

TELLING OUR STORY WITH JESUS AS THE HERO

“We are creatures of story, created by a storytelling God, who created the very fabric of our reality in terms of His story. Rather than seeing our existence as a series of unconnected random events without purpose, storytelling brings meaning to our lives through the analogy of carefully crafted plot that reflects the loving sovereignty of the God of the Bible.”

Brian Godawa, award-winning filmmaker

THE GOSPEL: GOD’S STORY

Every follower of Jesus has a story to tell, and it’s a story about God and his grace. However, many of us have not been equipped to tell our story in such a way that it points to Jesus as the hero. As those who want to show and share Jesus every day, it’s imperative that we learn to talk about him through the medium of our stories. Often, telling our story will be the most natural way to talk to our not-yet-believing friends about Jesus.

Every great story contains four movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. God’s Story follows the same pattern. God’s Story is the Great Story, the story that helps us make sense of all other stories. God’s Story is the ultimate Good News, the gospel that we find on the pages of the Bible. Understanding the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration pattern in God’s Story will help us make sense of our stories, and of the broken world in which we find ourselves. Below is a quick summary of these four movements along with the themes that emerge in each one.

CREATION

God’s Story begins with him miraculously creating everything out of nothing. The pinnacle of his creation is humans, man and woman made in his image. Like a mirror, Adam and Eve reflect what he looks like on the inside. They are totally unique amongst all of God’s creation. This defines them and gives them worth. As image bearers, the humans enjoy a unique relationship with God. They are made to worship him, to obey him, and to love him.

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Origin and Identity.

FALL

Though Adam and Eve enjoy a close relationship with God, they eventually choose to disobey him. They rebel against God, and choose to believe lies about their identity. This rebellion, called sin, brings about relational brokenness between Adam, Eve, and God. Ashamed, they hide from him and place blame on each other and on the serpent who deceived them (he was later revealed to be Satan). As a result of their sin, they would face death someday. God curses the serpent, and foretells of a coming day when he would be destroyed.

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Brokenness and Blame.

REDEMPTION

Many generations after Adam and Eve, God chooses to enter a special covenant relationship with Abraham, and with his descendants. These people will become a nation called Israel, and God's plan is to bless the whole world through them. He is like a father to them, and loves them deeply. After being miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt, under the leadership of Moses, God leads his people to the land he'd promised years before to provide for them. God also establishes a sacrificial system that allows his people to substitute the life of an animal in place of their own life. This makes it possible for God to forgive his people's sin, and for them to remain in relationship with him.

In the Promised Land, the Israelites rebel against God's authority and experience oppression from neighboring nations, but over and over again God rescues them when they cry out to him. Israel eventually becomes a well-established nation led by a succession of kings, but their pattern of rebellion and repentance continues. Finally, God removes them from the land because they persistently worship false gods despite the warning of God's prophets. However, God promises to one day send a perfect king who will redeem and rescue his people completely.

After 400 years of silence from God, his people finally hear him speak. Jesus, the Son of God, is miraculously born to a young virgin woman, a clear sign that he is the promised rescuer the prophets foretold. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Jesus lives a sinless life, always obeying God, his Father. He begins to establish his kingdom by healing the sick, showing compassion to the poor and needy, freeing the spiritually oppressed, and telling people that he can forgive their sins if they

put their trust in him. He is fully God and fully man. His message of forgiveness through faith deeply offends the religious leaders of his day, and they orchestrate his execution.

However, three days later Jesus rises from the dead! His followers see him, and he sends them out to tell everyone that forgiveness of sins is possible through faith in him. His death pays the penalty for all of the sins of humanity, making the rescue and redemption of everyone possible! Through him, people can now be made right with God, and know him as their Father.

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Rescue and Deliverance.

RESTORATION

A few weeks after the resurrection, Jesus ascends into heaven and sends his Holy Spirit to live inside of his followers, giving them new desires and the new power they need to walk in his ways. His followers are called a “new creation”, and through the Spirit’s power, are gradually changed to become more like Jesus.

Though Jesus began ruling as the King of his people while he was on earth, he will return to earth someday to judge all people, to establish his full rule and reign, and to usher in a new heavens and a new earth. Here, God’s people will worship him perfectly-Father, Son, and Spirit-just as they were originally created to do. Jesus’ followers anxiously await this amazing day!

The key themes in this movement of the Story are Hope and Transformation.

PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR GOSPEL STORY

Understanding God's Story is essential for properly interpreting the Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration elements in our own story. Though we regularly believe that our stories are about us, our stories are really about God. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Your story is ultimately God's Story. It's by him and about him. Your story is good news, a story about God's redemption of a broken person. He is the main character and the hero, not you. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever." (Romans 11:36).

Think through the four elements of your story, and consider how each one is an opportunity to point to your need for God and his work. Our stories consist of a countless string of smaller scenes, so begin by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to show you which parts you should include in your gospel story.

CREATION

We all have a fundamental belief about our origin – who or what gave us our existence, made us who we are, and shaped us into the person we are today. God's Story begins with him bringing everything into existence. He is the author and main character of the Story, and all things find their worth and value in him.

And yet, all of us have looked to someone or something other than God to define us, to give us a sense of worth and value. As you begin your gospel story, talk about your background, some early shaping influences, and what gave you your sense of worth and value.

Key Themes: Origin, Identity

Key Gospel Question: Who or what most shaped your understanding of yourself? What were the sources of your sense of personal value and identity?

Other questions to consider:

- Where were you born and what was going on in your family at the time?
- Talk about your relationships with your family members (parents, siblings, or other important people)
- Early on, who and what were some of the main influences in your life?
- What did you believe about God?

FALL

The world we live in is not as it should be. We are not as we should be. Brokenness is all around us. We have deeply held convictions about why things are broken. We often tend to place the blame at the feet of others: parents, siblings, friends, teachers, leaders, and even the government.

God's Story shows us that our own sin is the primary thing that wreaks havoc on our lives. As you tell your gospel story, talk about specific ways that your sin brought about pain and destruction in your life. Include failed attempts at fixing the brokenness in your life.

Key Themes: Brokenness, Blame

Key Gospel Question: How was your relationship with God and others not the way God created it to be? Why?

Other questions to consider:

- What were some of your most painful experiences?
- How did you respond to the pain?
- What was broken in your life? Relationships? Behavior? Attitudes? Health?
- Who was to blame for this brokenness?
- How did you try to fix the brokenness? Were those efforts effective?

REDEMPTION

All of us look to created things to save us, to rescue us, to give us significance, and to make us right. Money, possessions, acceptance, approval, relationships, and achievements all seem to offer some hope for repairing the brokenness in our lives. Education, government, recreation, and self-fulfillment can grab our attention as potential saviors, too. But the gospel tells a different story! The Redemption movement of your story has the potential to be very powerful because you get to declare your faith in Jesus as the One who has saved and rescued you. Talk specifically about how you placed your trust in Jesus to save and rescue you from your sin and from the brokenness in your life. Describe how Jesus' life, death and resurrection have brought redemption to specific broken parts of your story.

Key Themes: Rescue, Deliverance

Key Gospel Question: How has Jesus redeemed and rescued you through his death on the cross? How did you come to put your faith and trust in Him to save you and restore your life to the way God intended it to be?

Other questions to consider:

- What people or things failed to rescue you?
- How did the Spirit lead you to put your faith in Jesus? Did he use people, the Bible, a supernatural experience, difficult circumstances, a powerful message?
- What were some of the effects of your belief in Jesus? How did you begin to experience God restoring you back to the way you were originally created?

RESTORATION

There's a deep longing within each of us for change, for things to be different tomorrow than they are today. For some, this means finding a job or a spouse. Others hope for world peace and a fair distribution of resources, a Utopian society. The desire to "have it all" is a longing that many share. What we're all craving is a mending of the brokenness that surrounds us. We want restoration, but we want it to look a certain way.

Because of what Jesus has done, restoration has begun. We are a new creation, and we've been made right with the Father! In God's Story, restoration means that his image bearers begin to live in the way they were originally created to live. His Spirit lives in and through us, making us more like Jesus, even though we are still living in a fallen, broken world. Conclude your gospel story by talking about what the Spirit is doing in your life now. Share some evidences of his grace, indicators that you've been made new, that his restorative work has already begun in you.

Key Themes: Hope, Transformation

Key Gospel Question: What has changed and is changing in your life now? Who and what is the focus of your life today?

Other questions to consider:

- What are you hoping will change next week, month, year, 10 years?
- Who is the focus of your preferred version of the future?
- What are some specific ways you've seen the Spirit make you more like Jesus (consider the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23)? Examine restoration in your attitude, your behavior, and your relationships, and be as specific as you can.
- What aspect of the new heavens and new earth are you most excited about?

A FEW STORY TIPS

- Make your story about 10 minutes long.
- It's not essential, but you may want to consider writing out your story. This will help you stay on track, and will ensure you include the most important aspects.
- Use normal, every day language to tell your story.
- The Father already knows your story and accepts you fully because of Jesus, so you can be totally honest with others. Don't fear what people might think.
- Practice telling your story with close friends and family so you will be prepared when needed.
- Be prepared to share your gospel story in the midst of spiritual conversations with not-yet-believers. Anytime the conversation turns to God, Jesus, Church, or the Bible, it might be a great opportunity to share how Jesus is the hero of your story.
- Pray and ask the Spirit to speak through you as you tell your story.

REMEMBER, IT'S ACTUALLY HIS STORY!