



DISCOVERY TRAIL

The adventure toward finding your place in God's story

HILLCREST
C H U R C H



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The adventure toward finding your place in God's story



WELCOME!

We're excited for you to start a journey toward God.

We believe that God created the entire cosmos and that His plan for all people and things is revealed in the Bible and the life of his son Jesus Christ. **This true story is still unfolding and revealing new details every day.** So each and every human is eagerly invited to find their place and join a multitude of others on the same transformative adventure!

The steps on this *Discovery Trail* are pretty straightforward. Which means you *could* do it alone. But like any other unknown trail, it's not what we recommend. We take from the Bible and experience that Jesus-following is best done with other people! If you do not have someone that you would trust to be your Trail Guide* on this path, just email us at DiscoveryTrail@HCBellingham.com and we will connect you with somebody excited to take this walk with you.**

*A Trail Guide is a Christian who is willing to take the journey with you in regular meetings. They can pick-up *How to be a Guide on the Discovery Trail* in the lobby or online at HCBellingham.com/DiscoveryTrail.

**Deep transformation is rarely done alone. We recommend groups of 2-3.





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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In this guide you are going to find three main units: Read, Pray, and Discuss. *The Read sections* of this guide consists of two main components, the (1) Bible and a (2) summarized Big Story of the Bible. This “Big Story of the Bible” is the guiding theological statement of Hillcrest Church. Simply put, it describes the essential beliefs of our community and the larger Christian community unpacking what is true about God, ourselves, creation, and the purposes of life. We have taken the Big Story and broken it into 9 short summary statements. At the start of each “Mile Marker” on this journey, you will find a new statement as a portion of the Big Story of the Bible. Note, the entire Big Story Statement is included at the end of this guide. We recommend however, that you wait until the end to read it as a whole, and instead let the journey unfold over time. We have been careful to use plain language and not reveal parts of the story before their time. Even with a very generalized cultural understanding of Christianity being fairly pervasive, we think this natural progression of growing understanding will be really helpful.

Along the way, if you would like help better understanding a statement, we have prepared a teaching series on the story that aligns with each of the nine statements. It is on our website at:

<http://www.hcbellingham.com/sermons/the-big-story-of-the-bible>

The second and most important section of reading is the Bible itself. It is our intent to mostly let the Bible speak for itself! At each Mile Marker, following the Statement, there will be assigned Bible reading. Every time you get there, just open the Bible and ask yourself, “What is this part of the Bible trying to tell me?” In this case, we hope you will have a Trail Guide to discuss some of these questions. But the guide is simply there to walk a familiar trail with you, they may not be experts, but they are certainly fellow adventurers. The best part is discussing the questions together!

TRAIL ESSENTIALS

Before we begin let's get trail ready:

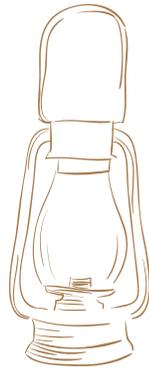
This is not a race. Each stop along the path is just the next step in the journey. Take each one when you are ready, stay there as long as you need, and only keep trekking when you are ready and it is time.

Each mile-marker has ***three common components to complete*** before you move on:

- 1.)  **READ:** the statement *and* the Scripture. Don't move on until you have completed and basically understand both. We highly recommend that everyone come to the meeting with these parts already read and prepared to discuss.
- 2.)  **PRAY:** with and for each other about the journey you are on together. Invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate this path. The Holy Spirit is also God like the Creator Father and Jesus the Son.
- 3.)  **DISCUSS:** the Scripture, ideas, and possible implications. To help out, we have designed a set of three questions to ask during the discussion segment of each mile marker.
 - a. Can you describe this section of the story in your own words?
 - b. What happens if you leave this part of the story out?
 - c. What does this mean for your life? And how does it help you find your place in God's story? Name one or two concrete examples.

We recommend you take the time to journal this adventure. Keep a log of questions asked and answered. This will be a precious record that you will come back to many times.

Resources are available to unpack more insights and answer questions along the path at the Resource Center in the lobby at Hillcrest Church.



ADDITIONAL TRAIL GEAR

To be ready for this adventure you are going to need a good Bible!

FAQ's

Which Bible do I read?! Good question, there are many different translations of the same basic text. Each one of these translations has its own goal – from a literal word-for-word translation to high readability and even “amplified” or explained reading. For the purposes of this guide and for middle ground – we recommend the New International Version (NIV) and discourage either hyper-literal or too amplified versions. These will be great for further study, but for now, a good, mostly literal but readable version is probably best.

How do I find the parts of the Bible to read? First, your Bible probably has an index in the beginning. It is smart to use the index to find your way around. Secondly, the Bible has been broken into “addresses” by later scholars so we could point each other to the same place. For example, in a letter that Paul (an early church leader) writes to one of the churches he founded, we might write the “address” as “1 Corinthians 15:3-7.” This means we are looking for the first letter to the Corinthians; we are in chapter 15 (the big numbers), and verses 3 through 7 (the little numbers). The more you try it, the easier it will get to find these addresses. Some of the books are just a few pages, so use your index and turn thin pages carefully.

How do I know what it actually means? Well, that is a big topic! If you are unfamiliar with the Bible, we highly recommend you watch the first sermon in the Big Story of the Bible series mentioned above. The word Bible literally refers to the mode of sharing “as a book.” But, the Bible is not a single book, nor is it an unrelated collection of religious works. It is an uncannily unified story carried over 66 books and at least 44 authors over 1500 years. It is therefore more like a sacred repository of the original and eye-witness accounts of our faith. This is why we also call the Bible our Sacred Library. When it comes to reading



MILE MARKER

God's True and Reliable Story



STATEMENT ONE

God has communicated to humanity throughout history; the written record is his words *intended* for all people at all times and in every place. This book, known as the Bible, is God's story of who he is, what the world is, who we are, and the ultimate purposes of history. It is the true and reliable story we trust with our lives.

THE GOAL

Build confidence that the Bible is true and reliable.

READ

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES: What does the Bible say about itself?

WHO'S PAUL?

He was a passionate Jewish leader whose life was radically changed by a personal call from Jesus. He wrote most of the books of the New Testament.

QUESTION

How does this connect back to statement one on the previous page. What words could you underline in the statement because of these passages?

1. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

This passage says all Scripture (literally "all the writings") are God-breathed or inspired. What would you say is Paul's view of the Jewish Scriptures?

2. **Exodus 4:10-12, 9:1, 11:4 and Isaiah 45:11**

How did Moses and Isaiah feel about the words they were verbalizing or writing? There are 2,700 more "this is what the Lord says" statements in the Old Testament!

3. **Acts 28:25-26, Romans 10:19-20, 2 Corinthians 6:16**

In these cases, who did the New Testament writers think was fundamentally speaking in these human author Old Testament quotations? Maybe underline key words in the text such as "The Holy Spirit spoke".

9. Galatians 1:1-2 and 2 Peter 1:20-21

Who is writing and what kind of content do we have here?

What do you think this means about God's inspiration of Scripture?

**WHAT IS
INSPIRATION?**

Inspiration refers to the process in which God helped human writers by filling them with His Spirit. In other words, He is literally in-Spirling.

10. 1 Corinthians 2:13

What is Paul's testimony about the source of his letters?

11. Jeremiah 26:2, Revelation 22:18-19

Why do you think writers of both the Old and New Testaments were instructed to "not omit a single word" and John pronounced a curse upon all who would add to or subtract from the "words of the book of this prophecy?"



MILE MARKER

In the beginning



STATEMENT TWO

In the beginning God created the cosmos and called it good. God placed humans in his good creation as his Image Bearers, to reflect his character to all the cosmos. Humans were in right relationship with God as their king, with their own hearts, with one another, and with all creation. God called all of this very good.

Man and woman however, chose to rebel against God and make themselves the center of their lives. This caused a spiritual fracture between them and God, shame invading their hearts, blame contaminating relationships between one another, and creation groaning. The Scriptures call this rebellion against God 'sin'. It is in every one of us and distorts our relationships with our own hearts, with one another, and with all creation.

God, out of his love for his Image Bearers and his creation, did not leave them in this state but commenced his rescue mission and began revealing his Rescue Hero.

THE GOAL

Appreciate how much God loves and desires to rescue His broken creation.

READ

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

1. Genesis 1-3

This is the story of how God created the cosmos and how things go wrong. What went wrong? Check out verse Genesis 3:15, underline it. This is the first glimpse of hope for God's Rescue Hero.

2. Romans 1:14-2:16, Romans 3:9-18

How does this connect with Genesis 3? How does this description make you feel?

3. Psalm 104

What is God's relationship to the Creation? How should we regard Him and what He has made?

UNDERLINE

Underline words in your Bible that you think relate to Statement Two on the previous page.

WHAT IS A PSALM?

Psalms are song prayers written for the whole community.

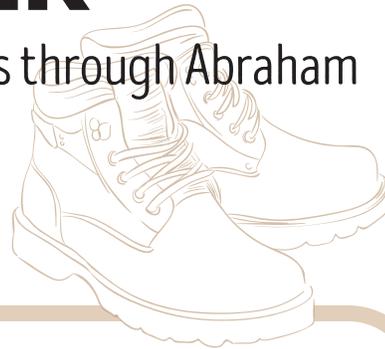
*This Psalm uses *anthropomorphism*. Which is when a writer uses human terms for huge God ideas. See any?



3

MILE MARKER

The promise comes through Abraham



STATEMENT THREE

After many years God called one man, Abraham, and promised that through his descendants the effects of sin would be undone and blessing would take the place of suffering. Through Abraham and Sarah, the people of Israel was born, out of which his Rescue Hero called the Messiah would come.

THE GOAL

Come to understand how Abraham and Israel ultimately point to the Rescue Hero Messiah.

READ

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

WHO ARE THE GENTILES?

A Gentile is every non-Jewish person on the earth.

1. **Genesis 12:1-10, Genesis 15:1-18:13, Genesis 21:1-22:19, Genesis 23:1-25:11** | The Life of Abraham
Underline Genesis 12:1-3 and 22:18. What is God's promise to Abraham?

ISAAC

Is the promised miracle son of Abraham and next in the line that brings the Rescue Hero of Genesis 3:15. (see Mile Marker 2)

2. **Galatians 3:16, Galatians 3:26-29**
Who is the promised Rescue Hero "seed" from Abraham and Isaac? What does that mean for believers in Jesus?

WHO'S SON?

Who's son is the Christ Messiah?

3. **Psalms 110:1 and Matthew 22:41-46**
Read these two verses together. They set up a paradox. Notice that Jesus is both the promised Messiah Rescue Hero, the son of Abraham, the son of David, *and* also much more.



MILE MARKER

Establishing a rescue mission people

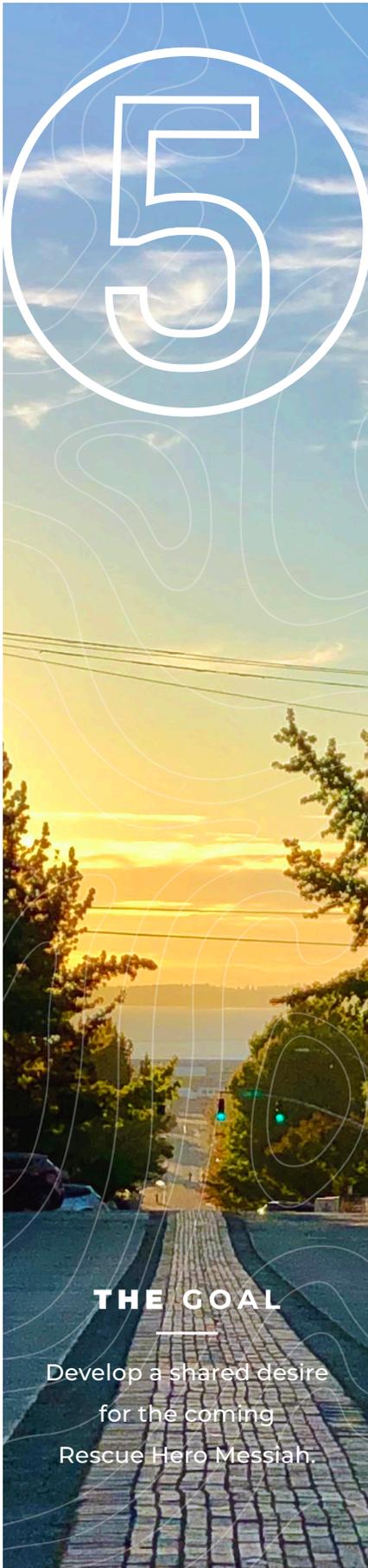


STATEMENT FOUR

Israel became entrapped and oppressed as slaves in Egypt. God heard the cry of the oppressed Israelites and acted to rescue them. This rescue, called the Exodus, defined the people as holistically rescued by God. Through Moses God brought the people out of slavery. God formed a relationship with them, dwelt among them, taught them to follow his Way, and brought them into a homeland. God did this so that they could be his Rescue Mission People for the world.

THE GOAL

Grasp how the people of Israel are meant to be partners in God's plan.



MILE MARKER

A hope delayed



STATEMENT FIVE

Over the next millennia, God gave kings to lead and prophets to speak his voice. Israel, while at times faithful to God's Way and mission, ultimately failed. Ten of the tribes were taken into exile by Assyria, two of the tribes later by Babylon. While some of these exiles eventually returned to their homeland, by the time of the first century there was an acute sense that a spiritual exile continued and the task of rescue was incomplete. Yet, in spite of the failure, those same prophets spoke of a day when God would act to rescue his people and the world through the long awaited Messiah.

THE GOAL

Develop a shared desire
for the coming
Rescue Hero Messiah.

READ

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

(This is a big section taking place over 1,000 years! Take your time.)

A CYCLE

The book of Judges repeats a cycle where the people fail to be God's Rescue Mission Partners. God corrects them but does not give up and rescues them again and again in a Redemption Cycle.

1. Read Judges 2:6-19 and 21:25

Following entry into the Promised Land and before Israel had a King, the people went through a dark time spelled out in the book of Judges, but God never gives up.

2. 1 Samuel 17:41-58 | Goliath

Read about David, Israel's first King, who foreshadows Jesus and writes about the "Rescue Hero Messiah" to come. What does He think about how real life reflects trust in God?

3. 1 Samuel 24:1-21 | Refusing to Kill Saul

David believes God's promises and longs to do the right thing no matter what.

WHO IS SAUL?

The first King of Israel who stopped following God and was jealous of David, his chosen replacement.

4. 2 Samuel 7:1-17 | Temple

What key words in this text make you think God is talking about more than just David's immediate son Solomon?

5. 1 Kings 1:1, 1 Kings 1:28-36 | Solomon Becomes King

6. 1 Kings 11:26-33 | The Kingdom is Divided

From this point onward, the tribes of Israel are divided.
In 722BC the ten tribes of the north are scattered by Assyria.
In 586BC Judah is taken to Babylon.

WHICH KING?

The people of Israel could easily look around and see that none of these kings fulfilled these great hopes. So they increasingly came to understand that the grander portions of these promises actually belong to the coming Rescue Hero Messiah!

After these burning words, the account is silent for 400 years. If you were a first century Jew who thought of the time of David as the “glory days,” what would you have hoped / expected of an upcoming king from the line of David?

7. Amos 3: 1-2, Malachi 2:17-3:1, Malachi 4

How does the end of the Old Testament leave you feeling? The kingdoms are gone; only a remnant remain, and God's Rescue Hero feels far away while nevertheless being completely assured once again.

 **PRAY**

 **DISCUSS**

- a. Review the Statement for this Mile Marker, then try restating in your own words?



MILE MARKER

A new beginning



STATEMENT SIX

At just the right time a virgin named Mary from Israel gave birth to Jesus, both the promised Messiah and divine Son of God. Through his life, teachings, conduct and miracles, Jesus modeled dependence on the Holy Spirit and a life wholly reflecting the character of God.

THE GOAL

Celebrate how Jesus fulfills the long awaited promise from Genesis 3:15

 **READ**

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

1. Luke 1-2 | The Messenger and the Messiah

After all this waiting for the Messiah what surprises you about this account?

2. John 1:1-18

Who is Jesus? When did He begin? What catches your attention in these verses?

3. Galatians 4:4-7

Who are we as believers? How do you feel when you read this text?

THE WORD

Is a Hebrew-Greek idea about the Wisdom of God. Here again, as in Proverbs 8, this is a clear personification of Jesus.



MILE MARKER

Jesus defeats the powers that oppose humanity



STATEMENT SEVEN

Through his God-reflecting life, suffering, and death Jesus willingly took on both the exile of Israel and the exile of all humanity. Through his resurrection, Jesus defeated all the powers that oppose humanity: sin, death, and Satan, confirming his promised victory. For any who surrender from their rebellion against God and trust in Jesus as their rescuer and king, Jesus is the way to a restored relationship with the Creator of all things, with our own hearts, each other, and all creation.

THE GOAL

Begin to appreciate the full implications of new life in Jesus.

4. John 19-20, John 3:16-21

Consider again what does these words mean for you?
What decisions need to be made?

5. Romans 3:21-24, Romans 5-8

What does this mean about the Old Testament, Jesus, and you?
We often think of ourselves as uniquely broken. What do we
learn in these passages?

**THE LETTER TO
THE ROMANS
IS PAUL'S
THEOLOGICAL
MASTERPIECE**

Romans 3-8 detail our total freedom and high-calling in Jesus. If these passages are the mountaintop of this trail, then Romans 8:1, 8:14-17 and 8:28-30 are the pinnacle verses of this journey.



MILE MARKER

The global multi-ethnic
Spirit empowered Church



STATEMENT EIGHT

After his resurrection, Jesus joined God the Father as the King of the Cosmos. At which time, they gave the Holy Spirit, God's presence, to dwell within any who trust in Jesus. God's Rescue Mission People, which began in Abraham, now continues as the global multi-ethnic, Spirit-empowered community of all Jesus followers called the Church. This is where we find our place in God's story. Together we center our lives on the love of God, grow to reflect God's character, share life, and care for the world by announcing his good news and healing broken places. As the church, we keep our identity centered on God through worship and teaching, baptism and communion.

THE GOAL

Rejoice that the Church
(Jew and Gentile)
is the Spirit-empowered
partner with Jesus
in restoring creation
as the partial fulfillment
of the plan for Israel.

 **READ**

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

HARD TO FIND!

The book of Joel is a great opportunity to learn to use the index in the front of your bible.

1. Joel 25-32

The promise of the Holy Spirit in all believers was always part of God's plan.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The beginning of God's complete restoration starts when the Spirit of God is poured out on every human who will receive Him.

2. Acts 1:1-11

Pay special attention to Acts 1:8. How does it relate to Joel 2?

3. Acts 2

What starts to happen when the promise is fulfilled?



MILE MARKER

Making all things well



STATEMENT NINE

At the end, Jesus will return to make all things well. There will be the final promised resurrection, the judgment of evil, the end of the human rebellion, and the renewed heavens and earth. All those whom Jesus calls his own will spend eternity with him in this restored future. God will heal the relationship between himself and humanity, as well as restore human relationships with each other and with all creation. We actively anticipate this reality with our lives today. Yet, even in this, the end of this story is not the end of the story. For then the hope that was from the beginning will be fully realized: God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit will dwell with, celebrate, explore and go on creating with this healed people, world without end.

THE GOAL

Anticipate how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will complete the mission began in Genesis — God dwelling among His people.

 **READ**

THESE BIBLE PASSAGES & TAKE NOTES:

1. I Corinthians 13:12

Here we see that even as Jesus has made the Way, and the church has been established, it's not all done quite yet. Even though, we now see Him only in part, one day we see Him face-to-face!

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

What do we learn about Jesus' return?

3. Matthew 25:1-13

RAPTURE

This image is not about us leaving earth, but about going out to meet Jesus and escorting Him back to earth with joy.

4. I John 3:2

How do the last 2 passages shape the way we think about Jesus' return?

5. Revelation 1:7, 20-22

What do you see in Revelation chapters 20-22 that remind you of Genesis 1-2?

ONGOING CREATION

God's massive city coming to earth points us to ongoing civilizational development and human creativity!

The universe is infinitely large enough for eternal exploration and building.

 **PRAY**

Talk to Jesus considering who you are now because of him and the Holy Spirit.

 **DISCUSS**

- a. Review the Statement for this Mile Marker, then try restating in your own words?



WRITE DOWN what questions you still want to explore and places you want to go back to and spend more time:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____



PRAY with your Trail Guide. Both of you give thanks to God for his goodness and the life-defining power of the Great Big Story of the Bible.



TAKE SOME TIME to encourage and thank your Trail Guide.

For example: Write a note, share a final meal, call and say thank you.



CONGRATULATIONS

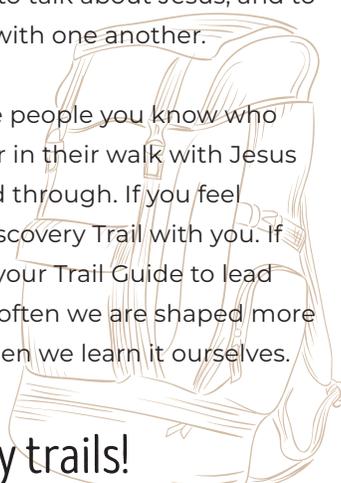
You've reached the end of the Discovery Trail! We hope it was a significant journey in your walk with God. But the amazing thing about walking with an infinite God is that we never arrive at a place where we know it all, have it all together, and can't grow closer with God. You've come to the end of this trail and it opens up into a whole land of wild adventure.

Here are three suggestions on next steps to take as you continue onto the next adventure.

ONE - Begin (or continue!) the habit of setting aside every day to read the Bible and pray. A lot of people find setting aside 10 - 30 minutes works for them depending on their season of life. We would encourage you to begin with reading the New Testament. Begin with the book of Matthew and read a few paragraphs to a few chapters each day. Pick up the next day where you left off. Don't feel pressure always to "learn something" every time you read or "hear something" every time you pray. Like eating three meals a day, simply spending time with God through Scripture and prayer is an important part of spiritual growth.

TWO - Make sure you have traveling companions! Christianity is not meant to be done alone. Ask your Trail Guide for recommendations in this. One way that a lot of people at Hillcrest do this is to participate in a small group. A small group is simply a group of 8 - 18 people who get together every week or two to talk about life, to talk about Jesus, and to talk about what those two things have to do with one another.

THREE - Invite others to the trail! Are there people you know who may be curious about Jesus or perhaps newer in their walk with Jesus that would benefit from what you just walked through. If you feel confident you might invite them to do the Discovery Trail with you. If you don't feel ready for that, you could invite your Trail Guide to lead you and your friend through the material. So often we are shaped more when we lead and teach others than even when we learn it ourselves.



Happy trails!



HILLCREST STATEMENT OF FAITH: THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE

WE BELIEVE:

1. God has communicated to humanity throughout history; the written record is his words *intended* for all people at all times and in every place. This book, known as the Bible, is God's story of who he is, what the world is, who we are, and the ultimate purposes of history. It is the true and reliable story we trust with our lives.

THIS IS THAT STORY:

2. In the beginning God created the cosmos and called it good. God placed humans in his good creation as his Image Bearers, to reflect his character to all the cosmos. Humans were in right relationship with God as their king, with their own hearts, with one another, and with all creation. God called all of this very good.

Man and woman however, chose to rebel against God and make themselves the center of their lives. This caused a spiritual fracture between them and God, shame invading their hearts, blame contaminating relationships between one another, and creation groaning. The Scriptures call this rebellion against God 'sin'. It is in every one of us and distorts our relationships with our own hearts, with one another, and with all creation.

God, out of his love for his Image Bearers and his creation, did not leave them in this state but commenced his rescue mission and began revealing his Rescue Hero.

3. After many years God called one man, Abraham, and promised that through his descendants the effects of sin would be undone and blessing would take the place of suffering. Through Abraham and Sarah, the people of Israel was born, out of which his Rescue Hero called the Messiah would come.
4. Israel became entrapped and oppressed as slaves in Egypt. God heard the cry of the oppressed Israelites and acted to rescue them. This rescue, called the Exodus, defined the people as holistically rescued by God. Through Moses God brought the people out of slavery. God formed a relationship with them, dwelt among them, taught them to follow his Way, and brought them into a homeland. God did this so that they could be his Rescue Mission People for the world.

5. Over the next millennia, God gave kings to lead and prophets to speak his voice. Israel, while at times faithful to God's Way and mission, ultimately failed. Ten of the tribes were taken into exile by Assyria, two of the tribes later by Babylon. While some of these exiles eventually returned to their homeland, by the time of the first century there was an acute sense that a spiritual exile continued and the task of rescue was incomplete. Yet, in spite of the failure, those same prophets spoke of a day when God would act to rescue his people and the world through the long awaited Messiah.
6. At just the right time a virgin named Mary from Israel gave birth to Jesus, both the promised Messiah and divine Son of God. Through his life, teachings, conduct and miracles, Jesus modeled dependence on the Holy Spirit and a life wholly reflecting the character of God.
7. Through his God-reflecting life, suffering, and death Jesus willingly took on both the exile of Israel and the exile of all humanity. Through his resurrection, Jesus defeated all the powers that oppose humanity: sin, death, and Satan, confirming his promised victory. For any who surrender from their rebellion against God and trust in Jesus as their rescuer and king, Jesus is the way to a restored relationship with the Creator of all things, with our own hearts, each other, and all creation.
8. After his resurrection, Jesus joined God the Father as the King of the Cosmos. At which time, they gave the Holy Spirit, God's presence, to dwell within any who trust in Jesus. God's Rescue Mission People, which began in Abraham, now continues as the global multi-ethnic, Spirit-empowered community of all Jesus followers called the Church. This is where we find our place in God's story. Together we center our lives on the love of God, grow to reflect God's character, share life, and care for the world by announcing his good news and healing broken places. As the church, we keep our identity centered on God through worship and teaching, baptism and communion.
9. At the end, Jesus will return to make all things well. There will be the final promised resurrection, the judgment of evil, the end of the human rebellion, and the renewed heavens and earth. All those whom Jesus calls his own will spend eternity with him in this restored future. God will heal the relationship between himself and humanity, as well as restore human relationships with each other and with all creation. We actively anticipate this reality with our lives today. Yet, even in this, the end of this story is not the end of the story. For then the hope that was from the beginning will be fully realized: God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit will dwell with, celebrate, explore and go on creating with this healed people, world without end.

AMEN

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1400 Larrabee Ave, Bellingham, WA 98226 | 360.733.8400 | www.HCBellingham.com

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