the whole family comes to Egypt. And the family tree grows like crazy. So now the family's so big it's a people. The team is a whole people now.
- 2 So the team keeps growing, and time goes by.
- 1 Joseph's in the hall of fame now, but the Egyptians don't care. All they see is a foreign family tree growing bigger and bigger on their land. So things get ugly for the team.
- 2 At its worst, the Egyptians start killing all the team's baby boys.

- 1 And that's when Shiprah and Puah, two heroic midwives, run a little interference, keeping baby boys alive behind Pharaoh's back.
- 2 Meanwhile, a mom has a baby, Moses, the people's next generational superstar.
- 1 And to save him, she risks her life and puts him in a basket in the river. And then Pharaoh's daughter finds him and decides she's gotta care for this kid.
- 2 And let's just pause for a second right here before Moses does his thing. Sometimes, the shorter you make the story, the less we talk about the women on this team. But they're there. Watch closely when you see them, because this story goes nowhere without them. They may not be at the centre of this story as often as they should be, but when they are, they call us to put them at the centre of the story as we live it in the future.
- 1 So Moses is near the top now, and this is when God steps in to tell him the team's gotta relocate. And Moses has gotta become the new manager to get them there. Moses doesn't want to do it, but God's got plans. God can't let this team get killed off by an angry pharaoh; they're the ones through whom God needs to bless everyone and everything. They're the ones through whom God will bring reconciliation and restore balance. So, plagues, departure, parting waters, dramatic escape. You've seen the movie.
- 2 God takes the team out into the wilderness for extended spring training. God gets really hands-on about it too - almost co-coaches with Moses sometimes. Gives them a lot of tips for becoming the kind of team that will fulfill its destiny. He gives them the 10 commandments and more. God, Moses, and the team develop a playbook of sorts. If this, then this. Here's what it would look like if the team is playing well. Here's what it would look like if the team is playing poorly. As happens with training, there's a lot of bluster and posturing - "You're gonna get killed if you play that way, son!" And so on. Maybe the coaches get carried away with their threats, or maybe everyone knows it's just part of how you train. Either way, the tone of the playbook reflects high goals and a heightened awareness of what's at stake - the things that are always needed before the Big Game.
- 1 But first, the team needs to get to the big leagues - the Promised Land. But just when they think they're ready, it becomes clear that they need a LOT more training.
- 2 But God's also a generous trainer. God rides them hard, but God's also got this really intimate compassion for them. "The Lord is my shepherd...The Lord makes me to lie down in green pastures," the players recall. "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine," they whisper.

- 1 And so it's decades of more training, learning this hard lesson from a loving coach - "Listen, team! You don't get into the Promised Land until you trust that I love you so desperately that I'm going to take care of you."
- 2 So finally the next generation gets their crack at the Promised Land, and lo and behold, God delivers it to them.
- 1 It's a crushing victory.
- 2 They wipe all their enemies out.
- 1 God. Is. On. Their. Side.
- 2 For God so loved the team that God gave them total and utter control of their very own country.
- 1 But, what if - yeah, I know this is a high point here, but just humour me for a minute - but what if we slipped another story in here too. You see, before all this happens, when the team's spies went to get the lay of the Promised Land, the strangest things happen. These spies shack up with this prostitute, Rahab. So, the local soldiers, they get wind of things, and they know right where to look. So they're pounding on the prostitute's door. And Rahab - despite the fact that these spies are here as part of a plan to TORCH HER CITY- she hides them!
- 2 And just like with Joseph and his brothers, we all get another little glimpse of God's big plan - a plan for a beautiful kingdom of peace - fighting its way to the surface for a moment. Because remember this - the Promised Land is a short-term plan. This gracious prostitute is a hint of the Big Game to come when God will use the team to restore relationships with EVERYONE. Some day. For God so loved the team that God gave them to a heathen prostitute, someone they assumed was nothing, to protect and care for them when they couldn't protect themselves. There's also that. No way around it.
- 1 So now they've got their very own land. And now the family tree can really spread its roots. Spring training is over, and they're all in the Big Leagues now.
- 2 Except here's the thing Once you're in the Big Leagues, you've got big league expectations. Do you deserve this?
- 1 (Who could?)
- 2 Will you get cocky?
- 1 (Who couldn't?)

2 Will you stay on top of your game?

1 (Good luck!)

2 Will you be able to stay there?

1 (Only if you stay on top of your game!)

2 Abuse this privilege, and this blessing will become a curse real fast. You'll wish you were still slaving away in Egypt's minor leagues. So don't throw those playbooks away. Keep them fresh and everthing's gonna be OK. For God so loved the team, that God gave them the kind of playbooks that could keep them right on track, as long as they used them diligently.

1 And yet - yeah, I know you want to find out if the team keeps it together - but yet, there's this guy I should tell you about right now. His name was Job. He was a star player. He had every athletic gift you could want. He was living up to every inch of his potential, and the ceiling for that potential only kept getting higher. He was the model of everything we just talked about. Ate, breathed, and slept the playbooks. And got rewarded for it big time.

2 But then one day, nothing. He walks on to the field and he's got nothing. Not only that, but he breaks his left leg. And then, trying to get up, he breaks his right leg. And then, falling down, he breaks his fingers. The guy can't even hold his broken legs together because he's broken his fingers! And the crowd, the crowd's brutal about it. They're booing. Hard. People are yelling at him, telling him he should've read the playbook better. Should've trained harder. Screaming that the playbook, itself, says that this kind of thing only happens to the kind of trash who doesn't read or follow it. But here's the thing - he did follow it. He absolutely did.

1 And this is a gracious story?

2 Yeah, because it's about a gracious God. Paradise isn't paradise anymore, and so things happen that aren't fair; they just do. But God didn't stay in paradise; God walked out into the muck of life after bad things happen. For God so loved the team, that God wasn't booing Job. God was waiting for the chance to pick up that frail body and set those broken bones. And here we see God's Big Plan breaking through to the surface again. Sure, the playbook's there to make sure you become the kind of team you should, but this isn't just about burying your nose in a playbook. In the end, it's about a relationship with a God who is working to use your team to HEAL things, not rub salt in other people's wounds.

But back to the temptations of the Promised Land.

- 1 This whole Job thing is actually a big reminder. You're in the big leagues, and your team is unstoppable, and, well, will you remember Abraham? Weird question, right? But will you? Will you remember Abraham and God and the start of the team, and the fact that this team wasn't built to win the league by itself, but to somehow *change* the league itself until EVERY team was a winner?
- 2 Like anyone would remember that, right? Isn't there a league to win here? And those other teams, you know they'll do anything to win. They'll stab your pregnant women if it gives them better odds. God's deal with Abraham sounds nice, but this isn't Folk Fest, folks. This is the Big League.
- 1 And so the team does what a team does. It nominates leaders who will protect it and look after its dominance. At first, that leadership process is rather primitive for this team. Have a few good games, and you might be leader for a while. But the longer the team's in the Big Leagues, the more they notice anything that might give another team an advantage.
- 2 And the other teams? They each have a really clear leader with a really clear system that serves to maximize their strength and stability.
- 1 Now, it's hard to believe that the team forgets this - until you remember how often you forget it yourself - but this team forgets that they have a secret weapon that makes all that formal leadership stuff irrelevant. They have God, of course. And God's got a plan, and God's plans always happen in God's time and God's ways. Remember spring training? This is God's team, and lesson number one is, "I love you." Lesson two, "I got your back."
- 2 But they forget. You'd think God would be hurt, but God doesn't see it as a problem - right now. People can run their team like a kingdom and grow like one too. The team can become a nation for now. That's certainly God's game plan for now - to grow the team.
- 1 So God lets one person in particular become the leader - against which all their leaders will be judged forevermore - David. Interestingly, he kind of sucks at it a lot of the time. Sleeps around. Kills a good guy to cover up the fact that he's been sleeping around. Not the kind of plumb line you'd expect God to be dropping from heaven.
- 2 But here's the thing. David pours out his heart to God. He's the guy you think of when you hear a lot of that "Dear God" poetry. Like "Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes!" ... And so when God sends one of his first human messengers, Nathan, to pour God's heart to David, David listens. David messes up, but when God uses Nathan to remind him about lesson one - "I love you" - and lesson two - "I got your back," he listens, and accepts it as best he can. And *that's* the plumb line. For God so

loved the team that God let them become a nation and have a king - and mess up in all the ways a nation and a king always do. For God so loved the team that God gave them what they wanted, corrupt as it would be, and worked with it.

- 1 Of course, David's not the only one who can make a mess of the kingdom from time to time. His story's just a small example of the big one. The people get promiscuous with other gods and selfish with each other. And so God turns Nathan's work into a recurring thing, hires a role player for the team every once in a while that does the dirty work. Amos. Hosea. Micah. Guys that only the Amish are brave enough to name their kids after anymore.
- 2 And these guys remind the team that no matter how big you get, you can't forget those playbooks. So it's back to the playbooks from spring training. Search in the basement and behind every wall for every last one. Don't miss a thing. For God so loved the team that God helped them find every last one of those lost playbooks.
- 1 And so they're reading those playbooks – well, to be honest, sometimes, sometimes not - and they're growing, and they're getting stronger and more independent and more organized. And they're waiting for the Big Game to break out. Or at least some of them are.
- 2 “God, when does this team conquer the league, like you said it would?” they ask.
- 1 Others lost interest. Life without Big Game pressure is pretty comfortable. But both groups are about to get a wake-up call they can't ignore.
- 2 Just when the team has grown from one man to one family to one people to one nation, it all falls apart.
- 1 Another team sweeps in, and there's no mercy.
- 2 We're talking worst case scenario.
- 1 If you're not dead, you're a slave.
- 2 A slave in another country.
- 1 Maybe your husband and kids are dead, and you're chained up in the killer's home, cleaning the toilets.
- 2 Terrible, terrible stuff.
- 1 And, of course, this little remnant of the team's left wondering, “Was *that* the Big Game? Did we just *lose* the Big Game?” Everything - I mean everything - is called into

question, right? God built this team to win. God promised to deliver the victory. But now this?!

- 2 So everyone's waiting to see what God has to say. (At least those who believed God didn't die with their husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, and kids back in the Promised Land.)
- 1 And those who bravely believe that God is alive aren't actually much of a treat to listen to either.
- 2 "My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground..." they write. Or, "Oh God, will you bless the person who takes these slave drivers' babies and bashes their brains out."
- 1 That "Dear God" poetry's not all about lying in green pastures and climbing each others' sexy pomegranate trees anymore, I'll tell you that much.
- 2 But eventually God sends more Amish namesakes around to deliver some messages. Guys like Jeremiah and Isaiah.
- 1 "First," they say, "even if this battle was the Big Game, it's not like you were following the playbooks closely enough to win it anyway."
- 2 "Second," they say, "you know that God never promised this would all happen as you expected it, did you?"
- 1 "So third," they say, "you may as well settle in here, in this foreign land. Remember that the ultimate plan was to be a BLESSING to the other nations. Well, you practiced the heck out of blessing yourselves, why don't you work on the others for a while? Seek the peace of their team's cities."
- 2 "And, "God loves you," and "God has your back."

So the splintered, shattered team spends some time thinking about it all. And they come to the conclusion that maybe they hadn't been following those playbooks very well after all. Maybe they brought this on themselves. Maybe they SHOULD use this as an opportunity to do a better job. And so a lot of them do.

And after a few generations, some of them even end up staggering back to the Promised Land to survey the damage and start over.

- 1 But still, was this it?

- 2 This “return” seemed like a small victory compared to what they had before. And a smaller victory than they had expected.
- 1 They sure as heck don’t feel like a team that conquered the league, changed the game, and brought every team into a perfectly balanced relationship with themselves, each other, everything, and God.
- 2 What in the world do you do with a reality like that?

Pause.

- 1 And it came to pass that a knocked up woman and her shotgun-wedding husband made a trip to Bethlehem because Big Government told them to.
- 2 And behold, a baby was born in a stable, the only place they could find to lay their heads.
- 1 Angels attended.
- 2 Kings brought gifts from afar.
- 1 In that stable, the stump of what had been the family tree sprouted something unbelievable.
- 2 Jesus.
- 1 And God’s plan is back in action.
- 2 Jesus grabs a few stragglers from this once-impressive team and gathers them around the playbook again.
- 1 Except nobody’s used the playbook like this before! Pages are turned upside-down. Plays are combined in ways that old coaches would never have allowed. The purpose of a play is explained, and then all the X’s, O’s, and arrows are erased. Erased! And then redrawn to fit the purpose again.
- 2 Who in the world gets to reinterpret the playbook like this?! Who does this guy think he is? “Well, who do you say I am?” he mostly replies.
- 1 Who, indeed. This guy heals the blind, casts out demons, raises the dead.

- 2 He also has this annoying knack for talking in riddles and turning things upside-down. In fact, he seems to be gunning for some kind of world that turns everything upside-down.
- 1 “Are you rich, young man? Give it all away.”
- 2 “Are you poor and run-down, my son? You’ll get it all some day.”
- 1 It’s confusing, frankly. But if his life and teachings are an abstract painting, there’s some vague familiar shape to it all. Of a kingdom, a paradise like the very beginning. A kingdom of love, where all is balanced and restored, where our broken relationship with each other, this creation, and God is finally healed.
- 2 And suddenly, all this kingdom talk starts to sound *really* familiar. Is this now the Big Game? Is this guy going to lead the Kingdom back to its former glory? Lead it into the promises of ancient times?
- 1 Unfortunately, those who are threatened by such questions are not so excited by them.
- 2 And so, just as things are getting exciting, they turn deadly.
- 1 There’s enough time for a trial, really a joke of a trial - and before you know it this heir to the throne of David is nailed to a tree and left there to die.
- 2 And yet.
- 1 And yet.
- 2 And yet. Three days later, there he is. Up from the grave. In the flesh.
- 1 Just long enough to say “Hi!” and “Check these scars out!”
- 2 And “Keep this thing going. It’s yours.”
- 1 And “Check you later. I’m gonna float up to heaven now.”
- 2 And so again, it begs the question, “Who is this guy?!”
- 1 And so his former students do some thinking. And some researching.
- 2 They check out the stuff written down by those prophets of old. And just like Jesus demonstrated, they turn the stories around and around to see what new things they might say.

- 1 And lo and behold, the picture starts to emerge again.
- 2 A kingdom. A king.
- 1 This. Was. The. Big. Game. Jesus is the king that won the big game. God's plan is in action. Israel's shattering defeat has been transformed through this Jesus guy, into a victory for everyone - a Kingdom where every relationship is being restored.
- 2 But there's something more. Something hard to pin down, but an unrelenting thought.
- 1 Nobody could deliver on this guy's promises, nobody could activate such healing, nobody could conquer death - but God.
- 2 This. Guy. Was. That.
- 1 A god-person. A person-god.
- 2 Nah, those aren't quite it.
- 1 All God, as a human. All God, all human.
- 2 Come to earth to take the throne.
- 1 Be the king.
- 2 Deliver on that promise by announcing God's kingdom, showing us how to live in it, and capping it off by conquering death.
- 1 Happy conclusion and all, but they have no idea what to do with it.
- 2 The guy's gone - floated back up to heaven.
- 1 He might be King of the World, but an absent king is only as good as a dead king.
- 2 But then it descends.
- 1 It's been tough enough to conclude that there's God the Father and God the Jesus ... no wait, God the ... Son - yeah, that works.
- 2 It's been tough enough to figure out that God's the Father and also the Son, but now there's God the invisible, hovering right there in the middle of things, clear as the miracles it performs.

- 1 God the Father. God the Son. God..the...Spirit. The essence of the King furthering that kingdom.
- 2 And that Spirit's no slouch.
- 1 It's proving itself left and right.
- 2 The people of the Kingdom are working to bring that healing to all relationships, all over, in whatever conditions.
- 1 With the Spirit, such monumental tasks isn't only possible, it's just another day at the office.
- 2 Not that everything's hunky dory. People are now claiming membership in the Kingdom from all over the place. From this family tree, all family trees will be blessed.
- 1 It's hard to know who's all on the team!
- 2 Foreskin or no foreskin? The playbook was clear - "No."
- 1 The Spirit, though, says, "Yes."
- 2 And I can eat bacon now too ...?
- 1 The Spirit says, "Sure. Wrap all your favourite foods in it!"
- 2 OK. But, really, how do we do this community thing together? We're all so different. That girl's awkwardly short, and that guy's got long hair and three unicorn tattoos. That family makes food that smells like Uncle Karl's feet, and...
- 1 Consult the Spirit.
- 2 The movement grows and the movement moves. To Jerusalem.
- 1 Rome.
- 2 Centre of the world, and beyond.
- 1 For God so loved the world, that God gave it a team, the Son as King, and the Spirit to share that team with the ends of the earth.
- 2 Just like they went, now you go.

Pause.

- 1 But maybe one more thing.
- 2 A guy named John, a real artsy type who talks in pictures, wants to get in the last word.
- 1 The guy's super hard to understand.
- 2 But the main point is what's important.
- 1 God wins.
- 2 Loving wins.
- 1 This is over. And this isn't over yet. The Kingdom is here, but it's clearly not yet complete.
- 2 People still mess up. People still get messed up, even when they don't deserve it.
- 1 So here's what you should do - Live in it. Cry about it. Enjoy it.
- 2 But if you want to do those things right, listen to John's last words so that you can EXPECT it.
- 1 Some day, no more evil.
- 2 Some day, perfect healing.
- 1 Some day, paradise.
- 2 Every day, live like you really expect it.
- 1 Like you're a part of it.
- 2 Because you are.
- 1 No matter what you've done
- 2 Or, what's been done to you,
- 1 You are a part of this story.

2 WE are a part of this story. So share it.

1 Your ugly stuff.

2 Everyone's ugly stuff.

1 Your ho-hum, this-is-boring stuff.

2 Everyone's ho-hum, this-is-boring stuff.

1 Your best stuff.

2 The best of everyone's stuff.

1 Your real stuff.

2 Is God's stuff.

1 Is the story.

2 So those who have ears,

1 Listen!

2 And those who have voices,

1 Share it!

2 And those who have life,

1 Live it!