

KICK OFF FOR THE STORY SERMON

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What if you were part of a great story – a best seller – that someone had written but you didn't even know it!

Wouldn't it be awesome to pick up that story one day and find yourself as an integral part of a narrative that has such an intriguing plot that you can't put the book down?

I bet you would get ***pretty excited***. What's going to happen next?, you might wonder. What's my next move?

I am an author myself of 9 books – none of them best sellers by any stretch – but the three books that I wrote years ago in the 90's are probably my most favorite because I enjoyed writing them more than any of the others!

They are a trilogy called “The Joonia Trilogy” about a swan named Laurel and the books are all about how Laurel (who is the Christ figure) actually rescues some children and brings them into another land.

Now years ago, when I wrote these books my kids were very young. Jonathan wasn't even born yet! They had no idea what Mom was doing locked up there in her study writing away.

At the very end of one of the books I put the names “Chris” and “Julie” and depicted them as the heroines children. I wrote my children into the story, but they were too young at that time for me to share that with them.

I kind of forgot about it until they were about middle school age. And I remember saying to them at that time did you know that you are in a book that I wrote – it's a story about a swan!” And they stood there shaking their heads. So I went and showed them. We are? We are actually in that story? They didn't believe me.

When I showed them their eyes got wide and they were so excited. We are in there! They said...We are in there! Read it to us... Obviously, if they are in there, they want to know what the story says... right? What happens next??

Today I want you to realize that you are in here!
This is God's story – far and above the best selling book ever - and although Your name may not appear in here, God had you and you and you in mind when he acted in history and created this STORY that we call the Bible. Psalm 139: 16 says

“When I was woven together in the depths of the earth your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

God has a plan for our lives that is bigger than our agenda. He has a purpose that is greater than our plans. And the more we know the Bible and immerse ourselves in scripture the more that plan will become evident to us.

As we begin this year long series called the Story what I want you to know is that this book is not a substitute for you own Bible. It is meant to help you understand your Bible. And also want you to understand that calling this book that is a paraphrase and a cut down version of the Bible THE STORY is no way pejorative.

This Book called THE STORY is meant to help you see how the whole Bible fits together and calling the Bible THE STORY is actually very theologically on track..

First off ***we are calling the Bible The Story, because story telling was key to the Jewish faith and key to how Jesus taught***

The Old Testament is full of stories and God commands the Jews to retell stories to their children about God's faithfulness all the time, everywhere, all day long.

“Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you get up.” Deuteronomy 11;19

We hope that as we go through this series that you will take the time to read the STORY version for children and youth as a family– before they go to bed at night or whenever. The youth the kids the adults are all going to be doing THE STORY this year together - at their own level to make it easy for us all to be learning the same thing at the same time.

Jesus himself, was constantly telling stories within stories to make points that couldn't be made any other way. This form of teaching was part of the rabbinic tradition of the time – the rabbis way of teaching was to tell stories – because stories have multiple levels of meaning. Research shows that people also remember stories better than they do just linear information.

Second we are calling this series THE STORY because **The Bible actually is a story!** Many people think of the Bible as a list of rules but that is just not the case.

The Bible is God's love story for all of humanity down through the generations.

AND...when you get to know it...you see how it all hangs together. And there is no greater way to communicate deep truths about who we are and why we exist then through the medium of story telling

I've told you before that when I stand up here I can see you all quite well. I know when I have your attention.

I can see you out there even if you are buried in the back pew.

I can tell when you are interested or you are not interested.

I know when you are not listening, or you are fidgeting around or staring blankly at the ceiling or sleeping even. I can and do see you.

And do you know what is happening most often when I have practically everyone's attention...it is when I am telling you a story...

Recently an article in Psychology Today stated the following” **“Telling stories is not just the oldest form of entertainment, it's the highest form of consciousness. The need for narrative is embedded deep in our brains... Stories, unlike straight-up information, can change our lives because they directly involve us... They provoke our memory and give us the framework for much of our understanding. They also reflect the way the brain works. While we think of stories as fluff, accessories to information, something extraneous to real work, they (stories) turn out to be the cornerstone of consciousness.**

So it would make sense that the God who created us would use a method of communicating with us that we all love and connect with –

One great big story stretching out for centuries and pointing to eternity...In scripture God tells us one gigantic story about his love for us and the extent that he will go to pursue us and give us a relationship with him.

Make no mistake about it - this isn't a flimsy love story. This ranks with the greatest...in fact it is absolutely without qualification the **GREATEST STORY EVERY TOLD**. The Bible is still by far the best seller of all.

But even so many Christians do not know the Bible the way they wish they did.

The Bible is daunting and can be intimidating to read if you don't understand how to do it, or understand the history behind it.

That is why we are going to be going through it from start to finish this year. We will have two classes after the service- One is a 101 class for those of you who really want the basics...much like Bible 101 that we did before...and the other class 201 is for those who are more familiar with the Bible.

And my hope is that by the end of this year all of us will feel more comfortable reading the Bible and because of this we will do it more and more– easily and well...

Because **As you engage with this study... you will understand all of the components; how it relates on a big picture level historically (the upper story) and also how intimately and purposefully to your life (lower story).**

God tells you today “You are a part of my story. I have written you in. You are a part of this plan, of this movement, of this document that I have given to the world. Get to know THE STORY, study it, learn it, repeat it to yourself. It is powerful and the more you know this story, the more you will see yourself in it and understand who I am, and what the purpose of your life is all about.”

Look at Ephesians 2:10 – **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

The word **WORKMANSHIP** used here in the Greek is the word **“Poima”** from which we get the word **poem, or epic story**. The word *literally* means fabric or something that is crafted together like threads that are woven together.

God has woven together history into a story. All of the events in human history are moving towards a culmination, an ending, a final destination and we are woven into the fabric of that dynamic moving storyline...

Long before you were even born God prepared you to be woven into his plan and purpose -- and he wants you to recognize that. He had his eye on you as you were being knit together in your mother’s womb.

And **finally**, what makes this so compelling is that **the central character of The Story is Jesus Christ.**

Isn’t it cool to be in a story where the central character is Jesus? You get to be involved with him! You will see him in every part of THE STORY as we read through it together...even before he is born here on earth he is referred to, referenced, prophesied about alluded to...and everything centers around him

So I hope that today you have some sense of anticipation/excitement – I know I do – as we begin our reading of the Bible. Beginning on Sept. 7 (next week is SW) we are starting with Genesis and by the end of the year we will have gone through the whole entire Bible.

I hope you all have the book and the study guide. (pre orders available afterward) That is all that you need all year long. If you don't you can get it on Amazon or CBD...

I want to challenge everyone to be committed to this process. Paul has this great statement in Philippians 3 where he says the following...

“Not that I have already obtained all this (become the perfect Christian) but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

The words “take hold of” is literally translated here as “seized”...Its a powerful word...and an amazing story of Paul (then Saul) was seized by God and turned around in his tracks when he had his conversion experience on the Damascus Road. He saw a light, and Jesus said stop what you are doing Paul. You are killing Christians. Stop killing them Paul and become one instead.

Paul was seized by a great God and put into God's great story. Here he found a greater purpose than he could have ever orchestrated on his own. So Paul was saying... ***as I was seized so I want to seize...Christ...I want to know him and I am going to do everything I can to know him.***

I'd like you all to be committed to do the same...press on to seize that knowledge of Gods Story, and come with us on this journey to delve into scripture, get to know it, and go deeper in our faith....

TO DO:

READ THE STORY WEEKLY (Bookmarks)

Memorize Monthly Memory Verse

FILL OUT THE COMMITMENT CARD AND COME TO WEEKLY WORSHIP

GO TO ADULT ED (101 & 201)

One of the great things that I love about being in ministry is hearing people's stories about how they discovered themselves in God's story. Every person has a different story...just amazes me
But as much as possible at the end of each sermon on Sunday I am going to try to have someone share a story or testimony – about how they found themselves in God's story.
See... I want you to wake up on Sunday mornings and be absolutely inspired to go to church.

I want you to look forward to hearing a story every Sunday that will lift your spirits and help you remember that ...God is alive...God is real...God changes lives through Jesus Christ...and there is nothing more powerful or wonderful than to spend your time right here learning about God's story for you...

Today I have someone very special who will share with you how God seized him, rescued him and saved him...and how he now sees himself in a new way – as a beloved child of God and a part of a grander story with a grander purpose than he could have ever imagined. Today he is living his life with one desire...to seize Christ...and to know him more deeply...

David Rodriguez is here to share with you...he is working with Matt and leading up our Crash Zone program this year with over 50 kids...
Welcome David!