

In just one more week we get to embark on a big adventure together. From our pre-readers, all the way up to our seasoned readers, we will all be listening to, and reading the Bible together.

Can you think of anything more unifying for a congregation?  
Can you think of anything more energizing?  
Is there any better way for God to work in us and through us to help us grow spiritually?  
Can you imagine any better way for God to help us grow in our ability to follow Christ, and love others with the love of Christ?

When we read the Bible God always promises to meet us  
and speak to us  
and give us understanding  
and sometimes convict us, and yet always God promises to give us life and hope.

Paul writes in Romans:

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.<sup>[a]</sup>

So this morning, I'd like to share an invitation with you. I would love it if every single member of this congregation, and not just our members, but also friends and neighbors, and co-workers would join us for this adventure that begins next week.

And to get the most out of this adventure I'd like to invite you to do three things:

**First**, I invite you to make a commitment to be faithful in your worship attendance.

Because the more faithful you are in coming to worship, the more you will be able to hear the stories each week, and see the threads that tie the stories together.

A lot of us have read a book of the Bible here, or many several different books of the Bible, and we've heard a lot of sermons on short passages of Scripture.

But the real strength of reading *THE STORY* is that it has arranged the Bible chronologically, and without repetition, and with bridges that tie seemingly unrelated stories together.

Just a few weeks into this series you're going to be able to start seeing the Bible in a whole new way.

The **second** invitation I have for you is just as important. Not only are you invited to come to worship and hear a message on the theme for each week, but I also want to invite you to take part in one of our discussion groups

So when you go from the worship service, and you still have questions, or you have things that you want to talk about, I invite you to find a group where you can ask those questions and grow and learn together.

When Pastor Minor was serving this congregation he organized some groups he called, "An Experiment in Practical Christianity." And I've heard many of you tell me how much being a part of a group like that meant to you.

- One mom told me how important it was in helping her form deeper friendships with other members of this church.
- Another person told me how these groups really helped build a bridge between what they were learning and hearing on Sundays, and how it related to the rest of their life, Monday through Saturday.

And that's my hope for the STORY groups that will be forming.

Instead of just having one big class that meets here in the sanctuary, we are going to have multiple tables set up

- some on the patio,
- one group meeting in the room next to kitchen,
- some groups meeting in homes, maybe some meeting in a break room
- during a lunch hour at work, or at a local restaurant.

And I will be preparing a discussion guide that will go along with the theme for the day so that you will have a resource in addition to the discussion questions that you find in the back of the book.

So that's my second invitation, the goal of meeting together and getting our whole congregation learning, and growing together.

My **third** invitation is similar to the second.

I would like to invite you, not only to come to worship, and be a part of a discussion group but I would also like to invite you make reading the Bible a regular part of each day. And not just reading it, but taking time for prayer, letting God's Word speak to you personally, and then sharing with someone else, what you are reading and learning.

Let me give you an example of how that might work.

My confirmation class will be reading the Teen edition of *THE STORY*.  
and their parents will be reading the hardcover version.

But instead of what often happens in our culture where teens have their music and their TV shows, and adults have their own music and their own TV shows, and even in the church we have a youth group for teens and adult classes for adults, and sometimes we have a hard time finding things in common to talk about.

So instead of that, I believe that God is calling this congregation, to bridge those age barriers and I am inviting my confirmation class and their parents to make it a practice to sit down together every Sunday and during the week, and share with each other, what they are reading and learning.

And so I invite you to do the same thing, to share with a friend or call a family member, or visit around the dinner table, or have a conversation at bedtime as you read the children's edition of *THE STORY*. And let the Word of God dwell in you richly as you share what God is doing in your life, with the people God has placed in your life.

This morning I also feel called to speak about one of the challenges I think we are all going to face.

Now you might be thinking that our biggest challenge is the challenge of our culture that is always competing for our time.

It is true that Sunday morning is busier than it has ever been.  
And it is also true that Sunday school attendance in every church that I know of has been in a steady decline for the last decade.

But the biggest challenge is not something external.  
It's not something out there.

Rather, it's right here.  
It's the battle within each one of us, to be attentive to the Word of God.  
To answer Jesus' call to, "Seek first the kingdom of God"

Many who followed Jesus, found his call to discipleship too difficult.  
And once when some of those who had been following Jesus turned away, Jesus asked his disciples: "You don't want to leave too, do you?"  
And Peter answered, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

What did Peter mean when he said "words of eternal life"?

In your heart of hearts, in the deepest place inside of you, I hope you have felt the unconditional love of Jesus.

I hope you have heard God speaking to you,  
maybe at a time when you have especially felt the sting and shame of your sin.  
And you heard God assuring you that you are deeply loved...

- that Jesus has paid the price for you sin and mine, once and for all.
- that God sent his own Son into this world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

That's the Gospel.

That's the heart of God's salvation story.

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Which leads me to a question you might be wondering about.

Why do we have a Christmas manger up here by the altar in the middle of September?

This is why:

When you are feeling that inner battle,  
when you are tempted by all those things that distract you and pull your time and attention away from God's Word, I want you to remember this:

Martin Luther said, "The Bible is the cradle that holds the Christ."

The Bible certainly can show us our sin, that's God speaking through the Law.  
But ultimately "The Bible is the cradle that holds the Christ." The whole Bible drives toward the salvation story of Jesus.

And God will speak through the Bible, to bring you life and forgiveness and salvation.

It is the greatest Story that has ever been told.

Will you join me on this adventure? Amen