

HIS STORY, MY STORY, OUR STORY
THE GREATEST STORY
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Have you ever heard the Bible referred to as “**The world’s greatest story book?**” Some might flinch at that description, associating “stories” with fiction and wondering whether referring to the Bible as a “story book” is an attempt to deny its inspiration and authority. But I’d like you to set that concern aside. The Bible is “The greatest storybook,” because it tells the world’s story from beginning to end. The Bible tells us the amazing story of Creation in the early chapters of Genesis; it depicts the Fall—Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden and the effects of that sin that continued to reverberate throughout history and which we acutely feel the effects of today; and, the Bible unfolds the story of God’s redemption through his prophets and priests and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and through his Son, Jesus in the New Testament, throughout history and in our lives today. The Bible is also the greatest story, because it includes each of us. Our individual stories intersect with God’s story and in the context of a church family, all of our stories join together to create a unique story.

The Bible is filled with stories—stories from the Old Testament and stories that Jesus told—but at times we focus so intently on isolated stories that we miss the big story. We can’t afford to do that, because the big story is too important. To trace the Bible’s story line for us, I’ve asked people from our church family to read 8 Scriptures I’ve selected from the Old and New Testaments. These Scripture passages highlight the scope of God’s story and the role we play as God’s story unfolds.

Genesis 1:26-28 & 31—

Genesis 12:1-3—

Ezekiel 36:22 & 23—

Matthew 5:13-16—

Acts 17:26 & 27—

2 Corinthians 5:17-20—

Ephesians 2:10—

Revelation 21:1-4—

Those are powerful Scriptures and there are so many more I could have included. Two observations I have about those verses and the story line they unfold. First, God's story has always been meant for everyone. It was never just for a select group of people. From Genesis to Revelation, God's desire has been that everyone in the entire world would know and experience his love. Second, from the beginning to the end—through Creation, Fall and Redemption—human beings have always played an important role. We're leading actors and actresses in God's drama.

We've been talking about the concept of story in broad brush strokes, now I'd like us to personalize this for our church family. If you had asked me during my first ten years of being a pastor what my overarching goal in ministry was I would have said that God's call on my life was to develop leaders—specifically leaders God calls to be pastors and missionaries. And over my first 10 years as youth pastor, pastor of young adults and executive pastor I'd had the privilege of seeing between 10 and 15 people I'd worked with closely in ministry called to full-time ministry roles. But when I became McBIC's senior pastor, my focus began to shift. I sensed God placing a call on my life to help every follower of Jesus understand and embrace the truth that they are called to be missionaries in their neighborhoods, in their schools and in their workplaces. We still need pastors and missionaries and I celebrate people responding to God's call for those ministry fields, but even more than that, we need all followers of Jesus to understand that their mission field consists of the places where they go every day.

For the past ten years or so twice each year I've preached on the theme of partnering with God to do his work in our world. I've approached the topic in a variety of ways, but the core message is the same: **God calls each of us to shine his light and share his love with the people we interact with every day in our spheres of influence.** John King calls this my "stump speech," and it is a passion of mine. I was sharing in a Christian Ministries class at Messiah on Monday and a student asked me the question, "What's your favorite part of ministry?" That's a

tough question, because I could go in a lot of different directions with the question. But I said that my favorite part of ministry is seeing people grab hold of the truth that whatever they do, they're missionaries and their neighborhoods, their workplace and their schools are their mission field. Our staff has also tried to be very intentional about highlighting through video people in our church family who are living this out, because we want to provide you with real life examples, not just theories.

Preaching two sermon series on the same subject demonstrates how seriously we take this topic, but I understand that simply preaching on a topic doesn't guarantee it takes root in our hearts and lives. So, earlier this year 3 of our staff members began meeting to brainstorm together how we can more effectively help our church family embrace the reality that we are all called to be on mission with God. As we talked, Susan encouraged us to pull Cindy King onto our team, because of Cindy's passion for communicating with others out of her own life experiences about living purposefully on mission with God. As Cindy met with our staff we landed on the idea of doing a focused 6-week initiative that would incorporate daily devotionals and Small Group/Bible Fellowship Group studies in conjunction with our sermon series. So, that's how we've landed where we are today. Our hope is that all of us will do more than just come on Sunday and listen to the sermons. We want to see as many people as possible reading the daily devotionals and participating in a small group or Adult Bible Fellowship Group.

I have 3 goals for McBIC as we walk through this series:

- 1) **I want to see existing missional communities at McBIC strengthened.** Over the last number of years we've seen individuals within our church start and lead some phenomenal ministries: At The Cross Recovery—to people in recovery; Family Promise—a ministry that provides temporary housing for homeless families; Our Father's Hope—a group that seeks to partner with foster and adoptive families; and, Peace Promise—a group that ministers to women in the sex traffic industry. I hope that through this series people's hearts will be moved and we'll see additional volunteers connect with those existing ministries.
- 2) **I hope to see new missional communities started.** While each of those missional communities do awesome work, the needs around us are great. Our staff has identified needs among: the elderly, prison inmates, students in local schools and people living in government subsidized housing communities. And that just scratches the surface. Recently Betty Ebersole, a 70-something year old from McBIC, has started a ministry to the elderly living in retirement communities called: Eternal

Hope. My hope is that as we walk through this series there will be others in our church family who tap into our Heavenly Father's heart and sense a nudge to start a new missional community with other like-minded folks.

- 3) **I want to see more teens and adults commit themselves to living as missionaries in their neighborhood communities, in their workplaces and in their schools.** In Matthew chapter 9 Jesus looked out over the crowds of people and told his disciples, *"The fields are ready to be harvested. Ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers into his harvest field."* When Jesus said that He wasn't just asking for prayer for more pastors and missionaries. He was asking his disciples to pray that all of his followers would recognize the harvest and would take responsibility for helping gather it. Each of us who follow Jesus is called to join with Him in his mission of reaching others with his love. There is a role for every one of us to play and my hope is that through this series, many of us who haven't viewed our lives in this way will take steps to intentionally engage in God's story.

So, over the next 6 weeks we're going to explore God's story; I'll emphasize the role each of us play in that story; and, hopefully together we'll understand the power that comes from many individuals collaborating and making it our story.

Every story—at least good ones—have some basic elements: there are characters, there is a setting or context, there's a plot or story line, there's a conflict and finally, there's resolution. Cindy has helped us frame our series around 5 questions: **"Who is the character?" "What does the character want?" "What's the problem standing in the way of the character getting what they want?" "What does the character do to solve the problem?"** and **"What happens then?"** And beginning next week our plan is to walk through these basic questions by looking at the life of Jesus: Who was He? What was his purpose? What were obstacles He faced? How did He meet those challenges? What happened next?

Speaking of the big story of the Bible Richard Stearns in his book, Unfinished, says, *"The story of scripture is the story of a Father's love for his children. It is the story of a Father faithfully reaching out to the children who rejected him. It is the story of a loving God who never gives up."* Richard Stearns And Stearns goes on to say, *"Most Christians don't have a good grasp of the broad storyline from creation to consummation. But here is the problem with that: we can't really understand the mission of Jesus unless we understand that he was the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament story. And if we don't understand the mission of Jesus, we won't*

understand the mission he gave us to fulfill. We have to know the big story to understand where our story fits in.” Stearns

If we don't understand Jesus' story, it's unlikely we'll fully grasp our place in that story. What I've shared today is pretty straight forward. In fact, you might ask, what's the big deal? This all seems pretty simple. I'll just start living with a missional focus. On one level it is simple, but we need to keep in mind that ever since creation, God's purposes have been opposed by our enemy, Satan. And while we may miss the central role we play in God's story, our enemy is keenly aware of the central role we play...and he's committed to doing everything he can to stop us. There are many ways Satan seeks to thwart us, but I'd like to highlight 2 obstacles I've observed in my own life and in the lives of others.

Obstacles We Face in Embracing Our Role In God's Story

We are misinformed. We've accepted a faulty understanding that divides our lives into sacred and secular compartments. This model comes from a dualistic, Greek mindset. **Diagram** The sacred part of life is what God cares about: spiritual things like our relationship with Jesus, going to church, worshiping, participating in a small group, serving the poor and telling others about Jesus. The secular part of life is really where we spend the bulk of our time and it relates to the physical, material and human aspects of life. In this framework, God is really concerned about 10-20% of our lives and the other 80-90% is just...well, were not sure exactly what to do with that. We go to work and get a paycheck to support our family; we do recreational activities; we take our kids to their activities; we go to bed; and, then we wake up the next day and do it all over again and again and again. When you stop to think about it, it's actually kind of depressing if this is all there is to it. This misinformed view leads many followers of Jesus to view only a small portion of their life as truly important.

But the Bible portrays a radically different worldview that looks like this. **Diagram 2** This model reflects the Jewish mindset and doesn't distinguish between the sacred and the secular or between the spiritual and the material. God created it all and He's concerned about it all. This worldview sees all aspects of life as connected and of concern to our Heavenly Father. The question with this mindset shifts from, "Is God concerned about this part of my life?" to "Is this aspect of my life in harmony with or in conflict with God's design?" When we

accept the 2nd worldview we're positioned to make all of our lives count for God. Throughout our "His Story..." series we're going to be highlighting some people from McBIC who are living this out. Today's video features Cindy Agoncilla, and her story fits so well here because Cindy's passion involves a normal, non glamorous aspect of life—where people live and what they do with their time. [Cindy's video](#)

The 2nd obstacle I frequently observe is **We believe we're too broken or too _____ to be used by God.** Every one of us has encountered this one—it becomes the excuse we accept or use to try and convince God or others why He can't use us. And we're partially right on this—every one of us is broken. But we miss the next piece, that as followers of Jesus, we have been restored and we're continuing in the process of being restored until one day when we're fully restored.

The Bible never dismisses or tries to explain away our brokenness, our inadequacies or our shortcomings. It does tell us that God uses our brokenness to accomplish his purposes in even greater ways. Look at how the Apostle Paul states it in 2 Corinthians chapter 4:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

The things we try to hide from others because we're embarrassed by them or try to use as excuses for why we're not able to do what God is asking, are the very things God uses to allow his light to shine through us.

My desire is that every one of us would understand and embrace the truth that God created us to partner with Him in doing his work in our world. And as we walk through this series I hope to help you remove the obstacles of being misinformed regarding what God cares about in your life, as well as the obstacle of believing we're too broken to be used by God. I'm confident that as we explore God's big story and examine Jesus' life we'll be positioned to be one of the people who answer Jesus' prayer to go into the harvest field to share Jesus' love with others.