

There's a saying: "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression." I wonder what impression the Bible has made on you? It's the world's all-time best-seller, written by 40 different authors over 1500 years. And it has a famous opening line. Here's the first impression it's trying to make:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

What do you think?

As first impressions go, I think this is EPIC. We're being told: HERE is a sweeping drama that encompasses all time – right back to "the beginning". It also takes in all space – the heavens and the earth. And as for its central character – well, nothing less than God himself! The Bible's "beginning" could not be bigger.

On the very first page it's trying to grab you and pull you into its world. It's trying to tell you a story that claims to be THE story. It's a story about God, the world and you.

Over the course of three videos I want to walk you through that story. I invite you to step inside the Bible's world and to look around. Ask questions, raise objections, that's all fine. But let me tell you the story of God, the world and you in 3, 2 and 1.

First, let's think about 3. Three is a truth about God: **God is Three Persons United in Love.**

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Let's begin in the beginning. We've heard the Bible's opening line. I wonder what you think was there "in the beginning?" Wind back the clock as far as you can, before people, before planets, before protons, what was there?

I think there are four main answers you can give to that question. They're not hard and fast answers – there's overlap between them. But these answers will shape everything we believe about ourselves, our world and our destiny.

Let's start with the first: **What was there in the beginning?**

Nothing

Some say: 'In the beginning' there was ... nothing. A big, dark, endless expanse of empty space.' (Of course, that's not nothing, that's a whole lot of black *something*, but let's not get picky).

I don't know about you, but this is my first thought:

“*Before* the universe? But the universe is everything! What could possibly come before it?!”

That's probably my first thought because that's the story I've grown up with in the west. In this story our origins lie in some absolute zero point. Bring it all back to basics and what do you get? Nothing.

Therefore what is life? It's trying to work a something out of a nothing. Make your own reason for being, construct your own image, be a self-creator. There's just one problem: in the end, we're left with what we started: nothing.

The artist **Damien Hirst** said recently that “...**everything you do in life is pointless if you just take a step back and look at it.**” That sounds horribly bleak. But if there was *nothing* in the beginning, he's absolutely right!

So let's try another tack. What was there in the beginning?

Chaos

Many of the world's creation myths tell of wars in heaven. Battling gods jostle for pre-eminence and the losers are cast out. Perhaps creation is the place of exile for naughty deities or the body of a dead god. Or maybe the universe is just the rubble of some cosmic storm.

There are scientific versions of the story too. Essentially it's the belief that our world is FUNDAMENTALLY about conflict, killing and chaos. Life, therefore, is about fashioning something from the cosmic debris. The strong will eat the weak and the powerful will rule. But only for a little while. Ultimately it's anarchy that reigns. At bottom, it's chaos.

Or what about this for a response. What was there in the beginning?

Power

Again, there's a religious and a non-religious version of this one. The non-religious version says this: “In the beginning there were colossal forces.” Reality is ruled by iron laws of physics that grind along. The universe dances to this relentless beat.

The religious version is remarkably similar. But in the religious version we put a name tag on this primeval power. We call it, “God.”

If you've grown up in the west, you'll probably be familiar with the 'power' God. He's basically the god that westerners either do or don't believe in. Whenever I ask people “what was there in the beginning?” religious people will answer “God.” But that doesn't tell us very much. The real question is *which* God? There are *millions* to choose from.

Yet, all too often, people imagine a “God” *there in the beginning* who is a single, solitary power. All by himself.

Think about that. Can you imagine this lonely god existing from all eternity? He has no-one and nothing beside him, just his own thoughts for company. This god knows nothing of relationship, nothing of back-and-forth or give-and-take. This god is not *essentially* loving.

Maybe, once he creates, this god might choose to love us. But... he might not as well. Because it's **power** that rules this universe. Therefore, how must his creatures relate to him? We must simply obey his absolute will. We cannot trust the love of this god – because he might take it away. Fundamentally we can only fear his power.

If this god was ‘in the beginning’, then we'd be saved from nothingness, we'd be saved from chaos... but we'd be delivered into slavery.

Is this what the Bible means when it starts “In the beginning God”? Wonderfully, no. That's not the God of the Bible at all.

Here is the Bible's answer to our question. What was there in the beginning?

Love

Here's an answer that changes everything. If it's true, it's the greatest of all truths: the Bible insists that God is Three Persons united in love. Therefore, we've come from love. We're shaped by love. Our lives, our world and our future is ruled by love.

Could that be true? The Bible says, Think back to “the beginning.” There you'll see that ultimate reality is not a lonely individual but a lively relationship. Let me explain.

The phrase “in the beginning” appears in two places in the Bible.

In the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, it says, “**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**” It goes on to describe God's creation in *plural* terms. **The Spirit of God** moves over the waters (Genesis 1:2). **The Word of God** brings everything into being (v3). And when this God makes humanity, it's the result of a committee decision: “**Let us make humanity in our image**” (**Genesis 1:26**).

Interesting.

The other place “in the beginning” appears is in the New Testament. Jesus' closest friend, John, wrote a biography of Jesus called “John's Gospel.” He begins it by saying:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” (John 1:1-2)

Here John is refreshing our memory of Genesis. In the beginning there was not a lonely god. In the beginning there was one Person called “God”, later called “the Father” (v14). Then there was a second Person called “the Word”. He can also take the name “God” (v1), “the Son of God” (v14) and “Jesus Christ” (v17). Finally, John introduces us to a third Person—the “Holy Spirit” or “Comforter” (e.g. John 16:5-16). He too is “God”. He too was there “in the beginning.”

[Cut to animation clips of Father, Son, Spirit, “God is love” and “Tri-unity”]

According to the Bible, this is what was there “in the beginning”—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ultimate reality is this: three **Persons united in love**.

Christians call this “the Trinity”, which is just a way of squashing two words together: *tri* and *unity*. The Triunity (or Trinity) is the unity of these Three. *That’s* who God is, and who He has always been.

That’s why the Bible can say “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) Forever the Father has loved His Son in the joy of the Holy Spirit. That’s why we feel like Love is the greatest thing. Because the greatest thing, God, IS love. The best things in life really are relationships, deep personal connection, meetings of minds, meetings of hearts. That’s REAL life. Because, the Bible says, that’s eternal life. That’s God’s life. This is where we’ve come from – a Family of love. And this is where we belong. We exist to find our place in the Three.

And perhaps you say, “Nice idea! *God is Love. Love is ultimate*. I don’t see it. I don’t feel it. To me it looks like Nothingness and Chaos and Power rule the world. If love really rules, where is it?”

That's a really serious issue. We need to deal with that. If God really is this Family of Love, if love really is ultimate, how **exactly** does that connect with the mess of this world?

Because this world is brim-full of suffering and death and disaster and evil – and we're supposed to believe that LOVE is ultimate?? How does that LOVE connect with our MESS?

Well there's more to be said on this when we explain TWO, but let me give the beginning of an answer. God connects His love to our mess by sending His Son into the world.

2000 years ago, the Son of God became our Brother. A member of the Trinity, became a member of the human race. On that first Christmas, the LOVE of God was earthed into our situation. WHY? **He joins us in our mess, so we can join Him in His Family.**

Let me tell you a story... When Jesus was 30 years old, there was a group of Jews getting washed in the Jordan River.

[Cut to pictures of baptism... panning across sketches of the scene?]

It was a religious ritual called "baptism" where people confessed to God and everyone else: "I am a mess". It's not just the world, I too am unclean on the inside. And they wanted to be washed.

Have you ever wanted a shower on the inside? These people felt their mess so they confess their uncleanness and they go through a ritual washing. They are baptised in the Jordan River.

*You can read about it in the third biography of Jesus in the New Testament:
Luke's Gospel, chapter 3.*

And who should turn up but Jesus, the Son of God. But instead of JUDGING them for being so messy, what does the Son of God do?

He GETS baptised. He joins the queue of messy people – shoulder to shoulder with all the other moral failures. And HE gets baptised.

It's a Public Relations disaster. How does it look? The perfect Son of God is taking a bath along with all the moral failures, all the messy people. What's He doing?

He's joining us in our mess, so we can join Him in His Family.

Luke chapter 3, verse 21 says: "When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

Right here – in the midst of the mess – the love of God connects. Jesus joins us in our mess and the Father publicly repeats His deep love for His Son. The Holy Spirit publicly comes on Jesus to re-fill Him. Because the Father and the Spirit want everyone to know: JESUS is still in the family!

Just because He's joined *us failures*, doesn't mean He's left the Trinity. No – He has joined us in our mess, so we can JOIN His family.

We'll find out how as we explain TWO and ONE. But for now, this is the good news of the THREE. God is Three Persons United in Love. Which means...

In the beginning there was love.

If there was **NOTHING** in the beginning, then life would just be absurd.

If there was **CHAOS** in the beginning, life would just be struggle.

If there was **POWER** in the beginning, then life would just be slavery.

But no, in the beginning there was **LOVE**. Because God is Three Persons united in **love**. And the good news is that you're invited.