THE STORY

Prologue – Week 3

Upper Story & Lower Story

August 20-21, 2016

* Personal Life
* Home Life
* Community Life
* Weekend Worship Service

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*Job 2:10*

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*Job 42:12-17 NIV*

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2. The **goal** is to **align** our story to God’s **Story**

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*Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV*

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,

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And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

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Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, TX

August 20-21, 2016

**To view The Story Prologue Week 3 sermon video,** [**CLICK HERE**](http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=538)**.**

**Opener**

Many of you know our church is about to embark on a 31-week journey through the Bible, so people have an opportunity to see the one Story God is writing, to discover what the Bible is all about—not just to see what it’s all about for your head knowledge, but to know what it’s all about for your life. We want to remind you that there are four ways to engage this experience:

1. **Personal Life:** We are inviting you to read the chapter in the book The Story before you arrive at church.
2. **Home Life:** This is an opportunity for your family to gather together, and make use of the Study Guide for The Story that contains a question for family members of all ages to discuss, preferably over a shared meal.
3. **Community Life:** We have a vision of over 500 groups in the greater San Antonio area gathering to discuss God’s Word, just like they did in the Old Testament and New Testament. If you do this it will deepen your understanding of God’s Word.
4. **Weekend Worship Services:** Come to any of the Oak Hills campuses and experience the message in the main services, the children’s ministries, and student ministries, all focusing in the same chapter in The Story, everyone literally on the same page, just like we saw happening in the Bible when an entire community gets their lives organized around God’s truth.

Consider which of those four environments you will engage in, and expect a blessing for your efforts.

**Introduction**

When our younger son was in high school, he wrote a paper comparing the famous writing of Robert Frost called *The Road Not Taken* with a lesser famous book I wrote called *The Heart of the Story* which is my commentary on the 31 chapters of The Story we are about to experience.

I always thought the main thrust of the poem was centered on my understanding of the phrase, “*the road less traveled.”* I thought it was an encouragement to not always choose the path everyone else does, but to be courageous and choose a different path that no one else will take. That is not really what the poem is about at all.

The poem is actually Robert Frost’s reflection on the impact of the personal decisions we make in our lives. We all come to forks in the road and must choose a path to take. The traveler can only look down the path as far as the eye can see – “*to where it is bent in the undergrowth.”* As humans we can’t see around the bend and what lies in store for us there, but we must choose. Frost says, whichever road you take, whether it’s the one everyone else did or the one less traveled, the sojourner will look back on his or her life and reflect, and you will let out a sigh (a sigh of either joy or regret) for the impact the decision you made back then has on your life now.

You see, we all live in the *lower story.* We see our life from the perspective of the Lower Story. No matter how hard we try, we can only see so far down the road. Humanity’s viewpoint is linear, horizontal, limited. All our decisions require some sort of faith or trust in what we cannot control around the corner. From the Lower Story point of view, it’s mostly about our individual lives and the lives of our family. Life is often too overwhelming to deal much beyond our space and concerns. We need to eat; we want to experience love; we need a good job to pay the bills; we want to be healthy and happy; we desperately want our kids to turn out okay and land on both feet in life…the list goes on. By the time we deal with everything going on in our own life, there’s not much time or space left over for anyone else.

**The Lower Story & Upper Story**

Here is a most fantastic discovery about the Bible you may have never seen, and it is a game changer. There are two parallel stories going on at the same time – The Lower Story and the Upper Story.

The Upper Story is how the things looks from God’s perspective up above. His viewpoint is panoramic and vertical and unlimited. He is looking down and sees it all from beginning to end. He can not only see around the next bend in the road, he can intervene at any time he desires and control things and change the outcome, and he does. But, there is more. God is weaving all the Lower Stories to tell one grand epic story from above.

Let me give an example from the life of Job, found in the Old Testament in the book that bears his name.

Job is a godly man, the most righteous man alive. We see in Chapter 1 he’s taking God seriously. He’s raising his kids according to the Word of God, he has integrity in his business, and he regularly reaches out to the poor and the needy.

One day, tragedy raids Job’s house like a tsunami. He is notified that his businesses have all collapsed in a single day. He also gets the word on the same day that a storm blew through the house where all 10 of his children were gathered, and the house collapsed on them, so on the same day he lost all of his businesses, he lost all 10 of his children. The death of his businesses and the death of his children seem to be completely unrelated to each other. We can’t even imagine the level of sorrow he must have felt.

To make matters worse, we are told in Chapter 2 verse 7 he was afflicted with sores all over his body, beginning at the bottom of his feet and going clear to the crown of his head. Job finally sits down in exhaustion in a pile of ashes, scraping the boils with shards of broken pottery.

From the Lower Story perspective, what are we to make of the tragedy of Job’s life? Job is standing at a fork in the road, and he must make a choice. Job’s wife, from her point of view, assumes all this tragedy must come from the hand of God, and she questions her husband. “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die.” I have been married to Rozanne almost 35 years, and I have tested her patience substantially, but I have never heard her say, “I want you to die.”

Job’s wife thought, “This is coming from the hand of a God who is not good, so you should give up on following him. All that’s left is to curse him and then take your life.”

Job also has 3 friends who concluded that this tragedy all came about from the hands of Job. “Job you have sinned, you are guilty. What God has done is justified. The path you need to choose is not to curse God and die, but to repent.”

If there was an atheist in the story (and there are very few atheists recorded in the Bible), they might have said, “There is no God, and this is proof of it. Why would God allow bad things to happen to such a good person? This has happened at the hand of chance. You drew a black bean, Job. Deal with it. Your life sucks.”

But let’s look at the same story from above. The book of Job gives us the Upper Story perspective. We are told what is actually going on in the heavens. Here is the account. One day Satan comes to God and challenges God about Job. He claims that the most righteous man alive only follows God because God puts a hedge of protection around Job to reward his goodness and commitment to God. Satan bets God that if he removes his protection, Job won’t follow him anymore; he will curse God. Job, in the Lower Story, is completely unaware of the deal that’s being struck in the Upper Story.

God says, “Okay, I will remove the hedge of protection, but you must not touch his body.” Satan unleashes his terror in the destruction of his 3 businesses and the death of his 10 children. Job maintains his integrity and commitment to the Lord. So, in the Upper Story, Satan revisits God and says, “That didn’t work, but if you will remove the protection around his body, then he will surely curse you.” So God gives Satan permission to touch his body, and that’s where the boils came from, from his head to his toes. Job is being used as a test case on the devotion of God’s followers.

What is Job’s decision? He is standing at a fork in the road, and he needs to decide. He chose a road less travelled, given his circumstances. Job maintained his commitment to God throughout this whole ordeal. He questioned God, but he never cursed God. He says to his wife:

“Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all of this, Job did not sin in what he said.

*Job 2:10*

Job’s life was being used to prove a point in the heavenly realm. God is using Job’s Lower Story to prove to Satan that his followers can be true to him, even in difficult circumstances. Job never knew about the deal God struck with Satan in the Upper Story to test Job’s faith. He didn’t know the plan, but he trusted God. He didn’t know what was around the next bend, but he looked up, and he asked God for help.

**How did the story end for Job?**

He comes to the end of his life, he releases a sigh, just like Robert Frost said, and it was a sigh of joy.

The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the former part. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters…Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. And so Job died, an old man and full of years.

*Job 42:12-17 NIV*

As we begin this journey through the Bible together, we’re going to be careful to point out to you every step along the way this notion of the Upper Story intersecting into the Lower Story, to disciple you and teach you the importance of living your life in the stream of God’s story.

**Application**

There are three things you need to know.

1. There are **two** stories going on in your life - an **Upper** Story and a **Lower** Story.

In your Lower Story, you are trying to make the best decisions you can, but you like Job and the other characters in the Bible can’t see around the bend in the road. And you can’t control what’s around the bend, no matter how hard you try. What should you do? Do what Job did; look up to see what God is up to.

1. The **goal** is to **align** our story to God’s **Story**

Listen to Isaiah 55:8-9:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

    neither are your ways my ways,”

declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,

    so are my ways higher than your ways

    and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

*Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV*

There is a fundamental question we all need to ask and answer: Whose life do you want to align your life to? Yours? Or God’s? Jesus made it clear that this should be the way we start every prayer:

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

    on earth as it is in heaven.’”

*Matthew 6:9-10 NIV*

**Paraphrase:** “God, I want to align my life in the Lower Story to your will in the Upper Story. Whatever is your will in the heavens I want to be my will here on earth.” This is the secret to a successful life as designed by God.

Paul goes on to turn this issue of aligning your life to God’s Upper Story into a very important promise:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

*Romans 8:28 NIV*

1. If we will align **our** story to God’s story he promises it will be a **good** story.

Anybody want their life to be a good story?

God promises he will do that for us but there are two conditions; look at the passage again. God works for the good of those who…

1) *love God*. We must love God. This means he has to have utmost importance in our lives.

2) *are called according to his purpose*. We must align our lives to his Upper Story purposes.

What does this mean practically? Christians in North America always want to hear the first part, where God’s going to make it good for us. But sometimes, we ignore the conditions.

* You have to make prayer and consistently reading the Bible an important part of your life. You have to proactively seek his will for your life daily, not just when you are in crisis. If we aren’t praying now, if we say “reading is so hard for me,” then this promise of God does not apply to your life!
* You have to take being involved in his church as an essential commitment of your life, not an optional thing. Attending church 1.5 times a month, which is the national average for church goers, isn’t a sign of taking him seriously. If you are not engaging in community with other believers, you are essentially saying to God, “I don’t need you to write a good story for my life.” This promise is not applied to you and you will be left with the consequences of the decisions you have made on your own.
* If we look at your credit card bill or your check book and there is no money going to fund the causes of God, the deal is off. The promise does not apply.
* If you are not tangibly serving somewhere to help others, to build God’s kingdom, but your calendar is consumed with meeting your own needs and wants, you can’t shake your fist at God when things don’t come together to make something good for you.

You will come to the end of your life and reflect as Robert Frost said, on the choices you made, the roads you chose, and you will let out a heavy sigh of regret about the life you gave up on, and how things could have been if you just took God up on his offer.

But if you will take God seriously and align your life to his will, his Story, he will take every story in your life, even the ones where your family threw you under the bus, or cancer, or a stroke or getting fired or being handicapped and he will weave it and tell a beautiful story with your life. How is this possible? He gives you his word. He has never gone back on his word. As we journey through the Scriptures you are going to see it over and over again. I am going to offer that up to you as evidence that what he did for them, he can do for you. *Would anybody hearing my words raise your hand to indicate that you have experienced this phenomenon in your life already?*

What an amazing promise. If we simply look up and dare to align our lives to God’s, he promises to write a good story with our lives. If you are up for that let me hear you shout a hearty “Amen!”

*PRAY*