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Martinson's "Story: The power of narrative for Christian leaders" (Book Review)

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This book by Jay Martinson, the Chair of the Communications Department at Olivet Nazarene University, surprised me at first. I was expecting either a set of short stories that a pastor could use to illustrate important points or at the very least, rules for analyzing fiction. Martinson, instead, leads the reader in a different direction. His intention is to use the power of story to lead others in their faith journeys and to inspire them to change their lives. In other words, stories should have more than entertainment value.

Martinson tells us that humans are narrative beings and that storytelling is part of being human. He says that, while abstract statements of faith are indispensable, stories that convey truth are easier to remember.

According to Martinson, the most basic and universal story is the monomyth in which the hero, who is often an ordinary human being, ventures out of his comfort zone, faces a conflict, and seeks a resolution. During the journey, the protagonist experiences a life-transforming encounter with something bigger than himself and is changed forever. An example is the testimony, which is a type of before-and-after story, in which a Christian relates the dissonance in his life before he found the Lord and the process by which he became a Christian, thereby resolving the dissonance. During the testimony, the storyteller identifies with the other person, implying that “if it happened to me, it can happen to you.” Martinson also examines other types of narratives that communicate vision or that counter error, misinformation, or intentionally false narratives. Storytelling, however, involves more than the oral telling of a story. It involves actively listening to another person’s story and attempting to discover the background context of his or her story.

In essence, God has written a beautiful story into each person’s life. God has designed us as narrative beings, and we understand our experiences as stories. We use stories to seek resolution to our struggles. Some look to people and things to bring resolution to life’s crises, but, as Christians, we should use the power of narrative to help others build a stronger relationship with the Savior.

**Reviewer**

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