

The background of the entire page is a photograph showing the silhouettes of four people standing with their backs to the camera. They are positioned against a very bright, hazy light source, likely the sun at sunrise or sunset, which creates a warm, golden glow. The people are dressed in casual attire; the person on the far left wears a denim jacket, while the others wear t-shirts and shorts. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

WEEK 7

WHO AM I? GOD'S PEOPLE

Who am I? It's a fundamental question, and our culture gives us many ways to answer it. Work: I'm a lawyer, I'm a nurse, I'm a builder, I'm a programmer, I'm a secretary, I'm a business owner. Family: I'm married, I'm single, I'm a mother, I'm a father, I'm a daughter, I'm a grandparent. Status: I'm a success, I'm a failure, I'm aspirational. Sexuality: I'm gay, I'm straight, I'm bi. Sport: I'm Brisbane Heat, I'm Brisbane Broncos, I'm Brisbane Lions. Nationality: I'm Chinese, I'm Australian, I'm Indian, I'm Korean, I'm Kenyan. We define our identity in different ways. But what we'll see this week is that God's Story actually gives us an identity which is more fundamental than any of these things: believers in Jesus belong to God, we are God's people...

EPISODE 1 - CREATION

From the very beginning of history, God has been seeking to display his glorious goodness. And as we've seen in the 5 episodes of God's Story, he chooses to display his glory through a people he gathers around himself. God longs for humanity to enjoy a personal and intimate relationship with him - starting with Adam and Eve...

1. From Genesis 2 (sidebar), who made Adam and Eve? Who did they belong to?

2. From Genesis 3 (sidebar), compare Adam and Eve's relationship with God before they sinned and after. How has sin corrupted humanity's relationship with God?

EPISODE 2 - COVENANT

God's desire was for Adam and Eve to be the start of his special people - God created them, gave them life, and walked with them in an intimate relationship. But all that changed when Adam and Eve chose to distrust God's goodness, and reached out to take what they thought they desperately needed - independence from God. In walking away from God, they rejected the relationship God offers to his special people. The relationship is broken and God sends them out of the garden disowned and separated from God. But God doesn't give up on humanity. Instead, God seeks to gather another people to himself...

3. From Exodus 19 (sidebar), how does God go about gathering a people? What's required of them to be God's people?

4. From Deuteronomy 7 (sidebar), what stopped other nations being part of God's people?

GENESIS 2

7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being...

21 The Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man...

25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

GENESIS 3

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

EXODUS 19

3 Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:⁴ 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

DEUTERONOMY 7

1 When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—2 and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.³ Do not intermarry with them. Do not give

your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons,⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.⁵ This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.⁶ For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

JEREMIAH 31

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

MATTHEW 3

17 A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

GALATIANS 4

4 When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

God calls the nation of Israel to be his new special people, who are set apart - made holy (Lev 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7-8) - and brought into a unique and intimate relationship with him. But as we keep moving through the history of the nation of Israel, just like Adam and Eve, they fail to live up to the requirements of God's special people and walk away from what God offers (have a look at Nehemiah 9 to see how completely and persistently they keep stuffing it up - talk about a bad rap sheet!). Eventually God says to them - 'enough's enough!', "you are not my people, and I am not your God" (Hos 1:9), and he gives the nation of Israel over to what they desperately want - life without him. Which doesn't end too well - they're carried off into slavery and separated from the blessings of God.

But God's not giving up on his people just yet, he's got a plan that will radically change everything...

5. From Jeremiah 31 (sidebar), what was required for Israel to be God's people once more?

EPISODE 3 - CHRIST

Despite God's desire to gather a nation around him who would reflect his glorious goodness, Israel aren't up to the task. They can't maintain a relationship with God, let alone reflect his glory. But there is one man who would show all the characteristics of God's special people...

6. Throughout the Old Testament (Episode 2), God often referred to Israel as his "son" (eg Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1). What's the implication of what God says in Matthew 3:17?

Here's finally a true Son who's obedient to God, whose heart is turned to his Father! It's like the people of Israel are reduced to a people of one... but that's not where the story of God's people ends. Through Jesus, God invites all people to be part of God's new covenant people...

EPISODE 4 - NEW COVENANT

7. From Galatians 4 (sidebar), what did Jesus do to make other people into God's "sons" with him?

8. Read Ephesians 2:11-19 in your Bible. What does Jesus do for Gentiles who believe in him? How is this different now in the new covenant to the old covenant with Israel?

God offers those who follow Jesus a place in his family; adopted as sons and daughters, which completely transforms our identity. We no longer live for ourselves, but for God, as one of his special people.

EPISODE 5 - NEW CREATION

As we get to the end of the story, we get a glimpse of what God intends for his special people in Revelation.

9. Read Revelation 7 and 21 (sidebar). Who are included in God's people? What's the picture of the relationship between God and his people?

In Jesus, the privilege of being part of God's Holy people is extended to people like us. Once strangers and aliens, we're now included among the people of God. God gathers a people from every nation, ethnicity and social background for himself in the church (which is from the Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means 'gathering'). It's in the church that God chooses to reflect his glory to the world (Eph 3:10), as we live differently (1 Pet 1:15). But what does that look like for us today as those who follow Jesus? What does it look like to be one of God's people now? And how will that change how we live?

Read Ephesians 4:1-6, 17-24, 5:1 in your Bible.

10. Rather than reflecting God's glorious goodness, the church can often look unloving, divisive and abusive to the rest of the world. Are there any areas of your life that don't reflect the glorious goodness of God?

11. What's something we as a church need to change to reflect what God's people should be (be as specific as possible)?

REVELATION 7

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

REVELATION 21

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."