

Finding your Story in God's Story (part one)

By Jay Wegter

Life has no meaning without a story about reality. We cannot rise from our beds in the morning with any sense of purpose if life is only an absurd question mark with no explanation or meaning. Questions such as: “Where did we come from?” “Why are we here?” “Who are we?” “How are we to live?” “Where are we going?” “Why are there fires, floods, quakes, hurricanes?” “Why is there evil, death and suffering?” “What is human flourishing?” These questions are all answered by a story.

Another word for story, is worldview, or life view—our life view forms the basis for all of the decisions we make. A story is a view of the world cast as a narrative with key players, events, and plotlines. Close-knit communities bond around a shared story. Members of the community find the part they play in that community by means of the common story.

Not only must we have a story about reality in order to function daily, we long for a personal story as well. We yearn to know how our lives fit into a greater story. A personal story about our meaning, contributions, uniqueness, and value is inseparable from our dignity and worth as a person. As a testament to this hunger, think of what is daily posted on social media—millions of posts by millions of individuals who treasure the validation they receive for each chapter and verse of their personal stories. There is a collective cry, “Confirm me!” “Recognize my significance by the significance of my story!”

God has a story too, but, it is a story different than all other stories—for His story is the story of reality itself. God didn't need a story in order to know and value Himself. In fact, God's story is the revelation of Himself to His creatures—He knows Himself perfectly, then makes a cosmos and puts people and angels in it that He might share Himself (Rom 1:18-23).

God's story is a 'glory story' because His story reveals His perfections, excellence, and majesty—all of the 'beams' of His glory ultimately shine through in His story. God's story is filled with key players known as 'the image and likeness of God'—that's us, the creatures He has made for Himself. Human history is 'His Story' because the history of our planet is the backdrop, or stage so to speak of redemptive history.

God's story begins in the book of Genesis. God, the Creator filled the creation with the endless wonder of marvelous design and beauty—from microscopic molecular structure, to distant galaxies that dwarf our own solar system. He created plants, animals, fragrant flowers, delicious fruits, bubbling clear springs, crystal gardens, the songs of birds. His final act of creating was to form man and woman and to place them in a garden paradise.

But, God formed another kind of creature, not made in His image, but also glorious; He created the angels. These 'spirit beings' have no corporeal existence (no physical bodies), yet are mighty in beauty, power, and glory. They were made to serve a different function than human beings. As guardians of God's glory and order, they serve Him in worship and oversight—carrying out His will. But, the highest of these spirit beings defected from God (Is 14; Ez 28). Lucifer rebelled against God, corrupted himself, and became God's archenemy.

God allowed this fallen angel to tempt and test our first parents with a lie. Like the offer of the 'red pill' in the movie, The Matrix, the evil one had devised his own 'red pill' by

which he proposed an alternate story to God's revealed Word. The evil one sought to persuade our first parents that his fictitious story was 'reality'. In this case, the forbidden fruit hanging on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was to function like the 'red pill'—supposedly it would open Adam's and Eve's eyes to reality. If they partake, promises Lucifer, they will find out what is really going on! Satan is about to war against God by perverting the image of God.

The dialog the devil sets up is cast in language which suggests that God is withholding something good from our first parents. Lest we forget, the evil one's insinuation that God is holding back blessing is also part of the big lie (Jn 8:44). But, rather than withholding something from Adam and Eve, God placed the first couple in a paradise, a setting of incredible bounty.

'The facts be damned' hisses the serpent; as he casts suspicion upon God's character, and then, at the same time, describes sin as a forbidden treat, something that will make us happy, even though prohibited by our Creator. Adam's test was in a context of paradise, with every need met, with the endowment of great personal strength, and with the surroundings of endless beauty and stimuli. By maximum contrast, Christ, the last Adam's test was in a wilderness, with real deprivation, hunger, opposition, weakness, and rejection.

In the Garden of Eden, the evil one sought to make the forbidden fruit attractive by means of an alternate story—a story where God was the oppressor, and Lucifer, was the deliverer from that oppression. So, this fallen angel depicts God as punitive, stingy, miserly—and, . . . so personally threatened by human potential that He makes idle threats of death as the punishment for eating the fruit.

Thus, the serpent plays the role of a liberator, "Not only will eating the fruit not result in death, it will actually be your entrance into knowledge, freedom, and liberty from God's dominion over you." "Be done with divine's control over you through His idle threats meant to scare you!" "You will not die if you eat, but the very opposite will take place; you will enter your pathway of equality with God—you will be able to transcend your creaturehood, and take charge of your own lives." "Isn't it time you decide good and evil, and right and wrong for yourselves—and no longer live under someone's thumb?"

This alternate story told by Lucifer was the first exercise in relativism—instead of universal with the authority of God standing behind it, 'truth' became relative to the individual. "After all, why can't we decide which view of life suits us best by having more than one story to choose from?" "Isn't that freedom—to choose which story seems best to us?" "Isn't it oppressive to have just one, overarching story to be received unconditionally."

In a way, Lucifer's story was the entrance of pluralism—namely that there is a multiplicity of stories about reality—each of which has its merit—none of which are absolute, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative. How ironic that it took the lie of a spirit being to make people into humanists? Eve reaches for the fruit in an act which smacks of empiricism—she places Lucifer and God on the same level. And, rather than placing her faith in God's infallible Word, she puts herself in the driver's seat as the final arbiter of truth. She will 'run her own empirical test'—if she eats and becomes a god, fine, if she dies, it was worth the risk. Humanism, pluralism, pragmatism, atheism, and empiricism were all birthed by Lucifer's lie.

My friends, God's story is the story of reality. He created the characters in His story—people and angels. He formed the cosmos out of nothing—He is the Author of life. He stamped human DNA on lifeless dust and breathed the breath of life into it. The definition of reality

comes from God alone. It cannot come from inside the universe any more than one can define what's in a box by what is in the box, or, any more than one can find the origin of the universe within the universe. God is creator, owner, ruler, sustainer, and definer of what He has made—these elements are central to His story. He is the fixed authoritative point of reference for all reality. His truth, justice, immutability, holiness, and lovingkindness stand behind absolute truth; and that is Truth spelled with a capital “T.”

The whole idea today that ‘what is true for you may not be true for me’ is nonsense in God’s world. Truth existing solely relative to the individual is, as Francis Schaeffer said, *Escape from Reason*; a bitter consequence of the ancient lie (history shows that when each person is his or her own final reference point, chaos ensues).

Once the devil’s lie was accepted, and formalized by eating the forbidden fruit, the light of the knowledge of God (His glory story) was extinguished in the soul of man. Man’s revolt against his Maker wrecked the race, and the world. For, since mankind was put over the works of God’s hands as a vice regent and steward—it follows that if man fails morally, so also, the creation goes down with him. It says in Genesis that God cursed the ground because of Adam’s rebellion (Gen 3:17). The world was subjected to a principle of futility, decay, and corruption for ethical reasons—because of Adam’s revolt (Rom 7:18-25).

Man’s bondage to darkness, sin, and Satan can only be removed if the light of knowledge of God’s glory floods man’s soul again. The very essence of that darkness is the concealment of the light of the glory of the Creator (Rom 3:23; 2 Cor 4:3-4). If man is to be recovered, he must have the darkness in his heart replaced by light.

Lucifer’s alternate story drove an immense wedge into the heart of man. The ‘wedge’ had a corrupting effect upon man’s intellect. It opened up a gash, a yawning chasm in man’s perception. As if peering through a distorting lens, man no longer saw God’s glory and human good operating together. After the fall into sin, the divine glory and human good were regarded as antithetical. Man trusted himself (his own reasoning) and became suspicious of God. In terms of man’s fallen intellect, the logic went like this: since God’s glory is hostile to man’s highest good, then man has every right (even a duty, or mandate) to choose autonomy, to break free from this untrustworthy God whose glory opposes man’s interests and potential.

Now, as a result rebellion, this present world is filled with darkened souls who regard the human condition as ‘normal’. By contrast, those who have received the light of the knowledge of God believe God’s testimony about man—that the human condition can be summarized as the love of darkness (Jn 3:19-21). Christ-followers understand that sin and death came into the world as a tragic intrusion. This present world is abnormal! Man’s willful breaking fellowship with God broke mankind, and broke the world. We are seeing that the entrance of evil is a very important part of God’s story—for man’s revolt was the misuse of liberty and freedom and the overt rejection of his created purpose to reflect, know, obey, enjoy, worship and serve his great God.

Now in a cursed world of brokenness, decay, death and evil, it is difficult to envision that a perfect world used to exist, and will exist again someday. Like the proverbial fish that doesn’t know it’s wet, so also, man immersed in his sin does not comprehend what a disaster sin actually is. But, some of the gravity of sin’s disaster is revealed by its consequences: the wrenching of soul from body at death, the return of man to dust again, our existence in a world

dominated by the powers of darkness, and eternal separation from God in hell.

In addition, a subtle consequence also appeared at the entrance of sin. Man, who was created as God's vice regent, and put over the works of His hands, became subjugated to his helpmate who became subjugated to the serpent. Think of it, the divine order: *God, man, woman, the creature, the creation* became inverted by sin to read: *creation, the creature, the woman, the man, God*. God beneath man; an absolutely upside down, reverse trajectory—no wonder man's sin fragmented and fractured our humanity and wrecked the world.

Our Creator made us in His image and likeness, the evil one sought to deface that image by leading man into rebellion, transgression, and idolatry (he warred against God by seeking to pervert the image of God). God's story is about the rescue of man who had sinned against his Maker and had thereby marooned himself in an impossible dead end, or *cul de sac* of guilt, condemnation, bondage and alienation from God. God's story is about the reclamation of His image—thus, the reclamation of His glory in the recovery of His own image.

Our restoration to our created purpose involves the restoration of the glory of God to us which was forfeited by our sin (Rom 3:23). Thus, to be recovered by Christ, our rescuer, is to be endowed again with the ability to behold, love, reflect, and live for God's glory. This is nothing less than the recovery of our created purpose. God, in reclaiming His image in us, is glorified as we recover our relationship to His glory (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6).

But, God does not seek to reclaim His image and glory in us by means of an executive pronouncement, that would not fully reveal His perfections. His divinely ordained reclamation campaign requires a fully qualified rescuer who has the power and ability to fix and repair what is broken. 2000 years ago, the Son of God entered a cursed and fallen world in order to become our rescuer, and make that repair. He came as an infant, born into the world as we are. He did not come in blazing glory, but humbly as a suffering servant (Lu 2:7; Gal 4:4-5).

In order to make the repair, He had to undergo what He referred to as a 'baptism', but this was a baptism of divine wrath (Jn 12:49-53). His obedience to the Father took Him all the way to death on a Roman cross (Phil 2:5-8). His perfect life, His atoning sacrifice, His identity as Son of God and Son of man means He is perfectly and uniquely qualified to accomplish our rescue. How wonderful is our rescuer—He is both sacrifice and High Priest (Heb 9:14).

The laying down of His life and His obedience unto death has become His 'equipment' to save to the uttermost (Heb 7:25). And His 'equipment' to rescue and save is His glory. He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Lu 19:10). He is determined to save all those given to Him by the Father; they will trust Him and entrust themselves to Him (Jn 6:39; 17:1-2).

At the apex of God's story is the paradox of the cross. Marvel of marvels, the weakness, shame, injustice, ignominy, bloody death, and resurrection of our Lord is the means by which members of Adam's fallen race are recovered. Since our Lord is our suffering Substitute, Christ's Person and work is the 'sphere' in which our dead souls are vivified and raised up in salvation (Col 2:10-14). All of rescuer's work is vicarious—accomplished in our place—His death is our death to sin; His resurrection is our resurrection to newness of life (Rom 6:4-10).

When His Person and work are revealed to the sinner by the Spirit of God, the soul is flooded with the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). The innate darkness in the soul by reason of the devil's alternate story is evicted. In a moment of time, by the 'sight' of this glory a person comes to know God. For, Christ and His cross-work reveal God (Rom

3:24-26). To know God is to worship, love, obey and serve Him without constraint or pressure. Those who know God possess life eternal (Jn 17:3). One of my students shared his testimony with the class. This enterprising athlete and business man admitted that he hated God with a violent hatred before he was saved. He began reading the Bible in order to prove that God was monstrous (in other words, to deepen his commitment to Lucifer's alternate story). But to his amazement, when he read of Christ's love in bearing the sins of his enemies on Calvary's cross, it broke my student's heart in an instant. He gave up, threw down his weapons, and bowed before His rightful Lord. He had been conquered by divine love.

We have heard it said by well-meaning ministers who wish to magnify the grace of God, that our Creator could have cast the entire human race into perdition without jeopardizing or violating a single one of His attributes. That may be true from the standpoint of God's holy justice, but I am not certain that the statement really honors God. Here is the reason why: early in Genesis, God begins with a series of sovereign statements which may be designated 'fiats'. "Let there be light, and there was light." "Let the earth sprout vegetation. . ." "Let Us make man in our image. . ." etc. God 'speaks' reality into existence by these *fiats*, or sovereign declarations.

These 'fiats' express God's determined will from all eternity. Thus, if Yahweh has determined to make man in His own image and likeness for His own glory and for fellowship, would it really be a concrete option for God to allow Satan to permanently thwart His sovereign intent? The entire human race thrown into perdition would, by all appearances, suggest that Lucifer had successfully aborted God's design to form mankind in His own image and likeness.

God was not about to permanently resign every last vestige of His image and likeness to corruption. No, my friends, Christ is the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the earth (Rev 13:8). For, immediately after man's fall into sin, God announced His plan to recover our race: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen 3:15). A 'double bruising' will take place by divine decree, by the determined will of God. None of God's 'fiats' are suspended upon human contingency—they will take place—that is reality.

God says in Isaiah of His covenant people: "But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!'" (Is 43:1). "Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made" (Is 43:7). "The people whom I formed for Myself will declare My praise" (Is 43:21).

These prophetic 'fiats' are stating that God's recovery project will succeed through the work of a mighty rescuer. Man's transgressing against the honor, glory, and truth of the sovereign Creator produced a dilemma infinitely beyond human agency. What is needed to accomplish the rescue is a divinely appointed rescuer who can secure a guilt transfer. This rescue work by means of a guilt exchange can only be done by a qualified Substitute who is able to represent guilty humans before a holy God—even answering for their sins in His own Person! (Rom 8:33-34; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; Rev 1:5). Only if the rescuer is the sinless God-man can He effect the needed repair.

The remarkable plotline of God's story is that the depth of the brokenness of the world's inhabitants is answered by the uniqueness of Jesus (Greg Koukl, *The Story of Reality*,

pp. 173-179). God is jealous of His own image in man, an image created to reflect rays of His moral majesty. In fact, our creational identity as the image of God says so much about who we are by revealing our purpose and meaning (Ibid, pp. 90-94).

The rescue of Adam's race is about the formation of a 'new humanity' built upon, rescued by, and represented by the 'last Adam', Christ Jesus. Oh, to realize that God has not desisted from His original 'fiat' of making man in His image—but now He is making men and women in His image by making them new creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Prior to Christ's incarnation, the perfect image of God had not been on earth for more than 4 millennia (in other words, not since unfallen Adam and Eve) (Col 1:15). But, now those rescued by Christ make up a new humanity, complete in Christ, their Head (Col 2:10). Christ, our rescuer is the destroyer of Lucifer's deeds and lying story (1 Jn 3:8). By this destruction of sin, our rescuer delivers His people (Eph 2:7; 5:8; Heb 2:14-18; Rev 1:5-6).

God's generous, self-giving nature, His propensity to share Himself is fully expressed in the giving of His Son (Jn 3:16). God gives Himself by the giving of His Son in order that the rescued creature become like his rescuer. How remarkable, so effective is Christ's work, that the believing lawbreaker is adopted into God's forever family by the Lawgiver Himself—all because of the merits of the rescuer. Adam's one deed plunged the race into darkness, death, and decay. Christ's 'one act' of obedience at Calvary brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim 1:9-10).

There are so many 'cameos' in Scripture which summarize God's story in a few lines. Romans chapter five is one of them. In that passage we see two representatives, two deeds, two reigns, and two resultant destinies. "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:18-21).

What the first Adam lost, eternal life with God, the last Adam restores. God's story does not terminate upon what we are rescued from, but rather what we are rescued to. For with the matchless gift of Christ, our rescuer, comes the matchless gift of being made like Him. That divine promise of being conformed to Christ is necessary for us to fully recover our created purpose. For, conformity to Christ ultimately enables us to enjoy God in His presence perfectly, to worship God flawlessly, and to serve God superbly. That is heaven indeed (Rev 21).

The restoration of the image of God in us is actually joined to the restoration of the entire cosmos itself. The timing of the cleansing of the universe of all corruption and restoring it to a pristine state is synchronized with the presentation of the sons of God (Rom 8:18-23). This astonishing climax of God's story is made possible because our rescuer did His work as 'the last Adam'—as our representative and substitute. He reversed the ruin caused by the first Adam. The resurrection of Christ is the Father's stamp of approval upon our rescuer's work on our behalf (Rom 4:25). And, Christ's resurrection is the promise and warranty of a New Heavens and a New Earth (2 Pet 3:10-13).

In his Pentecost sermon, the apostle Peter announces that Christ's resurrection marks the end of corruption and decay (Acts 2:24-27, 31). Think of it, as the last Adam, Christ's

perfect obedience wins immortality for His people. For, the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15, “For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21).

These spiritual realities which make up the major beats of God’s story are beyond the comprehension of the natural man who is still in darkness (1 Cor 2:14). Due to our natural state of darkness in Adam, we cannot possibly diagnose our condition on our own. We are just too familiar and comfortable with our habitual law-breaking to be shocked by it. But, Christ the rescuer has a solution; He sends the Holy Spirit to lay our hearts bare. The Spirit exposes the plague of sin that is attached to the inner man. The Spirit is sent to establish a guilty verdict of condemnation so that the descendants of Adam will see the beauty of, and need for the rescuer (Jn 16:8-11).

This same Spirit quickens whomever He will (Jn 3:8), causing that man or woman to flee to Christ in an act of moral trust and reliance (Jn 1:12; 6:37). Then, God’s Spirit comes to reside in that person—thus fulfilling God’s original vision to form an order of creatures in His image who would find their highest joy and purpose in serving as God’s sanctuary and dwelling place (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:4-5). Yes, our rescuer is forming a kingdom of priests who will offer up spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb 13:15-16). And, these sacrifices focus upon building up our fellow priests so that we might present each of them mature, or complete in Christ (Col 1:28-29).

Therefore, for you who have been found by Christ, this is where you will discover your story—in your ministry connections to other believers, in your fruit-bearing by the Spirit. This is where you will find your story in God’s story, for you have a vital role to play, a role that has been designed for you (1 Cor 12; Eph 4-5). In our next lesson, we will explore how to write a story that is found in God’s story and that is approved by Him (Rom 12:1-2).