



# Enter the Story

## ***Intro to Storying***

A narrative based around  
John the Baptist

## ***THE BIBLE***

Matthew 3:1-17  
Matthew 11:1-19  
Matthew 14:1-12

### INTRODUCTION

## What is Storying?

- In a few words, what has your experience with the scriptures been like?

Storying is a group process that is founded on the belief that the Scriptures are living and active and that God illuminates His word in order to move us toward transformation – making us more and more like Christ. The hope is for all participants to trust and allow God’s Spirit to work and to encourage each other to listen and look for God to take us deeper.

- Have you OR how have you experienced God’s word as “living” and “active”?

## Why Storying?

The Goals of Storying are that each of us will:

- See the big picture of God’s great story.
- Listen for God’s direction through Scripture and insights from each other.
- Learn deep truths about the character and nature of God.
- Express our thoughts and what we’re learning through group discussion.
- Discover new insights and direction for our lives in light of God’s story.
- See how our story is a part of God’s bigger story.

# Turning the Diamond

The Hebrew tradition possesses a unique reverence for God's Story. This manifested itself in the special ways in which they learned from the Scriptures. The Jewish people were taught to regard the Scriptures as a "living person" – with respect and complexity – and take the time to get to know her.

They were to approach the stories of the Torah as if they were actually standing in the place of their ancestors – in the presence of God. In essence, they were asking what it would be like to put themselves into the story – to enter into it for themselves.

In his book, "The Seventy Faces of Torah," author Stephen Wylen describes a way in which the Jews studied the text:

*"There are seventy faces to the Torah." Every single verse in the Torah yields seventy different interpretations. Each interpretation teaches something new and different. They may even contradict one another ... yet each one of the seventy interpretations is the true word of God."*

- How does that idea strike you? Can the scriptures have more than one meaning?

The image of the 70 faces may be taken from the imagery of the jeweler's art. Each side of a cut gem is called a facet, meaning 'a little face'. A light sparkles within every fine gemstone. We know that this light is a reflection, but the ancients thought of the light in a gemstone as originating from within the stone. The beauty and fascination of a fine gem is that one stone sparkles in so many different ways.

We know there is a single light within the stone, but we see that light differently depending on which face we gaze upon. One diamond is like seventy different diamonds as we turn it, but of course, it is one.

In the same way, there is only one God whose light shines forth from every verse in His word. We see that light differently depending on how we interpret the verse. The light of God's Holy Spirit is fully revealed in many sparkles and flashes as we seek God through many different interpretations of every single verse of Scripture.

The Hebrew nation believed that every time they looked at the stories of the Scriptures, they'd discover something new: Further beauty, details, depth, and richness. As they gathered to listen and look attentively into the Scriptures, they'd engage in lively dialogue, sharing all they'd seen reflected back through the 70 faces of the Torah.

These were often spirited discussions, sometimes turning toward disagreement. Shouting and laughter were even considered commonplace. Many Jews continue this tradition with the belief that God continues to reveal more of Himself each time they gather and learn from the Scriptures.

We, too, should embrace this approach to God's word. The Bible and its stories are living, filled with endless meaning and mystery that we can connect with today. We must listen as God's Spirit illuminates the Scriptures for us – turning the diamond – allowing our imaginations to explore each idea and implication that the story may reflect back to us.

## The Process

- Rewind the Story – Remember what has come before.
- Hear the Story - Actively listen for our observations and wondering questions.
- Retell the Story – Retain the key points of the story.
- Discuss the Story – Share our observations and listen to others.
- Join the Story – Critically think about the application and implications of the story.

### *Rewind the Story*

Our story comes from Matthew 3:1-17, Matthew 11:1-19, & Matthew 14:1-12

It takes place during the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Judea, where God's people live under Roman rule, as they anxiously await a Messiah who they believe would overthrow those in power by force.

### **Scene One: The Message of John the Baptist**

While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, *“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of heaven is near.”*

The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, *“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”*

John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food, he ate locusts and wild honey. People from Jerusalem, Judea, and all over the Jordan valley went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him, he denounced them, saying, *“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.*

*Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe because we are the descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. Even now, the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees.*

*Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire. I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am – so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave or carry his sandals.*

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”*

### **Scene Two: Jesus Baptized by John**

Then Jesus appeared, arriving at the Jordan River from Galilee, and He wanted John to baptize him. But John tried to talk him out of it, saying, *“I am the one who needs to be baptized by you.”* But Jesus said, *“It needs to be done, for we need to do all that God asks.”*

So, John agreed to baptize Him. After His baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on Him. And a voice from heaven said, *“This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”*

### **Scene Three: John’s Disciples Question Jesus**

After this, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, while John continued to call people to repentance and speak out against those who abused their power. He even went so far as to confront the Roman official, King Herod, telling him that it was against God’s law for him to marry his sister-in-law, Herodias.

This confrontation led to John being arrested and thrown into prison. After some time, John heard the news about all of the miraculous things Jesus was doing. So he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him, *“Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”*

Jesus told them, *“Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. And tell him, God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.”*

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. *“What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of the wind? Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet.*

*John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, “Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.” I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!”*

### **Scene Four: John's Demise**

Meanwhile, John was still in prison, and Herod wanted to kill him. But he chose not to because he was afraid that the people would riot because they all believed John was a prophet.

But at a birthday party thrown in his honor, Herod received a dance from Herodias's daughter. It pleased him so much that he vowed to give her anything she wanted. At her mother's urging, the girl said, *"I want the head of John the Baptist on a tray!"*

The king regretted what he had said, but because of the vow he had made in front of his guests, he issued the orders. So John was beheaded in prison, and his head was brought on a tray and given to the girl who took it to her mother.

Later, John's disciples came for his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus what had happened.

#### *Retell the Story*

- *John was preaching in the wilderness, calling people to repentance.*
- *John challenges the authorities and says someone greater is coming.*
- *Jesus is baptized by John and goes into the wilderness.*
- *John confronts Herod and is put in prison.*
- *John doubts who Jesus is and sends his disciples to ask for help.*
- *Jesus doesn't help.*
- *At Herod's birthday party, Herodias's daughter asks for John to be killed.*
- *John is beheaded and displayed.*
- *His disciples bury him and tell Jesus what has happened.*

#### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?

- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- What do you think John meant about Jesus' baptizing "with the Holy Spirit and with fire?"
- Why do you think God gave visible and audible signs of His presence at Jesus' baptism? What is the significance of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit tangibly working together at the same time?
- After Jesus' baptism, John is arrested. What question does John have his disciples ask Jesus? Why do you think he asks this question?
- What do you think John's expectations of Jesus were at this point in the story?
- What do you think Jesus' response to this question was saying to John and his other followers? What does it mean for us?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

## 1) BEYOND DOUBT

At the beginning of our story, John the Baptist is boldly proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah. After some time in prison, he begins to reconsider and sends his disciples to investigate. What role does doubt play in the life of a believer? Are we allowed to doubt God? Does God punish us for doubt? Explain your thoughts.

## 2) GOD'S JUDGEMENT

In our story, John the Baptist is out in the wilderness telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that God's judgment was coming and that those who didn't repent would be cut down. Who is the only person to suffer in our story? Is that God's judgment at work, or is something else going on? What do you think this means for us today, as we may experience suffering?

## 3) PREPARE THE WAY

Everyone seems to agree in this story that God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus; that was the role and job that God had made John specifically for. Do you believe that God has a specific role for each and every person, or does God only call "special" people to His service? In what ways could God be calling you to "prepare the way" on a daily basis?

## Pray

God,

*As we begin to put ourselves into your scriptures, we are reminded that the story you are telling isn't always the story we are looking for. As we continue to meet together and learn from your word, we ask that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear your story. Amen.*