

LIFE IN GOD'S STORY

PROXIMITY

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND CHALLENGING
CONTENT DESIGNED TO RESOURCE
RELATIONAL DISCIPLE-MAKING.


Presbyterian
CHURCH IN IRELAND

WHAT IS PROXIMITY?

This booklet provides you with biblical content and practical questions that aim to resource you in your discipleship journey.

However, Proximity is much less about the booklet you are holding and much more about the relationship you will foster.

Just as Paul shared the truths of the Christian faith with Timothy in the proximity of close relationship, this resource gives you the opportunity to dive deeper into key discipleship themes and talk about them with other disciples with whom you can learn.

LIFE IN GOD'S STORY

'Life in God's Story' focuses on exploring how we live in response to God's big story unfolded in the Bible. The story reveals God's identity as Creator, Redeemer, Rescuer and Renewer, helping us to understand our responsibility as his children.

This resource unpacks our life in God's story by pointing to the paradise we were made for, the brokenness of humanity, the rescue offered by Jesus and God's plan for renewal through the power of his Spirit, the work of his church, and his coming to earth. Each session balances both personal reflection and practical conversation by digging into the bible and providing questions to discuss.

As you use this resource, may you discover how to find hope, rescue, responsibility and renewal in Jesus.

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- P.4** 1/ **HOOKED** / John 14:1-6
God's story is focused on the One who is the way, the truth and the life.
- P.12** 2/ **MADE** / Genesis 1
God's story starts with the Creator and his creation as we glimpse how we were made in perfection, for paradise and with purpose.
- P.20** 3/ **FRAYED** / Genesis 3
God's way is rejected, resulting in brokenness and disorder.
- P.28** 4/ **ANTICIPATING** / Exodus 6:1-12
God is patient with his people, constantly leading them on a journey towards him. He keeps his promises but doesn't always act on our timescale.
- P.36** 5/ **RESCUED** / John 8:1-11
God's story shows that his people need rescuing from their sin. Jesus came to free us from the sin that accuses us and set us on the path of new actions.
- P.44** 6/ **EMPOWERED** / Acts 1:1-8
God empowers his people by his Spirit and challenges them to be his witnesses in the world.
- P.52** 7/ **TOGETHER** / Acts 2:42-47
Jesus does his work in the world through his church.
- P.60** 8/ **RENEWED** / Revelation 21:1-8
God's story ends with the incredible picture of the future awaiting God's people.

GETTING THE MOST FROM PROXIMITY

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”
2 Timothy 2:2

You will get the most from Proximity by engaging with the first two sections of the material on your own before beginning to discuss these with others.

ON YOUR OWN

‘**INTO THE THEME**’ gets you thinking about the topic in the context of your own life. ‘**INTO THE BIBLE**’ then introduces a passage to be read alongside a short reflection to include some application and challenge. Both these sections are meant to be completed on your own and space is provided to make notes if you want. This means the process begins by the Holy Spirit revealing key biblical truth to you, which you can then unpack with others.

WITH OTHERS

Having read the material before meeting together, you will come to the conversation with thoughts, reflections and questions already in mind. This is where the conversation begins as others share what struck them as they read and what truths jumped out. ‘**INTO THE CONVERSATION**’ provides trigger questions to help you go deeper together in discussion.

IN YOUR LIFE

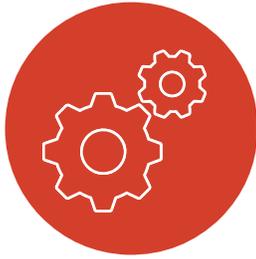
The ‘**INTO OUR LIVES**’ section is vital at the end of each session. It helps you move towards living out the truth and ground it in everyday circumstances. There are 3 aspects to this: Respond (suggesting one specific action in your life), Reach out (signalling a missional or outward implication that will impact your witness to others) and Read further (signposting an additional Bible passage to read to continue reflecting on). At this point, you should also take time to pray together and for one another.

1/ HOOKED

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’

John 14:6

God’s story is focused on the One who is the way, the truth and the life. Approach life thoughtfully, by reflecting who’s way, truth and life we are following.



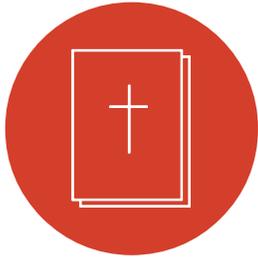
INTO THE THEME

You know what it's like to get hooked on a story? To start reading a book and find you can't put it down. To tell yourself, 'just one more episode', then end up watching a whole boxset. Each of us, at times without even realising it, are hooked by a story that is directing the course of our lives. We must consider if it is the right story for our lives to be hooked on.

Among all the competing stories vying for a piece of our lives, there is one story that has had a deeper impact on human history than any other. This is a story that has shaped countless works of art and literature. It's a story that has sold more printed copies than any other book and has shaped culture for generations across the world. It's a story that, as Christians, we should be familiar with – the big story of God that has unfolded through history and is captured in print in the Bible.

How do you view the Bible? You might see a variety of stories, some of which excite you more than others, provide an example to follow, or guide you how to live a more moral life. But if that's all it is, then we might wrongly assume that the Bible is merely a random collection of stories about us. Instead, each event, book and character found within the Bible fit together to form one incredible story that isn't actually about us, but about God. While it has many different scenes and subplots, there is one single, connected and overarching story that revolves around his Kingdom where he is centre stage.

All the narratives, prophecies, promises and wisdom of Scripture come together to provide us with an amazing vision of God's purposes. Understanding this bigger story is vital to living as a Christian and helping others journey as disciples. While the temptation always exists to begin with our own story, let's instead explore God's story, because life is much bigger than us and we can only begin to make sense of our lives as part of his bigger purpose.



INTO THE BIBLE

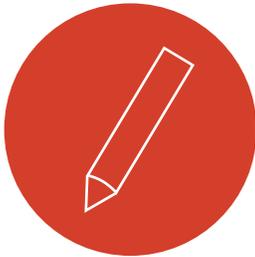
Take time to read John 14:1-6 and the following reflection. *Let the words sink in.* What captured your attention? What questions surfaced for you? Into what circumstances of your life did it seem to speak? What is God revealing to you?

Through these words, Jesus deals with the worry and anxiety the disciples are facing. He wants his first disciples to trust him to set the storyline for their lives. He wants us to do the same. Yet sometimes this can be a challenge as we navigate the huge variety of substitute stories offered to us by the world. Every story promises us things like fulfilment, happiness, satisfaction and hope along the way.

Perhaps we search for satisfaction, causing us to sacrifice long-term peace for short-term pleasure. Perhaps the assumption of choice is the truth we believe, causing us to overvalue keeping our options open and undervalue commitment. Or perhaps the story of ambition is the life we live, driving us to work hard, climb the ladder and have our name known, yet causing us to overwork, refuse rest and neglect our relationships. Every story to live by offers a 'way', a 'truth', and a fulfilment in 'life'.

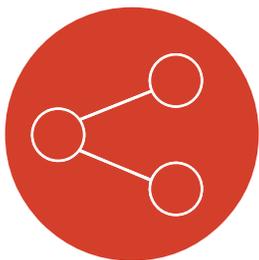
However, these are all substitute stories to God's story found in following Jesus who offers the way to live, the truth that echoes reality and the life that fulfils. Ultimately, among the myriad of ways and truths offered to us in our lives, Jesus describes himself here as THE way, THE truth and THE life. While the world's stories might sparkle in our eyes, they have a limited shelf life and will someday come to an end. While building our own story might excite us, it is so very small in the grand scheme of things and will leave us lonely. But God's story encompasses all of our individual stories, is guaranteed to last forever, and offers life to all.

In the passage we see a refreshing admission by Thomas. He was confused and disoriented about what way he was to go. Because Thomas was in the dark about the destination, he was confused about the directions. Yet these words reassure and remind us that Jesus is both the destination and direction. He isn't just the author of this story, he is also the finisher of the story. This means that the same way we get into the story is the same way we continue in the story – through Jesus. As he actively goes ahead to prepare a place for his people, he will also equip them for their journey there.



**WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON WHAT
YOU HAVE READ IN THE SPACE BELOW**

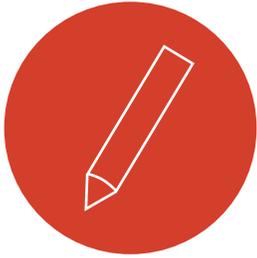




INTO THE CONVERSATION

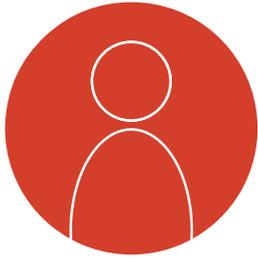
As you meet together, take time to chat with one another, sharing some things that are going on in each other's lives. Then use some of the following questions to guide your discussion, sharing your reflections on the truth that was revealed to you through the Bible passage and reflection.

- 1/** What is your favourite story of all time and why does it resonate with you?
- 2/** Share together what struck you about the reading and the reflection. What did you see that you hadn't noticed before? What words or phrases stuck out for you from the passage?
- 3/** Satisfaction, choice and ambition were mentioned in the reflection as alternative stories by which our lives can be shaped. Which of these do you find yourself most tempted to inhabit? In what ways do you find them clashing with the way, truth and life that Jesus calls you to follow?
- 4/** In what ways are you tempted to elevate the importance of your story above God's story in your life?
- 5/** In what circumstances do you find your story most easily connecting with the story of the Bible?
- 6/** Like Thomas, where are you experiencing disorientation or doubt in your story? How can you see Jesus again as the way for you, the truth to live by and the one in whom to find life?



WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON WHAT
YOU HAVE SHARED IN THE SPACE BELOW





INTO OUR LIVES

RESPOND:

Which of the world's substitute stories do you need to become less hooked on and what does that mean practically in your life right now?

REACH OUT:

It's amazing how much we communicate in stories. As Christians, we often feel pressure to share our story with others. Turn the tables by asking a colleague or friend about the story of their life. What do they believe? What story are they hooked on? Take time to listen to them.

PRAY:

Talk about the **RESPOND** and **REACH OUT** sections together, being specific about what you hope to do. Commit to praying for one another for these things and take time to share about the outcomes of this in your next session together.

READ FURTHER:

John 1:1-14. Notice how Jesus is both the author of the story and the story itself.

An aerial photograph of a winding road through a forest, overlaid with a red color scheme. The road curves through the landscape, and the overall image has a dark, moody atmosphere with a strong red tint.

While it has many different scenes and subplots, there is one single, connected and overarching story that revolves around his Kingdom where he is centre stage.



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