



“Story is the language of the heart. Story nourishes and feeds our souls.”

John Eldredge from the book ‘Epic’

We are captured by stories. Think about it. Movies, books, reality tv, sports, news, history....everything that grabs our attention is rooted in story. Bring 2 people together and before long they will be telling stories.

DISCUSS: Share your favorite movie, tv show, or book and explain why it is a favorite.

Have you thought about your own life as a story? It is. Every day life comes to you scene by scene. We enter into story every moment of our lives.

If you watched a movie about a guy who wanted a VOLVO and worked for years to get it, you wouldn't cry at the end when he drove off the lot, testing the windshield wipers. You wouldn't tell your friends you saw a beautiful movie or go home and put a record on to think about the story you'd seen. The truth is, you wouldn't remember that movie a week later, except you'd feel robbed and want your money back. Nobody cries at the end of a movie about a guy who wants a VOLVO.

But we spend years actually living those stories, and expect our lives to feel meaningful. The truth is, if what we choose to do with our lives won't make a story meaningful, it won't make a life meaningful either.

-Donald Miller (‘A Million Miles in a Thousand Years’)

DISCUSS: When you view your life as a story, what do you see? A ‘Volvo’ type of story or something different?

So what is behind all of this? If our lives are all a story and stories are so central to everything about us and what captures our hearts, is there perhaps a much bigger

story behind all of this? Our faith says that there is and for us to understand our own story, we first must understand 'THE STORY'.

Take a few minutes and quietly read the following thoughts and excerpts from the book 'Epic' by John Eldredge as we seek to understand 'THE STORY':

"We won't begin to understand our lives, or what this so-called gospel is that Christianity speaks of, until we understand the Story in which we have found ourselves. For when you were born, you were born into an Epic that has already been under way for quite some time. It is a story of beauty and intimacy and adventure, a Story of danger and loss and heroism and betrayal."

Act 1 – "In the beginning...." (John 1:1-3)

-The Story begins with something relational....Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Human personality came from something personal. Creation reflects personality. To be human is to be relational. Look at your memories, both good and bad, and you will discover that everything is rooted in relationship. Something preceded us, something good, something eternal.....a life that existed before our own.

Act 2 – The Entrance of Evil

-Why does every story have a villain? Because yours does. The problem is that most people do not live as though this is true despite the fact that we cannot deny the presence of evil in our world. Where did it come from? Something happened before we came along...before humans came the angels. The Bible tells us that we live in two worlds, one that we can see and one that we cannot and we are told to fear the world we cannot see more than the one that we do see. THE STORY changed when Lucifer decided that the story should be about him...pride. Betrayal. THE STORY has been different ever since. Evil entered in. Do we take this part of the story seriously? Do we live as though THE STORY has a villain? What is it going to take for us to take evil seriously? Satan mounted this betrayal through the power of an idea: God is holding out on us. Is God truly good?

Act 3 – The Battle for the Heart

-Creation is amazing but we have grown dull to it. We were created in the image of God. We were created with original glory. God gives us the ability to love. He also gives us the freedom to choose. Why? For love to be real, it must be chosen. Satan hates God. His revenge is to get us to turn us away from God. He succeeds. Sin enters in and original glory has been trampled on. Deep down we know we are not what we are meant to be. Most of our misery comes from the fruits of our hearts gone bad. The battle has begun. Rescuing the human heart is the hardest mission in the world.

*“The dilemma of THE STORY is this: we don’t know if we want to be rescued. We are so enamored with our false stories and our false gods, we are so bound up in our addictions and self-centeredness and take it for granted unbelief that we don’t even know how to cry out for help. And the Evil One has no intentions of letting his captives walk away scot-free.” John Eldredge from the book **Epic***

*“The challenge God faces is rescuing a people who have no idea how captive they are; no real idea how desperate they are. We know we long for Eden, but we hesitate to give ourselves back to God in abandoned trust. We are captivated by the lies of our Enemy.” John Eldredge from the book **Epic***

-God will not give up on us. He seeks for us to be his allies. God comes into THE STORY as one of us. He laid aside His glory and clothed Himself in humility and dies to rescue us. The hero died to give freedom to his beloved (hmm, just think of how many movies today have this story line). Our sin made us hostages to death but Jesus became our ransom to the Evil One. He paid the price for our betrayal. He proved once and for all that He is good and that we matter to Him. At the point of our biggest betrayal, God came and died for us. We have never been loved like this and He saved us in every way that we can be saved. The battle is won.

Act 4 – The Kingdom Restored

-And they lived happily ever after.....why do we never get tired of such endings? Because God planted eternity in our hearts. Every story has an ending except for THE STORY. Jesus restored humanity, God is restoring the world He made. ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ Rev. 21:5. The resurrection of Jesus was the first of many. We too, shall live and never die. The Kingdom restored begins with a great party....the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

Epilogue – The Role We Play

-Don't forget that there still is a place called hell. Our God desires that no one will perish (2 Peter 3:9). Also, hell was not created for mankind but for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41). But remember, he gave us free will...he gave us a choice and it is us that betrayed Him. In the end, we know that there will be some who refuse to come to the wedding banquet of God (Matthew 22:2-3). They will not choose God. They will get their desire – to be left to themselves.

-We are living somewhere in Act 3. The battle wages on between paradise lost and paradise regained. This is the Epic we have fallen into. You have been given a role to play. Your life can be one that chooses Christ and reveals to the world something about the God that created us so that others would come to know Him. To discover your role, you must turn to Jesus. You must ask Him to make us all He intended us to be – to tell us who we are and what we are to do now.

We were reminded in this reading that 'THE STORY' that we all find ourselves in changed forever when Lucifer decided that the story was about him and he then convinced us of the same thing. The battle for our hearts has been waging ever since.

DISCUSS: So where does this find you? Who is winning the battle for your heart? The world & its material pursuits (which the evil one controls) or God? Does your story confirm your answer? In 1 word, what do you feel like God is revealing about Himself through your life?

It's been said that God's story is like a forest and our story is a tree in that forest. A tree by itself is not very significant (yet we tend to think that we are). The story of the forest is so much greater than the story of the tree but each tree does have a role to play in the forest's story.

DISCUSS: To miss the call God has for your life is to miss why He put you on this planet. Have you asked God what it means to be a tree in His forest? What role has He asked you to play?

"If you are not telling a good story with your life nobody will think you died too soon when you pass. They will just think you died." Donald Miller – "A Million Miles in a Thousand Years."

Action Steps:

1. Read Donald Miller's book "A Thousand Miles in a Million Years".
2. We only remember what we put into story. Begin the habit of journaling as a way to remember the activity of God in your life.
3. Commit to writing a better chapter with your one and only story. It's what we have been put on this planet to do.
4. SERVE!! The greatest part of our stories is to give ourselves away and let God work in us.