



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

God's Story: The Economy of Salvation and Election

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to ground all that follows within the divine narrative of creation, redemption, and finally consummation and restoration. Using Ephesians 1 as the primary text, the study will help participants understand that all that exists and occurs takes place within the directed plan of God—including, of course, their own lives. The implications for understanding discipleship and stewardship are enormous. If God has established things to be a certain way, then anything outside of God's plan is doomed to provoke frustration and end in failure.

The first series of questions is designed to help the group begin to think about what it is that motivates and inspires people—and to stimulate contemplation about their

own living. Whether or not a reason for being is “right” depends on how one defines right. Many life motivations work from a pragmatic view. Ultimately, though, the only standard that counts is God's.

This lesson delves into some weighty issues of basic theology. Be prepared to offer further explanations about the idea of God's story (or metanarrative) being formative and normative for our lives. A discussion about predestination and free will is also encouraged by the nature of the text and the direction of the questions. A review of the crux theologorum should be expected, complete with a solid Lutheran (non-)answer.

ANSWERS

- 1 It is obvious that it was not Paul's idea to be an apostle. The word apostle indicates a derived and secondary existence: someone more important must send an apostle. That Paul is an apostle “through” or “by” the will of God declares his passive role in his calling. [The author uses the New American Standard Bible throughout this study.]
- 2 Saint implies the declaration of justification that makes one holy. But, faithfulness is a word of sanctification, or better, a word that describes the life of new obedience. Help the group consider what it means to be faithful; push for answers that go beyond “I go to church and read my Bible.” Lead them to consider the challenge of faithfully following God's way of life.
- 3 Paul rightly sees the doctrine of election as a cause of thanksgiving and praise to God. Election is not terrifying if considered through the lens of justification in which God does the calling and sustaining through the means of grace. Guide the participants to consider Paul's response as a model for their own way of thinking about election.
- 4 No doubt, the revealed “mystery of his will” is the cross. The NASB uses “administration” in place of economy. The cross is the economy of salvation. It is the plan that God chose and executed for the sake of his creation. The cross is the perfect plan as it highlights utter passivity and the absurdity of God's way of upending our hierarchies, values, and wisdom—who could imagine a cross at the center!

ANSWERS cont.

- 5 For Paul and the church fathers, the study of doctrine was worship. Our contemporary understanding that divorces doctrinal study from praise and worship is an impoverishment of the Christian life. In our study and learning, we worship God with our minds and hearts.
- 6 The sealing with the Spirit is a clear reference to Holy Baptism. Sealed yet still waiting for the full inheritance is a potent way of describing our “now/not yet” standing in this life.
- 7 Calling the Father “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” is usually disconcerting to Christians—after all, Jesus is God, isn't he? By using this phrase, Paul highlights the economy of salvation in which God sends the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit that all of creation might be restored to a right relationship with him. To see Jesus as submissive to the Father and willingly playing his role within the economy (the plan) of salvation should serve as potent encouragement for us to willingly and submissively take up our part in God's plan for lives.
- 8 Hearts with “enlightened eyes” have learned to see and trust in God's plan that begins with hope, grows in the assurance of the promised inheritance, and is made complete through the working of God's complete power in Christ. God's grace is not wishful thinking. It is a powerful and effective reality which culminates in the economy of salvation—the cross, empty tomb, and right-hand reign of Christ—all done for the sake of God's people.
- 9 Glimpsing the enormity of the plan of salvation should have an impact on one's understanding and appreciation for one's place within God's unfolding plan for his creation. Everything has meaning. All of life has purpose. Exactly how this plays out will be the focus of upcoming lessons.
- 10 Guide the group to make connections between theological truth and application to daily living.