

SUBPLOTS

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FINDING OUR VOCATION IN GOD'S GREAT NARRATIVE.

'So, what do you want to do with your life?'

It's one of those questions that I have been asked numerous times that has often left me feeling overwhelmed. Life is full of so many uncertainties and opportunities, that it's difficult to give a clear succinct answer. And often I'm just not sure how to answer it.

In church circles, we often talk about our vocation. There is a sense that God is calling us to be used by him in bringing about change and transformation in the spheres of society, but it can be difficult to articulate what that looks like in terms of a career or a ten-year plan.

Over the last couple of years, I have been exploring the beauty of story. Stories are powerful. They shape how we see the world, how we see ourselves and ultimately how we see God. And I wonder if the language of story can better help us articulate how we live our lives well, discerning what God has called us to and who God has called us to be.

In the UK today, it's easy to get distracted from the idea of God's calling and to follow the stories that the world has to offer. The world bombards us with mini-stories on billboards and through

social media and it's easy to think that the best kind of life is one in which we are the very centre of our story - chasing a life that is all about personal happiness; or about making ourselves safe and secure in a turbulent world; or about making a name for ourselves chasing accolades and retweets.

But a lifetime with ourselves at the centre of the story is actually never fulfilling. Those who have reached the pinnacle of fame or achieved financial success or received glowing accolades have found that these things ultimately do not satisfy. We were created by a Creator and it's in relationship with him that we find out what it is to be truly human.

God does not reveal himself in a book simply made up of rules or information, but he reveals himself in a story. From Genesis to Revelation, we get this incredible story about God that reveals his justice and love and compassion. And it's in this story that we also discover how desperate he is to be in relationship with us, his creation. This story reveals that ultimately we are never meant to be the centre. God is always meant to be centre stage.

I have found it helpful not only to think of the Bible as God's story, but to think of my life as a story that finds meaning in God's bigger story. I believe each of our lives tells a story and it's this big story that we find in the Bible that helps us frame our lives, helping us make sense of our time here on earth.

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The challenge is to work out how our own personal story fits into the larger God story - for me, this is what we mean when we talk about vocation. Here are five statements that have helped me try to live the best kind of a story, wrapped up in God's great narrative.

1. THE STORY HAS ALREADY BEGUN

Choosing to live in God's story isn't just a decision we make once, when we come to faith. It's a daily decision to find out how we can be involved in seeing God's will being done here on earth. With God as the central character, we are invited to partner with him in restoring all things.

Sometimes we have limited this solely to the spiritual. For sure, God wants spiritual renewal and invites us to help others discover who he is and what it means to live in relationship with him. This is essential and is a call upon all of our lives.

But he also wants social renewal and invites us to transform structures and institutions so that people are empowered to live well, free from the strongholds of poverty. He wants cultural renewal and invites us to create better ways of being in our different spheres of influence.

Our life stories are about joining in with what God has been doing for generations and begins with a recognition that God is central and that he is already at work. Wherever God has placed you, you can begin by asking 'God, what are you up to?'

2. THERE WILL PROBABLY BE NO BURNING BUSH

Many of us like very specific instructions. We would quite like God to make every step of our lives very clear, but that is not the way that God tends to work. Scripture talks about his word being a lamp unto our feet, so that we can see the next few steps ahead rather than a search and rescue light allowing us to see every step well ahead.

The sad thing is that many of us are waiting for a burning bush experience to kickstart our story. We can end up spending our

lives waiting for some dramatic revelation. The truth is, God rarely speaks in such dramatic ways. At times he uses angels, visions and even a donkey but he often speaks through a whisper - through convictions and Holy Spirit nudges.

God created us with desires that cannot be fulfilled exclusively in him and finding our story is about working out the godly passions that God has embedded within us; the passions that go beyond us and serve God's kingdom priorities.

Some helpful questions may be: 'What makes you come alive? What keeps you up at night? What has God been teaching you through your life experiences so far? What pain in the world do you notice that you just have to do something about?'

It's as you tease through some of these big themes, that you can begin to think about what they look like in the here and now. You don't need to be CEO of a large corporation or a local councillor with a portfolio of responsibility. You begin now, in the roles and the responsibilities that God has already given you.

3. GOOD STORIES COST

The comfortable life is very attractive but the secret to any good story is that there needs to be some kind of conflict or challenge. It's not that we go looking for conflict, but that the vision or the passion we carry will require it.

Some of the best biographical stories from history are about leaders whose vision cost dearly - think Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Theresa. Ultimately, the God story reveals the cost that God was willing to pay as Jesus went to the cross.

Finding your story in God's is about being willing to pay a price. It might mean risking failure as you step into something new; or turning down lucrative career moves to follow God's prompting; or being willing to be hurt by those that you want to help.

If we want to live a good story, finding the calling that God has for our lives, then we need to wrestle with the challenging

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question: What am I willing to surrender to God? More than our ability. God is looking for our availability.

4. WHO THE CHARACTER BECOMES IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT THE CHARACTER ACHIEVES

I'm the kind of guy that makes lists and loves to tick things off. I have to 'achieve' things every day and when it comes to life, I often set myself targets. But an interesting thought that I have been thinking through recently is perhaps I need to be less fixated on lists of what I want to achieve and more focused on who I want to become.

One day as people sit around at my wake, do I want to be remembered for what I achieved or for how I treated other people? My dad, Rob Frost, achieved some significant things - national touring productions, countless books and TV shows. But what do people remember him for? The personal phone call and the word of encouragement. They remember him for how he was with them more than what he achieved.

When what we want to achieve replaces who we want to be, we can forget the greatest of Jesus' commands - to love one another. Maybe we need to write down some of the values that we want to live in our life stories.

5. WE KNOW HOW THE STORY ENDS...

The last book in the Bible, Revelation, paints this incredible picture of a new heaven and a new earth. Tears are wiped away. Things are as they should be.

Reminding ourselves of how the story ends is vital because there is always hope. We live in a dark world and it's easy to become disillusioned when there is so much pain and suffering. We can easily get knocked off course in our vocation as we journey through the highs and lows of life.

Wrapping ourselves in the God story helps us frame both the joys and the disappointments that we encounter. Finding our story in God's story is ultimately about remembering that God is sovereign, that we never need to despair because we know how the story ends.

An important question to think through is: 'When it comes to my vocation, what rhythms of prayer and Bible reading will help me centre myself on Jesus, no matter what life throws at me?'

And so next time someone asks me, 'So what do you want to do with your life?', how will I answer? I probably won't have a fixed plan for the next ten years that

I can articulate, but what I do know is that my life story will be about helping others enter a relationship with God. I will choose not to feel overwhelmed by the question because, ultimately, my life is just a small subplot in God's great story.

Andy Frost is the Director of Share Jesus International. He has two new books out this year: *Long Story Short* and *Raising Faith*. For more information about books, the new Eklesia Conference and his youtube outreach channel, 'The Adventures of the Ginger Vicar and the Balding Bishop,' visit: sharejesusinternational.com



LONG STORY SHORT

'The universe is made of stories not of atoms,' said American poet Muriel Rukeyser. The fact is: your life tells a story. From beginning to end, your life will create a unique narrative, shaped by the wider stories you find yourself living in.

So what story are you living in?

Exploring the importance of such stories and how these shape our identity, Share Jesus International's Andy Frost presents the ultimate narrative of life, the universe and everything: the God Story.

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