



**gospel  
community  
mission**

# Engaging in Story

By Jeff Vanderstelt

## Life Inside a Story

### Everyone Has a Dominant Story

Every person you encounter, every community you enter into and every culture you engage has a dominant Story with many sub-stories. The Dominant Story is the most prominent, compelling and controlling informant for how people perceive God, others and the world. Some call this a worldview because it is the lens through which they view the world. One's worldview shapes how they receive and process information, engage in relationships, make decisions and shape their philosophy and beliefs. You can discover a person's dominant story by asking questions.

*Complete this sentence with the first 3-5 descriptions that come to your mind "God is..."*

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*Write down the three words that come to your mind when you hear the word "Father":*

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**How you responded reveals part of your Story...How you describe God is connected to your dominant Story...What you think of Father comes from your dominant Story...**

**IN GROUPS:** *Discuss how you believe Your Story shapes your response...*

# Life Inside THE Story

## THE Dominant Story

There is ONE dominant Story that all stories will ultimately find their place in and finally be complete because of...God's Story – The Gospel. His Story precedes, finishes, corrects and ultimately makes sense of all other stories. In order to effectively administer the Gospel to people we must listen with "Gospel Ears" for where any part of someone's story is not in line with or influence by The Gospel.

At Soma, we expect that every person become familiar with The Story of God so that eventually our worldviews become realigned with God's intent for the world, our lives, and our place within His eternal plan. AND we might also become more effective Gospel Listeners who can bring the Gospel to bear on the lives of believers and unbelievers around us.

There are four distinct movements within God's Story: CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION, and RESTORATION

## CREATION

Here we come to understand that God is eternal and is the Creator of all things. Since God is the Creator, He is the one who gives meaning and purpose to all that exists and is the one for whom all exists. We aren't self-made men or women AND we don't determine our own meaning or purpose, God made us and determines the purpose for our lives. And, He has the authority to hold us accountable to the purposes for which He created us.

## FALL

In this part of THE STORY we come to understand why all that has been made is no longer in the state that God created it to be. Humanity and all of creation is broken and in need of restoration because of humanity's rebellion against God, which started with Adam and Eve in the Garden but has continued on to the present. We all deserve judgment and death because of our sinful rebellion. We are presently experiencing the consequences of our rebellion all around us in the world and in our lives. Ultimately, we will all stand before God as Judge for our rebellion.

## REDEMPTION

Since humanity rebelled and was turned over to their rebellion by God, God is the only one who can rescue us from our rebellious state and the punishment we justly deserve. God spoke words of hope to Adam and Eve and to generations that followed by foretelling of His rescue and redemption plan. God spoke through the prophets of a rescuer who was coming to live the perfect life we don't live, die the death we deserve, rise from the dead overcoming sin and sin's penalty, which is death, ultimately

satisfying the righteous requirement of God for us and purchasing for God a people set apart for His work and worship. This rescuer and redeemer is Jesus Christ. There is no other hope for being rescued and redeemed for God and from God's righteous judgment outside of Jesus and His work.

## **RESTORATION**

The plan of God doesn't end with only a people redeemed for God and forgiven by God, but with a New Heaven and New Earth where sin, death and destruction is all removed and peace and love defines how we relate to each other and God. Jesus will return to bring about this full restoration and will ultimately be at the center of it all – all honor and praise and glory will belong to Him. While we wait with hopeful anticipation for him to return to complete this final work, he calls us to participate with him in bringing about healing and restoration as a foretaste of this future reality. Wherever people are living in submission to Jesus and His ways, serving and sharing the Gospel with others while empowered by His Spirit, Restoration is being experienced. Our lives of Gospel Service are like a Movie Trailer of what is to come when The Kingdom is fully consummated.

## **Every Story Reflects THE STORY**

This four-part storyline is found in every person and culture's story. However, most are not fully in line with the truth of the Gospel Story – this includes many of us as well. Our job is to continue to grow in our understanding of and belief in God's Story (The Gospel) so that:

1. Our personal stories might more fully line up with the truth of The Gospel
2. The stories of the people in our Missional Community would line up with the truth of the Gospel
3. The people God is sending us on mission to save would come to find their stories redeemed in and lined up with the truth of the Gospel.

So, we must continue to grow in our knowledge and understanding of THE STORY and grow in "Gospel Listening": listening closely to the stories of others in light of THE STORY – The Gospel.

**Every person and culture has these four parts in their Story:**

## **CREATION**

Everyone has a fundamental belief about their Origin – who or what gave them their existence, made them who they are, shaped them into the person they are today.

*The Key Question here is: Who or What do you credit for who you are?*

## **FALL**

There is a reason for why people, community and the world is broken. Each person has a fundamental belief about the cause of brokenness and has a deep desire for Justice in the form of

Righteous Judgment. People blame their parents, family, friends, boss, government etc...for what they've become AND want justice by putting the blame on someone else for the pain and brokenness in the world. Everyone has a "Fall Guy" mentality – Someone is to blame and someone deserves punishment.

***The Key Question here is: Why are things and people not the way they are supposed to be and who is to blame for it?***

## **REDEMPTION**

Everyone has a solution they believe in, a remedy they look to or savior they believe in to redeem the brokenness in their life and world. Many are looking to a philosophy. Others look to a plan for self-improvement or personal growth. Many believe some kind of reform in education or politics will change things. Everyone believes in a Redeemer or in a Self-Improvement plan of sorts.

***The Key Question is: Who or what will rescue me and redeem what is broken?***

## **RESTORATION**

Every person has a picture of the future when everything is as it should be. Some see a utopia with humans all living at peace with one another. Others believe Mother Earth and humanity will be one. Still others see another world they will go to where they will be at the center. Some people's future hope is to be married...have children...get a job...be rich...etc...Everyone wants something better...restoration of what they believe their world should be like.

***The Key Question here is: What will the world or your world look like when all is as it should be AND Who or what will be the focus of this world?***

**IN GROUPS:** *What should you be listening for in each story part to determine what someone believes...*

CREATION

FALL

REDEMPTION

RESTORATION

## Engaging a Story

Once we start to understand some person or culture's story, we want to begin to engage them in their story with the hope that can: 1) Find common ground to build from; 2) Confront or Correct the inconsistencies or brokenness in their story; 3) Complete with The Story

### Common Ground with THE STORY

As you listen carefully, pay close attention to where the story your hearing lines up with some or part of The Gospel Story. They could have a whole section of The Story that they agree with (i.e. Environmentalism agrees with The Fall – It's Humanity's fault...but the rebellion is against Mother Earth, not God); or there may be parts of a section that agree, but still miss the Gospel (i.e. Jesus did come to redeem us, but it all depends on how well we behave or perform for him).

Finding the common ground creates a point of agreement and potential Gospel Foundation from which you can work outward to both lay more foundation and/or show the weakness of their prior foundational storyline.

*Consider how Paul did this in **Acts 14:8-18** and **Acts 17:22-34**..*

*What common ground did Paul start with?*

*How did he move from the common ground to what they didn't yet know or believe?*

### Confront and Correct the Inconsistencies or Brokenness

At some point through dialog it is imperative to identify where the story they believe in does not hold up under close scrutiny. Generally, one or more fundamental parts of their story do not line up with the rest of their story OR the life they're living does not line up with the story they hold to.

If you are listening closely to a Christian's story, your goal is to help them see where their life or doctrine does not line up with the truth of the Gospel. If the person is an unbeliever, your desire is to encourage them to work out the fullness of their story's implications to see where they do not or will not live fully in line with their story OR that their story will not accomplish what they hope it will.

The best way to work toward this is through ongoing series of questions...

*What might some of those questions be?*

## **Completion of Their Story with THE STORY**

Finally, once we become clear on where their story is incomplete, broken or based not on the truth, we look for opportunities to show how only The Gospel Story corrects and completes their story. If we listen closely, we should be able to share with them The Story so that it speaks Good News to their story. We should tell The Story in such a way that they want it to be true since it answers the deep questions and longings they are looking to another story to fulfill.

### **Assignment:**

Try this with your Own Story first... (Suggestion: do this with your dna group)

*What key events or experiences have most significantly shaped your life?*

*Try to identify 5-10 of them:*

*In what ways has the Gospel Story better interpreted or completed those events or experiences?*

*How are some of those events or experiences still writing the dominant storyline for you?*

*How does the Gospel speak to that?*

*What key hopes, dreams or life changes are you looking forward to?*

*Try to identify 5-10 of them:*

*How are they grounded in the Story of the Gospel?*

*Where do they need to be corrected or completed by the Gospel Storyline?*

Now, do this same assignment for one other MC member and an unbeliever God has sent you to (With as much info as you already know OR make it your goal to begin to know their story well enough so you can do this).

**ADVANCE:** Do this for the community/culture God has sent your MC to...what is the dominant Story line of your neighborhood, community, city, region (Pick one or all)?

**FURTHER STUDY:**

- **The Drama of Scripture** by Michael Goheen
- **Living at the Crossroads** by Michael Goheen