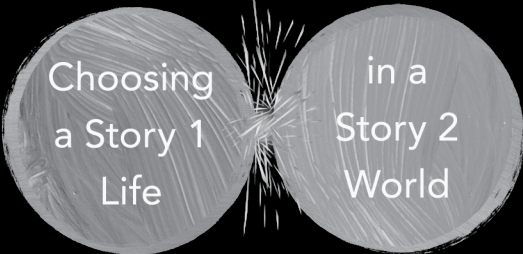


The World Is Unraveling.
But That Doesn't Have To Be Your Reality.

Chapter 1
Excerpt

the Eden Option



Choosing
a Story 1
Life

in a
Story 2
World

Allen Arnold

Author of *The Story of With*

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries.

Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from The Living Bible copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked TPT are from The Passion Translation®. Copyright © 2017, 2018 by Passion & Fire Ministries, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ThePassionTranslation.com.

Copyright © 2022 Allen Arnold.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the author.

Printed in the United States of America
ISBN: 978-0-578-31905-6 (print)

First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To My Mom

Your heart and home hold such beautiful memories.
May our best stories together be the ones still ahead.

① The Lost Story 1

② Answers in Eden 39

③ The Homeward Journey 85

④ Eden Union: Reconnect to the Vine . . 125

5 Eden Voice: Restore Your Roar . . . 143

6 Eden Vision: Re-See Reality. . . . 167

7 Eden Rest: Real Restoration. . . . 193

8 The Real Country 223



The Lost Story

**You don't think your way into a new kind of living.
You live your way into a new kind of thinking.**

Henri Nouwen

Accelerating in the Wrong Direction

It isn't just your imagination. The world is accelerating.

More, it's unraveling because it was never meant to be what it's become. But it isn't just the world. The unraveling is also happening inside us.

In spite of technology that connects us all, we're growing more disconnected. Even in a crowd, we feel alone. Virtual reality takes us farther from what's real. We're somehow bored and overwhelmed. Energy drinks can't quench our exhaustion. Distractions won't fill our emptiness.

We're losing confidence in this world. And honestly, we never should have put our confidence there.

God invites us into a better story. A life of active, daily intimacy with the Creator of galaxies, oceans, and wildflowers. That was Eden. A place with God at the epicenter where Adam and Eve were fully seen, known, and loved.

I call this way of life Story 1. But experiencing it requires more than just believing in God. As James reminds us,

Are there still some among you who hold that “only believing” is enough? . . . Well, remember that the demons believe this too—so strongly that they tremble in terror! (James 2:19 TLB)

Adam and Eve were believers in God before and after the fall. But belief alone wasn't enough to keep them in Eden . . . or in union with God. It isn't enough for us either.

I'm a believer who loves God deeply. Yet I was spending too much time in the wrong story. My hunch is that's true for most believers.

We're deeply embedded in Story 2. It's all we've ever known, so we've made it our home and learned to play by its rules. Worse, we think God

does as well. But there's been a better way since the beginning. Adam and Eve didn't choose it in Eden. But we can choose it now.

The Eden Option is a roadmap to experiencing the true story we were created for. It reveals God's original design for our lives, how we lost it, and why it matters more than we imagine. When we return to Story 1, we reclaim four traits that Adam and Eve relinquished in Eden. Union. Voice. Vision. Rest. In Story 2, these four things remain lost. But in Story 1, we can actually get them back.

Along the way, you'll find Eden Beacons. Like lighthouses, these brief thoughts and questions illuminate aspects of the original paradise . . . and signal the way towards the New Eden.

C. S. Lewis said, "If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the [one] who turns back soonest is the most progressive" (*The Case for Christianity*).

That's what we're after. The true Story God has been telling since before time began. Let's discover it together.

**The question is not what we intended ourselves to be,
but what He intended us to be when He made us.**

C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Losing My Voice

The day that changed everything for me began in the most normal way. Same as every summer weekend. Doing yard work.

On this particular morning, something else was on my mind. If you had asked me what it was, I would have said . . . well, I wouldn't have said anything.

I had no voice. For going on three months.

It began when I was the only speaker for a three-day event with sessions morning to evening. The back-to-back talks took a toll on my vocal cords. After the conference ended, my normal deep voice was reduced to a hoarse whisper. Beyond the obvious inconveniences, speaking is a large part of my calling. I participate in a weekly podcast, conduct coaching sessions, and lead events. All of which require a strong, healthy voice.

Yet up until that moment, I took my voice for granted. I never gave my vocal cords a thought. I just opened my mouth and spoke. At least until three months ago.

The first month, I tried everything from silence (my kids loved that!) to voice exercises to consuming vast amounts of hot honey tea with lemon. Nothing worked. Once it was apparent this was more than just a case of temporary hoarseness, I made an appointment with an ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) specialist.

The doctor placed a high-tech tube with a camera into my nose and guided it down my throat by remote control. As the cold, slick tube slithered down my throat, I felt like I was in a scene from the movie *Alien*. I did my best not to gag. I remained silent because, well, I had no voice. And besides, as the *Alien* movie poster declared, “In space, no one can hear you scream.”

The doctor offered a comforting smile. “Just breathe normal, like always.” Like people do when an alien thrusts its tentacles down their nose to invade their body. Got it.

The image on the monitor revealed two nodules on my vocal cords. The doctor explained they were like micro calluses that propped my vocal cords open and prevented air from flowing as it needed to. Turns out it's a frequent problem for speakers and singers who overstress their voices. He said until the nodules were surgically removed, my voice would remain hoarse and weak. His first available time for the procedure was months away. Two. Long. Months.

I left the room and walked down the long hall with my paperwork. I should have been relieved. I had a solid diagnosis. A plan for surgery. And the issue wasn't life-threatening. All good, right? Yet all I could muster was a sigh. I felt like I was in the wrong story . . . without knowing what that even meant. But with no real voice and no perceived alternative, I shook off the feeling and headed to my truck, trying to make peace with the long, silent wait.

That was months ago. Now, as I wiped the sweat from my brow while mowing the yard, I knew the surgery was just three days away. It wouldn't be long until I had my voice back. Yet something still seemed off.

That's when God showed up . . . with another option.

If we reduce the Christian faith to only that which we can explain, we end up with a paper-thin, watered-down, cheap knock-off of Christianity that no longer has the capacity to astonish.

Brian Zahnd, Beauty Will Save the World

Finding My Story

Covered in sweat and grass clippings, I sensed God asking me a question.

Allen, do you want Story 1 or Story 2?

The question reminded me of a game show host asking the contestant, “Do you want what’s behind door #1 or door #2?”

I knew the question wasn’t frivolous. But I had no idea what it meant. What’s Story 1? And is Story 2 better or worse? Or was I just becoming delusional in the heat? I shut the mower off and sat on the lawn. I love questions from God. I see them as his invitation into conversation.

I asked God to tell me more about the two choices.

Over the next half hour or so, he revealed more about the options.

Story 1. Cancel the surgery. Step with God into faith and mystery regarding my voice.

Story 2. Have the scheduled procedure.

He was giving me a choice, but few details on how either would play out.

I sensed God's assurance I would one day have my voice back either way. And that something more was at play in the spiritual realm. God began to show me how the enemy's goal since Eden was to come against his voice ... and ours.

Story 1 made me uncomfortable. Yes, God did say I'd eventually have my voice back. But he didn't say how it would happen or how long it would take. Story 2 sure seemed the most practical, expedient path. The doctor had successfully performed this procedure countless times. It was scheduled. All I had to do was show up. Story 2 seemed the more rational choice. After all, God provides healing through surgeons all the time. And the immediacy of surgery sounded a lot better than God's wait-and-see option. I'd been without a voice for such a long time.

The gravitational pull to Story 2 was intense.

But I remembered that feeling of something within me being “off” during the doctor appointment. Yes, I wanted my voice back. Desperately. But Story 2 just didn’t fit me well. Like wearing pants two sizes too small. On the other hand, I couldn’t quit thinking about Story 1. I wanted to read that story. Wear that story. Step into that story.

If both options were made into documentaries, which would you want to watch? One with me having routine surgery, or one where I step from the familiar to the unfamiliar with God ... at his invitation?

Me too.

So I chose Story 1.

**The riddles of God
are more satisfying than
the solutions of man.**

G. K. Chesterton, Introduction to the Book of Job

It Will Be Awkward

The next morning, I called my throat doctor's office. Canceling just days before the procedure was uncomfortable. But the truly awkward part was explaining why. Yes, I could have just made up an excuse. But if I was going to pursue Story 1, I wanted to own it.

"So you no longer want the procedure?" his assistant asked.

"That's right. I, well, I believe God is inviting me to choose another story."

After a few seconds of chirping crickets, she noted if I changed my mind, the first opening was currently ninety days out.

As I hung up, I could feel doubt rising. Doubt about what that person thought of me. And doubt about foregoing this accepted path to fix my vocal cords. But with God's help, my resolve held. The decision was

never a medical issue for me. I know God works through skilled doctors. My focus was on the adventure God was inviting me into.

No two situations will look alike. God may invite you to have a surgery, postpone a trip, or start a business. Before any big decision, especially one that impacts your family, verify what you're sensing aligns with Scripture rather than just your own desires. Ask others who walk closely with God to do listening prayer for clarity on what God is saying . . . and when to act on it. That's what I did in my situation. From there, enter into Story 1 knowing the only guarantee is that God will be with you. That has to be enough. If anything becomes more important, the enemy will work overtime to cause you to doubt God's goodness.

So how did the story of my voice play out? Keeping this real, here's part of my follow-up email conversation with the throat doctor. Sending it felt risky and, yes, awkward. But I sensed God's nudge to invite him into the wonder of what happened.

"I wanted to share some amazing news with you. I canceled my surgery to cut the nodules from my vocal cords because I felt God was inviting me to another story . . . one that he was doing that would exceed my wildest imagination. I definitely wanted my voice back. But even more, I wanted

to enter into the story God was offering me. One with no guarantees other than his presence. Within three days of cancelling the surgery, I had my full-strength voice back. And even after recent speaking events, it has remained full-strength. I know you hear a lot of bad news. Just wanted to share with you this story of a miraculous healing in a situation where the only cure seemed to be surgery. I'm in awe of God and his ability to exceed our best-case scenarios."

Within hours, I received his response.

"Being in medicine it gets easy to just not expect miraculous healing or to pray in such a way that you 'give God a way out' in the event healing doesn't happen. To hear a story like yours makes me want to double down and trust more fully!"

God used the temporary loss of my voice to help me find Story 1. And I was getting my first taste of both the awkwardness and the beauty of it.

Eden Beacon

Jesus in Eden

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was doing in Eden? As part of the Trinity, he was actively involved in creation. The first chapter of John tells us that all things were created in and through Jesus. Which would, of course, include Eden. And Adam and Eve. And, well, everything.

In Eden, we have the appearance of God, Adam, Eve, the serpent, animals, and cherubim (with flaming swords).

Given that Jesus had an irreplaceable role in creation and would be the cure for Adam and Eve's fall, is it plausible he wouldn't be present in Eden? In his own creation? Doubtful.

Remember, this would be the pre-incarnate Jesus. He didn't take on human form or the name Jesus until he was born to the virgin Mary.

Though we don't see Jesus in Eden, God offers this prophetic word, of which Jesus is the fulfillment:

From now on you and the woman will be enemies, as will your offspring and hers. You will strike his heel, but he will crush your head.
(Genesis 3:15 TLB)

For all the enemy's scheming, he seemed to forget that all things were created in and through Jesus. . . including Eden and himself. Though the enemy led Adam and Eve into the wrong story, Jesus was the one true Story in which everything finds its deeper meaning. And at great cost, he would prevail. Listen to how the great lion Aslan touches on this theme in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis:

Though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward.

How might Jesus have filled his days and evenings in Eden? It's a question that stirs my heart with wonder. May it do the same for you.



**When the whole world is running towards a cliff,
he who is running in the opposite direction
appears to have lost his mind.**

C. S. Lewis

Invisible Force Field

After months of not having much of a voice, its return was hard to miss.

But it was the reaction of others that caught me off guard. Especially after the amazing response from my doctor.

For the most part, the people I shared my story with believed in God. Yet few expressed awe, asked questions, or wanted to engage in the topic. After a polite nod, raised eyebrow, or moment of awkward silence, they usually shifted the conversation to the weather or the weekend football game. I was hitting an invisible force field of some kind. I was puzzled at first but think I know why now.

Over time, we accept the story we find ourselves in as normal operating procedure. So we no longer see what's really going on. Like the best Agatha Christie mysteries, the clues are right in front of us, but we miss

them because our upfront assumptions about the story we're in lead us to the wrong conclusions.

When something pushes up against this false narrative, we tend to push back or disengage. Because it doesn't fit our perceptions of how life—or God—works. One of the signs this is true is how we've reduced stories of men and women in the Bible to one-dimensional morality lessons rather than examples of the way we can live. We still believe in God but view him as distant so we get on with life. The roots of this run really deep. All the way back to creation. More on that soon.

For now, realize that any resistance you may be feeling is like the invisible force field I was bumping into. The enemy doesn't want us embracing a story that draws us into greater intimacy with God. Which is exactly what Story 1 does. So he'll throw any distraction he can at us to keep us in Story 2.

If that fails and we enter into Story 1, he'll do his best to make us doubt our decision. But the deeper doubt centers on God's goodness. Will we let go of our unreliable banner of certainty and trust God with a wilder, riskier, less controllable story?

This is where the reaction of others comes into play. Some may respond in beautifully encouraging ways. Like my throat doctor did. But others may stare blankly or try to prove why we're foolish or naïve for living this way. That's okay. The goal isn't to persuade or convince others but to simply share the wonder and the awkwardness of our choice.

The Story 1 life isn't a nice addition to our current life. It is an entirely new way of seeing God, ourselves, and this world.

It is seeking God's active involvement in the rhythm of our days, dreams, and challenges. It is knowing we are never alone. He is at the epicenter of everything we do, and we keep our eyes on him rather than the world for how to live, work, create, rest, and love.

The institutions rooted in Story 2—whether political, business, educational, entertainment, or even religious—will never support those breaking free into Story 1. In many cases, they will actively oppose it. Don't let such resistance cause you to doubt this journey.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let's slow down to learn more about the differences between Story 1 and Story 2.

**Story 1 is the original, true story
we were made for.
A way of life with
God at the epicenter.**

**Story 2 is the default narrative we're born into.
It tries to make life work without
God's active, intimate presence.**

A Tale of Two Stories

So what are the key differences between the two Stories? Here's a quick overview.

In Story 1, God is at the epicenter. In Story 2, we put ourselves at the center.

In both cases, everything flows from there. For good or for ill.

For greater clarity, let's compare their key traits.

In Story 1, we live in intimacy with God as sons and daughters. We awake with childlike expectancy. This relationship leads to rest and restoration. Infinite possibilities and wonder run through the DNA of Story 1. It is filled with God's presence.

Story 1

God at the Center

Faith & Hope

Seen & Known

Loved for Who You Are

A Father Who Provides

Anything Is Possible

Heart is Awake & Alive

Living from Restoration

Open-Handed Abundance

Love-Based Decisions

Imagination for What Could Be

Wisdom and Faith

Expectancy

Freedom

Wonder

Present

Story 2

You're at the Center

Doubt & Despair

Unseen & Unknown

Loved for What You Do

You Rely on Yourself

Limited Options

Heart is Numb & Shut-Down

Looking for Relief

Closed-Handed Scarcity

Fear-Based Decisions

Indoctrination for What Must Be

Knowledge and Facts

Expectations

Control

Boredom

Distracted

In Story 2, we settle for a world in which God is largely off-stage. We toss and turn with unmet expectations, seeking relief but settling for addictions. Limited possibilities are the norm in Story 2. We accuse God of being distant as we distance ourselves from him. Though over time, the Story 2 life feels normal to us, it's not what we were made for. It's just what we're used to.

In Story 1, we have dialogues with God and others, asking questions and listening. In Story 2, we have monologues with God and others, stating what we think and want. Story 1 permeates our thoughts, hopes, and dreams. We're drawn to movies and songs and art that reflects the themes and perspectives of Story 1—while losing interest in those that embrace Story 2. You realize independence from God—the hallmark of a Story 2 life—only leads to greater isolation. While Story 1 dependence on God leads to greater intimacy.

If you're not sure which story you're in, you're almost certainly in Story 2. Why? Because it's the default narrative. We're born into Story 2 but can be reborn into Story 1. But we have to actively choose that. You'd remember if you had. Based on these traits, which most describes your current world? More importantly, which story would you like to be yours?

**We spend our days either
believing life is up to us
or experiencing the wildness
of life with God.
You choose which reality to call home.**

No Neutral Ground

In his Gospel, Luke describes the collision of these two stories—as well as the stakes involved.

If you grasp and cling to life on your terms, you'll lose it, but if you let that life go, you'll get life on God's terms. (Luke 17:33 MSG)

In a world that's conditioned us to expect endless options, Luke boils it down to two choices.

We can't opt out, create new options, or remain neutral. Nor should we.

As C. S. Lewis says, "There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God, and counterclaimed by Satan" (*Christian Reflections*).

We don't live in a world of neutrality but rather one of two competing narratives.

There is God's story and there is the counter story.

What's confusing is when the choices before us don't appear to be opposites. Often it seems to be just a slight difference or twist. So we compromise, not realizing the way our choices ripple beyond us.

Story 1 has been under attack for every generation since Eden. Because God has an enemy and so do we. The role of the enemy in these two stories will become clearer soon. For now, just know the tension between these two stories isn't theoretical or poetic.

It's impossible to simultaneously live two stories. Only one can be your home base. And the more you understand the toxicity of Story 2, the less time you'll want to spend in that broken world.

**We have all read...the story of the man
who has forgotten his name. This man walks about
the streets and can see and appreciate everything;
only he cannot remember who he is.
Well, every man is that man in the story.
Every man has forgotten who he is ...
We are all under the same mental calamity;
we have all forgotten our names.
We have all forgotten what we really are.**

G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

Secret Sauce of Story 1

We are eternal beings. After this life, our life continues. But only one story continues in the coming kingdom. Story 1.

Only it offers a way of life that we can live both now . . . and continue living in the coming kingdom. That's because it reflects an Eden view of life, with God at the epicenter.

The life of Enoch provides a dramatic example of this way of living. He spent his life walking in close fellowship with God. Then he disappeared from this world without dying. God simply took him (Genesis 5:23–24). He went from living Story 1 here to living Story 1 in the kingdom . . . without missing a beat.

When we choose Story 1, we begin to experience the power of faith, hope, and love now. And our lives become infused with three things that last forever.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT)

Of the three traits, love is the greatest. It's the secret sauce of Story 1.

We intuitively know this. Almost every movie, song, or speech gains its strength by tapping into the power of love, faith, and hope. It's just the object of those traits where things get messy. Faith in what? Hope in what? Love of what? We tend to focus our faith, hope, and love on created things rather than the Creator.

When that happens, we become tangled in the trappings of a Story 2 life. But when we love God above all else, we increase the likelihood of staying in Story 1. That's why the greatest commandment is this:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30 NIV)

It's also why love is even more powerful than belief. Had Adam and Eve loved God with all their hearts, doubt would have found no home. And Eden would have remained their home.

**We walk by faith and not by sight because there
are places to go that cannot be seen and the
scope of our vision is too small for our strides.**

Rich Mullins, Winds of Heaven, Stuff of Earth

Steep Your Life in God-Reality

Our world is moving more virtual every day.

Most spend more time staring at screens than interacting with real people ... or real life. Many reading this will even challenge what real means anymore. That's how comfortable we've come to be with the artificial.

And when we move against it, we're often told to "get real" and accept the ways of this world. But that's actually just the opposite of what's needed.

One of the many benefits of choosing a Story 1 life is the return to what is real. Not what we say or feel is real, but reality as God made it to be.

Think of it this way. God has always existed. He created everything that is. Everything we call reality was made by One who is far more real than it is.

So in a world of competing realities, nothing is more real than God. Which means the further we get from God, the shakier our foundation becomes.

And like a beacon, Scripture calls us back to God-reality.

Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. (Matthew 6:33–34 MSG)

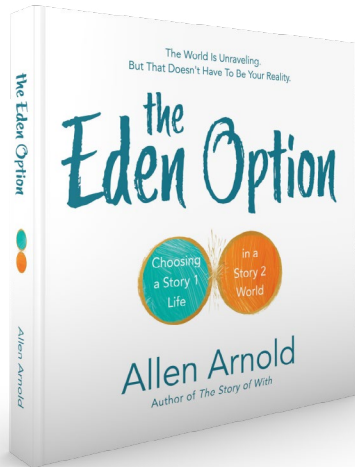
How did we lose this original God-steeped Story? Where did it go? Or more honestly, where did we go?

It's called Story 1 because it reflects our origin story in Eden. Let's revisit paradise and see it with new eyes to better understand what we had, why it was lost, and how to get it back.

**Eden is at the epicenter of everything.
It is the first and truest glimpse
of what reality
is meant to be.**

Ready for More?

The Eden Option reveals God's original design for our lives, why we lost it, and how we can reclaim four traits that Adam and Eve relinquished. Doing so leads to a new way to live, speak, see, and rest in this restless world.



This excerpt provided a glimpse of what's possible.

Continue the journey by reading *The Eden Option*.

**Available on Amazon
in print and e-book formats.**

Allen Arnold
STORY • GOD • CREATIVITY