

2-1-2014

Fire, Water and Wind: God's Transformational Narrative

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Recommended Citation

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FIRE, WATER, AND WIND:
GOD'S TRANSFORMATIONAL NARRATIVE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 1, 2014

George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2014
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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To my wife and best friend

Teresa Elaine Haukenfrers

You give more than I will ever be able repay.

Thank you.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory, for the great things he is doing.

To my wife, Teresa, for your enduring love and faithfulness, and to my daughters, Jasohna and Ellora, for your support and encouragement of Dr. Daddy. For three years, you have given me time that could have been spent together; without your incredible support and encouragement I would have never finished.

To my parents and grandparents for the gift of faith and love.

To my doctoral cohort at George Fox, my advisors, and Leonard Sweet, thank-you. As iron sharpens iron we have challenged each other in an environment of love, respect, and trust.

To my Teachers, Pastors, and Mentors: Rick Wiebe, Richie White, Ron Pettigrew, Fred Friesen, Norman Reimer, Eugene Peterson, J. I. Packer, James Houston, Lorne Wilkinsons, as well as the teachers through the ages that have understood their times.

To the editors and commentators of this work, thank you, you have improved the arguments and aided with clarity. Anything that remains challenging, unclear, or questionable is solely my error or oversight.

ABSTRACT

“Fire, Water, and Wind: God’s Transformational Narrative” explores factors in forming a healthy sense of personal identity. The impetus for this dissertation is the observation that people in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada and the surrounding area, are searching for meaning and identity. They are dissatisfied with their current situations and many are actively seeking escape from their current life experiences. This is evidenced by the number of people participating in high-risk behaviors and activities such as drug or alcohol abuse, gambling, engaging and soliciting prostitution, pornography, multiple sex partners, unprotected sexual encounters, smoking, or violent crimes, and far too many people who believe that taking their lives is their final escape. Does it have to be this way? I propose that the biblical narrative’s understanding of one’s identity and the ongoing formation of that identity enables one to face the varied challenges of life, a way of transformation (resurrection) even in the most hopeless situations.

The first half of the dissertation includes the written statement establishing the scholarly basis for the Artifact component of the dissertation, which will produce a nonfiction book. The Artifact begins by looking at story and the biblical narrative in the context of identity formation. Chapters three and four seek to encourage the nurturing of an imagination shaped by scripture and unconscious, as it plays a significant role in one’s identity formation. Chapter five presents psychological and neurological understanding of the function of story in personal identity formation. Chapter six examines the role of signs, symbols, and metaphors in narrative identity formation. The research leads me to conclude that a narrative understanding of identity and ongoing formation as a follower

of Jesus encourages one's life wholly alive, offering a holistic understanding that incorporates an integration of heart and mind, body, and soul, enabling one to answer the question, 'What am I here for?'

SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

“The Word at all times and all places desires to become flesh.”

–Max the Confessor

Jenny graduated from her village’s high school at the top of her class and the following fall enrolled at the nearest community college with dreams of becoming a lawyer. She dropped out after one semester: she could not do the work. She was not prepared and in the spring returned to her village on the Indian Reservation. Her hopes and dreams crushed, she was received by the mocking taunts of her high school friends. In her mind, there was no point in trying; change was not possible.

So she joined her friends who had never left the village, drowning her shame, exchanging her dreams for the erotic. She just wanted the emptiness to stop, it was more than she could accept – by the fall she was emotionally raw and psychologically ragged. In the winter, alcohol and sex could no longer drown her pain; she found relief in the needle of a friend.

Come spring, a year since she returned to the village, she discovers that she is infected with Hepatitis C and expecting a child. What is the point in continuing, she wonders? What right does she have to bring a kid into her messy life? Is there a way to end the shame and stop the pain?

As an Anglican priest living in Saskatchewan, a province that has an HIV infection rate double the national average,¹ in a region that has five to seven times as

¹ In 2012, the rate of new HIV infections was 17.2 per 100,000; in 2011, it was 19.1 per 100,000. The Canadian average is 7.4 per 100,000 and newly diagnosed infections among First Nations people living on reserves have doubled since 2009. 2012 HIV/AIDS Statistics released at Prairie HIV Conference, Travel Lodge, Saskatoon SK, November 4-5, 2013.

many suicides as the rest of the country,² in a town that is haunted by two residential schools run by the Anglican Church,³ it is not difficult to demonstrate that many people in Prince Albert are in crisis and carrying deep hurt.

The indigenous and public perception of residential schools is mostly one of abusive treatment and as a place where many turned to self-abuse since they could not love themselves, their families, or their indigenous languages and cultures. Prince Albert is not unique in this pain; every community with indigenous peoples in Canada has been affected. This pain is compounded by low education standards, alcohol and narcotic addictions, high crime and incarceration rates, as well as other dynamics, according to Chief Justice Murray Sinclair.⁴ The pandemic of hurt and hurting with all its symptomatic manifestations expressing this deep level of despair and hopelessness cannot be denied. Something must be done. *My proposal is for a reintroduction of a narrative intelligence that can play a key role in the required re-formation of indigenous identity.*

We need to be telling the stories; stories not only of what happened and how survival was achieved but stories that offer release from the shackles of pain and abuse from the past and present (redemption), stories that bring people hope and the possibility of a new story (transformation). The truth, the whole truth, and the manifold truth needs

² In 2009, "According to Health Canada, suicide rates are five to seven times higher in First Nations communities than in the rest of Canada. In extreme cases, some aboriginal communities have seen suicide rates 800 times higher than the national average." http://www2.canada.com/saskatoonstarphoenix/news/third_page/story.html?id=fba8ea08-3183-4ea8-be1a-c3bd54c87cb9 (accessed November 6, 2013).

³ Residential schools were one of the Canadian Government's primary tools in administering what was an assimilation policy of aboriginals and is a big black blotch on the history of the Canadian Anglican Church as they were contracted to run some of these schools.

⁴ Marites T. Sison, "Special Report: Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Anglican Journal* (Toronto), 137 no. 10 (December 2011).

to be told and we do this by telling stories, as stories simply have more room for truth.⁵ We need to tell our own stories and tell them well.⁶ It is through stories that people truly connect with one another and create community. Those of us who follow Jesus have a reason to want to connect because we are part of the greatest story of redemption and transformation ever told.

Part of this process for me has been my perceptions of missions and what it means to be a missionary. The missionary paradigm of bringing God to a community I find does not resonate with an understanding of a present and active, resurrected Christ. As Mark McDonald told me when I was beginning to wrestle with this, “God didn’t get off the boat with Columbus.”⁷ The paradigm shift involves changing one’s understanding of who does what, the invitation comes from God to us, not from us to God, we are joining an already active present God who personifies hope. Being on a mission with this already present and active God transforms the missionary effort into one of joining the activity of God the Father through his Son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Entering into the story with God, from Adam to Jesus and from Jesus to now, relies, “not on teaching, not on exhortation, not on reason, but on the one human form that can convey truth that we are more than we can ever understand, the only form that is open, the form of pure

⁵ Mark L. MacDonald, interview by author, October 4, 2011.

⁶ Marites T. Sison, “Director to Improve Storytelling,” *Anglican Journal* (Toronto), 137 no. 10 (December 2011).

⁷ MacDonald.

narrative.”⁸ The biblical narrative invites one to live in the story of being formed into a community of God, missionally, relationally, and incarnationally.⁹

Understanding that redemption and transformation are the primary themes in all of these stories provides a helpful construct with which to listen to all stories. This helps in understanding evil and the many people who have suffered and/or continue to suffer at the hands of evil.¹⁰

Reading scripture with an awareness of narrative structure and broad narrative themes produces fruitful results;¹¹ an understanding of the structure of a story sheds light on the particulars within the story. As one begins to understand the nature of narrative one can permit a character’s narrative to unfold within a storied context. It is this unfolding that gives the story its intention and direction. Great stories take one on a journey. The details of place and time based on chronology and geography are present to convince and create a plausible reality leaving no doubt that God has what it takes to make the authentic.¹² This has reinvigorated and strengthened my understanding of how to read, study, and communicate more effectively.¹³ Illustrations are no longer the add-

⁸ Gabriel Josipovici, *The Singer on the Shore: Essays 1991-2004* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), 23.

⁹ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009).

¹⁰ Bobette Buster, "The Arc of Storytelling." (lecture, Q: Portland 2010, The Crystal Ballroom, Portland, April 28, 2011). This statement will be explored further later on.

¹¹ Megan Gannon, ““Genesis Death Sandwich’ Discovered in Bible” LiveScience. NBC News. <http://www.nbcnews.com/science/genesis-death-sandwich-discovered-bible-1C8501538> (accessed November 15, 2013).

¹² Brown and Kätz. *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (New York: Harper Business, 2009), 137.

¹³ Justin Rossow, "Preaching the Story behind the Image: the Homiletical Fruit of a Narrative Approach to Metaphor," *Concordia Journal*, 2nd ser., 34, no. 1 (January 2008): 9-21.

ons to the truth, for emphasis, to keep it interesting or to make it easily understood. Stories are the staple, the meat and potatoes, for the narrative of God's redemptive and transformational activity in the world. To approach scripture as a how to manual, i.e. propositionally, is to miss the flesh and blood of God with us.

Many people in Saskatchewan are struggling with their current situations, drowning in addictions, and taking their life as a way of dealing with or escaping their currently desperate situations. This dissertation is provoked by the question: Why are people engaging in self-destructive behavior and what is required for them to stop this self-destruction?

Having explored several options, I have come to the conclusion that as one becomes a participant in the ongoing activity of God, transformation occurs; discovering one's identity in Christ empowers one to live in and through desperate situations with hope. Semiotically engaging in God's narrative revelation enables one to recognize the activity of God and participate in God's business of restoring and renewing people and places. In 1 Chronicles 12:32 we find an early example of the importance of theo-semiotic engagement, as the sons from the tribe of Issachar understood their times and knew what Israel should do. Their knowing occurs in community and relationship, we are made to live in a community of relationships, and it is stories that give context and offer meaning to these relationships. All of the particulars one receives are given meaning and value by placing them within a narrative construct or social imaginary, as Charles Taylor calls it. It is one's narrative construct that determines whether information is important, needs to be acted on, ignored, or saved for later.

There is psychological and neurological research that indicates that: healthy brains continually adapt, change, and renew by narrative engagement; humans are social, relational, storytellers; and the expression of any particular emotion lives out of a particular cultural narrative.¹⁴ The bulk of my research has concentrated on that. This dissertation relies on this research to support the premise that: narrative understanding of identity is both incremental and exponential; all narratives shape meaning and offer identity, but not all narratives promote life and/or health; and the biblical narrative is the key transformational narrative to live out of, offering a redeemed and transformed identity.

A narrative understanding of identity is not artistic license having nothing to do with the real world, as I once thought. I grew up believing that, at best, stories were good for fantasy, entertainment, and escapism. I now see stories as instrumental in identity formation and not as academic exercises, seeing that they have consciously and unconsciously played a significant role in my identity development. What follows is information that has helped me appreciate the critical role narrative plays in identity formation.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Landau, "What the Brain Draws from: Art and neuroscience," *CNN.com*, November 6, 2012. http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/06/health/art-brain-mind-nov/index.html?hpt=hp_rr_7 (accessed November 6, 2012).

SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Story

He was ten years old when he first intentionally cut himself. Most of his childhood, he had bounced between foster homes and the various towns and reserves of his extended family. He had an older sister and two younger brothers, but hardly knew them. His grandparents were taken from their parents and shipped to a residential school, where they were forbidden to speak the language of their forefathers and given white man's haircuts and clothes. Their daughter, his mother, busy with her own survival, doesn't know who his dad is. The only men who paid attention to him were principals, police officers, and his mom's angry drunk boyfriends. In his teens, he began associating with bartenders, drug-dealers, and members of gangs.

When I met Ben, he had aged out of the foster care system and for the last six years had been living between rehab, girlfriends, odd jobs, and mostly avoiding prison. He had been through psych wards, thirty-day dry outs, twelve-step programs, anger management programs, and numerous stints in various skills training programs. He would do all right for a while, but then a crisis would trigger a spiral once again.

This dissertation looks at human identity development, working on the premise that life is more than a simple mass of habits.¹ Looking particularly at the solutions presented by the neurosciences, logotherapy, narrative psychology, and twelve-step programs, evaluating the contribution they make to Christian identity formation.

¹ Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do and How to Change It*, (New York: Random, 2012), Kindle 129, quoting William James *Talks to Teachers of Psychology and to Students on some of Life's ideals*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983).

Narrative Psychology

Introduction

We all have routines and have no need to explain why we follow them. We have habits that we practice without any thought or attention: now brush your teeth, gently using small circles, slowly moving around the outside, and when someone starts telling us about our everyday habits we quickly lose interest. Yet, when the routine is interrupted, we once again reorder our life to include or deny the unexpected or unimagined interruption. Sometimes we pick up where we left off and other times it is a struggle to make sense of what we have experienced or witnessed. It is these unexpected and unimagined situations that require us to create or alter our stories: Revising the meaning or order and purpose to our lives.² Dan McAdams, among others, suggests that our stories need to be constantly evolving in order to help us make sense of life. Writer and activist Rebeca Solnit goes so far to say that “A life isn’t a story; it’s a whole Milky Way of events and we are forever picking out constellations from it to fit who and where we are.”³

It is the evolving stories that enable one to piece together and create meaning or purpose “out of what may otherwise seem to be an incomprehensible array of life events and experiences.”⁴ For example, how else do we renew relationships with those who have hurt us?

² Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14.

³ Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 246.

⁴ Jack J. Bauer, Dan P. McAdams, and Jennifer L. Pals, “Narrative Identity and Eudaimonic Well-Being,” *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9 no. 1 (2008): 84.

Understanding oneself, others, and the world comes through our stories.

Everything that is observed or experienced is put into our story's tapestry. This material is either made to fit into the existing pattern, the pattern is adjusted to make it fit, or it is discarded as unusable or irrelevant to the pattern. The tapestry creates the context for the events or experience. This story tapestry offers meaning by providing a context with which to understand and interpret new experiences.⁵ It is from the raw material of our experiences that we choose the story tapestry, constructing a pattern, placing things within a larger context, reestablishing order and pattern. These stories are crafted in community, offering individuals a way of seeing and understanding their life; healthy stories assist individuals in giving unity and purpose to one's life; unhealthy narratives lead to despair and death.⁶

Historical Foundations

Victor Frankl observed in the Nazi concentration camps and discovered, during his internment, the role that meaning and purpose play in one's existence, even in the most horrendous situations.⁷ It is from this context that Victor Frankl developed Logotherapy as a therapeutic tool to assist those in particularly desperate situations in finding meaning and purpose in life.⁸ This same desire to help others understand their

⁵ Timothy Hoyt, "The Development of Narrative Identity in Late Adolescence and Emergent Adulthood: The Continued Importance of Listeners," *Developmental Psychology*, 45, no. 2 (2009): 559.

⁶ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 180.

⁷ In 1946 Victor Frankl published, *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, published as *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1963). For a haunting account of the struggle for meaning and purpose in the holocaust see Elie Weisel, *Night*, trans., Marion Wiesel, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

⁸ Logotherapy is based on an existential analysis focusing on Kierkegaard's will to meaning.

meaning and purpose led Erik Erickson to coin the term ‘generativity,’ which refers to how one generation helps the next. Narrative psychology grew out of Erikson’s work as Michael White and Dan P. McAdams began understanding that it is one’s personal narrative that lends meaning and purpose to those seeking understanding.

Over the last 30 years, there has been a growing awareness, across the social sciences, that one uses stories to make sense of one’s life. This begins in the early teen years, Erickson highlights, as people begin to construct their own stories to make sense of their life. It is at this time that people begin to understand who they are through these stories of self, establishing a narrative identity.⁹

Narrative psychology began in the 1980’s with a series of critiques of personality psychology. It began to take shape as psychologists began seeing that narratives are helpful in conveying meaning in clients’ lives. Simultaneously, other fields of psychology became interested in narrative as a clinical technique, leading up to today, where there is an increased awareness within psychology “to the power of societal myths and cultural narratives in shaping human behavior in social contexts.”¹⁰ In hindsight, we can see the value of Sarbin’s suggestion, in 1986, “when he predicted that the general idea of narrative could provide a new root metaphor for the field of psychology as a whole.”¹¹ Today, psychology expects a lot from stories, particularly as they relate to a person and their culture.

⁹ Bauer, 82.

¹⁰ Dan P. McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories," *Review of General Psychology*, 5, no. 2 (2001): 100-101.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 101.

When it comes to one's life, storytelling is not once upon a time; it is the serious business of sense making.¹² Recently, Timothy Hoyt has seen that the “narrative conceptualizations of identity hold the promise of integrating Erikson and Erikson's aspects of identity as well as illuminating the processes by which individuals develop identity.”¹³ This culminates in Rurt Ganzevoort's conclusion, in 2008, that one's “identity is the story one tells about oneself.”¹⁴

Literary Foundations

Jerome Bruner, a twentieth-century psychologist, contributed significantly to understanding how stories are used within the context of human lives.¹⁵ Bruner identified two ways of knowing. There is the paradigmatic way that one gets from schools. This is where one learns to understand rationale, logic, science, and causation. The other way is through narrative.¹⁶ “Bruner points out that stories are typically told when there is a ‘deviation from a culture's canonical pattern’ . . . Unless something unexpected or out of the ordinary happens, there is nothing really interesting to tell.”¹⁷

Narrative is a way of knowing and understanding that is practiced in all cultures and communication: *narrative is transcultural and trans-generational*. Globally people tell stories to others – socializing. One does not tell a story to oneself; stories by their

¹² McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 76.

¹³ Hoyt, 559.

¹⁴ R. Rurt Ganzevoort, “Scars and Stigmata: Trauma, Identity and Theology,” *Practical Theology*, no. 1 (2008): 20.

¹⁵ Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 77-78.

very nature are inherently social. Stories are developed in the community, for the community. Rubin observed that even as one looks at the way people structure the stories about themselves, one's autobiographical memories are "indistinguishable from the narrative structure of other social communications, . . . and the recall of autobiographical memories is usually a social act that can define a social group."¹⁸

One's story of oneself, like all stories, "make[s] use of characters, plots, themes, tones, and other narrative elements to convey meaning. Themes – or recurrent, goal-directed sequences in life narratives – go a long way in establishing meaning and have, therefore, been widely examined in narrative research."¹⁹ As Donald Miller asked at the Storyline 2.0 Conference, "What will the world miss if you don't tell your story?"²⁰ Is there meaning and purpose to one's life and how does one discover it? Or, as Dan McAdams asked, "How is a person's psychosocial world arranged in such a way as to provide life with some modicum of unity and purpose?"²¹ Additionally, Bruner and Polkinghorne began suggesting, in the 1980's, that the language of narrative was the best means of addressing these questions.

It is as one considers the building blocks of one's life, the high points, the low points, and times of transition, that one develops one's story, giving the self meaning and identity.²² It is the stories of one's life, Bauer observes, that enable "people to

¹⁸ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 114.

¹⁹ Jack J. Bauer, Dan P. McAdams, and Jennifer L. Pals. "Narrative Identity and Eudemonic Well-Being," *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, no. 1 (2008): 81-104.

²⁰ Donald Miller, *Storyline 2.0 Conference*, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA. February 23-24, 2013.

²¹ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 111.

²² Laura King, "The Hard Road to the Good Life: The Happy, Mature Person," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 41 (2001): 58.

interpret the past in terms of trait-like perceptions of ‘who one is’ and to plan the future in terms of traits that one wants to continue developing in their lives.”²³

But one’s life story does not exist in a vacuum; it exists in a community and a culture. One’s story mirrors the culture and the community where the story is birthed and told. The story of one’s life is born, grows, reproduces, and dies “according to the norms, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society, according to a society's implicit understandings of what counts as a tell-able story, a tell-able life.”²⁴

Philosophical Foundations

While Michael White cites the work of Michael Foucault, who traces the roots of the modern internalization of understanding life and identity in Western culture back to the seventeenth century,²⁵ I agree with McAdams, who is inclined to trace the roots of the Western understanding of identity and life back to as far as the Catholic Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215. This is the council that made the practice of the confession an annual practice. If one agrees with McAdams in tracing these roots to the practice of confession, would not we then be able to trace the modern understanding of life and identity back to Augustine’s *Confessions*, the first autobiography to first employ confession on a full scale?²⁶ McAdams notes, in *The Redemptive Self*, that this decision, in 1215, set in motion a social ritual that has affected Western culture’s understanding

²³ Bauer, 92.

²⁴ McAdams, “Psychology of Life Stories,” 114.

²⁵ Michael White, *Maps of Narrative Practice* (New York: Norton, 2007), 25.

²⁶ Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative: Fortieth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 78.

of self and identity in a way that nothing before has, and its effect continues to shape how one thinks about one's life.²⁷ He suggests that while many in the sciences have viewed the practice of annual confession as manipulative and out of order, in the modern world, confession can have a profound restorative effect on one's narrative identity, particularly in the area of integrity and wholeness.²⁸ What confession does, as Giddens observes, is separate a person's identity from one's behavior, grounding identity "in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."²⁹ This separation of problem from a person and their identity does not in any way remove the responsibility of the problem from the person or their responsibility to address it. Rather, it empowers the individual to address the problem as a problem and not the person as the problem. Recall the Jewish tradition described in Leviticus 16 where a young bull and two male goats are offered for sin, separating the problem from the person. Assuming agency, the ability or power to choose, is a characteristic firmly rooted in the biblical narrative, particularly evident in atonement stories. As long as one sees oneself as the problem, there is no hope of having any agency (the capacity to act) to resolve or address the problem other than to take actions that are self-destructive.³⁰

²⁷ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 224.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, "Psychology of Life Stories," 111-112.

³⁰ White, 26. This does not eliminate the possibility of supernatural agency, but that is beyond the scope of this work.

In Practice

Embracing the idea that one is living out of a story means accepting that a personal story can be discovered, explored, and developed. As one begins acknowledging that one is living a story-shaped life, there are questions one asks: Does one see oneself with an ability to make decisions in that story? Does one understand how this plays out in particular roles, themes, and trajectories within that story?³¹ One of the things that we as humans habitually do is determine meaning.³² One needs to make sense of our experiences, to give them coherence. Storying our life to make sense of it is arguably a central human need.³³ As Laura King observes, “in the face of major life change, human beings are prone to spontaneously generate stories about what happened.”³⁴

Generating these stories is not easy; agency in storytelling is multilayered. This is because the storyteller is giving voice to the story while the main character, the agent or protagonist, of the story “has feelings, beliefs, desires, and identities expressed in interpretive [narrative] content.”³⁵ As Marcela Cornejo so helpfully suggests, conceiving of one’s “identity as a function of one’s own history and therefore as a narrative construct presupposes that the narration of one’s own history is an integral part of the process of building an identity, as a narrative identity. Consequently, the

³¹ Miller, *Storyline 2.0 Conference*.

³² Eric Erickson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1978).

³³ Frankl, *Man’s Search*.

³⁴ King, 58. See also James W. Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say about Us* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011).

³⁵ Hoyt, 569.

narration introduces a meaning for actions in time, as it allows the individual to become involved in the construction of his/her [one's] identity."³⁶

Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Al Anon and other twelve-step programs all have the central aim of reconstructing a life story so that the individual can function within society as a productive and caring citizen in community.³⁷ But to become aware of this point of reconstruction, the addict, or the person whose life is strongly determined by the actions of an addict, must come to the place of surrender, realizing that one is powerless to effect change, that one needs the help of a power outside of oneself, commonly referred to as a higher power. This is not a loss of agency but an expression of choice. The philosophical fulcrum of these twelve-step programs is that only a power greater than one can free one from the contamination of the seductive and deceptive powers of one's addiction. One point of contention I have with most twelve-step programs is they have no way of acknowledging that a person's story is or has been reconstructed, as they insist that the participant continues to identify himself first and foremost by their past addiction: 'Hi I'm Norbert and I'm an addict.' Something inside me screams, 'No I'm not an addict. I once was, but now I am not; I have been and am being redeemed, there has been a change of story, a restoration of identity.' Always remembering with the apostle Paul that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15). One must decide to turn to a source outside of oneself for strength and help, in other words, the individual must practice agency. Who or what this, outside of self, Higher Power is remains open,

³⁶ Marcela Cornejo, "Political Exile and the Construction of Identity: A Life Stories Approach," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 18, no. 4 (2008): 337.

³⁷ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 228.

so as to not erect any barriers, leaving it up to the protagonist to decide who or whom can function as the antagonist (the force of nature that must be reckoned with) in the story.

As Gordon Allport states, one begins each day anew, creating and finding new opportunities daily for meaning and value.³⁸ A life story discovered, surrendered and redeemed is a story with hope and meaning.

Contribution of Dan McAdams

It was not that long ago that the sciences, including psychology, considered all stories of an equal value to that of a charming fairy tale: interesting, perhaps even enchanting, but essentially the realm of children and child's play compared to the real work of a reasoned understanding of humanity and how one ascertains meaning, value, and purpose. McAdams continues to be a leading psychologist in the field of narrative and identity. He has developed a life story model of identity that purports that one's "identity itself takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme."³⁹ This sets McAdams' work apart from the work of Erik Erikson, who understands one's life story as a developmental model of ego identity.⁴⁰

McAdams is not denying that one's narrative identity is formed in adolescence and early adulthood, but argues that it keeps evolving throughout the course of one's life as new events and experiences are incorporated into one's sense of self and

³⁸ King, 55.

³⁹ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 101.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 99-104.

narrative identity.⁴¹ The life story model that McAdams presents stresses that one's narrative identity is plastic, an ongoing work of assimilating events and experiences into one's life story. He argues that "life stories develop and change across the life course, reflecting various on-time and off-time happenings and transitions . . . people may work on different facets or qualities of the story at different times in life."⁴²

One's narrative identity development has to do with where one is in one's life and in culture. For as we have already discussed, one's cultural setting provides the psychosocial menu out of which one constructs one's narrative identity. Culture provides a tableau from which one constructs a working narrative identity.⁴³ "Identity is not an individual achievement but a work of (and in) culture. In a sense, the person and the person's social world coauthor identity. Identity is a psychosocial construction."⁴⁴ One's "work on narrative identity has as much to say about the social component of the self as well."⁴⁵ Life stories are strongly shaped by one's culture, therefore affecting what one values and finds meaningful and identifies with. The conception of the good life varies from one cultural context to the next.⁴⁶ One "constructs a narrative identity by appropriating stories from culture. Self and culture

⁴¹ Kate C. McLean, "Stories of the Young and the Old: Personal Continuity and Narrative Identity," *Developmental Psychology*, 44, no. 1 (2008): 254.

⁴² McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 106. See also James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁴³ J. M. Adler and D. P. McAdams, "Time, Culture, and Stories of the Self." *Psychological Inquiry*, 18, no. 2 (2007): 98-99.

⁴⁴ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 116.

⁴⁵ Adler and McAdams, 97.

⁴⁶ Bauer, 98-99.

come to terms with each other through narrative.”⁴⁷ Life stories are not simply about “personal growth and redemption [they] reflect prevailing cultural narratives.”⁴⁸

Conversely, an understanding of one’s narrative expression of self cannot be developed outside of a particular social or cultural context (be they real or imagined) in which they are experienced.⁴⁹

These narrative identities provide the stories with which we tell ourselves to live by. We make “and remake them, we tell them and revise them not so much to arrive at an accurate record of the past as to create a coherent self that moves forward in life with energy and purpose.”⁵⁰ McAdams sees human intentionality as being “at the heart of narrative, and therefore the development of intentionality in humans is of prime importance in establishing the mental conditions necessary for storytelling and story comprehension.”⁵¹ For story and purpose are inseparable as they are the two ways that people establish meaning. “There can be no story without intention. Further, there can be no intention without story.”⁵² As Bauer points out, there is an “empirical connection between certain qualities of narrative identity on the one hand and well-being on the other, [and] it becomes especially important to understand how adults narrate the most difficult experiences in their lives and integrate them into their

⁴⁷ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 289.

⁴⁸ Bauer, 100.

⁴⁹ Adler and McAdams, 98.

⁵⁰ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 98-99.

⁵¹ Ibid., “Psychology of Life Stories,” 103.

⁵² King, 58.

evolving life stories over time.”⁵³ This is what the work of Dan McAdams seems to revolve around. What McAdams’ work does for me is open the door to change at any stage of life. The patterns are not set or predetermined; any dog can learn new tricks and we can learn to tell new stories with our lives. It therefore takes an intentional and often Herculean effort to break old storylines of identity and live into our new story, this is one of the reasons why a new network of relationships can be so helpful.

Contribution of Michael White

Another psychologist leading in the field of narrative psychology is an Australian, Michael White, whose contributions to narrative psychology are clinically focused. For White, Bruner’s work *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* was a turning point in his narrative practice as Bruner understood that “great storytelling . . . is about compelling plights that . . . must be set forth with sufficient subjectivity to allow them to be rewritten by the reader, rewritten so as to allow play for the reader’s imagination.”⁵⁴ Duhigg highlights this same point when he suggests that AA “succeeds because it helps alcoholics use the same cue, and get the same reward, but it shifts the routines. Researchers say that AA works because the program forces people to identify the cues and rewards that encourage their alcoholic habits, and then helps them find new behaviors.”⁵⁵ This reinforces White’s observation that sometimes one’s life story needs a rewrite and that this rewrite is possible, given a new narrative context.

⁵³ Bauer, 93.

⁵⁴ Bruner, *Actual Minds*, 35.

⁵⁵ Duhigg, Kindle, 1273. For more see John F. Kelly and Mark G. Meyers, “Adolescents participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous: Review, Implications, and Future Directions,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 39, no. 3 (September 2007): 259-69. John Francis Kelly, Molly

In narrative psychology therapy, White sees the therapist as one who enables another to re-author one's life. One does this by inviting clients to continue telling stories and, as the stories continue to develop, often helping clients work through particularly "neglected but potentially significant events and experiences that are 'out of phase' with their dominant storylines."⁵⁶ It is as these out of phase or subordinate stories are redeveloped that clients find ground on which "to proceed to address their predicaments and problems in ways that are in harmony with the precious themes of their lives."⁵⁷

What I find helpful for my work in identity development and the use of narrative is that White stresses that the matter of metaphor selection is highly significant. "All metaphors that are taken up in the development of externalizing conversations are borrowed from particular discourses that invoke specific understandings of life and identity."⁵⁸ Choosing what metaphors to use is based on what is most viable in the particular situation giving all ethical considerations.⁵⁹

One of the pitfalls of narrative psychology that White warns against is the tendency towards totalizing problems in therapy by clients and therapists. Totalizing typically occurs as one becomes totally negative in defining a problem: Setting up a false dichotomy, not living in the paradoxical state of both/and. As one uses metaphors,

Magill and Robert Stout Lauren, "How do People Recover from Alcoholic Dependence: A Systematic Review of the Research on the Mechanisms of Behavior Change in Alcoholics Anonymous," *Addiction Research and Theory*, 17, no. 3 (2009): 236-59.

⁵⁶ White, 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

one must guard against metaphors that totalize situations or events as then they function as a suppressant of other metaphors that may be emerging. One needs to be able to maintain the tension that keeps agency within the protagonist.⁶⁰ White argues that narrative therapy can help arouse curiosity concerning what is possible by playfully engaging the imagination.⁶¹ Just as good stories do not explain everything or get overly detailed, but invite the reader into participating in the story by filling the details of the story, narrative psychology therapy helps clients bring together events and experiences from the past, mapping the narrative, assisting the client in recognizing a plot and theme in one's narrative, enabling one to see oneself apart from the problems and to see the possibility of redemption and transformation.⁶²

Conclusion

What narrative psychology suggests is that one's narrative identity is not work done in isolation or in the imagination, but is a collaborative effort of one's culture and the telling of the narrative within a particular community of listeners.⁶³ While an identity may not even be contained within a single grand narrative, it is the narratives that are relied upon to give meaning and purpose within the particular social constructs inhabited, and sometimes one relies on more than a single story to make sense of the varied contexts

⁶⁰ White, 31-7. Man has been given the charge of being the protagonist in creation in Genesis 1 and 2.

⁶¹ Ibid., 76.

⁶² Ibid., 77.

⁶³ Adler and McAdams, 99.

one lives in.⁶⁴ The stories and identity of self are not always congruent. One's narrative is distinguishable from one's identity. The stories we craft gives an account of what we perceive has occurred, providing the context and setting. Each teller of an event has a unique understanding of what occurred as they make their own connections regarding what was trivial, what was important, why this matters, and how it fits. Every storyteller and story-catcher interprets events according to their perceptions of significance that is uniquely theirs. It is these variables within a story that create and give voice to one's uniquely crafted narrative identity.⁶⁵ As one proceeds through life striving towards a sense of who one is with a continuity of meaning and purpose, one begins to realize that one does this differently at various times for potentially different reasons:⁶⁶ struggling to find the 'good life.' It is this elusive good life that is helpfully described with the metaphor of a tapestry. "The rich tapestry of human life certainly bears witness to the variety of ways the good life exists. Although happiness may be one important thread, the fabric of life is more than silk and spun gold. Surely, bad days and bad times are part of the good life."⁶⁷

This look at narrative psychology's contribution to how narrative shapes identity highlights how the sociocultural context affects the warp and woof of self-identity. It explored possible models of redress for addictions and suicide in a context of broken dreams and economic impoverishment. Despair, addiction, and suicide are not the only ways of escaping desperate conditions, as Frankl observes, only when there is no

⁶⁴ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 117.

⁶⁵ Hoyt, 559.

⁶⁶ McLean, 262.

⁶⁷ King, 68.

narrative context that offers meaning or purpose do these life-destroying alternatives appear as viable solutions.⁶⁸ This cycle of despair and destruction will continue as long as the problems are understood as the person.⁶⁹ Until this changes, the culture of despair faces an irreconcilable problem. When the person is the problem and the problem is inseparable from the person, the only way to eliminate the problem is to eliminate the person. Conversely, if the problem is exclusively outside of the person it can be avoided as a non-issue, having nothing to do with the person, requiring no personal action. To realize that one has agency means that choices made matter and that the past does not have to predetermine the future. When one can decide what defines who they are, they have separated the person from the problem and are able to address the problem without eliminating the person. The problem is not what defines who they are, the problem is what defines their choices, since they are the protagonists. As one begins to see oneself as a protagonist, with intrinsic value and worth, one begins drawing breathes of hope. God's revealed narrative offers provenance that establishes that value and intrinsic worth; many have lost this story or do not see that this is their story. Pope Francis recently said it well when he was asked, who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio? "I do not know what might be the most fitting description . . . I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre . . . the best summary, the one that comes more from the

⁶⁸ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). Doehring suggests that there are three main issues that people deal with: loss, violence, and compulsion. How these issues are processed and faced is determined by one's understanding of self and the story they see themselves participating in.

⁶⁹ This is not a denial of the doctrine of original sin; sin is real and everyone is born into sin bearing the marks of a sin-stained life. People are not made for sin but are marked by sin. As the image of God we are created, and this is the image that Christ loves, forgives, redeems, and transforms; man is created in the image God, sin dirties the original image.

inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.”⁷⁰ In that, Bergoglio expresses the agency of a protagonist found within a particular story.

When placing this understanding of narrative identity within a theological metaphor, Origen’s metaphor of provenance is helpful. Origen explains that *Logos* is not only the original painting, *Logos* is the artist painting and the human soul is like a reproduction. Because God is the painter, the image cannot be destroyed; it can only be buried or obscured. The decisions and activities of humans brush many different colors on the image, painting over the image with every imaginable brush stroke of sin. But as one turns towards God, redemption occurs, allowing God (the highest power) to become the great restorer, removing all the colors that have distorted the image made.⁷¹

Understanding that problems and challenges are outside of one and that the original beauty is still there makes the entire endeavor one of restoration of the image, acknowledging that the beauty is present in the here and now, just not seen, understood, or appreciated. A veil of despair has been torn in two and resurrection is possible. In researching narrative psychology, I can see that as one begins to understand one’s story and identity within the context of *Logos*, one can have hope for things not yet seen and possibly previously unimagined. It is with the help of narrative psychology I understand that a twelve-step program is only part of the restoration project. For when an *imago deo* is restored, there comes a point when the once-soiled painting no longer sees or refers to itself out of its old, soiled identity. I am suggesting that there comes a point when one no

⁷⁰ “A Big Heart Open to God,” Interview by Antonio Spadaro of Pope Francis in August 2013 in Rome. <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> (accessed September 19, 2013).

⁷¹ Robert Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 98.

longer sees themselves as an addict but as a redeemed and restored child of God, a sinner saved by grace, a sinner whom God has looked upon. I have and am witnessing this. Hurting people are being redeemed and restored and some of them no longer can identify themselves as an addict, since that is no longer a part of their story, it is who they were (1 Corinthians 6:11). By the grace of God, their socio-cultural context has enabled them write ‘addict’ completely out of their current narrative identity. They do this by never denying who they once were but go on living out of a grace redeemed and lovingly restored identity, their *imago deo*. This work in narrative psychology has helped me not only understand this, but has helped me walk with friends who are in various phases of *Logos* restoration. “Every one of us is unworthy to stand and confess to being a disciple. Every one of us loves and lives this reality of brokenness. But the good news is this: God uses broken things.”⁷²

Neuroscience

Remember Jenny, whose story began this chapter. While Jenny’s story does not refer to a single person, it is the story of many in northern Saskatchewan. Charles Darwin, Ayn Rand, Frederick Nietzsche, and others see little cause for concern, as they promote that it has always been about the survival of the fittest, and the fittest determining the story.⁷³ Others, like Brian Boyd, see our stories as forms “of cognitive play . . . a

⁷² Leonard Sweet, *Strong in the Broken Places: a Theological Reverie on the ministry of George Everett Ross*, (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1995), 9-10.

⁷³ Exemplified by Galt’s speech, “To help a man who has no virtues, to help him on the ground of his own suffering as such, to accept his faults, his need, as a claim, is to accept the mortgage of a zero on your values.” Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Random House), 1961,180.

playground for the mind.”⁷⁴ What role does our mind or brain play when we think of stories and identity?

Introduction

Should we even bring the findings of science into the realm of story, one of the last sacred preserves of human imagination? Should story occupy space science does not penetrate? Are we willing or able to reduce the ancient mysteries to electrochemical functions?⁷⁵ There are even those who say that the challenge of neuroscience in trying to understand how the brain works is like trying to understand how a bird flies by looking at a feather.⁷⁶ Not to mention our current cultural tendency to allow neurological explanations to “eclipse historical, political, economic, literary and journalistic interpretations of experience.”⁷⁷ Somewhere along the way we have forgotten that life and its story are about the interplay between form and history.⁷⁸ Storytelling involves assessing the symptoms, diagnosing the problem, and then enabling or prohibiting healing. Most stories, throughout the ages, have followed this three-act structural pattern

⁷⁴ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt, 2012), 43-44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁷⁶ Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Who's in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 10.

⁷⁷ Alissa Quart, “Neuroscience under Attack,” *New York Times*, November 23, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/opinion/sunday/neuroscience-under-attack.html> (accessed November 27, 2012).

⁷⁸ Enrico Coen, *Cells to Civilizations: Principles of Change That Shape Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), Kindle 288.

where the story is about a protagonist's journey, securing, usually at some cost, what they desire. Story = Character + Predicament + Transubstantiation.⁷⁹

Understanding of Narrative

That there is a pattern should not disturb, surprise, or cause concern, as “there is now substantial evidence from cognitive neuroscience that humans readily find patterns and impart agency to them.”⁸⁰ Humans are pattern seeking by nature. Shermer identifies this pattern making, calling it “agenticity: the tendency to infuse patterns with meaning, intention, and agency.”⁸¹ In his research, Gazzaniga has “identified specialized circuitry in the left hemisphere that is responsible for making sense of the torrent of information that the brain is always receiving from the environment. The job of this set of neural networks is to detect order and meaning in that flow, and to organize it into a coherent account of a person's experience – into a story.”⁸²

Hood documents the abundance of research that supports the conclusion that not only do humans have a tendency to “infuse patterns with intention and agency, but also to believe that objects, animals, and people contain an essence – something that is at the core of their being that makes them what they are – and that this essence may be transmitted from objects to people, and from people to people.” Hood goes on to say that “many highly educated and intelligent individuals experience a powerful sense that there

⁷⁹ Bobette Buster, (lecture series, *Epiphany: How Understanding Story Creates Change*, Tribeca Cinemas, New York City, October 4-5, 2012).

⁸⁰ Michael Shermer, *The Believing Brain: From Spiritual Faiths to Political Convictions – How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths* (London: Robinson, 2012), 88.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸² Gottschall, 96.

are patterns, forces, energies, and entities operating in the world;” he calls this inclination or sense a supersense as it is unsupported by any body of scientific data.⁸³

Role of Narrative

This also helps us understand the conclusions Aaronovitch reaches about conspiratorial thinking: it “is a reflex of the storytelling mind[s] compulsive need for meaningful experience.”⁸⁴ Conspiracy theories offer ultimate answers to a great mystery of the human condition: why are things so bad in the world? These theories propose that “bad men live to stalk our happiness;” offering a solution to why bad things happen by proposing that one can fight and prevail against bad men as one discovers the real story.⁸⁵

We prefer to receive and share knowledge with stories because we are by nature story-catchers and storytellers. Stories assist in making sense of the world and what we are experiencing and observing. We like our stories to have distinct structures, with clear beginnings and ends, and we usually like things to happen for particular reasons that progress in sequence.⁸⁶ We are just beginning to understand what priests and shamans have known for quite a long time: “if you want a message to burrow into a human mind, work it into a story.”⁸⁷

⁸³ Shermer, 88.

⁸⁴ Gottschall, 116, referring to David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).

⁸⁵ Gottschall, 116.

⁸⁶ Coen, Kindle, 4397.

⁸⁷ Gottschall, 118.

Neuroscience is concluding that humans are distinct from the rest of the animals because we “have the capacity to create not merely a social order but an institutional reality. This institutional reality is, above all, a system of deontic power. These deontic powers provide human agents with the fundamental key for organized human society: the capacity to create and act on desire independent reasons for action.”⁸⁸

In Practice

Stories stimulate the brain and even change our behavior. Neuroscientists upon reviewing brain scans have discovered that something unexpected happens when we read an evocative metaphor, a detailed description, or an emotional exchange between characters.⁸⁹ “A team of researchers from Emory University reported . . . that when subjects in their laboratory read a metaphor involving texture, the sensory cortex, responsible for perceiving texture through touch, became active. Metaphors like ‘the singer had a velvet voice’ and ‘he had leathery hands’ roused the sensory cortex, while phrases matched for meaning, like ‘the singer had a pleasing voice’ and ‘he had strong hands,’ did not.”⁹⁰ These findings help demonstrate that our neural networks store information as “a pattern of activation across networks of neurons . . . In the neural networks that process language and meaning, the pattern representing the word you believe you encountered was triggered as part of the collateral activity of all the other

⁸⁸ John R. Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language, and Political Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 109.

⁸⁹ Annie Murphy Paul, “Your Brain on Fiction,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-onfiction.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed October 19, 2012).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

words that were processed and encoded.”⁹¹ Our brain makes little “distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated.”⁹² Imagine the effect of TV and movies on our brain.

This function relies on our memory of previous experiences; it is our memory that ceaselessly places us:

Between a thoroughly lived past and an anticipated future, perpetually buffeted between the spent yesterdays and the tomorrows that are nothing but possibilities. The future pulls us forward, from a distant vanishing point, and gives us the will to continue the voyage in the present. This may be what T. S. Elliot meant when he wrote: ‘Time past and time future / what might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present.’⁹³

We need our memories of our past and anticipated futures to live. Abuse and trauma research suggests that there are forms of trauma that can be stored in the primitive portions of our brains, tattooing the trauma into our memory.⁹⁴ How do we figure out what to remember of the past, when there is no possible way anyone could remember everything about their past or forget other things? How does human memory work? Munsterberg’s theory of memory postulates that while, “none of us can retain in memory the vast quantity of details we are confronted with at any moment in our lives and that our memory mistakes have a common origin: They are all artifacts of the techniques our

⁹¹ Bruce M Hood, *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80.

⁹² Paul, “Your Brain on Fiction.”

⁹³ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 297.

⁹⁴ I. Sotgiu and C. Mormont, “Similarities and Differences Between Traumatic and Emotional Memories: Review and Directions for Future Research,” *Journal Of Psychology* [serial online]. 142, no. 5 (September 2008):449-470. (accessed November 4, 2013).

minds employ to fill the inevitable gaps.”⁹⁵ Mlodinow believes that we remember and “perceive by engagement, rather than by passive receptivity, . . . [that is] the reason why we often recall contexts rather than just isolated things.”⁹⁶

No one believes that they can remember everything; forgetting is commonly accepted and it seems to be expected that one forgets as they age, but to get to the point where we realize that what we remember “is completely fabricated is something else. It is shocking because it makes us question our own minds. If we can vividly remember events that never happened,”⁹⁷ does not this then completely destabilize any notions of trust in what one remembers and from that any confidence in oneself?

Perhaps Hood is right in saying that memories are “stories we retrieve from the compost heap that is our long term memory; we construct these stories to make sense of the events we have experienced.”⁹⁸ We tell ourselves stories, as our mind seems to be adverse to coincidences, uncertainty, and randomness. Our minds are habituated to finding meaning. When we cannot find meaning or identify meaningful patterns, we struggle to adapt and find meaning. We simply cannot live with cognitive dissonance. When things that do not make sense or fit the established patterns confront us, we do our best to fit them into patterns or remember the stories differently. Then, when no pattern works, we create a new way of ordering that attempts to make sense of our reality,

⁹⁵ Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 61.

⁹⁶ Damasio, 133.

⁹⁷ Hood, 82.

⁹⁸ Hood, 221. This metaphor for memory first appears in W. L. Randall, “From Compost to Computer: Rethinking our Metaphors for Memory,” *Theory Psychology* 17 (2007): 611-633.

whether it is true or not.⁹⁹ As humans, we need some way of accepting the memories of our past or finding a way to live with and through them.

James Wallis writes that, “our brains have a natural affinity not only for enjoying narratives, but learning from them, but also for creating them. In the same way that your mind sees an abstract pattern and resolves it into a face, your imagination sees a pattern of events and resolves it into a story.”¹⁰⁰ Bellah observed that he was learning more about himself and the world that he lives in as these stories were shaping his understanding. “After all, that’s what stories do.”¹⁰¹

There is more to stories shaping our understanding than what appears on the *fMRI*.¹⁰² Since the beginning of psychology, von Helmholtz, Freud, and others saw that there were processes that we were not conscious of that determine our decisions and actions. What is now being realized “is the extent to which these processes are there to protect the self illusion—the narrative we create that we are the ones making the decisions.”¹⁰³ To be able to look at the whole of human experience and begin to understand it, we must address and engage both the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. Our unconscious mind “influences our conscious experience of the world in the

⁹⁹ Gottschall, 103.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰¹ Robert Neelly Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), Kindle, 909.

¹⁰² *fMRI* stands for Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging. It is a procedure using MRI technology to detect blood flow changes within the brain to ascertain brain activity. This connects cerebral blood flow with neuronal activity; therefore, as blood flow to a region increases, brain activity does. Since the early 1990s, this has been the preferred research method for observing brain function. Scott. A. Huettel, Allen W. Song, Gregory McCarthy, *Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging*, 2nd ed. (Sunderland: Sinauer Assoc., 2009), 1-21.

¹⁰³ Hood, 156.

most fundamental of ways: how we view ourselves and others, the meaning we attach to everyday events of our lives, [and] our ability to make quick judgment calls and decisions.”¹⁰⁴ We have to address the idea of free will and realize that while the “experience of free will is very compelling, and even those of us who think it is an illusion, find that we cannot in practice act on the presupposition that it is an illusion.”¹⁰⁵

As we seek to understand the formation of the conscious and unconscious mind we must acknowledge that, when compared to all the other creatures, human adolescence and childhood takes a disproportionate amount of our life. Damasio suggests that the reason for “the inordinate amount of time is because it takes a long, long time to educate the non-conscious processes of our brain and to create, within that non-conscious brain space, a form of control that can, more or less faithfully, operate according to the conscious intentions and goals.”¹⁰⁶ Stories shape our unconscious and conscious mind and “help us practice key skills of human social life. They also provide a basis to run fictional simulations in our head and hearts. See a movie, read a story, participate in an action; in all of these events we activate bodily representations of what it feels like.”¹⁰⁷ Our brains simulates through the actions required, imagined or real.

Kuleshov in his film experimenting with un-narrated images demonstrates how unwilling we are to be without a story. The ‘Kuleshov’ effect shows how we interpret images and put a story to them to make sense of what we see. Gottschall mentions a more recent study where a group was asked to choose a pair of socks out of seven pairs of

¹⁰⁴ Mlodinow, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Seale, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Damasio, 271.

¹⁰⁷ Gottschall, 57-63.

identically priced socks. As people explained their choices they referred to texture, color, and quality, even though the seven pairs were identical. The real pattern that no participant was able to identify was that they tended to choose from the right side of the display. Everyone created a story to explain their choice but “the stories were confabulations – lies honestly told.”¹⁰⁸

Thanks to our innate propensity for creating stories, things are “almost always coming to mind . . . As a result, to know what we don’t know, we can’t just passively wait around to see if our mind comes up empty. Instead we need to actively identify and reject all the incorrect and ill-grounded hypotheses our inner writer is madly generating.”¹⁰⁹ Being wrong feels like being right: we default to relying on our stories.

Not being able to differentiate between a coherent and an incoherent story or having an inadequate story often leads to depression, according to Michele Crossley’s research.¹¹⁰ “Who we are is a story of our self—a constructed narrative that our brain creates” and our social identity.¹¹¹ “Families, nations, [and] religions know who they are by the stories they tell.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Gottschall, 106-110.

¹⁰⁹ Kathryn Schultz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 82.

¹¹⁰ Gottschall, 175.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹¹² Bellah, 771.

Conclusion

We return to Jenny, unfortunately, her story has failed her and her peers have enforced her failure – welcoming her into their story of despair. It is the only story presented that enables her to order her experience. She, like all of us, is “naturally inclined to interpret the world in terms of meaningful stories.”¹¹³ Even if those stories are of hopelessness and despair. When the story draws us in, all of our typical Enlightenment defenses are dropped. We are moved by our emotions, leaving us vulnerable and defenseless.¹¹⁴ Once our beliefs are embraced, our brain seeks evidence that will confirm our beliefs. This then gives an emotional boost that encourages our confidence in our beliefs, accelerating the process of reinforcement: “round and round the process goes in a positive feedback loop of belief confirmation.”¹¹⁵ Jenny’s story of an anticipated future of change has been replaced with a story of despair and hopelessness.

In order to effect any change, Damasio suggests that we require an awareness of the challenges of “our consciously deliberated decisions and we need to facilitate that influence. One way to transpose the hurdle would be the intense conscious rehearsal of the procedures and actions we wish to see non-consciously realized, a process of repeated practice that results in mastering a performing skill, a consciously composed psychological action program gone underground.”¹¹⁶

If we have learned anything from interpersonal or social neurobiology, it is “that the brain is constantly rewiring itself based on daily life. In the end, what we pay the

¹¹³ Hood, 231.

¹¹⁴ Gottschall, 152.

¹¹⁵ Shermer, 5.

¹¹⁶ Damasio, 281.

most attention to defines us. How you choose to spend the irreplaceable hours of your life literally transforms you.”¹¹⁷ Michael Shermer goes on to explain that our beliefs are formed for a variety of reasons within a variety of environments. After our beliefs have taken shape, we bolster them with a variety of defenses and explanations. He establishes that explanations follow belief, a process he calls belief dependent realism, “where our perceptions about reality are dependent on the beliefs that we hold about it. Reality exists independent of human minds, but our understanding of it depends upon the beliefs we hold at any given time.”¹¹⁸

Yes, it is true, neuroscience has observed that it is our brains that ‘make us do it’ but this in no way excuses our personal responsibility for our actions, unless we see ourselves as simply biological animals.¹¹⁹ Jenny adapts to her new situation as she copies or mimics, which is the most powerful skill we are born with.¹²⁰ Not only do we have a natural inclination to mimic, we have smoother interaction with and like strangers more who mimic our mannerisms.¹²¹ As Jenny finds acceptance, mimicking the behavior, she becomes accepted by her peers; as she is accepted, she mimics more of the behavior that made her acceptable in this group to begin with and it starts the descent into despair.

¹¹⁷ Dianne Ackerman, “The Brain on Love,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2012. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/the-brain-on-love/> (accessed October 19, 2012). See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) and Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) for more on this in spiritual formation.

¹¹⁸ Shermer, 5. For an exploration of definition shaping belief see David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale, 2013).

¹¹⁹ John Monterosso and Barry Schwatz, “Did Your Brain Make You Do It?” *New York Times*, July 27, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/opinion/sunday/neuroscience-and-moral-responsibility.html> (accessed October 19, 2012).

¹²⁰ Hood, 61.

¹²¹ Gazzaniga, 163.

Jenny's understanding of herself changes how she remembers her story just as "parents reminiscing with their children" refresh children's memories¹²² Jenny becomes a different person as her story changes and continues spending time with her new acquaintances. Cooley suggests this most strongly when he argues "that no real identity exists separately from the one created by others. We are a product of those around us – or at least what we believe they expect of us."¹²³ Hood's research concurs that "the memories we recall to define our self story are defined by the groups to which we belong."¹²⁴ Who do you allow to shape your story? What memories are you empowering to define you?

Neuroscientists in the last few years have come to realize that stories engage and activate more parts of the brain than initially expected, offering a plausible explanation as to "why the experience of reading can feel so alive. Words like 'lavender,' 'cinnamon' and 'soap,' for example, elicit a response not only from the language-processing areas of our brain, but also those devoted to dealing with smells."¹²⁵ Narrative has this ability and capacity to refashion our identity as it reaches into our body. Story with all of its power to transform contains a womb, full of conceptual possibilities.¹²⁶

¹²² Hood, 241.

¹²³ Ibid., 72. Referring to C. H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner, 1902).

¹²⁴ Hood, 241.

¹²⁵ Paul, "Your Brain."

¹²⁶ Bellah, 801.

The present becomes bearable as our story begins to fashion a hope that the power to change is accessible.¹²⁷ As Stutz and Michel state “a sense of purpose doesn’t come from thinking about it. It comes from taking action that moves you toward the future. The moment you do this, you activate a force more powerful than the desire to avoid pain.”¹²⁸

Shermer ends his book with the statement, “in the end I want to believe. I also want to know. The truth is out there, and although it may be difficult to find, science is the best tool we have for uncovering it.”¹²⁹ If we agree that neuroscience is the ultimate arbiter, then perhaps it is the best tool for uncovering truth. I believe this conclusion is flawed; neuroscience seems to be pointing towards story as being the way to truth.

Summary

Brian Boyd may be more right than many care to admit, that we are living, “in a world awash with junk story” leading to “something like a ‘mental diabetes epidemic.’”¹³⁰ Perhaps by asking neuroscience for definitive explanations we are asking for an answer that it is not able to provide.¹³¹ Growing up we are told, ‘it is only a story.’ Everything in us tries to believe this, all the efforts of science and education try to reinforce it. But as adults we must return to a narrative way of knowing where we see

¹²⁷ Hood, 167.

¹²⁸ Phil Stutz and Barry Michels, *The Tools: Transform your Problems into Courage, Confidence, and Creativity* (New York: Random House, 2012), 33.

¹²⁹ Shermer, 344.

¹³⁰ Gottschall, 198.

¹³¹ Quart, “Neuroscience under Attack.”

“that the story has it’s own truth that such disclaimers don’t reach.”¹³² The question really is, what narrative will you choose to address the biggest stuff in human life?¹³³ We need to see patterns in our past to make paths for our memories to shape our present and future. Like Jenny, we all need our social influences to verify and validate our story.

In northern Saskatchewan, there is an epidemic of ‘junk stories.’ Jenny provides a prototypical example of what it is like to live with a loss of meaning and purpose where the infection of ‘mental diabetes’ is rampant. Addictions and unhealthy lifestyle choices are symptomatic of this loss of story. For Jenny, her failed attempt was seen as the end. What is needed is a resilient story with room for failure. Thomas Edison provides an example of how a resilient story shapes one’s understanding of personal failures. When asked by a reporter about his failed experiments, Edison responded by saying, “I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.”¹³⁴ Neuroscience has led us to the altar of story. Story is how we order and understand our experiences and give them meaning.

This look at neuroscience’s conclusions has strengthened my understanding of the role and purpose of story in identity formation – in discipleship. It has encouraged me to keep telling the story of God’s revelation found in the Bible. Even Gottschall agrees that the Bible is “a collection of intense narratives about the biggest stuff in human life.”¹³⁵

¹³² Bellah, 752.

¹³³ Gottschall, 117.

¹³⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179233/Thomas-Alva-Edison> (accessed December 12, 2012).

¹³⁵ Gottschall, 117.

Why is it that we in the church have missed this?¹³⁶ Why do we keep treating the Bible as if it were an encyclopedia and not a story?

This research has renewed my interest in relating the story in a manner that allows people to not only see the change, but to live into the change, as participation changes our identity. It has led me to understand that knowing the story and seeing how it works is not enough. We need to be able to read our self into the story. To do this, we need to be able to recognize the signs and symbols of the living, active God, which is the role of theo-semiotics. I am beginning to see that the discipleship model I am pursuing may offer a way of hope in places of despair and hopelessness, freeing people to choose a new story to live out of. This discipleship model is best understood as a ‘narraphoric’ way of following God.¹³⁷

A narrative understanding of Christian faith prepares one to face the varied challenges of life, as it equips one to face disillusionment and the reality of evil, offering hope in the most forlorn situations.

¹³⁶ Drew Sams, *The Re-Membered Church: Establishing and Enacting a Narrative Ecclesiology in a New Media World*, DMin. dissertation, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, April 2012.

¹³⁷ ‘Narraphor’ is a word coined by Leonard Sweet combining narrative and metaphor.

SECTION THREE: THESIS

*One cannot make a new heaven and a new earth with facts.*¹

Story

After it happened, I knew what I should have done, but didn't do. Let's be honest, I couldn't do it anyways. I was a failure. Riddled with guilt and shame, I withdrew. What did it matter anyway? I knew the right answers; I could talk a stranger through it, yet nothing changed. Life was passing me by as I sat on the bleachers. I was a spectator. I could tell you what they were up to; one liked sailing and the other had a passion for Africa but I didn't know them as friends or live with them.

Then one day, I was called from the bleachers. He picked me from the crowd for something that he had uniquely prepared me for. Not despite of, or because of, my failures, but because He loved me. My history mattered to Him and He gave me glasses to see my story with.

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There is a story of a water-bearer who carried two large pots on a yoke across his shoulders up the hill from the river to his master's house with one pot cracked and leaking and the other always delivering a full pot of water. After years of arriving half-empty, the cracked pot apologized. "I'm sorry that I couldn't accomplish what the perfect pot did." The water-bearer replied, "What do you have to apologize for?" "All this time, I delivered half my load of water. I make more work for you because of my flaw." The water-bearer smiled and said. "Take note of all the lovely flowers growing on the side of

¹ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 35.

the path where I carried you. The flowers grew so lovely because of the water you leaked. There are no flowers on the perfect pot's side."²

Why Story?

North Americans currently live in a culture of cynicism where one is taught to disbelieve what one hears and to be skeptical of what one sees. What is trusted is what one's friends tells one and what one tells oneself. In making this observation, Seth Godin comes to the conclusion that it is the role of a leader to "give people stories they can tell themselves."³ Everyone needs stories, for it is through stories that we get to know who we are and how we fit in. Facts without a narrative are irrelevant bits without context. As one places the things one sees, hears, and observes into a narrative construct (a story), one begins to see meaning and purpose, as bits and bytes are connected and seen in a relational context.

Identity depends on stories, and it is through stories that one understands them. It is from stories that one learns and interprets the meaning making of self and others.⁴ But how does this story-catching, crafting, and telling happen? Brian Boyd observes that, "humans assimilate information through the rapid process that specialized pattern

² A tale from India retold by Mary Dressein <http://www.healingstory.org/stories/treasurechest/cracked-pot.html> (accessed May 30, 2012).

³ Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Portfolio, 2008), 138. See also Timothy Martin, "Illuminating the Landscape of Religious Narrative: Morality, Dramatization, and Verticality," *Religious Education* 104, no. 4 (July/August 2009), 393. Accessed November 11, 2011.

⁴ Elizabeth McIsaac Bruce, "Narrative Inquiry: a Spiritual and Liberating Approach to Research," *Religious Education* 103.3 (2008), 323.

recognition allows.”⁵ Through the making of patterns one sees shapes and shares gathered facts in a manner that stays open ended, as there is a continual intake of bits and bytes. This pattern-making nature of humans enables one to quickly assimilate facts, as it is this pursuit of pattern making that enable one to “yield the richest inferences to our minds.”⁶ Stories give a context and add meaning to one’s ideas, observations, and experiences.⁷

The ability to tell stories is central to problem solving that places humans at the center, according to the work of Tim Brown and Barry Kätz.⁸ Stephen Denning champions the notion that it is through stories that the shared values of a community are transmitted and it is through stories that common meanings are established.⁹ Denning writes about how stories enable “communities to see the world differently, to experience the internal ‘ah-ha’ that revitalizes and reframes how they connect with each other and the world.”¹⁰ As Marek notes, one is informed, persuaded, enlightened, connected and moved through stories.¹¹

Brian Boyd introduces *On the Origin of Stories* with an understanding that one needs stories to provide a context for decision making. According to Boyd, it is stories

⁵ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 14.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bruce, 323.

⁸ Brown and Barry Kätz, 132.

⁹ Stephen Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 156.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kate Marek, *Organizational Storytelling for Librarians: Using Stories for Effective Leadership* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2011), 1-2.

that provide “clues to the present, hints from the past, examples or analogies for reasoning about future.”¹² Stories help one to remember the past, so that one can remember the present and imagine a future.¹³ This remembering requires one to use one’s imagination.¹⁴ For it is by one’s imagination that the stage is set for the story to unfold, as Diane Butler Bass says, empowering “narrative, tradition and practice [to] perform their dance.”¹⁵ The imaginative use of stories helps one to live into a freedom that one’s current reality may not reflect. Stories provide a context that allows one to explore possibilities of how one’s current situation can be understood, redeemed, and transformed. As one learns to imagine possibilities, with ease and a sense of play, it can make the difference between despair or hope and fear or courage.¹⁶ Good stories engage us honestly with a sense of uncritical playfulness that lends a sense of courage and hope for the future.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, everyone lives in a story; the question is, are we conscious of it? It is common to be unaware of the story one is living in and, even when there is an awareness of having a story, by inattention, distraction, or unintentionally one can find that they have wandered out of their story.¹⁷ Forgetting one’s

¹² Boyd, 167.

¹³ George W. Stroup, “Theology of Narrative or Narrative Theology: A Response to Why Narrative?” *Theology Today*, 47, no. 4 (January 1, 1991): 431.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2004), 98. Two important books on the theological significance of the imagination are Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), and David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Boyd, 188.

¹⁷ Wendell Berry, *Imagination in Place: Essays* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010), 89.

history can also lead to losing a sense of personal identity and membership in a community. We need to cling to narratives because they assist in remembering who one is. It is in the stories and traditions one remembers and practices that one's understanding of personal and community identity is embodied. Stroup offers words of caution for if we are "no longer part of a community that is struggling to appropriate its stories and traditions we run the risk of losing that memory that binds us to others, both in the present and previous generations."¹⁸ It is not uncommon to struggle with one's history; everyone has regrets concerning their behavior or what they have witnessed. When you lose the understanding that you are part of a larger story, you lose the ability to remember your history. Stroup suggests that North America's fascination with story "suggests a crisis of memory in the social fabric;"¹⁹ a crisis that one desires release and relief from.

The loss of story in culture is indicated by a personal and corporate failure of imagination. Wendell Berry, in *Imagination in Place*, says that: "Though you may get a new life, you can't get a new past. You don't get to leave your story. If you leave your story, then how you left your story is your story, and you better not forget it."²⁰ Berry suggests that you cannot or should not try to escape or deny your past; if you do, your story becomes a story of denial and escapism. Living out of a story that does not deny one's past requires an imagination, for without an imagination one cannot live creatively. For Stroup, it is in the realm of the biblical narrative that one's imagination is stirred, inviting the possibility of new paradigms of redemption and transformation.²¹ One's

¹⁸ Stroup, 431.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Berry, 91.

²¹ Stroup, 432-3.

stories must give meaning and purpose to one's experiences, these stories must address all areas of experience and observation: body, soul, mind, and spirit. Good stories do not avoid one's past or gloss over present realities; they factor in all of one's life. Bruce points out that good stories enter the diversity and complexity of life, respecting the diversity and differences while searching for meaning in the complexity by remaining open to patterns as they present themselves.²²

This desire for redemption or reinvention is not uncommon; according to Ann Rice and F. Scott Fitzgerald, they are the only two themes in all of literature.²³ It is this desire for redemption and reinvention, or transformation, which should define the mission of the Church. Robert Jensen sees the core task of the church to be one of telling "the biblical narrative to the world in proclamation and to God in worship, and to do so in a fashion appropriate to the content of the narrative; that is, as a promise claimed from God and proclaimed to the world."²⁴ Christ is promised, Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, is what the Church is to be about.²⁵ It is this story of promises being fulfilled, where redemption and transformation are being realized, that

²² Bruce, 335.

²³ Bobette Buster, "Concepts of a Story," (lecture, Epiphany the Art of the Transformational Narrative, Crosby Street Screening Room, Crosby Street Hotel, New York City, October 12, 2011).

²⁴ Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost its Story: as our changing culture struggled to define itself, the theologian Robert W. Jenson mourned the missing narrative of a universe gone postmodern and mad," *First Things* (2010), no. 201: 31. Joshua 5 and 6 provides an example of such a narrative.

²⁵ Ibid. Jensen does not include 'Christ is promised' in his summary of the Gospel but there is a growing awareness of Jesus within the Old Testament, see Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012). For more on unpacking soteriology implications see N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2010) and Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: a Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) for more on the doxological import.

the church needs to portray in word and deed, offering hope to a world longing to be found in a story that makes a difference.

Culture

In the world that was modernity, it was assumed that one lived in a ‘narratable world,’ where stories could be shared that were authentic to it. As Jensen says, in modernity, it was understood “that the reason narratives can be true to the world is that the world somehow ‘has’ its own story, antecedent to, and enabling of the stories we tell about ourselves in it.”²⁶ In modernity, Boyd helps one see how stories depended on an understanding of events and the sequencing of those events before one placed them within a narrative.²⁷ He goes on to say that narrative in modernity depended on the “capacity for meta representation: not only to make and understand representations but also to understand them as representations.”²⁸ But one no longer lives in the age of modernity; the culture has shifted to what is post-modernity. One can no longer assume to begin by asking, do “you know the story you think you must be living out in the real world? We are here to tell you about its turning point and outcome . . . [When] the church does not find her hearers antecedently inhabiting a ‘narratable’ world, then the church must herself be that world.”²⁹ The power of the story must be released; the re-membering must begin. It has been forgotten that Jesus was a storyteller who engaged people by

²⁶ Jensen, 33.

²⁷ Boyd, 129.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Jensen, 34.

telling stories. As Don Miller points out, “Nowhere in Scripture does God step in and say now here is the point . . . The point is the story itself.”³⁰

In an iTGIF (iPad, Twitter, Google, Instagram, Facebook) environment, we need to offer a storied world back to the world, and one of the ways we do this is by acknowledging that everyone can tell stories.³¹ People are floating “in an ocean of data and disconnected facts that overwhelms them with choice . . . in this ocean of choice a meaningful choice, a meaningful story can feel like a life preserver that tethers us to something safe, important, or at the very least more solid than disembodied voices begging for attention.”³² The Gospel, like any momentous story, is a story that requires a narrative world. “If the church is not herself a real, substantial, living world to which the gospel can be true, faith is simply impossible.”³³ One begins by acknowledging that the twenty-first century belongs to those who will tell the best stories.³⁴ It is in the story arts that people are finding a way of imagining how to live one’s life and these stories are

³⁰ Don Miller, “How Narrative Shapes Culture,” (lecture Q: Austin 2007, April 2007). <http://www.qideas.org/video/narrative-expressions.aspx> (accessed November 22, 2011). This does not deny that the narrator of a story provides interpretation of the truth; the narrator helps tell the story so one understands what occurred in the story, otherwise the story catcher may miss an important detail within the story.

³¹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Principle, Story, and Myth in the Liturgical Search for Identity,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 3 (2010): 237.

³² Annette Simmons, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact* (New York: Amacom, 2007), 5. For more on overwhelming choice see Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

³³ Jenson, 34.

³⁴ Buster, “Cusp of an Era,” (lecture, Epiphany the Art of the Transformational Narrative, Crosby Street Screening Room, Crosby Street Hotel, New York City, October 14, 2011). see also Peter Guber, *Tell to Win: Connect, Persuade, and Triumph with the Hidden Power of Story* (New York: Crown Business, 2011).

shaping many of today's dreams and expectations.³⁵ But this will be no easy task. Auster points out that:

The prospect of building congruent, life-giving narratives in this day and age, however, are highly debated. Postmodern theorists like Jean-Francois Lyotard argue that the 'master narratives' that shaped the modern, Enlightenment society—like historical progress, the rational self, and the enlightenment science—have ordered or collapsed. Parallel changes in religion—like the decline in biblical literacy, authority, and confessional traditions—confirm that the 'grand narratives' of denominations and congregational life no longer hold the power they once did. Because these master, framing narratives are weak or missing, people are bombarded by an endless stream of images, vignettes, and emotional moments in this postmodern [twenty-first century] culture, to the point that many become 'saturated selves' without agency or purpose.³⁶

Gergen highlights this crisis of 'saturated selves' because the biblical narrative has fallen silent, and with no story to remember, one forgets who one is. As Stroup says, one's "untutored imaginations turn to other narratives and other gods."³⁷ The pursuit of the Enlightenment's rational obsession has led the modern church to give up on the story as the way of knowing truth as there is no way of reconciling the paradox.³⁸ The reality of God must be presented and proclaimed in terms of narrative for that is the way He chose to prepare for and reveal the Incarnation to humanity. As Jungel wrote; "If thinking wants

³⁵ Brian Coley, "Evolution of a Voice," (lecture, Q: Portland, April 28, 2011).

³⁶ Larry A. Goleman, "Reclaiming the Story: Narrative Leadership in Ministry," *Congregations* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 8. Quoting Paul Auster, *The Locked Room* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986). See also Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1979) and Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) for an expansion on these ideas.

³⁷ Stroup, 432.

³⁸ Donald Miller, "Narrative Expressions" (lecture, Q: Atlanta 2007, Atlanta, GA, April, 2007), <http://www.qideas.org/video/narrative-expressions.aspx> (accessed November 22, 2011). See also Donald Miller, writer, *Your Story Series*, recorded 2010, Mellowtown, 2010, MP3.

to think God, then it must endeavor to tell stories.”³⁹ A return to story catching and storytelling, that places people of the twenty-first century within the paradoxical stories of God’s activity of redemption and transformation, is needed to offer people of the twenty-first century a world where the possibility of hope can be grasped. That is why this dissertation focuses on the role of narrative in identity formation, particularly why the biblical narrative plays a key role in Christian identity and faith formation.

What is a Story?

With an argument for stories presented, it will be helpful to define what we mean by referring to stories or narratives. There are a variety of definitions that spring to mind, yet, simply understood, a story is the arrangement that orders and gives meaning and significance to information.⁴⁰ Stories contain plots, themes and characters, change and locations. In understanding story, it is helpful to agree with Polkinghorne that narrative and story, in the broadest everyday sense, are synonyms.⁴¹ When thinking about stories, it is important not to restrict oneself to the use of words, as narratives are not dependent on the exclusive use of words. As Boyd suggests, a narrative “can be expressed through mime, dance, wordless picture books or movies.”⁴² In fact, a story “gains impact through

³⁹ Eberhard Jungel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Trans. Darrell Gruder, 1983), 303.

⁴⁰ Bruce, 323.

⁴¹ Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action through Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 229. See also Hoffman, 235, and Denning, *Leader’s Guide*, xxiii – xxiv. It is the practice of this paper to use the terms story and narrative interchangeably.

⁴² Boyd, 130-1.

enactment or the emotional focusing that music offers in dance, theatre, opera, or film or the visual focusing in stage lighting, comics or films.”⁴³

While we primarily depend on language to express ideas and concerns, there are a variety of tools used to communicate these ideas and concerns. Yet, while the communication of ideas in conversations and speeches provides information, they are not stories. What makes stories unique is that they have the capacity “to move people’s hearts, minds, feet, and wallets in the storyteller’s direction.”⁴⁴ Stories, then, by their very nature, “always bear at least a trace of strategy.”⁴⁵ As Denning has outlined, “the most effective stories usually include: The story of what the change is, often seen through the eyes of some typical characters who will be affected by the change. The story of how the change will be implemented, showing in simple steps how we will get from ‘here’ to ‘there.’ The story of why the change will work, showing the underlying casual mechanisms that make the change virtually inevitable.”⁴⁶ Stories are about change; change that has happened, change that needs to happen, change that can happen.

As Bobette Buster observes, all successful films tell one of three stories: Cautionary tales; stories of fear faced and overcome (redemption); or, stories of finding the courage to become fully alive (transubstantiation).⁴⁷ Perhaps, Josipovich is headed in the right direction when he:

⁴³ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁴ Guber, 6. This is also a premise of Bobette Buster, Stephen Denning, and Annette Simons.

⁴⁵ Boyd, 170.

⁴⁶ Denning, *Secret Language*, 36.

⁴⁷ Bobette Buster, “The Arc of Storytelling,” (lecture, Q: Portland 2020, The Crystal Ballroom, Portland, April 28, 2011). and “Concepts of a Story.” Buster understands transubstantiation narratively to refer to the change of a substance or character from one thing to another, i.e., it is transformed.

places narrative above theology, reality above consolation. It does seem so, to me, because it recognizes that in the end the only thing that can truly heal and console us is not the voice of consolation but the voice of reality. That is the way the world is, it says, neither fair nor equitable. What are you going to do about it? How are you going to live so as to be contended and fulfilled? And it contains no answers, only shows us various forms of response to these questions. And from Adam to Jesus it is constant in its reliance not on teaching, not on exhortation, not on reason, but on the human form that we convey the truth that we are more than we can ever understand, the only form that is open, the form of pure narrative.⁴⁸

We are all part of a community, members, tied together by our stories.⁴⁹ It is the act of telling honest stories and participating in the rituals of these stories that we become community.⁵⁰ Healing becomes possible as “we live in a narrative that is larger than the trauma and hurt we remember.”⁵¹ This is why the biblical narrative becomes so critical for Christian identity formation: we are a people invited into participating in the story of redemption, restoration and transformation. We are, as Tom Wrights puts it, a people “being remade, judged and remolded by the spirit” through the biblical narrative.⁵²

As we ask questions regarding our identity, such as who am I, why me, what am I here for?, I suggest that one needs to ask, what do stories offer? How do stories assist with these big questions? What is it that we need to know to live well? We need to know many things for a variety of reasons. Berry comments:

That we need to know who we are, where we are and what we must do to live. These questions do not refer to a discreet category of knowledge. We are not

⁴⁸ Jocirovici, 23.

⁴⁹ Wendell Berry, *Imagination*, 88.

⁵⁰ Herbert Anderson, “How Rituals Heal,” *Word and World* No. 1 (December 1, 2010): 46. See also Stephen Denning, *Secret Language*, 115.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵² N.T. Wright “How Can The Bible Be Authoritative” http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm (accessed September 12, 2013).

likely to be able to answer one of them without answering the other two. And all three must be answered well before we can answer well a further practical question . . . How can we live without destroying the sources of our life?⁵³

Raine indicates that “realism cannot show us what we are, but only our failure to become that.”⁵⁴ Stories offer clarity without oversimplifying.⁵⁵ Stories express human character and the revelation of that character in crisis and stress filled situations.⁵⁶

What Kind of Stories?

Our twenty-first-century world no longer lives in the ‘realistic narrative’ world of Jane Austen, Edward Gibbon and James Baldwin, or, for that matter, our local newspaper or soap opera. The modern way of telling a sequence of events is characterized by the notion that:

Sequential events are understood jointly to make a certain kind of sense—a dramatic kind of sense. Aristotle provides the classical specification of dramatically coherent narrative. In a dramatically good story, he said, each decisive event is unpredictable until it happens, but immediately upon taking place is seen to be exactly what ‘had’ to happen. So, to take the example of Aristotle’s own favorite good story, we could not know in advance that Oedipus would blind himself but once he has done it instantly see that the whole story must lead to and flow from just this act. Second, the sequential dramatic coherence is of a sort that could ‘really’ happen . . . With this kind of narrative, the question of whether the story depicts something beyond itself, and if it does how accurately, are therefore subsequent and independent questions.⁵⁷

⁵³ Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance and other Essays by Wendell Berry* (Emeryville: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁵ Bruce, 335.

⁵⁶ Bobette Buster, “The 10 Movements of a Transformational Narrative” (lecture, Epiphany the Art of the Transformational Narrative, Crosby Street Screening Room, Crosby Street Hotel, New York City, October 13, 2011).

⁵⁷ Jenson, 32-3.

As Denning points out, the “stories that are most effective in modern organizations do not necessarily follow the rules laid down in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. They often reflect a different tradition in storytelling, in a minimalist fashion, which is reflected in the parables of the Bible.”⁵⁸

Timothy Martin is on to something when he suggest that “choosing religious stories and narrative forms that appeal to the cultural life-world of the students offer even greater potency for a ‘fusion of horizons.’”⁵⁹ ABC’s TV series *Once Upon A Time* is a popular example of how this fusion of horizons is practiced, fusing the world of fairy tales with a place identified as Storybrook, Maine, 2011. It is this type of ‘fusion’ story that emboldens the twenty-first-century person for what lies ahead of them.⁶⁰

To demonstrate the value of a narratable world, Herbert Anderson tells of what occurred in the early ‘90s when a psychologist was brought to a refugee camp, in Tanzania, to address the women’s inability to sleep. These women had been told not to speak of the unspeakable horrors they has seen and experienced. To address the situation, the psychologist established a safe place for the women to tell of their experiences. In the morning:

The psychologist went to the edge of the refugee camp and waited under the huge canopy of the shade tree. The first day no one came. On the second day one woman appeared and told her story and left. The next day another came, and then another, and another; within the span of a week, scores of women were gathering under the shade tree each morning to listen and share their terrifying tales of violence and death. Finally after weeks of the ritual of the story tree, it was reported that the women were sleeping.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Stephen Denning, *Leadership Guide*, xvii.

⁵⁹ Timothy Martin, “Illuminating the Landscape of Religious Narrative: Morality, Dramatization, and Verticality,” *Religious Education* 104, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 394.

⁶⁰ Buster, “Concepts”

⁶¹ Anderson, 42.

We need stories and songs to give voice to unspeakable suffering.⁶² We need rituals to express “what cannot be captured in words. They make the invisible visible.”⁶³ Storytelling practices are “a vehicle for liberating us from narratives that confine and for retelling stories that liberate. We tell meaning laden stories with our lips; we also perform them with our bodies in ritual form.”⁶⁴

You cannot move culture unless you move its heart.⁶⁵ If redemption or transformation is to occur, the hearer must identify with the possibility of living in a new story: “they have to discover it for themselves in the form of a new story.”⁶⁶ It is not merely a new story that is generated, it is a credible story to live by that is capable of being lived into, and lends understanding to life. This emerging story is crafted from the individual and corporate stories as well as the story offered by those they follow. “It is born in the listener’s mind as a more compelling version of their ongoing life stories. The listeners themselves create the story. Since it is their own story, they tend to embrace it. What the leader says is mere scaffolding, scaffolding to a creative process going on inside the listeners.”⁶⁷

When I read this I felt that Denning had torn a page out of Jesus’ narrative playbook and appropriated it. We in the Church need to live into the Gospel narrative

⁶² Ibid., 43. For an exploration of the importance of story in times of crisis see Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Buster, “Concepts.”

⁶⁶ Denning, *Secret Language*, 34.

⁶⁷ Denning, *Secret Language*, 35.

allowing a more compelling version of our life to be born out of the new story put forward by Jesus, the Christ. The question never was were you born or will you die but how did you live? As William Wallace says in the movie *Braveheart*, facing execution, “All men die. But not all men truly live.”⁶⁸ As the story of life unfolds, each character has the opportunity to practice a sense of purpose, participating in the action.⁶⁹

This is the kind of story that engages the mind, touches the heart, and inspires hope. In creating stories, we are participating in the possibility of a different future, even if the story is about the past - a future that we may desire to be a part of even if we cannot imagine participating in it.

Conclusion

“To imagine humanity the heart can recognize . . . [is] our common responsibility.”⁷⁰ To do this, we must acknowledge that global culture of the twenty-first century is returning to orality,⁷¹ using the language of narrative and metaphor.⁷² We have to let go of our stranglehold on the biblical story, insisting that there is only one right way to tell the story. “Narrative comprises an array of tools, each suitable to different purposes. Different combinations of story can be woven as an integral narrative

⁶⁸ See Matthew 25:31-46.

⁶⁹ Brown and Kätz, 137.

⁷⁰ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 85.

⁷¹ For more on orality in the twenty-first century, see Bryce Ashlin-Mayo, *Shift: Expanding Preaching for a Social Media World*, DMin. Dissertation, George Fox Seminary, September 2013.

⁷² Leonard I. Sweet, “Introduction to Semiotics” (lecture, *Semiotics and Future Studies Orientation Advance*, Paramount Hotel, Portland, August 25, 2011).

tapestry.”⁷³ What I am encouraging is more than simply a call for stories, better communication, or a re-ordering of information but a narrative intelligence that encourages “understanding the world in narrative terms and grasping the pervasive role of narratives in all aspects of human existence.”⁷⁴ We must learn to live with the ambiguity that “the story of a person’s life cannot be entirely known or told.”⁷⁵ Yet, it is “through story we can put an end to the worry, the fear and the fret of trying to live instrumentally.”⁷⁶

Story provides the framework, giving structure and meaning in a demanding and changing culture. It is a good story that offers meaning and context to the givenness of life; narrative makes it possible to accept and be released from our past, gives purpose and strength to our present, no matter what the circumstances are, and offers hope for the future. Allowing one simply to be.⁷⁷

This is the opposite of where we left Jenny. She was struggling to make sense of her experience, wondering what the point of continuing is. But Jenny’s story does not end here, nor is this simply her finding a new story that gives her meaning and purpose and she lives happily ever after. This is no fairy tale; this is real life. Come summer, with her belly bulging, a few women in the community begin befriending her. She begins listening to their stories, learning of their failures and the struggles they faced. Her new story is beginning; with their encouragement, she begins going to

⁷³ Denning, *Leader’s Guide*, 19.

⁷⁴ Denning, *Secret Language*, 114.

⁷⁵ Berry, *Imagination*, 88.

⁷⁶ Stephen, *Leader’s Guide*, 300.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Narcotics Anonymous, not for herself but for her unborn child. She works through the steps, discovers that someone outside of herself cares, and it gives her the strength to stay clean.⁷⁸

Biblical Story

Introduction

The massive success of the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises demonstrates the enduring power of a story, well told, that explores the limits beyond rationalism. Eugene Peterson, when speaking of the centrality of story, observes that the North American Church does not know what to do with these stories or really any stories.⁷⁹ As one gets acquainted with this language that comes in the form of story, one does not “know exactly what is going to take place or who it will let in, or how it will end . . . A story is not a script to be copied”⁸⁰ nor is the ending to be manipulated or controlled by the protagonists, and that is difficult to accept, especially using the leadership model popular in many churches today.

Yet, this submitting to the story does not nullify the importance of endings, particularly happy endings, but places them outside the sphere of the protagonist. Happy endings are not fantasy, or escapist, or fugitive, nor do they “deny the existence of *dycatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure; the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance;” says J. R. R. Tolkien. He continues to say that happy endings deny

⁷⁸ This does not to negate or ignore the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, “*Introduction to Practices*” (lecture, Practices: Cultivating Your Inner Life in an Age of Distraction, Crosby Street Screening Room, Crosby Street Hotel, February 28, 2012).

⁸⁰ Ibid., *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 118.

“universal final defeat, and in so far is *evangelism*, giving a fleeting glimpse of joy, joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief . . . When the sudden ‘turn’ comes we get a glimpse of joy, and heart’s desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of the story, and lets a gleam come through.”⁸¹

It is this gleam that makes stories so influential, taking the particular and breathing life into it, even in the postmodern environment of the twenty-first century. One forgets that this is not an age of anti-modernism but rather a perspective that maintains a greater degree of openness to the mysterious or unexplainable, that is neither naïve or gullible. As Le Grys argues now “is time to challenge the modernist [rationalist] stranglehold on factual models of the Bible, and allow Scripture once again to tease the mind.”⁸²

But how does one enter the biblical narrative so that it becomes one’s story? When Jürgen Moltman asked Miroslav Volf at the conclusion of his lecture on loving your enemy, “Can you embrace a *cetnik*?”, he demonstrated the centrality of this question. As Volf struggled to answer, “What would justify the embrace? Where would I draw the strength for it? What would it do to my identity as a human being and as a Croat?” Volf knew what he wanted to say. “No, I cannot, but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to.”⁸³ How does one become able to? How does one allow God’s story to shape

⁸¹ J. R. R. Tolkien *Tree and Leaf and The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 68-70.

⁸² Alan Le Grys, “Shaped by God’s Story: Making Sense of the Bible” (Thesis, King’s College London, 2008), 123. The current efforts by Glenn Paauw, the creator of *The Books of the Bible: A Presentation of Today’s New International Version* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2007), and Phil Chen, the founder of *Glo. The Bible for the Digital World* (computer software), exemplify this desire.

⁸³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9. A *cetnik*, a variant spelling of Chetnik, refers to a Serb nationalist and monarchist paramilitary organization. Croat refers to a South Slavic ethnic group whose homeland includes Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

one's identity, becoming a lover of one's enemy? Or, how does one begin to permit the biblical narrative to function as a transformational narrative?

One can begin by allowing the sun to set on reading the Bible as a Rorschach inkblot, where one projects one's own values and ideas onto the Bible "instead of being swept away into the Bible's story, Rorschach thinkers sweep the Bible into their own story. Instead of being an opportunity for redemption, the Bible becomes an opportunity for narcissism." Scot McKnight continues, saying that when "reading the Bible becomes patting ourselves on the back and finding our story in the Bible, instead of finding the Bible's story to be our story; instead of entering into that story, we manipulate the story so it enters into our story."⁸⁴ This is a dangerous situation indeed, as this displaces the God of the biblical narrative, thereby divesting the narrative of its transformational power and turning the narrative into a pragmatic how-to manual.

The Story of the Self

As one looks at the narrative whole, one must guard against a functional pragmatic approach that is characterized by a stripping of the narrative of the first two (Genesis 1 and 2) and the last two (Revelation 21 and 22) chapters of the story. Effectually, having the story begin in sin and end in judgment instead of revealing the story that goes from good to good (from engagement to consummation).⁸⁵ Within the Creation narrative, one learns the story of one's life as one is drawn into a way of

⁸⁴ Scot McKnight, *Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

understanding one's identity and life:⁸⁶ This is an understanding of self that acknowledges the vulnerability of humanity being the only creature given a garden for sustenance and clothes to cover one's nakedness. To deny this vulnerability is to deny one's image-bearing, sin-scarred identity.⁸⁷ Humanity's vulnerability and interdependence has led to the majority of conflicts within and beyond the biblical narrative. Yet, it is this hostility that makes the biblical narrative so great, as great stories are told in conflict. To embrace the potential greatness of a story requires that we do not resist the conflict we find ourselves in. One resists by refusing to identify God as unjust, as this causes a distortion and disorientation within the narrative arc. Instead one starts by embracing God as a master storyteller, who can be trusted as just and merciful.⁸⁸ He is the one who created the garden for man and he is the one who gives life to man by his breath. This creation context establishing the dynamic tension of the Bible where on the one hand 'it is all about us' and on the other 'thou art dust and to dust shalt thou return.'

As one hears of this God-shaped, God-breathed life; one is introduced to an understanding of man's breathing as breathing God's breath. As *pneuma* is breath you "cannot not breathe, you cannot not pray."⁸⁹ If one begins with the Creation narrative's understanding of man as one made in the image of God, one is able to appreciate God's Spirit as life-sustaining breath. "For the God whom we have been given has named

⁸⁶ Eugene H. Peterson "Prayer," (lecture, Practices: Cultivating Your Inner Life in an Age of Distraction, Crosby Street Screening Room, Crosby Street Hotel, February 28, 2012).

⁸⁷ Andy Crouch, "Power," (lecture, Andrew Mellon Auditorium, Washington, April 10, 2012).

⁸⁸ Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 31.

⁸⁹ Peterson, "Prayer." For more on 'cannot not love,' see Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

Himself in us, and named himself in such a manner that we cannot dissociate His identity from our own.”⁹⁰ Thereby, recognizing with Michael Foucault that man made in the image of God is by necessity a ‘theological conception.’⁹¹ This bestowed identity opens one to a world charged with possibilities, giving man an identity and a vocation (to conserve and create) gratified by the activity of God. Being “created in the image of God, the human subject reflects divine subjectivity. The self-conscious individual reflects the self-conscious God;”⁹² echoing Buber’s assertion, “I become through my relation to the Thou,”⁹³ that declares one knows and is known in relationship.⁹⁴

This kind of relational understanding enables one to see God as a person, not as a book or words written on paper, but God who is before, above, and beyond the Bible. This helping one to see that the Bible is the story-filled revelation of God who is madly in love with all of creation and wants to be loved as a person, not as an object to be venerated, or an institution to be sustained.⁹⁵ For in relationship there is conversation where we tend to each other, taking time and attention, which also involves a flight from self-perception, leading to a flight one to another.⁹⁶ This understanding of God being one who desires relationship enables one to enter the history of human life, as we truly do

⁹⁰ Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Descent into Hell: A Study of the Radical Reversal of the Christian Consciousness* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 37.

⁹¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

⁹² Taylor, 40.

⁹³ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (New York: Scribner, 1958), 11.

⁹⁴ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperOne, 1993).

⁹⁵ McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 87.

⁹⁶ Peterson, “Prayer.”

have everything that we need, we have each other.⁹⁷ The reality is that, as Miller says, “if the character doesn’t change, the story hasn’t happened yet.”⁹⁸ One cannot assume one is living a storied life unless one is witnessing change in one’s life and change around them. The two necessary elements for engaging in a storied life is that “the thing a character wants must be difficult to attain. The more difficult the better . . . [and] the ambition has to be sacrificial. The protagonist has to be going through pain, risking his very life, for the sake of somebody else.”⁹⁹

Thinking in terms of story means thinking in terms of change and character development. When thinking that way, one begins to realize, with Charlotte Gordon and many others, that the biblical characters, particularly those of the First Testament, have populated imaginations for centuries and while never denying their imperfections, religious practices, or desires, these protagonists are part of how one measures oneself. As one aspires to understand who one is, and why one strives for particular dreams, or why is it that one prefers some things to other things that cause strong adverse reactions, one needs to engage the stories of the Bible.¹⁰⁰

When looking at the Biblical narrative it is helpful to remember that:

A historian might guide you on a search for the ‘real’ Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar and help you explore the actualities (the socio-economics, diet, customs, marriage practices, etc.) of the people of the second millennium B.C.E., the period when these figures lived. A theologian could help you uncover many of the religious meanings of this story, its impact on your faith and your view of God. With an

⁹⁷ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

⁹⁸ Miller, *Million Miles*, 68.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁰⁰ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths* (New York: Little Brown, 2009), xv, xvi.

archeologist, you might get to go on a tour of the ancient sites and look for the evidence that these peoples or people like them, existed. And, finally a Bible scholar could help you understand when this story might have been written down and the politics and historical stratagems that helped shaped the narratives.¹⁰¹

The difficulty is that these professions keep the text in the hands of experts. While these professions are helpful and informative as to the nature, context, and meaning of the text, they remove the story from its *primary objective of revealing God's desire to love and be loved*.¹⁰² For some it seems an impossible task, as all these professions lock the text into what was, leaving one with a 'that was then' understanding and shedding little light on how one lives into the story today. The transformational character of the biblical text requires the present, active tense. This challenge almost seems impossible; as Kevin Kelly asks, how can one "restore a 2,000-year-old religion so that it no longer rejects, no longer chases, but actually leads a modern, pluralistic culture running at the speed of Twitter?"¹⁰³ That is the challenge one faces when reading the biblical narrative as a transformational narrative. Bonhoeffer is helpful in wrestling with this as he sees the revelation placing the "I into truth," seeing it as "a contingent occurrence which can only be welcomed or rejected in its positivity—that is to say, received as a reality—but not elicited from speculations about human existence as such."¹⁰⁴

This professionalization of the text has removed the essential character or story questions from the hands of the reader. Non-professional readers are not encouraged to

¹⁰¹ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁰² Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Helmers. *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperLuxe, 2008).

¹⁰³ Gabe Lyons and Norton Herbst, *The Next Christians: Following Jesus in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), dust jacket.

¹⁰⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (New York: Harper, 1962), 80.

ask: “Who were these characters as individuals? Why did they do what they did? Did they change over time? What do[es] the Bible . . . suggest about their personalities, strengths, and flaws?”¹⁰⁵

Ralph Underwood likens what has happened to the biblical narrative to the ‘squiggle game’ devised by Winnicott to assist his work with children. Winnicott would draw a few lines on a piece of paper that had no particular meaning, and the child would be asked to take over and complete the drawing. The initial squiggle came from the unconscious, but in the response made by the child, and through conversation that accompanied the exercise, both participants would negotiate meaning in the drawing as their relationship developed. The meaning that emerges from a seemingly random event is thus multidimensional; it is certainly a response to the squiggles, but it is also a response that evolves through negotiation. It is not a free for all, because the initial squiggle imposes constraints on the possibilities or development, there might even be agreed social constraints, in that some versions of the game begin with an agreement between both participants about a set of ground rules. Even so, each response displays both ‘intentionality and creativity.’¹⁰⁶ Underwood suggests that any biblical text taunts a reader with “what are you going to do with me?”¹⁰⁷ Gordon states that, “it is our responsibility to seek out this book [the Bible] and reevaluate who we are in relationship to the past. Otherwise we are left with an inert document of apparently contradictory

¹⁰⁵ Gordon, xvi, xvii.

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Underwood, “Winnicott’s Squiggles Game and Biblical Interpretation,” *Psychological Insight into the Bible*, W.G. Rollins and D.A. Killie, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 69-78.

¹⁰⁷ Le Grys, 113.

messages that antagonists can deploy, mining the text for one new weapon after another, defending arguments of hate.”¹⁰⁸

One needs to begin to understand oneself as a protagonist in the text, living in a world full of meaning. Our language is pregnant, carrying a range of meaning based on history and expectations. Gadamer argues that tradition plays a large role in determining meaning, making tradition and social context partners in meaning making. But since the crafting of our story is an ongoing process, our preconceived notions continually evolve as we strive to continue to make sense of ongoing events, thus completing the circle of a living tradition.¹⁰⁹

One must come to the place where words matter, simply because words flow out of people. Alan Jacobs in *A Theology of Reading* formulates a theory of reading where he makes these two important observations:

1. Written words are personal communication from one person to another.
2. The proper relationship of a Christian to a person’s communication is to love that person by listening to the others words.¹¹⁰

Listening is an art form not often considered when thinking about reading or love, but as Snodgrass points out, even in Scripture the biggest complaint “is that people do not listen to God. Theirs is a freely chosen deafness.” Choosing not to listen contradicts the *Shema*, “*Hear O Israel . . . Love the Lord your God.*”(Deuteronomy 6:4-5) Snodgrass then reaches this insightful conclusion: Israel is commanded to love God but before they are

¹⁰⁸ Gordon, xvii.

¹⁰⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 268-310.

¹¹⁰ Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Boulder: Westview, 2001).

commanded to love they are charged to hear.¹¹¹ Jacobs extends this notion of listening and loving in his hermeneutic of love to include not only living persons but also the books and authors of the Bible, who should also “be understood and treated as neighbors.”¹¹² In effect, this brings the old, old story into the present. Treating these authors and books as neighbors involves listening to them and hearing the challenge of the common contemporary assumption of man’s identity, of who is in charge. The Biblical narrative clearly draws one into a story of participation where one is “not in charge of this, the Trinity is.”¹¹³

Biblical Narrative

When one reads the story of King David and Bathsheba, one is alarmed at the double moral failure of a great king. Robert Alter in his commentary points out this decline is anticipated several chapters earlier and this incident is the finale of David getting completely out of touch with who he is in the sight of God. The story is about what happens when one believes that they are the worshiped one.¹¹⁴ The biblical narrative always tells the story of how mankind is designed to flourish as a worshipper. Donald Miller makes the same point when he says that, “the main way we learn story is not through movies or books; it’s through each other. You become like the people you

¹¹¹ Klyne Snodgrass, “Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutic of Hearing,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24 (2002): 1-32.

¹¹² Jacobs, 13.

¹¹³ Peterson, “Prayer.”

¹¹⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 240-310.

interact with.”¹¹⁵ Our passions and desires are shaped by stories. What one values and sees as important is determined by the stories that have permeated one’s life. One lives into the stories one has absorbed.

For too long one has been deceived by a rationalist account that says one can think for oneself, assuming ‘one is what one thinks.’ But sociological, psychological, and anthropological research has now overwhelmingly demonstrated that is not what initiates action. It is one’s primed/storied orientation to the world that initiates action. One needs to be captured imaginatively, but how does one capture the imagination? As James K. A. Smith said at a lecture I attended, “We live at the nexus of body and story; we are narrative animals.” One needs to accept that “the gospel is a design project and worship is the design studio . . . Liturgies are tactile stories that capture our imagination.”¹¹⁶ In other words, one becomes what one worships.

Biblical Imagination

Stories help one to not only recall the past, but also assist one in imagining a different future, a new direction.¹¹⁷ If one is to develop a biblical, personal narrative, one must also develop a hopeful imagination, seeing the world with fresh eyes. Miller describes this imaginative world as being in that place where “God sat over the dark nothing.” He put one explicitly in the story “with the sunset, and the rainstorm as though

¹¹⁵ Miller, *Million Miles*, 160.

¹¹⁶ James K. A. Smith, “Imagining the Kingdom,” (lecture, Q, Andrew Mellon Auditorium, Washington, April 11, 2012). For more see, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* and David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011) for more on narrative animals.

¹¹⁷ Barbara Doerrer-Peacock, *Space, Symbol, and Story: Windows to Transformation* (Dissertation, Pacific School of Religion, 2008), 17.

to say, enjoy your place in my story. The beauty of it means you matter, and you can create within it even as I have created you.”¹¹⁸ Resonating with what C. S. Lewis said in response to why he wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Perelandra*:

I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say. Then of course the Man in me began to have his turn. I thought I saw how stories of this kind steal past a certain inhibition, which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the suffering Christ? I thought that the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.¹¹⁹

One develops an imagination to get over one’s conscious and unconscious constraints. It is only as one begins to live imaginatively into one’s own story that one can see that “the whole point of the story is the character arc. You didn’t think joy could change a person, did you? Joy is what you feel when the conflict is over. But it is the conflict that changes the person.”¹²⁰ Or, if one prefers more traditional language, “Being in Christ means the possession of the new direction of will.”¹²¹ It is as one takes the hope-filled, determined, and imaginative posture of Job and stops expecting God to put an end to all of life’s troubles that one can be truly surprised as to “how much you like spending time with God.”¹²² We need to get past the fairy tale notion that everything will simply be

¹¹⁸ Miller, *Million Miles*, 59.

¹¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 37.

¹²⁰ Miller, *Million Miles*, 180.

¹²¹ Bonheoffer, 105.

¹²² Miller, *Million Miles*, 206.

better with Jesus,¹²³ releasing the Bible to achieve its storied intent of transformation through relationship; the difference is that we now enter and experience crisis, disasters, pain, and loss with Jesus. We are not removed from the broken and hurting world. The biblical narrative of life with God is absorbed into our “imagination as a story, not a manual,” giving room to respect each other’s formation in all of its unique particularities. With this kind of a biblical imagination, the Scriptures become “a story to enter not a blueprint to follow.”¹²⁴

Conclusion

As one begins to grapple with what it means to live a storied life, one realizes that while the whole story begins and ends with great goodness, abounding, it is not our task to “imminentize the *eschaton*,”¹²⁵ our charge is to become “the human person fully alive” as this is what gives glory to God.¹²⁶ Character transformation is not only the purpose of a story, it is the point of life.¹²⁷ Always remember that “a good storyteller . . . invites other people into the story . . . giving them a better story too.”¹²⁸ Helping one to realize that this most gracious narrative reveals that all God really wants from us is to live in a

¹²³ Ibid., 203.

¹²⁴ Peterson, *Pastor*, 120.

¹²⁵ Gideon Strauss, “Principled Pluralism,” (lecture, Q, Andrew Mellon Auditorium, Washington, April 10, 2012).

¹²⁶ Dianna Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 39.

¹²⁷ Miller, *Million Miles*, 68.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 236.

divinely made “body he made and enjoy the story and bond . . . through the experience.”¹²⁹

Living in Prince Albert means living in a town where violent crimes are on the rise. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, in 2010 we were ranked third among cities its size for violent crimes. In 2009 we were fourth. In 2011, in a city with just over 40,000 residents, there were almost 10,000 drunk and disorderly arrests, and violations causing deaths has gone up 150% from 2010 to 2012. Likewise, from 2010 to 2011 reported sexual assaults were up 26% and prostitution arrests were up 93%,¹³⁰ both of which, Police Chief Dale McFee believes, are a result of alcohol or drug problems. It is estimated that over 80% of the crimes in Prince Albert are drug or alcohol related.¹³¹

These statistics demonstrate that Prince Albert is in crisis and conflict. This is not an imagined reality and how one responds or participates in the crisis can make the difference of life or death. As a pastor in Prince Albert, with the help of my increased understanding and appreciation for the power of the biblical narrative, I am encouraged. Great stories are told in conflict and I live in a place of great opportunity to participate in the transformational narrative of Scripture. Specifically, how do I live as a follower of Jesus here in this place, at this time?

For me, this begins with being encouraged by Job’s tenacious refusal to curse God or to give up. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I’ll return to the womb of

¹²⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁰ <http://papolice.ca/Portals/CrimeStat/PAPS/CrimeStat.2011.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2012).

¹³¹ <http://www.panow.com/node/178868> (accessed February 6, 2012).

the earth. God gives, God takes. God's name be ever blessed. Not once through all this did Job sin; not once did he blame God" (Job 1:21, 22). Job shows one "how to push through protests in the face of suffering and get through the pain to a more intensely lived faith,"¹³² never denying that this is not the safest place to raise a family but this is the place God has called me to. This giving me the freedom to agree with Miller when he calls out the escapist, protectionist lie that Jesus Christ will make everything better.¹³³ He doesn't. Jesus is not a 'get out of jail free' card; yes, ultimately Jesus does realize His kingdom that is His promise. My task is to bring glory to God, to become a human fully alive.¹³⁴ God ordered the world so that the local, personal, relational human body is the primary place one gets to know God.¹³⁵ I need to stop reading the Bible for answers and continue falling in love with Scripture, opening up myself to the transformative activity of God.¹³⁶ Reading Scripture and engaging in this place with pregnant expectation, trusting the master storyteller, learning to enjoy my place in the story.¹³⁷

Over the last few years, with the community I worship with, we have been learning together what it means to enjoy our place in the story of God's redemption activity in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; as we continue to seek out the ministries God has equipped and called us to join him in. We were a typical congregation, struggling to make the finances work, struggling to see our way forward. So we asked ourselves not

¹³² Eugene Peterson, *The Message Study Bible: Capturing the Notes and Reflections of Eugene Peterson* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2012), 718.

¹³³ Miller, *Million Miles*, 203.

¹³⁴ Bass, *People's History*, 39.

¹³⁵ Peterson, "Embodiment," (February 29, 2012).

¹³⁶ Peterson, "Community."

¹³⁷ Miller, *Million Miles*, 59.

what it is that we wanted, but asked ourselves what it is that we have to offer to God for use in the kingdom of God. We had a few women who enjoy knitting, a few amazing cooks, a few parents longing for their children to return to church, a few bringing their children or grandchildren to Sunday school, and a building mostly unused during the week.

We are still a typical congregation that is challenged financially as we had to replace our roof in 2013, and are struggling to see our way forward, but, we have been invited into some amazing opportunities. The women who love knitting have begun knitting prayer shawls and are giving them away to people facing difficulties and this group is now teaching others how to knit. Those that love cooking and serving food have begun participating in feeding the hungry one Saturday a month and the number of people who are participating in this ministry is growing. A few who have a heart for prisoners are escorting inmates so that they can attend public worship. A few men heard of a need for wooden cross necklaces at the maximum security prison and have hand-crafted over a thousand black walnut cross necklaces, to be given away at the Prince Albert Federal Correctional Institute. Twelve-step recovery groups now use our building 4 to 5 nights a week. A Bible study group birthed a suicide prevention initiative that has been used throughout Saskatchewan.

What does reading scripture and engaging in your place with pregnant expectation, trusting the master storyteller, look like? I don't know. What I do know is that God has uniquely placed YOU in your worshipping community. Do you see yourself participating in God's story of redemption and transformation? What part of God's redemption story have you been prepared for? What are you being called to participate in with God?

As Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said in an interview with Nicky Gumbel, “We are what we are before God and nothing more . . . it’s all grace . . . We need to be a risk-taking church . . . there is no safety in Christ, there is absolute security . . . there is a big difference between knowing we are in his arms and knowing that he calls us to do risky things . . . we cannot live for our cause to win, we have to live for his [Jesus’] cause to win.”¹³⁸

¹³⁸ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5059/watch-we-need-to-be-a-risk-taking-church-archbishop-opens-international-christian-conference> (accessed October 19, 2013).

SECTION FOUR: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

A nonfiction book may at first glance seem counterintuitive, as there are real pragmatic issues that need to be addressed. I agree that there are many issues that need to be addressed and that this book is not the magic bullet, it is part of the puzzle that equips and empowers those struggling and working with the suffering. This for many will be a completely new perspective and understanding and will require reorientation. By offering a narrative approach to identity formation for those engaged in risky behavior, such as drug and alcohol addictions and/or suicide, provides a way of identifying the activity of God, seeing how God interacts with people in their gathering and going.

SECTION FIVE: TRACK 02 ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION/BOOK PROPOSAL

Query Letter – e-mail

Dear Mark Sweeney,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and for accepting the request to connect on Linked In via the introduction of Leonard Sweet, my doctoral mentor at George Fox University. As you will have guessed, my desire is to gain your interest in *Fire, Water, and Wind*, a nonfiction book project that is spurred by the epidemic of suicide in northern Canada and come up with fresh and life-giving answers to the question: when life sucks, how do you keep on living and why does it even matter?

In an effort to more effectively answer that question, I have been working on understanding what the latest scientific research tells us about identity formation. In this research, I discovered that one's identity is formed by the stories one chooses, to make sense of the information one receives. How does this realization affect one's understanding of the role of the biblical narrative in the formation of Christian identity? Does this enable me to answer, 'why should I even bother to keep on living?'

Fire Water and Wind: God's Transformational Narrative seeks to open eyes and ears to the story of God's transformational activity. Without stories of transformation it is hard, if not impossible, to find a way through the storms of life. *Fire, Water, and Wind* explores how understanding the narrative revelation of God enables one to see sparks of hope, when surrounded by nothing but drowned dreams. The book will dig wells for the streams of the imagination, seeking to pool one's identity in the springs of the biblical narrative. *Fire, Water, and Wind* will offer the refreshing stories of a God who is love and does love, then and now.

I appreciate you taking the time and hope to hear from you soon regarding your interest in this manuscript.

Yours Truly,

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Cover Letter – e-mail

Dear Mark Sweeney:

It is with gratitude that I thank you for taking the time to read this letter. As you will have guessed, my desire is to gain your interest in *Fire, Water, and Wind*, a nonfiction book project I have been working on regarding identity formation and the role of the biblical narrative within Christian identity formation. This interest was spurred by the epidemic of suicide in northern Canada and having to come up with fresh and life-giving answers to the question: when life sucks, how do you keep on living and why does it even matter?

Fire, Water, and Wind: God's Transformational Narrative seeks to answer that question by opening eyes to the story of God's transformational power. Without stories of transformation, it is hard, if not impossible, to find a way through the storms of life. *Fire, Water, and Wind* explores how understanding the narrative revelation of God opens one's eyes, enabling one to see sparks of hope, when surrounded by nothing but drowned dreams. The book will dig wells for the streams of the imagination, seeking to pool one's identity in the springs of the biblical narrative. *Fire, Water, and Wind* will offer the refreshing stories of a God who is love and does love, then and now.

I was born into the German Baptist tradition and raised in northern British Columbia in the Christian and Missionary Alliance tribe. I have professional experience as a Construction Superintendent and Marine Engineer, as well as experience in the Casino Industry. For 23 years now, I have been married to my best friend, Teresa; together we are raising two daughters. Currently, I am serving as a Priest, Rector, and Regional Dean in the Anglican tradition and pursuing doctoral work in semiotics and future studies with Leonard Sweet.

It is with humility and expectation that I submit this proposal to you, trusting that with your knowledge of the publishing industry, and insights into what is up and coming, you will see that *Fire, Water, and Wind* has something to add to the ongoing conversation of what it means to follow Jesus in these times of change and renewal. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,

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Nonfiction Book Proposal

Title: *Fire, Water, and Wind: God's Transformational Narrative*

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Hook: When life sucks, how do you keep on living and why does it even matter?

Overview: *Fire, Water, and Wind* opens your eyes to the story of God's transformational power. Without stories of transformation, it is hard, if not impossible, to find the way through the storms of life. *Fire, Water, and Wind* explores how the narrative revelation of God opens one's eyes, allowing one to see sparks of hope where there is nothing but drowned dreams. The book will dig wells for the streams of the imagination, seeking to pool one's identity in the springs of the biblical narrative and offer the refreshing stories of a God who is love and does love, then and now.

This will be done immersed in the breeze of neurological and psychological research that concludes that we order information and give structure to events shaping our identity. Drawing strength from the conclusion that the story we choose, determines the life we will live; dipping into narrative business leadership writing that is full of examples of how important understanding and living out one's story is in corporate identity, and the difference it makes.

Purpose: Help people in Saskatchewan see that despair is not the only option.
Assist all those struggling with drug and alcohol addiction issues.
Assist in realizing a meaningful, personal identity to live out of.
Offer God's narrative as a way out of despair.
Offer glimpses of how one participates in the redemptive activity of God.
Invite one to begin being transformed.
Offer practical suggestions to how one enters God's current narrative activity.

Promotion and Marketing: There are a disproportionate number of members of our indigenous community who are incarcerated. Over 80% of the prison population in Prince Albert is indigenous; we have eight correctional facilities in the area. There is a disproportionate number of indigenous people struggling with drug and alcohol addictions, a number that is hard to extract. There is a disproportionate number of indigenous people committing suicide, at a rate of almost 3 times the national average. There is a disproportionate number of indigenous people unemployed; in Saskatchewan indigenous unemployment is 17.4% while the non-indigenous population has a 4.4% unemployment rate, November 2012.

Twitter, Pinterest, and Facebook are rising in their usage among indigenous youth. I suggest offering review copies to those with influential followings. By raising the awareness regarding the situation while offering a possible solution, you would quickly generate an appetite of interest. Awareness can also be raised by networking with support and 12-step groups as well as social service agencies. There are also Powwows, Sacred Circles and General Assemblies that provide opportunities to meet with chiefs and elders. Other opportunities in Saskatchewan include the indigenous radio station, MBC (that does morning talk shows), AM radio talk shows and Canada's public broadcaster (that is always looking for indigenous stories).

Competition: Michael R. Emler, *Crosstalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet*, Greensboro: New Growth, 2009
 Sean Gladding, *The Story of God, The Story of Us: Getting Lost and Found in the Bible*, IVP Books, 2010.
 Bob Goff, *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*, Thomas Nelson, 2012.
 Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Story of Scripture*, Baker Academic.
 Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama Faith Alive*.
 Donald Miller, *Storyline: Finding your Subplot in God's Story*, Donald Miller Words, 2012.

Uniqueness: None of the above:
 Focus on the power of narrative to be an instrument of transformation.
 Emphasizes the emotions and its roles in transformational narratives.
 Explore the neurological or psychological research on narrative.
 Are written for a Canadian audience or perspective.
 Begin in the place of despair and hopelessness.

Endorsements: Todd Hunter, Leonard Sweet, Bobette Buster, Phylis Tickle, J.I. Packer, Paul Williams, Loren Wilkinson, Markku Kostamo and Leah Kostamo and Eugene Peterson are a few that I have talked to about this project. I have

asked none of them for an endorsement but they all have been supportive of the project and all have expressed an interest in seeing it when it is complete.

Book Format: The book will be a combination of stories, personal reflections, and principles. It will be written for a general audience.

Chapter Outline: Short one/two paragraphs per chapter to show the plot development.

1. Introduction: Why Story?
2. Bible as the Story of God's Revelation of Self
3. Developing a Biblical Imagination
4. Nurturing a Biblical Unconscious
5. What Does Current Psychology and Neuroscience Say About Narrative?
6. Metaphor and Narrative – What Does it Mean?
7. Conclusion: Seeing and Recognizing One's Identity in Christ
8. Appendix: Study Guide to Narrative Identity Formation

Intended Readers:

Primary:

People working with indigenous communities

People working with those struggling with drug and alcohol addiction

Secondary:

Indigenous individuals and others living in northern communities

People struggling with drug and alcohol addiction

Manuscript: The book is researched and drafted as a 25,000 word manuscript. It could be expanded to 45,000 - 60,000 words with the unpacking of concepts and the incorporating of a greater element of narrative. This could be completed with an editor's assistance in about 130 hours.

Author Bio: Having spent the last 8 years in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, as an Anglican Priest, I am a witness to the tragedies of life in indigenous and northern communities and witness the feeling of hopelessness. Listening to stories and confessions, I have been moved to do something that may offer help.

I was born into the German Baptist tradition and raised in Northern British Columbia in the Christian and Missionary Alliance tribe. I have been granted a Bachelor of Religious Education majoring in Pastoral Studies from Rocky Mountain College, Calgary, AB and a Master of Christian Studies majoring in Spiritual Theology from Regent College, Vancouver, BC. I have professional work experience as a Construction Superintendent and a Marine Engineer. I am married to my best friend, Teresa, and we are

raising two daughters. In 2012, I was a candidate for Bishop of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle.

Currently, I am a priest in the Anglican tradition serving as the Rector of St. David's and The Regional Dean of Prince Albert and completing doctoral work exploring the role and use of narrative in identity formation.

Publishing Credits:

Monthly Columnist for the Saskatchewan Anglican since September 2012.
<http://69.27.116.222/index.php/the-saskatchewan-anglican>

Suicide Prevention: Local Church Outreach, February 15, 2011,
http://www.outreachmagazine.com/searchresults.html?cx=008786035087005900921%3A13or6b6_jlm&cof=FORID%3A11%3BNB%3A1&ie=UTF8&q=norbert+Haukenfrers.

Future Projects:

Non-fiction – a theological memoir recalling a journey from theological conservatism to one of generous orthodoxy.

Fiction – a series of stories exploring life on Reserve and how lasting change occurs. This would be a multigenerational story in the line of Wendell Berry's Port William Membership series.

Follow-up – e-mail

Dear Mark Sweeney,

Three months ago, I sent you the manuscript for *Fire, Water, and Wind*, I was wondering if you would be able to give me an idea concerning the manuscript's review status

Yours Sincerely,

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SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT

In exploring what narrative psychology and neurology have concluded regarding narrative and identity formation, I have demonstrated that narrative plays a large part in identity formation. This begins the interdisciplinary work of narrative identity formation, as I will continue to explore a narrative way of knowing and being known. Hopefully, this work encourages others as they enter the story of God to have their identity fashioned by the Holy Spirit. Narrative identity formation is not a program; it is the receiving of an invitation to live into the story of God. There are dance steps to learn, music to follow, and life to be celebrated.

The neglect of the term discipleship is intentional as it seems to carry an army of propositional methodologies that at its worst encourage an impersonating of Jesus, a ‘what would Jesus do’ mentality. Where the development of narrative identity encourages one to find their identity in Christ receiving the invitation of God the Father to be filled with God’s grace and heavenly benediction; through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Sacramentally, we receive Christ to be Christ. Followers of Jesus are called to be Jesus – offering Christ’s brokenness to the world as a way of healing.

APPENDIX: ARTIFACT/WRITING SAMPLE

FIRE, WATER, AND WIND

When do we get down to business?

“The Word at all times and all places desires to become flesh.”

(Max the Confessor)

Jenny graduated from her village’s high school at the top of her class and enrolled that fall at the nearest community college with dreams of becoming a lawyer. She dropped out after one semester because she could not do the work; she was not prepared. In the spring, she returned to her village on the Indian Reservation with her hopes and dreams crushed, only to be received by the mocking taunts of her high school friends.

In her mind there was no point in trying, there was no way to escape; change was not possible.

She joined her friends who had never left the village, drowning her shame with alcohol, exchanging her dreams for the erotic, because she just wanted the emptiness to stop. It was more than she could accept; by the fall, a year after her return, everything was raw and ragged. Come winter, she could no longer dull her pain by drowning in alcohol. She found relief in the needle of a friend.

The following spring, she discovered that she was expecting a child and infected with HIV. She had a pretty good idea of who the father might be, but couldn’t be sure. But was it him or someone else that gave her this death sentence or was it from one of the many-shared needles? What did it matter, anyways? What was the point in continuing? Her indifference was growing.

What right does she have to bring a kid into her messy life? Is there a way to end the shame and stop the pain?

As a pastor living in Saskatchewan, this story is all too real. Saskatchewan has an HIV infection rate double the national average, and among First Nations people (refers to aboriginal peoples living in Canada who are neither Inuit nor Métis) living on reserve, the HIV infection rate has doubled since 2009.¹ Coupled with this deluge is the wreckage of suicide occurring on Canadian First Nations Reserves with five to seven times as many suicides as the rest of the country.²

Part of this may be understood when placed within a historical context of the establishment of Indian Residential Schools shortly after Canada's Indian Act of 1876 and the amendments of 1884 becoming law. These schools while funded by the federal government were operated mostly by Roman Catholic Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada. The primary objective of these schools was removing and isolating Indian children from the influence of their families, traditions, and culture to assimilate them into the dominant European culture of the day. As is infamously remembered, the sole objective was, "to kill the Indian in the child."³ Add to these already atrocious intentions of these schools the observations found in Dr. Bryce's Report submitted in 1907, as the Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, where

¹ In 2012, the rate of new HIV infections was 17.2 per 100,000; in 2011, it was 19.1 per 100,000. The Canadian average is 7.4 per 100,000. 2012 HIV/AIDS Statistics released at Prairie HIV Conference, Travel Lodge, Saskatoon SK, November 4-5, 2013.

² In 2009, "According to Health Canada, suicide rates are five to seven times higher in First Nations communities than in the rest of Canada. In extreme cases, some aboriginal communities have seen suicide rates 800 times higher than the national average." http://www2.canada.com/saskatoonstarphoenix/news/third_page/story.html?id=fba8ea08-3183-4ea8-be1a-c3bd54c87cb9 (accessed November 6, 2013). In 2009, the Canadian national average was 11.5 suicides per 100,000. Remembering that suicides are only counted as suicides if it can be the demonstrated cause of death recorded, the overall average is likely higher.

³ <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html> (accessed December 9, 2013).

he observes that of the 150,000 aboriginal children who attended, somewhere between 90-100% experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse while in the care of these institutions that had a 40-60% mortality rate. The last of these schools closed in 1996.

To say that Prince Albert is a place where many people are in crisis and have experienced deep hurt is not difficult. What does it mean to be a church here that participates in the mission of God and offers forgiveness, hope and the power to change?

While there have been official apologies made by government and church leaders, compensation claims paid to survivors, and A Truth and Reconciliation Commission established, the healing and reconciliation is just beginning. The memory of residential schools, for many, is one of isolation, separation, and abusive treatment. This memory and the sweeping effects of the Indian Acts of the late nineteenth century are often cited as why many learned to self-abuse and fail to love themselves, their families, and their indigenous languages and cultures. Prince Albert, Saskatchewan is not unique in this pain; every community with First Nations peoples in Canada has been affected. This painful denial and loss of identity is continuing to fester with the aid of low education standards, alcohol and narcotic addictions, and high crime and incarceration rates, as well as other dynamics, according to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Interim Report. The pandemic of receiving and inflicting pain with all its symptomatic manifestations expressing this deep level of despair and hopelessness cannot be denied. Something must be done. *My proposal is for a reintroduction of a narrative intelligence that can play a key role in the required re-formation of First Nations people's identity.*

We need to be telling the stories; stories not only of what happened and how survival was achieved but stories that are offering people release from the shackles of pain and abuse of the past and present (redemption), stories offering people hope and the possibility of living into a

new story (transformation). As Bishop Mark MacDonald shared with me in an interview, “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth needs to be told and we need to do this by telling stories, as stories simply have more room for truth.”⁴ It is in stories that we find “a spark, a power: to comfort, connect, destroy, transform – and even heal.”⁵ It is through stories where people truly connect with one another and create community. Those of us who follow Jesus have a reason to want to connect because we are part of the greatest story of redemption and transformation ever told.

Part of this storytelling process for me has been that my perceptions of missions and what it means to be a missionary is being re-plotted. I began with an understanding that the mission of God and the work of a missionary were bringing God to a community. While taking a few days away from public ministry, Mark MacDonald challenged my assumption by saying that “God didn’t get off the boat with Christopher Columbus,” God was already present and active in North America.⁶ With a simple hip check, my assumption was flattened as hockey player playing with his head down in the corner.

I am beginning to see that the plot isn’t about the missionary bringing God to the community. The plot is that the missionary is invited into joining an already active and present God called to personify grace, mercy, and love. We are all missionaries, called to be little Jesus’, if you will, participating in his activity through his body, the church. In a sense we are all writing another chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Before you get all excited I’m not

⁴ Mark L. MacDonald, interview by author, October 4, 2011. At the time of the interview, MacDonald was the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop. On November 4, 2013, he was elected the North American Regional President for the World Council of Churches.

⁵ Bobette Buster, *Do Story: How To Tell Your Story So The World Listens*, (Do Book CO.2013), kindle loc. 20.

⁶ MacDonald.

suggesting that we add more chapters to the bible but that by participating in the redeeming activity of Jesus, healing activity of Spirit, expressing the Father's love who desires relationship we are following Jesus.

Being on a mission with an already present and active God transforms one's missionary effort to one of joining the activity of an already present and active God. I don't have to come up with a solution, I have to identify and participate in the work he is already doing. I have to look for signs of God and his dirty, blood-soaked fingerprints. Then I have to testify to what he is up to, encouraging others to join the work he has already begun. This entering into the story with God, from Adam to Jesus, relies, "not on teaching, not on exhortation, not on reason, but on the one human form that can convey truth that we are more than we can ever understand, the only form that is open, the form of pure narrative."⁷ There is a great story and we are in it. The work of narrative is shaping our life whether we are aware of it or not; the choices we are making are defining our story. Storytelling and story catching give us lenses to see our choices within a context that helps us in our decision-making. Bobette Buster believes that storytelling is what gives us perspective. Storytelling provides the clarity we seek to seize our destiny, assisting us in understanding that we are not victims; we are called to be protagonists. The biblical narrative invites us to live as protagonists, living into a great story, being formed into a community of God missionally, relationally, and incarnationally; Leonard Sweet in *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church: Missional, Relational, Incarnational*, helped me in unpacking what this all means.

Understanding that redemption and transformation are the two primary themes of all stories provides a helpful structure for story catching and storytelling. This also enables one to

⁷ Gabriel Josipovici, *The Singer on the Shore: Essays 1991-2004* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2006), 23.

face evil and not be destroyed. Bad things, evil wicked things, happen every day and often to undeserving or unsuspecting people. It is this desire of redemption from evil and the hope of evil being transformed that helps in understanding evil and the many people who have suffered and/or continue to suffer at the hands of evil.

Understanding that redemption and transformation are the two primary themes of stories and that all stories have an identifiable structure has helped me in discovering a whole new way to read, meditate and understand the story of God With Us that is revealed Scripture. Through this understanding, I see things that I never saw before. This consciousness of the structure of the story shedding new light on the particulars within the story; each character has a reason for being in the story and often that becomes clear only *as the story unfolds*. The details of place and time are there to convince and create a plausible reality leaving no doubt that God has what it takes to make it real. This has reinvigorated my preaching and teaching and strengthened my understanding of how to read, study, and communicate more effectively. Illustrations are no longer the add-ons to the truth, for emphasis, to keep it interesting or to make it easily understood. Stories are the staple, the meat and potatoes, for the narrative of God's redemptive and transformational activity in the world.⁸

Some of you may be wondering, how did you transition from the people in Saskatchewan who are struggling with their current situations, drowning in addictions, and taking their life as a way of dealing with or escaping their currently desperate situations to storytelling and the biblical narrative? This book will hopefully help you understand why I have come to this conclusion and how I came to this conclusion. It all began as I started asking myself various versions of this question: Why are people engaging in self-destructive behavior and what is

⁸ It is the practice of this book to use the terms story and narrative interchangeably.

required for them to change? I began with that question because too many people are dying preventable deaths. Having explored several options, my simple answer is that, as one becomes a participant in the ongoing activity of God, transformation occurs; discovering one's identity in Christ empowers them to live in and through desperate situations with hope. Semiotically engaging in God's narrative revelation enables one to recognize the activity of God and participate in God's business of restoring and renewing people and places. I have come to this conclusion as the narrative of scripture reveals a God who is knowable and wants to be known, a God who is love and wants to be loved and we are made to live in relationship with this Creator God, each other, and the rest of creation. It is this story of God With Us that offers context and meaning to these relationships. All of the information we receive is given meaning and value by placing it within a narrative construct of our choosing, be that consciously or unconsciously. It is this narrative construct that determines whether information is important, needs to be acted on, ignored, or saved for later.

Have you ever noticed that whenever you buy a car you are surprised by how many cars like yours others drive? Some of you will notice this while you are driving your newly acquired car; perhaps you will begin noticing them while you are considering a purchase. Others of you notice this in the parking lot as you're looking for your car and see so many that look alike. We are all different as to what catches our eye. We are all the same in that once we have a context that values something particular, like the car, we pay attention because we have a context, a story that gives them value.

In the following chapters we will survey some of the psychological and neurological research that indicates that: (1) healthy brains continually adapt, change, and renew; (2) humans are social, relational, storytellers; and (3) the expression of any particular emotion lives out of a

particular cultural narrative. This book relies on this research to support the premise that: (1) narrative understanding of identity is both incremental and exponential; (2) all narratives shape meaning and offer identity, but not all narratives promote life and/or health; and (3) the biblical narrative is the key transformational narrative to live out of, offering a redeemed and transformed identity.

Maybe, you are like me and have been at the place where you have understood stories and a narrative understanding of identity as simply artistic license or touchy feely stuff, having nothing to do with the real world or the facts of life. Growing up, I somehow came to the conclusion that, at best, stories were good for fantasy, entertainment, and escapism and had little to do with what mattered. To think of stories as necessary or essential in identity formation was purely an academic area with interesting arguments or exercises that had no significant effect on my life. What follows is some of what has helped me appreciate the critical role narrative plays in identity formation.

Chapter 2

“All our life, so far as it has definite form, is but a mass of habits.”

(William James)

He was ten years old when he started cutting himself. Most of his childhood he bounced between foster homes and the various towns and reserves of his extended family. He had an older sister and two younger brothers, but rarely spent time with them. Everyone thought of him as a problem child. What he knows of his family is that his grandparents were taken from their parents and shipped to a residential school, like freight in a boxcar. It was at this reformatory disguised as a school that they were forbidden to speak the language of their forefathers and given white man’s haircuts and clothes. Everything that had helped him understand who he was was either taken from him or declared evil. His mother, preoccupied with her own survival, didn’t know who his dad was. The only people that paid attention to him were teachers, social workers, principals, police officers, and his mom’s angry, drunk boyfriends. In his teens, seeking to be valued, he began spending time with gangsters, drug-dealers, and bartenders; they offered him value and a way of escape. They didn’t deny his pain, his toughness, or his value. He confused their selfish valuations for love. This is the way of love and relationship that he learned. It was all about what you could get out of somebody. You loved them as long as they added value and when they no longer did, they became expendable.

When I met Ben, he had been out of the foster care system for six years. Without a home, he had been living between rehab, girlfriends, odd jobs, and mostly avoiding prison. He had tried to keep it together, going to 30-day dry outs, attending various 12-step groups, participating in anger management programs and numerous stints in various skills training programs, and

interspersing several visits to the psych ward and numerous nights in the local drunk tank. He would do all right for a while, but then a crisis or a stressor would trigger him and he would begin his spiral once again.

Can Ben ever escape this cycle, isn't this who he is? Is it possible or desirable for him to change who he has become? As we look at the contributions of the neurosciences, logo therapy, narrative psychology, and 12-step programs, we see that they all indicate that change is possible and often desirable. They all seem to agree that this type of a change requires a narrative understanding of who one is and where one fits in the grand scheme of things: This narrative way opens the door for a more dynamic understanding of Christian identity formation.

NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

We all have routines, habits that have no need to be explained, and we follow them as if on autopilot. We follow these practices without any thought or attention. This morning when you brushed your teeth did you have to think, gently using small circles, slowly moving around the outside and to the inside? When someone starts telling us about the ordinary, they quickly lose our attention. Yet, when that routine is interrupted, by the unexpected or unimagined, say you chip a tooth, one struggles to make sense of what has transpired and what one has experienced. It is in these unexpected and unimagined situations that people create or alter stories, revising them to make sense of what just happened. It is with stories that we order and find purpose to our lives. Dan McAdams suggests that our stories need to be constantly evolving in order to help us make sense of life. We are constantly adjusting to include more information and new experiences. It is

with the help of these evolving stories that we piece together what may be an unintelligible assortment of events and experiences' and get some sense of meaning or purpose.

Our story defines how we understand others, the world, and ourselves. Everything that we observe or experience is put into our story matrix and is either made to fit, the story is adjusted to make it fit, or it is thrown out. The story of our lives is integral to the development of and understanding of who we are. The story of ourselves that we tell ourselves is understood to play a significant and primary role not only in constructing meaning within the context of one's experiences but also determining our emotional health and happiness. Researchers have developed a test that enables them in twenty questions to determine that "adolescents who report knowing more stories about their familial past show higher levels of emotional well-being, and also higher levels of identity achievement, even when controlling for general level of family functioning."¹ The twenty questions they have developed are identified as the *Do You Know Scale* (DYK). It is an interesting narrative exercise and a great conversation starter with your family and friends. To find out your DYK number you answer the following questions answering 'yes' or 'no.'

¹ Robyn Fivush, Marshall Duke and Jennifer G. Bohanek, "*Do You Know . . .*": *The Power of Family History in Adolescent Identity and Well-Being* <http://www.journaloffamilylife.org/print/node/518.html> (accessed October 29, 2013).

1. Do you know how your parents met?
2. Do you know where your mother grew up?
3. Do you know where your father grew up?
4. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up?
5. Do you know where some of your grandparents met?
6. Do you know where your parents are married?
7. Do you know what went on when you were being born?
8. Do you know the source of your name?
9. Do you know some things about what happened when your brothers or sisters were being born?
10. Do you know which person in your family you look most like?
11. Do you know which person in the family you most act like?
12. Do you know some of the illnesses and injuries that your parents experienced when they were younger?
13. Do you know some lessons that your parents learned from good and bad experiences?
14. Do you know some things that happened to your mom and dad when they were in school?
15. Do you know the national background of your family (such as English, German, Russian, etc.)?
16. Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were growing up?
17. Do you know some awards that your parents received when they were young?
18. Do you know the names of the schools your mom went to?
19. Do you know the names of the schools your dad went to?
20. Do you know about the relative whose face ‘froze’ in a grumpy position because he or she did not smile enough?²

Your score is determined by the number of questions that you answered yes to. The higher the number the more likely you are to be emotionally healthy and function out of a known identity, your story.

The narrative that we develop and incorporate shapes our understanding of who we are. It is from this raw material of experiences that we construct a story that gives order or makes some sense of our observations and experiences. These stories we craft are offering us a way of seeing and understanding life; healthy stories assist individuals in giving unity and purpose to one’s life, unhealthy stories lead to despair and death.

² <http://articles.memoriesgrow.com/share/do-you-know-scale-dyk-predictor-of-your-childs-emotional-health-and-happiness>. Accessed October 29, 2013.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Victor Frankl observed, while a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, that some fared better than others in the tyrannical culture of defeat and concluded that how one handled these atrocities within their stories enables some, himself included, to continue living with some sense of meaning and purpose, even in these the most horrendous of situations. It is out of his experience that Frankl developed *Logotherapy* as a therapeutic tool to assist those in particularly desperate situations in finding meaning and purpose in life. Logotherapy is based on an existential analysis focusing on Kierkegaard's will to meaning.

Elie Wiesel had a completely different experience of Auschwitz and Buchenwald and his haunting account helped him win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. His trilogy *Night, Dawn, and Day*, reiterate the importance of knowing your story and the personal devastation that one can experience when one's story is not able to make sense of the evil one is observing and experiencing. This same desire to help others understand their meaning and purpose led Erik Erickson to coin the term 'generativity,' which refers to the desire one generation has to help the next. Narrative Psychology grew out of Erickson's work as Michael White and Dan P. McAdams continue to explore how our personal narratives lend meaning and purpose to those seeking understanding.

Even though the last thirty years have been labeled as the 'information age,' there is a growing awareness, across the social sciences, that we use stories to make sense of our lives. We appropriate stories and claim them as ours; we change and are changed by the stories that our culture, society, and economy generate. This begins in the early teen years, Erickson highlights, as people begin to construct their own stories to make sense of their life. It is at this time that

people begin to understand who they are through these stories of self, establishing a narrative identity. James Fowler, following Piaget stages and Kohlberg stages as a guide, developed a way of understanding the stages of faith development. M. Scott Peck developed a simplified faith development chart based on Erikson's stages outlining the four most common stages.

Interest in the field of Narrative Psychology began in the 1980s as the disillusionment with personality psychology grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By the 1990s, it was a recognizable field of study with new narrative theories gaining momentum. Simultaneously, "scientists in developmental, social, cognitive, clinical, counseling and industrial-organizational psychology became increasingly interested in story concepts and narrative methodologies. Psychotherapists began using narrative therapies."³ Today, the field of psychology expects a lot from stories, particularly as they relate to a person and their culture. Theodore R. Sarbin may have been correct in 1986 when he proposed narrative as a root metaphor for psychology.

When it comes to one's life, storytelling is not 'once upon a time;' it is the serious business of sense making. Recently, Timothy Hoyt has seen that the "narrative conceptualizations of identity hold the promise of integrating Erikson and Erikson's aspects of identity as well as illuminating the processes by which individuals develop identity."⁴ This culminating in Rurt Ganzevoort's conclusion, in 2008, that our identity is inseparable from the stories we tell about ourselves.

³ Dan P. McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories," *Review of General Psychology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 100.

⁴ Timothy Hoyt, "The Development of Narrative Identity in Late Adolescence and Emergent Adulthood: The Continued Importance of Listeners," *Developmental Psychology* 45, no. 2, (2009): 559, doi: 10.1037/a0014431.

LITERARY FOUNDATIONS OF NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Jerome Bruner, a twentieth-century psychologist, contributed significantly to understanding how stories are used within the context of human lives. Bruner identified two ways of knowing: The *paradigmatic way* and the *narrative way*. The paradigmatic way of knowing is what we learn at school; this is where we learn to understand rationale, logic, science, and causation. The narrative way of knowing we learn from the stories we hear and tell.⁵ Stories that are told of when things don't go as expected, when things deviate from the cultural norms or patterns of behavior, help us with times when things don't go as we expected. Think of the recent news headlines or the stories you heard in the last week. Did they involve people doing what was expected? Most of our headlines, coffee times, and water cooler conversations are typically times when we hear and tell stories of the out of the ordinary or the unexpected. We share these stories because they are interesting to hear and tell. Typically, we are not interested in hearing about what we already know or expect; we want something new. When someone begins telling us what we already know, we cut him or her off, with a summary, "I know," or simply allow our attention to drift, tuning back in when we perceive there is something new.

Narrative is a way of knowing and understanding that is practiced in all cultures and communication: *narrative is transcultural*. Globally, people tell stories to others – socializing. We do not tell a story into a vacuum or simply to ourselves; stories by their very nature are inherently social; stories are developed in the community, for the community. Rubin has observed that even as one looks at the way people structure the stories about themselves, they mimic the forms of communication we are familiar with and are inseparable from them. The

⁵ Jerome Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

recollection and recalling of our autobiographical stories is a social act defined by and defining a social group.

The stories we construct and tell of ourselves use all the elements of storytelling. We use all the components of storytelling including plots, characters, themes and tone to express meaning. As we go about this task of establishing and expressing meaning narrative research has concluded that it is important that we pay particular attention to any recurring or goal orientated ventures or activities in our life story, as they help us understand identify themes. Donald Miller begins *Storyline 2.0 Conference* by asking participants, “What will the world miss if you don’t tell your story?”⁶ Is there meaning and purpose to your life and how do you discover it? Or, for those of you more familiar with the paradigmatic way of knowing, Dan McAdams asks this question, “How is a person's psychosocial world arranged in such a way as to provide life with some modicum of unity and purpose?”⁷ We can thank Bruner and Polkinghorne for opening the door, in the 1980s, to this way of understanding ourselves as they proposed that the language of narrative was the best means of addressing these questions.

As we consider the building block of our lives, the highs, the lows, and the times of transition, these are the times that we develop our stories that offer us meaning and identity. It is the stories of our lives, Bauer observes, that enable us “to interpret the past in terms of trait-like perceptions of ‘who one is’ and to plan the future in terms of traits that one wants to continue developing in their lives.”⁸

⁶ Donald Miller, *Storyline 2.0 Conference*, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA. February 23-24, 2013.

⁷ McAdams, “Psychology of Life Stories,” *Review of General Psychology* 5, no. 2 (2001): 114. doi: 10.1037//1089-2680.5.2.100.

⁸ Bauer, 92.

We must remember that our life story does not exist in a vacuum or in isolation; it exists in a community and a culture. Our stories mirror the culture and the community where the stories are birthed and told. Our life story lives in one's community and culture. The story of our life is born, grows, reproduces, and dies "according to the norms, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society, according to a society's implicit understandings of what counts as a tellable story, a tellable life."⁹ This, I believe, is one of the reasons that make it clear why living in community with a fellowship of followers of Jesus is so important. We need each other to tell our stories to, since together we figure out what it means to live resurrection lives; we need each other to avoid allowing our pasts to chain our futures. This is why becoming a society dictated by pop culture is so disconcerting. One of the prevailing arguments of today's pop culture is articulated by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' hit song, 'Same Love,' when the chorus cries out "And I can't change, Even if I tried, Even if I wanted to, . . ." The resurrection of Jesus never denies the reality of our birth or the societal situations or the biological conditions of our birth but says that we should not allow our birth to determine, restrict, or limit our future. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus proclaim that change of even the worst possible situation is imaginable, possible, and desirable. In the crucifixion, we see that redemption is offered and in the resurrection we see that transformation is a guarantee.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Michael White, citing the work of Michael Foucault, traces the roots of the modern internalization of understanding life and identity in Western culture back to the seventeenth century. Dan McAdams in his research traces the roots of the Western understanding of identity

⁹ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 114.

and life back to as far as the Catholic Fourth Lateran Council, in 1215. This is the council that made the practice of the confessional an annual practice. McAdams notes, in *The Redemptive Self*, that this decision, in 1215, set in motion a social ritual that has affected Western culture's understanding of self and identity in a way that nothing before has, and its effect continues to shape how one thinks about one's life. He suggests that while many in the sciences have viewed the practice of annual confession as manipulative and out of order, in the modern world, McAdams notes that, confession can have a profound restorative effect on one's narrative identity, particularly in the area of integrity and wholeness. McAdams, within narrative psychology, sees confession as an act that separates a person's identity from one's behavior, grounding one's identity "in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."¹⁰ This separation of a problem from a person and their identity, McAdams understands, does not in any way remove the responsibility of the problem from the person or their responsibility to address it. Rather, it empowers the individual to address the problem as a problem and not see the person as the problem. Problems viewed this way, within the practice of Narrative Psychology, makes it possible for an individual to assume agency, to take an action that produces a desired effect within their story. As long as one sees the person as the problem, there is no hope of having any agency (the capacity to take an action that produces a desired effect) to resolve or address the problem other than to take actions that are self-destructive.

THE PRACTISE OF NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Embracing the idea that one is living out of a story means accepting that a personal story can be discovered, explored and developed. As we begin acknowledging that one is living a

¹⁰ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 111-112.

story-shaped life, there are questions that arise: Are we conscious of our story? Do we see our self with agency in that story? Do we understand that this agency plays out in particular roles, themes and trajectories within that story? Erik Erickson in *Childhood and Society* was the first to identify that what we habitually do is determine meaning and it is our habits that shape who we are. We have an inherent need to make sense of our experiences, to give them coherence.

Ordering the events of our life to make sense of them is arguably a central human need. As Laura King observes, “in the face of major life change, human beings are prone to spontaneously generate stories about what happened.”¹¹

Generating these stories is not easy; agency in storytelling is multilayered, because the storyteller is giving voice to the story while the main character, the agent or protagonist, of the story “has feelings, beliefs, desires, and identities expressed in interpretive [narrative] content.”¹² Marcela Cornejo helpfully suggests that we see our personal histories as one of offering identity; it is a part of who we are that must be dealt with and made sense of if we are to build a narrative understanding of who we are. Our assembling of our history introduces and attempts to give meaning to things that have occurred, the meaning and value we give these events are part of what shapes our understanding of ourselves, who we are, and what role we see ourselves playing.

Twelve-step programs like Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and Al Anon are programs that have assisted many in their reconstructing of their life story. One of the central aims of these programs is to assist and support individuals, enabling them to function within society as productive and caring members of a community. But to become aware of this point, participants of the fellowship, addicts, or the person whose life is strongly

¹¹ King, 58. See also James W. Pennebaker, *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say about Us* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011).

¹² Hoyt, 569.

determined by the actions of an addict must come to the place of surrender, realizing that they are powerless to effect change, that they need the help of a power outside of them, commonly referred to as a higher power. The philosophical fulcrum of these 12-step programs is that only an external higher power can provide the strength to free one from the contamination of the seductive and deceptive powers of one's addiction or compulsion. One point of contention that I have with most 12-step programs is they have no way of acknowledging that a person's story is or has been reconstructed. A 12-stepper's story must begin with a self-identification of being an addict. 'Hi I'm Norbert and I'm an addict.' There is no way of recognizing that a true and lasting transformation has occurred. As members of the 12-step fellowship are transformed by the strength of a higher power, they insist that the participants continue to identify themselves first and foremost by who they once were rather than what they are. Their addiction, compulsion, or victimization is no longer the identity they function out of, as it is no longer who they are. Many stop going to meetings at this point as they can no longer with any integrity introduce themselves as an addict. Something inside of them screams a denial, 'You are not an addict; you once were, but now you're not; you have been and are being redeemed; there has been a change of story; redemption is real and transformation has begun with a restoration of identity.' As one is transformed, they are not what they once were; they are changed. The biblical narrative takes it even further and says that we are made new. Isn't this what the Apostle Paul was saying in Ephesians 4:17-24?

And so I [Paul] insist—and God backs me up on this—that there be no going along with the crowd, the empty-headed, mindless crowd. They've refused for so long to deal with God that they've lost touch not only with God but with reality itself. They can't think straight anymore. Feeling no pain, they let themselves go in sexual obsession, addicted to every sort of perversion. But that's no life for you. You learned Christ! My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus. Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through

and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you. (The Message)

Where is the space to introduce this renewed, God-fashioned life? Should there not be room within the fellowship for; ‘Hi I’m Norbert, I was an addict but now I’m being made new’? With that, one is acknowledging the redemption that has occurred, while acknowledging the ongoing strengthening of the higher power’s transforming work.

This deciding to turn to a source outside of oneself for strength and help is acknowledging that a new story is desired where strength is required to change and begin living out of a new story. For many, this is one of the first conscious acts of agency, acknowledging that their past doesn’t have to be their future. This is the beginning of a new story; one is no longer powerless and alone. At this point of the story, it is the reaching outside of oneself to the yet unknown Higher Power that is important. This can and needs to remain open, so as to not erect any barriers. At this point it is perfectly safe to leave it up to the protagonist to decide who or whom can function as the higher power and the antagonist (the force of nature that must be reckoned with) in the story.¹³ I understand and appreciate the need to be vague in recognizing the higher power that can give strength, but where is the room for the ultimate expression of that strength, in the person being made new? We begin each day anew, creating and finding new opportunities daily for meaning and value. A life story discovered, surrendered and redeemed—a story with hope and meaning.

¹³ Remembering that it is God, the good Shepherd, who seeks and saves the lost.

CONTRIBUTION OF DAN MCADAMS

Less than thirty years ago, all the sciences, including psychology, considered all stories of an equal value to that of a charming fairy tale. Yes, stories are interesting, perhaps even enchanting, but stories were essentially the realm of children and child's play compared to the real work of a reasoned understanding of humanity and how one ascertains meaning, value, and purpose. Consider for a moment, do you think all stories are of equal value? Are novels simply the leisure activity of vacations? Or do they play an important part in your everyday life? What stories do you allow to shape your past, present, and future?

Dan McAdams, a leading psychologist in the field of narrative and identity, has developed a life story model of identity that proposes that our understanding of self is found in the elements of a story including the "setting, scenes, character, plot, and theme."¹⁴ This sets McAdams' work apart from the work of Erik Erikson, who understands one's life story as a developmental model of ego identity.

McAdams is not denying that one's identity is formed in adolescence and early adulthood, but argues that the narrative that shapes one's identity keeps evolving throughout the course of one's life. As we live, new events and experiences must be reconciled with our story. We choose to incorporate some of these events into our sense of self and narrative identity and others we shrug off, suggesting that has nothing to do with us or who we are. The life story model that McAdams presents stresses that one's identity is fluid, as one's narrative understanding of self is an ongoing work of assimilating events and experiences into our life's story. McAdams argues that "life stories develop and change across the life course, reflecting various on-time and off-

¹⁴ McAdams, "Psychology of Life Stories," 101.

time happenings and transitions . . . people may work on different facets or qualities of the story at different times in life.”¹⁵ I find this a very helpful way of thinking about identity formation as a way of becoming. Could this be part of what was occurring in the Exodus story when God redeemed his people from slavery? Calling them out to the wilderness to build a new temple, to reform their community and to renew their covenant identity as the people of God. Could this be the image John had in mind when he said; “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”(1 John 3:2) We are being transformed; called out of who we once were, to who we are now, a new creation, a child of God becoming more than we ever asked or imagined.

One’s narrative identity development has to do with where one is in one’s life and in culture. For, as we have already discussed, one’s cultural setting provides the psychosocial menu out of which we construct our narrative identity. Culture provides the raw material from which one constructs a working narrative identity. McAdams states that our “identity is not an individual achievement but a work of (and in) culture. In a sense, the person and the person’s social world coauthor identity. Identity is a psychosocial construction.”¹⁶ The work that we do on developing our narrative identity is not merely a personal narrative, as our narrative identity develops within a social and societal context that says something about who we understand ourselves to be. Our life stories are strongly shaped by our culture; typically what our culture values and finds meaningful, we find meaningful, unless we consciously choose to follow a different narrative that defines meaning differently and giving value by what it defines as meaningful. Our conception of the good life varies from those who live in different cultural

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶ McAdams, “Psychology of Life Stories,” 116.

contexts. What it means to live the good life is partly determined by our cultural context. Parts of our narrative identity are developed as we assume or adopt stories from our cultural context. Part of the task of our narrative identity is to come to terms with who we understand our selves to be and the culture that we live in. Never forgetting the influence of the prevailing cultural narratives power to shape our stories of redemption and transformation. Our understanding of our narrative expression of self cannot be developed outside of a particular social or cultural context (be they real or imagined) in which they are experienced. This is not a new concept: Moses in Deuteronomy 32 advises Israel to; “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.” Israel had walked out of their story and been subsumed by the cultural norms of their day. Moses is recalling their story, being completely honest about their past and the decisions that have affected them, saying that this does not have to continue. They no longer need to be who they had become; Moses was inviting them to live into their true but forgotten and abandoned identity. He tells them to remember the story of who they are, and to live out of that God-given narrative identity. Moses is advising the people of Israel to put into practice every single word of this story of God with us, concluding that, “Yes. This is no small matter for you; it's your life. In keeping this word you'll have a good and long life in this land that you're crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Genesis 32: 47, The Message)

These narrative identities provide the stories with which we choose to live by. We make “and remake them, we tell them and revise them not so much to arrive at an accurate record of the past as to create a coherent self that moves forward in life with energy and purpose.”¹⁷ McAdams sees human intentionality as being “at the heart of narrative, and therefore the

¹⁷ McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 98-99.

development of intentionality in humans is of prime importance in establishing the mental conditions necessary for storytelling and story comprehension.”¹⁸ For story and purpose are inseparable, as they are the two ways that people establish meaning. “There can be no story without intention. Further, there can be no intention without story.”¹⁹ As Bauer points out there is an “empirical connection between certain qualities of narrative identity on the one hand and well-being on the other, it becomes especially important to understand how adults narrate the most difficult experiences in their lives and integrate them into their evolving life stories over time.”²⁰ This is what the work of Dan McAdams seems to revolve around. What McAdams’ work does for me is open the door to change at any stage of life. The patterns are not set; old dogs can learn new tricks. Or, as the Apostle Paul puts it, “It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone (Ephesians 1:11, The Message).

CONTRIBUTION OF MICHAEL WHITE

Another psychologist leading in the field of narrative psychology is the Australian, Michael White, whose contribution to Narrative Psychology is clinically focused. For White, Jerome Bruner’s work *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* was a turning point in his narrative practice, as Bruner understood that “great storytelling . . . is about compelling plights that . . . must be set forth with sufficient subjectivity to allow them to be rewritten by the reader,

¹⁸ McAdams, “Psychology of Life Stories,” 103.

¹⁹ King, 58.

²⁰ Bauer, 93.

rewritten so as to allow play for the reader's imagination."²¹ Duhigg highlights this same point when he suggests that AA "succeeds because it helps alcoholics use the same cue, and get the same reward, but it shifts the routines. Researchers say that AA works because the program forces people to identify the cues and rewards that encourage their alcoholic habits, and then helps them find new behaviors."²² This reinforces White's observation that sometimes one's life story needs a rewrite and that this rewrite is possible given a new narrative context.

In Narrative Psychology therapy, White views the therapist as one who enables another to re-author one's life. One does this by inviting clients to continue telling stories, and as the stories continue to develop, often helping clients work through particularly "neglected but potentially significant events and experiences that are 'out of phase' with their dominant storylines."²³ It is as these out of phase or subordinate stories are redeveloped that clients find ground on which "to proceed to address their predicaments and problems in ways that are in harmony with the precious themes of their lives."²⁴

What I find helpful for my work on identity development and the use of narrative is that White stresses that the matter of metaphor selection is highly significant. "All metaphors that are taken up in the development of externalizing conversations are borrowed from particular

²¹ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 35. Emphasis mine.

²² Duhigg, Kindle 1273. For more see John F. Kelly and Mark G. Meyers, "Adolescents participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous: Review, Implications, and Future Directions," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 39, no 3, (September 2007), 259-69. John Francis Kelly, Molly Magill and Robert Stout Lauren, "How do Peoples Recover from Alcoholic Dependence: A Systematic Review of the Research on the Mechanisms of Behavior Change in Alcoholics Anonymous," *Addiction Research and Theory* 17, no. 3 (2009): 236-59.

²³ White, 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

discourses that invoke specific understandings of life and identity.”²⁵ Choosing what metaphors to use is based on what is most viable in the particular situation given all ethical considerations.

One of the pitfalls of Narrative Psychology that White warns against is the tendency towards totalizing problems in therapy by clients and therapists. Totalizing typically occurs as one becomes totally negative in defining a problem: Setting up a false dichotomy, not living in the paradoxical state of both/and. As we use metaphors, we must be on guard against metaphors that totalize situations or events, as then they function as a suppressant of other metaphors that may be emerging. Part of being semiotically engaged demands that we be able to maintain the tension that keeps agency within the protagonist. I find the guiding metaphor of Crystal Downing’s book *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* helpful in understanding how one lives with this tension. Downing concludes that, “even though the Holy Spirit joins us on the edge of the coin as we balance between the Immutable Word and the mutable words, the surface upon which we roll the coin changes with the time.”²⁶ But I’m getting ahead of myself.

White argues that Narrative Psychology can help arouse the curiosity concerning what is possible by playfully engaging the imagination. Just as good stories do not explain everything or get overly detailed, and invite the reader into participating in the story by filling the details of the story, Narrative Psychology therapy helps clients bring together events and experiences from the past, mapping the narrative, assisting the client in recognizing a plot and theme in one’s narrative, enabling one to see oneself apart from the problems, and enabling one to see the possibility of redemption and transformation.

²⁵ White, 31.

²⁶ Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Academic, 2012), Kindle loc. 3000.

CONCLUSION

Narrative Psychology suggests that our narrative identity is not work done in isolation or in the imagination, but is a collaborative effort of our culture as well as sharing the narrative within a particular community of listeners. While an identity may not even be contained within a single overarching narrative, it is the narratives that are relied upon to give meaning and purpose within the particular social constructs inhabited, and sometimes we rely on more than a single story to make sense of the varied contexts we live in. The stories and identity of self are not always congruent as if our narrative is separate from our identity; they are distinguishable. The stories we craft give an account of what we perceive has occurred; they provide the context and setting. Each teller of an event has a unique understanding of what occurred, as they make their own connections regarding what was trivial, what was important, why this matters, and how it fits. Every storyteller and story-catcher interprets events according to their perceptions of significance that is uniquely theirs. It is these variables within a story that create and give voice to our uniquely crafted narrative identity. As we proceed through life striving for a sense of who we are with a continuity of meaning and purpose, we begin to realize that we do this differently at various times for potentially different reasons: Ultimately, we are hoping to find the good life.

This look at Narrative Psychology's contribution to how narrative shapes identity highlights how the sociocultural context affects an understanding of self. It explored causes and possible courses of restoration for addictions and suicide in a context of broken dreams and economic despair. Despair, addiction, and suicide are not the only ways of escaping desperate conditions. Frankl observes that it is only when there is no narrative context that offers meaning or purpose that these life-destroying alternatives appear as viable solutions. Doehring in *The*

Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach suggests that there are three main issues that people deal with: loss, violence and compulsion. How these issues are processed and faced is determined by one's understanding of self and the story they see themselves participating in. The cycle of despair and destruction continues as long as the problems are understood as internal problems within the person. This is not a denial of the doctrine of original sin; sin is real and everyone is born into sin, bearing the marks of a sin-stained life. People are not made for sin but are marked by sin. As the image of God we are created; this is the image that Christ loves, forgives, redeems, and transforms; man is created in the image God, sin dirties the original image. When the person is the problem, the problem is solved by the elimination of the person. Conversely, if the problem is exclusively outside of the person, it can be avoided as a non-issue, having nothing to do with the person, requiring no personal action. To realize that one has agency means that they realize that their choices matter and that the past does not determine or rule the future. Once we acknowledge that we have agency, we can decide what defines who we are. With this agency comes the realization that we are a protagonist, have separated the person from the problem, and we are able to address the problem without eliminating the person.

In addressing these problems, we may even realize that we are encountering an antagonist, 'a higher power,' that is not against us but can empower us to change. The problems are not what define who we are; the problem is what defines our choices, as we are the protagonists. As we begin to see our self as a protagonist, with intrinsic value and worth, we begin drawing breaths of hope. God's revealed narrative offers us a provenance that establishes our value and intrinsic worth; our worth is not tied to our economic valuation, social status, or political affiliation. In the Scriptures, we are pulled into a story where we are valued and loved because we are created in the image of God. We are sinners, welcomed to become his children; forgiven, invited and

encouraged to call God, the highest power, our Father. Many have lost their place in this story or do not see that this is their story. Pope Francis recently said it well when he was asked, who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio? “I do not know what might be the most fitting description . . . I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre . . . the best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.”²⁷

Placing our understanding of narrative identity within a theological metaphor, Origen’s metaphor of provenance is helpful. Origen explains that *Logos* is not only the original painting. *Logos* is the artist painting and the human soul is like a reproduction. Because God is the painter, the image cannot be destroyed; it can only be buried or obscured. Our decisions and activities brush many different colors on the image, painting over the image with every imaginable brush stroke of sin. But as one turns towards God, one allows God [the highest power] to become the great restorer, removing all color, dirt and soot that have distorted the image made.

Understanding that problems and challenges are outside of our self is often difficult. Remembering that the original beauty is still present may be even more difficult to imagine. We are image bearers of God and it is this identity that makes the entire endeavor of restoration possible. We bear the image of the truth, beauty, and goodness of a God who is present, in the here and now. We may not see or know him, we may not even understand, appreciate, or realize it, but he is the God who is with us. It is God with us that rips the veil of despair and death; resurrection has happened, transformation is happening, all things are being made new (Romans 6, 7:6, 1 Peter 1:18).

²⁷ “A Big Heart Open to God,” Interview by Antonio Spadaro of Pope Francis in August 2013 in Rome. <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> (accessed September 19, 2013).

In researching Narrative Psychology, I can see that as we begin to understand our story and identity within the context of *Logos*, we can have hope for things not yet seen and possibly previously unimagined (Hebrews 11:1-13). For when our *imago dei* is restored, there comes a point when the once-soiled painting no longer sees or refers to itself out of its old, soiled identity. There comes a point when one no longer sees themselves as an addict but as redeemed and restored children of God. I have and am witnessing this. Hurting people are being redeemed and restored and some of them no longer can identify themselves as an addict, since that is no longer a part of their story, it is who they were (1 Cor. 6:11). By the grace of God, the socio-cultural context has enabled followers of Jesus to write ‘addict’ completely out of their narrative identity. Hopefully, this brief look at Narrative Psychology will help you as it has helped me, not only to understand this, but also to live out of this grace-redeemed story of God with us and walk with friends who are in various phases of *Logos* restoration. “Every one of us is unworthy to stand and confess to being a disciple. Every one of us loves and lives this reality of brokenness. But the good news is this: God uses broken things.”²⁸

NEUROSCIENCE

Earlier, we looked at Jenny, who dropped out of college, returned to her tribal village, and a year later she was pregnant and infected with HIV. While Jenny’s story is fictional, many in northern Saskatchewan would see it as their story or have points of connection with this story. Charles Darwin, Ayn Rand, Frederick Nietzsche, and others see little cause for concern since they promote that it has always been about the survival of the fittest, and the fittest determining

²⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Strong in the Broken Places: a Theological Reverie on the ministry of George Everett Ross* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1995), 9-10.

the story. Ayn Rand in *For the New Intellectual* gives voice to this attitude in Galt's speech, "To help a man who has no virtues, to help him on the ground of his own suffering as such, to accept his faults, his need, as a claim, is to accept the mortgage of a zero on your values."²⁹ Others like Brian Boyd see our stories as forms "of cognitive play . . . a playground for the mind."³⁰ What role does our mind or brain play when we think of stories and identity?

Do we dare to bring a hard science such as neuroscience into the conversation of narrative identity formation? Isn't the realm of story one of the last sacred preserves of our imagination, untouched by the Enlightenment? Should we not protect stories like we try and protect the wilderness and endangered species? Should story not be the one place science does not penetrate, with science fiction given a necessary literary exemption, of course? Are we willing to allow the realm of the story to be conquered by science, reducing the ancient mysteries to an electrochemical function? There are even those who say that the challenge of neuroscience in trying to understand how the brain works is like trying to understand how a bird flies by looking at a feather. Not to mention our current cultural tendency to allow neurological explanations to "eclipse historical, political, economic, literary and journalistic interpretations of experience."³¹ Somewhere along the way, we have forgotten that life and its story are about the interplay between form and history.

Storytelling involves assessing the symptoms, diagnosing the problem, and then shaping healing. Almost every good story, throughout the ages, has followed this three-act structural

²⁹ Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Random House, 1961), 180.

³⁰ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt, 2012), 43-44.

³¹ Alissa Quart, "Neuroscience under Attack," *New York Times*, November 23, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/opinion/sunday/neuroscience-under-attack.html> (accessed November 27, 2012).

pattern where the story is about a protagonist's journey to secure, usually at some cost, what they desire. Story = Character + Predicament + Transubstantiation.³² That there is a three-act pattern should not disturb, surprise, or cause concern, as “there is now substantial evidence from cognitive neuroscience that humans readily find patterns and impart agency to them.”³³ The conclusion seems to be that we as humans are pattern seeking by nature. Michael Shermer identifies this pattern making, calling it “agenticity: the tendency to infuse patterns with meaning, intention, and agency.”³⁴ Michael Gazzaniga in his research has “identified specialized circuitry in the left hemisphere that is responsible for making sense of the torrent of information that the brain is always receiving from the environment. The job of this set of neural networks is to detect order and meaning in that flow, and to organize it into a coherent account of a person's experience – into a story.”³⁵

Bruce Hood documents “the growing body of data that demonstrates our tendency not only to infuse patterns with intention and agency, but also to believe that objects, animals, and people contain an essence – something that is at the core of their being that makes them what they are – and that this essence may be transmitted from objects to people, and from people to people.” Hood goes on to say that “many highly educated and intelligent individuals experience a powerful sense that there are patterns, forces, energies, and entities operating in the world . . . More importantly, such evidence is not substantiated by a body of reliable evidence, which is

³² Bobette Buster, (lecture series, *Epiphany: How Understanding Story Creates Change*, Tribeca Cinemas, New York City, October 4-5, 2012).

³³ Michael Shermer, *The Believing Brain: From Spiritual Faiths to Political Convictions - How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths* (London: Robinson, 2012), 88.

³⁴ Shermer, 87.

³⁵ Gottschall, 96.

why they are *super*-natural and unscientific. The inclination or sense that they may be real is our supersense.”³⁶

This also helps us understand the conclusions David Aaronovitch reaches about conspiratorial thinking when he states that our obsession with conspiracy theories “is a reflex of the storytelling mind’s compulsive need for meaningful experience.”³⁷ Conspiracy theories offer ultimate answers to a great mystery of the human condition: why are things so bad in the world? “They provide nothing less than a solution to the problem of evil . . . [bad things] happen because bad men live to stalk our happiness. And you can fight, and possibly even defeat, bad men. If you can read the hidden story.”³⁸

We prefer to receive and share knowledge with stories because we by nature are story-catchers and storytellers. Stories assist us in making sense of the world and what we are experiencing and observing. We like our stories to have distinct structures, with clear beginnings and ends, and we usually like things to happen for particular reasons that progress in sequence. We are just beginning to understand what priests and shamans have known for quite a long time, as message worked into a story burrows into our minds.

Neuroscience is concluding that humans are distinct. We are not like the rest the animals that are social creatures. As humans, we not only create a social order – we have the capacity for this social order to take on an institutional reality. This is a uniquely human behavior. John Seale explains that this institutional reality develops to form an organization that is concerned with

³⁶ Shermer, 88, referring to Bruce M. Hood, *Supersense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

³⁷ Gottschall, 116, referring to David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).

³⁸ Ibid. Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (*Comparative studies in Religion and Society*) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) has done some interesting work on conspiracy theories and where they originate.

obligations and permission. It is this system of obligation and permission that give us an essential component with which to organize our society, giving us the “capacity to create and act on desire independent of reasons for action.”³⁹

Neurological research is coming to the conclusion that stories not only stimulate our brains; stories have the ability to change our behavior. In reviewing brain scans, typically done using fMRIs,⁴⁰ neuroscientists have discovered that something unexpected happens when we read an evocative metaphor, a detailed description, or an emotional exchange between characters.

A team of researchers from Emory University reported . . . that when subjects in their laboratory read a metaphor involving texture, the sensory cortex, responsible for perceiving texture through touch, became active. Metaphors like ‘The singer had a velvet voice’ and ‘he had leathery hands’ roused the sensory cortex, while phrases matched for meaning, like ‘the singer had a pleasing voice’ and ‘he had strong hands,’ did not.⁴¹

These findings help demonstrate that our neural networks store information as “a pattern of activation across networks of neurons . . . In the neural networks that process language and meaning, the pattern representing the word you believe you encountered was triggered as part of the collateral activity of all the other words that were processed and encoded.”⁴² Murphy Paul, in her New York Times article “Your Brain on Fiction,” states that our brains hardly differentiate “between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated.”

³⁹ John R. Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language, and Political Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 109.

⁴⁰ fMRI stands for Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging. It is a functional neuroimaging procedure using MRI technology to detect blood flow changes within the brain to ascertain brain activity. Connecting cerebral blood flow with neuronal activity does this; therefore, as blood flow to a region increases, brain activity increases. This has become the preferred and dominant method of neurological research since the early 1990s, as it is the least invasive for observing brain function.

⁴¹ Searle, 109.

⁴² Bruce M Hood, *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80. Referring to H. L. Roediger III and K. B. McDermott, “Tricks of Memory,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9 (2000): 123-127.

This function relies on our memory of previous experiences; it is our memory that ceaselessly places us:

Between a thoroughly lived past and an anticipated future, perpetually buffeted between the spent yesterdays and the tomorrows that are nothing but possibilities. The future pulls us forward, from a distant vanishing point, and gives us the will to continue the voyage in the present. This may be what T. S. Elliot meant when he wrote: ‘Time past and time future / what might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present.’⁴³

Or, as Robert Beelah puts it, “no past, no future: it’s that simple. One might also say, no present either.”⁴⁴

We need our memories of our past and anticipated futures to live. Abuse and trauma research suggests that there are forms of trauma that can be stored in the primitive portions of our brains, tattooing the trauma into our memory. How do we figure out what to remember of the past when there is no possible way anyone could remember everything about their past and yet there are some things we cannot seem to forget. How does our memory work? Munsterberg’s theory of memory proposes that while, “none of us can retain in memory the vast quantity of details we are confronted with at any moment in our lives and that our memory mistakes have a common origin: They are all artifacts of the techniques our minds employ to fill the inevitable gaps.”⁴⁵ Leonard Mlodinow believes that we remember and “perceive by engagement, rather than by passive receptivity, . . . [that is] the reason why we often recall contexts rather than just isolated things.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 297.

⁴⁴ Robert Neelly Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), Kindle 35.

⁴⁵ Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 61.

⁴⁶ Damasio, 133.

No one believes that they can remember everything; forgetting is commonly accepted and it seems to be expected that one forgets as they age, but to get to the point where we realize that what we remember is a fabrication of our story-making brain desiring order is something else. Once we begin to wrestle with this, it begins to make us question everything that we call to mind or think we remember. This means that we can remember things and events in living color that never, ever happened. This realization has the ability to completely destabilize any notions of trust in what we think we remember, removing the confidence we typically place on our memory.

Perhaps Hood is right in saying that memories are “stories we retrieve from the compost heap that is our long term memory; we construct these stories to make sense of the events we have experienced.”⁴⁷ We tell ourselves stories, as our mind seems to be adverse to coincidences, uncertainty, and randomness. Our minds are habituated to finding meaning. When we cannot find meaning or identify meaningful patterns, we struggle to adapt and find meaning. We simply cannot live with disorder, even if we think we can. When things or events occur that do not make sense or fit our established patterns, we do our best to fit them into patterns. Then, when no pattern works, we are confronted with the need to create a new way of ordering that attempt to make sense of our reality or experience, whether this re-ordering is true or not. As humans we need some way of accepting the memories of our past or finding a way to live with and through them.

James Wallis writes that, “our brains have a natural affinity not only for enjoying narratives, but learning from them, but also for creating them. In the same way that your mind sees an abstract pattern and resolves it into a face, your imagination sees a pattern of events and

⁴⁷ Hood, 221. W. L. Randall is credited with the metaphor for one’s memory as “a compost heap in a constant state of reorganization.” W. L. Randall, “From Compost to Computer: Rethinking our Metaphors for Memory,” *Theory Psychology* 17 (2007): 611-633.

resolves it into a story.”⁴⁸ Bellah concurs with this when he says that he was learning more about himself and the world that he lives in and these stories were shaping his understanding. “After all, that’s what stories do.”⁴⁹

There is more to stories shaping our understanding than what appears on the *fMRI*. Since the beginning of psychology, von Helmholtz, Freud, and others saw that there were processes that we were not conscious of that determine our decisions and actions. What is now being realized “is the extent to which these processes are there to protect the self illusion—the narrative we create that we are the ones making the decisions.”⁵⁰ To be able to look at the whole of the human experience and begin to understand it we must address and engage both the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. Our unconscious mind “influences our conscious experience of the world in the most fundamental of ways: how we view ourselves and others, the meaning we attach to everyday events of our lives, [and] our ability to make quick judgment calls and decisions.”⁵¹ We have to address the idea of free will and realize that while the “experience of free will is very compelling, and even those of us who think it is an illusion, find that we cannot in practice act on the presupposition that it is an illusion.”⁵²

As we seek to understand the formation of the conscious and unconscious mind, we must acknowledge that when compared to all the other creatures, human adolescence and childhood takes a disproportionate amount of our life. Antonio Damasio suggests that the reason for “the inordinate amount of time is because it takes a long, long time to educate the non-conscious

⁴⁸ Gottschall, 104.

⁴⁹ Bellah, Kindle 909.

⁵⁰ Hood, 156.

⁵¹ Mlodinow, 5.

⁵² Seale, 43.

processes of our brain and to create, within that non-conscious brain space, a form of control that can, more or less faithfully, operate according to the conscious intentions and goals.”⁵³ Stories shape our unconscious and conscious mind and “help us practice key skills of human social life. They also provide a basis to run fictional simulations in our head and hearts. See a movie, read a story, participate in an action; in all of these events we activate bodily representations of what it feels like.”⁵⁴ Our brains take our bodies through the actions required, imagined or real.

Lev Kuleshov in his film experimenting with un-narrated images demonstrates how unwilling we are to be without a story. The ‘Kuleshov’ effect shows how we interpret images and put a story to them to make sense of what we see. Gottschall mentions a more recent study where a group was asked to choose a pair of socks out of seven pairs of identically priced socks. As people explained their choices they referred to texture, color, and quality, even though the seven pairs were identical. The real pattern that no participant was able to identify was that they tended to choose from the right side of the display. Everyone created a story to explain their choice but “the stories were confabulations – lies honestly told.”⁵⁵

Add to that our natural inclination to order and create stories we come up with reasons for why we did what we did, or choose what we choose. As a consequence of this, Kathryn Schultz writes in *Being Wrong* that, “to know what we don’t know, we can’t just passively wait around to see if our mind comes up empty. Instead we need to actively identify and reject all the incorrect and ill-grounded hypotheses our inner writer is madly generating.”⁵⁶ She states that the

⁵³ Damasio, 271.

⁵⁴ Gottschall, 57-63.

⁵⁵ Gottschall, 106-110.

⁵⁶ Kathryn Schultz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 82.

real problem with being wrong is that it feels exactly like being right. Our natural default is to rely on our stories that create order, whether they are true or not.

Not being able to differentiate between a coherent and an incoherent story or having an inadequate story is what often leads to depression, according to Michele Crossley's research. Our personal identity resides in the story we tell our self and so does our social identity. As Robert Bellah states, "Families, nations, [and] religions know who they are by the stories they tell."⁵⁷

As Damasio states:

There is indeed a self, but it is a process, not a thing, and the process is present at all times when we are presumed to be conscious. We can consider the self-process from two vantage points. One is the vantage point of an observer appreciating a dynamic object – the dynamic object constituted by certain workings of minds, certain traits of behavior and a certain history of life. The other vantage point is that of the self as a knower, the process that gives a focus to our experiences and eventually lets us reflect on those experiences.⁵⁸

We return to Jenny and her story. Unfortunately, Jenny's story has failed her and her peers have enforced her failure – welcoming her into their story of despair. It is the only story presented that enables her to order her experience. She, like all of us, instinctively reaches for a meaningful story to help her understand and interpret the world, even if those stories are of hopelessness and despair. Jenny has lost or forgotten that stories worth believing in and adopting require what is true, good, and beautiful and that the best stories to believe in and adopt hold all three of these values in dynamic tension, offering hope. It is true, as Hood says, that, "who we are is a story of our self—a constructed narrative that our brain creates."⁵⁹ The stories we assent to order and create our story and these are the stories that draw us in to understanding who we

⁵⁷ Bellah, 771.

⁵⁸ Damasio, 34. Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, and Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, are two works that address the self and the other, wrestling with where they meet.

⁵⁹ Hood, xiii.

are. When the story draws us in, all of our rational, logical defenses are dropped. We are moved by our emotions, leaving us vulnerable and defenseless against the influence of the story. Once our beliefs are embraced, our brain seeks evidence that will confirm our beliefs. This then gives an emotional boost that encourages our confidence in our beliefs, accelerating the process of reinforcement, “round and round the process goes in a positive feedback loop of belief confirmation.”⁶⁰ Jenny’s story of an anticipated future has been replaced with a story of despair and hopelessness.

In order to effect any change towards hope, Damasio suggests that Jenny needs to become aware of the deliberate and conscious decisions she has made in facing her failure. It is only as she does this that she will be able to discover her unconscious decisions that determine her conscious attitudes and actions. “One way to transpose the hurdle would be the intense conscious rehearsal of the procedures and actions we wish to see non consciously realized, a process of repeated practice that results in mastering a performing skill, a consciously composed psychological action program gone underground.”⁶¹

If we have learned anything from interpersonal or social neurobiology, it is “that the brain is constantly rewiring itself based on daily life. In the end, what we pay the most attention to is what defines us. How you choose to spend the irreplaceable hours of your life literally transforms you.”⁶² Michael Shermer goes on to explain that:

We form our beliefs for a variety of subjective, personal, emotional and psychological reasons in the context of environments created by family, colleagues, culture and society at large; after forming our beliefs we then defend, justify, and rationalize them with a host of intellectual reasons, cogent arguments, and rational explanations. Beliefs come

⁶⁰ Shermer, 5.

⁶¹ Damasio, 281.

⁶² Dianne Ackerman, “The Brain on Love,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2012. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/the-brain-on-love/> (accessed October 19, 2012).

first, explanation for beliefs follow. I call this process belief dependent realism, where our perceptions about reality are dependent on the beliefs that we hold about it. Reality exists independent of human minds, but our understanding of it depends upon the beliefs we hold at any given time.⁶³

It is true, neuroscience has observed, that it is our brains that ‘make us do it’ but this in no way excuses our personal responsibility for our actions. Jenny adapts to her new situation as she copies or mimics, this most powerful of skills that we are born with.⁶⁴ Not only do we have a natural inclination to mimic, we have smoother interactions with and like strangers who mimic our mannerisms. As Jenny finds acceptance, mimicking behavior, her peers accept her, the more she becomes accepted by her peers, the more she mimics the behavior that made her acceptable in this group to begin with and the spiral of descent into despair begins.

Jenny’s understanding of her current status changes how she remembers her story just as children’s memories are “aided by parents reminiscing with their children.”⁶⁵ Jenny becomes a different person as her story changes and as she spends time with her new acquaintances. Cooley suggests this most strongly when he “argued that no real identity exists separately from the one created by others. We are a product of those around us – or at least what we believe they expect of us.”⁶⁶ “The memories we recall to define our self story are defined by the groups to which we belong.”⁶⁷ After analyzing 86 fMRI studies, Raymon Mar indicates that

A substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interactions with other individuals – in particular, interactions in which we’re trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others . . . Narrative offers a unique

⁶³ Shermer, 5.

⁶⁴ Hood, 61, referring to A. N. Meltzoff, P. K. King, J. Movellon, and T. J. Sejnowski, Foundations for a New Science of Learning,” *Science*, 325 (2009), 284-288.

⁶⁵ Hood, 241.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 72, referring to C. H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner, 1902).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 241.

opportunity to engage this capacity, as we identify with characters' longing and frustrations, guess at their hidden motives and track their encounters with friends and enemies, neighbors and lovers.⁶⁸

This highlights that the stories Jenny is allowing to shape her identity is altering who she understands herself to be, as well as restructuring her memories of successes and failures.

Neuroscientists, in the last few years, have come to realize that stories engage and activate more parts of the brain than initially expected, offering a plausible explanation as to “why the experience of reading can feel so alive. Words like ‘lavender,’ ‘cinnamon’ and ‘soap,’ for example, elicit a response not only from the language-processing areas of our brain, but also those devoted to dealing with smells.”⁶⁹ Narrative has the ability and capacity to refashion our identity as it reaches into our body. Story with all of its power to transform contains a womb, full of conceptual possibilities.

The present becomes bearable as our story begins to fashion a hope that the power to change is accessible. “A sense of purpose doesn’t come from thinking about it. It comes from taking action that moves you toward the future. The moment you do this, you activate a force more powerful than the desire to avoid pain.”⁷⁰

Shermer ends his book with the statement, “in the end I want to believe. I also want to know. The truth is out there, and although it may be difficult to find, science is the best tool we

⁶⁸ Annie Murphy Paul, “Your Brain on Fiction,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-onfiction.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed October 19, 2012).

⁶⁹ Paul, “Your Brain in Fiction.”

⁷⁰ Phil Stutz and Barry Michels, *The Tools: Transform your Problems into Courage, Confidence, and Creativity* (New York: Random House), 2012, 33.

have for uncovering it.”⁷¹ I find his conclusion odd and inconsistent, as neuroscience seems to be pointing towards story as being the way to truth.

Brian Boyd may be more right than many care to admit, that we are living “in a world awash with junk story” and this leading to “something like a ‘mental diabetes epidemic.’”⁷² Perhaps by asking neuroscience for definitive explanations we are asking for an answer that it is not able to provide. Growing up, we are told, ‘it is only a story.’ Everything in us tries to believe this; all the efforts of science and education try to reinforce it. But as adults we must return to our childhood way of knowing, where we see “that the story has its own truth that such disclaimers don’t reach.”⁷³ The question really is what narrative will you choose to address the biggest stuff in human life? We need to see patterns in our past to make paths for our memories to shape our present and future. Like Jenny, we all need our social influences to verify and validate our story.

In northern Saskatchewan there is an epidemic of ‘junk stories.’ Jenny provides a prototypical example of what it is like to live with a loss of meaning and purpose where the infection of ‘mental diabetes’ is rampant. Addictions and unhealthy lifestyle choices are symptomatic of this loss of story. For Jenny, her failed attempt was seen as the end, when that is not what it should have been. What is needed is a story with room for failure, like the story that enabled Thomas Edison to see failure as a thousand ways that would not work. Edison said once that, “I haven’t failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.”

⁷¹ Shermer, 344.

⁷² Gottschall, 198.

⁷³ Bellah, 752.

“A sense of purpose doesn’t come from thinking about it. It comes from taking action that moves you toward the future. The moment you do this, you activate a force more powerful than the desire to avoid pain.”⁷⁴ Neuroscience has led us to the altar of story. Story is how we order and understand our experiences and give them meaning.

This look at neuroscience’s conclusions has strengthened my understanding of the role and purpose of story in identity formation – discipleship. It has encouraged me to keep telling the story of God’s revelation found in the Bible. Even Gottschall agrees that the Bible is “a collection of intense narratives about the biggest stuff in human life.”⁷⁵ Why is it that we in the church have missed this?

This research has renewed my interest in telling the story in a manner that allows people to not only see the change, but to live into the change, as participation changes our identity. It has also led me to understand that knowing the story and seeing how it works is not enough. We need to be able to read our self into the story. To do this we need to be able to recognize the signs and symbols of the living, active God, which is the role of theo-semiotics. I am beginning to see that our narrative identity formation is a core discipleship practice that is ongoing. Seeing also that narrative identity formation offers a way of hope in places of despair and hopelessness, offering a gift to people, enabling and equipping to choose a new story to live out of. This narrative identity formation in terms of discipleship may be understood as a ‘narraphoric’ way of following God. A narrative understanding of Christian identity formation prepares one to face the varied challenges of life, equipping one to face disillusionment and the reality of evil, offering hope in the most forlorn situations.

⁷⁴ Stutz and Michels, 33.

⁷⁵ Gottschall, 117.

Chapter 3

One cannot make a new heaven and a new earth with facts.

(Henry Miller)

After it happened, I knew what I should have done, but didn't do. Let's be honest, I couldn't do it anyways. I was a failure. Riddled with guilt and shame, I withdrew. What did it matter anyway? I knew the right answers; I could talk a stranger through it, yet nothing changed. Life was passing me by as I sat on the bleachers of life. I was a spectator. I could tell you what they were up to; one liked sailing and the other had a passion for Africa. Just don't ask me what I was doing; it didn't seem significant or important, especially since I knew what others were doing to change the world and bring healing and hope to this broken world

Then one day, it was as if I was called from the bleachers to play. It wasn't that there wasn't anyone else. He picked me, drawing me in for something that he had uniquely prepared me for. Not despite, or because, of my failures, but because he loved me, seeing that my brokenness was where he could build strength. My history mattered to Him; He gave me glasses to see my story with.

I'm reminded of the tale from India that Mary Dressein tells of a water-bearer who carried two large pots on a yoke across his shoulders up the hill from the river to his master's house. One pot was cracked and leaking, the other always delivered a full pot of water from the river. After years of arriving half-empty, the cracked pot apologized. "I'm sorry that I couldn't accomplish what the perfect pot did." The water-bearer replied, "What do you have to apologize for?" "All this time, I delivered half my load of water. I make more work for you because of my flaw." The water-bearer smiled and said. "Take note of all the lovely flowers growing on the side

of the path where I carried you. The flowers grew so lovely because of the water you leaked. There are no flowers on the perfect pot's side.”

WHY STORY

North Americans currently live in a culture of cynicism where one is taught to disbelieve what one hears and to be skeptical of what one sees. We trust what our friends tell us and what we tell our self. In making this observation, Seth Godin comes to the conclusion that it is the role of a leader to “give people stories they can tell themselves.”¹ Everyone needs stories, for it is through stories that we get to know who we are and how we fit in. Facts without a narrative are irrelevant bits of ones and zeros. As we place the things we see, hear, and observe into a narrative construct (a story) we begin to grasp at meaning and purpose, as bits and bytes are connected, written into a code and seen in a relational context.

Our identity depends on stories, and it is through stories that we understand who we are. It is from stories that we learn and interpret the meaning making of self and others. But how does this story catching, crafting, and telling happen? Brian Boyd observes that what we as humans do is take the massive amounts of information we receive, quickly and unconsciously running it through a pattern recognition sieve, incorporating the information as best we can with the sieves we have and making new pattern sieves as required to sort the information we receive. Through this sorting by pattern recognition we see shapes and share gathered facts in a manner that reflects the patterns of sense making we know, as there is a continual intake of bits and bytes.

¹ Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us* (New York: Portfolio, 2008), 138. See also Timothy Martin, “Illuminating the Landscape of Religious Narrative: Morality, Dramatization, and Verticality,” *Religious Education* 104, no. 4 (July/August 2009), 393 (accessed November 11, 2011).

This pattern-seeking nature of humans enables us to quickly assimilate facts, as it is this pursuit of pattern making that enable us to “yield the richest inferences to our minds.”² Stories give a context and add meaning to our ideas, observations and experiences.

The ability to tell stories is central to problem solving, according to the work of Tim Brown and Barry Kätz. Stephen Denning champions the notion that it is through stories that the shared values of a community are transmitted and it is through stories that common meanings are established. Denning writes about how stories enable “communities to see the world differently, to experience the internal ‘ah-ha’ that revitalizes and reframes how they connect with each other and the world.”³ As Kate Marek notes, one is informed, persuaded, enlightened, connected and moved through stories.

Brian Boyd introduces *On the Origin of Stories* with an understanding that one needs stories to provide a context for decision-making. According to Boyd, it is stories that provide “clues to the present, hints from the past, examples or analogies for reasoning about the future.”⁴ Stories help one to remember the past, so that one can re-member the present, and a future. This remembering requires us to use our imagination, for it is with our imagination that the stage is set for the story to unfold, as Diane Butler Bass says, empowering “narrative, tradition and practice [to] perform their dance.”⁵ The imaginative use of stories helps us to live into a freedom that our current reality may not reflect. Stories provide a context that allows us to explore possibilities of

² Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 14.

³ Stephen Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 156.

⁴ Boyd, 167.

⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 98. Two important books on the theological significance of the imagination are Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), and David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989).

how our current situation can be understood, redeemed, and transformed. As we learn to imagine possibilities, with ease and a sense of play, it can make the difference between despair or hope and fear or courage. Good stories engage us honestly with a sense of uncritical playfulness that lends a sense of courage and hope for the future.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, everyone lives within a story, the question is, are we conscious of it? It is common to be unaware of the story they are living in and even when there is an awareness of having a story, by inattention, distraction or unintentionally one can find that they have wandered out of their story. Forgetting our history can also lead to losing a sense of personal identity and membership in a community. We need to cling to narratives because they assist in remembering who we are. It is in the stories and traditions we remember and practice that our understanding of personal and community identity is embodied. Stroup offers words of caution for when we find that we are “no longer part of a community that is struggling to appropriate its stories and traditions we run the risk of losing that memory that binds us to others, both in the present and previous generations.”⁶ It is not uncommon to struggle with their history; everyone has regrets concerning their behavior or what they have witnessed. When you lose the understanding that you are part of a larger story, you lose the ability to remember your history. Stroup suggests that North America’s fascination with story “suggests a crisis of memory in the social fabric;”⁷ a crisis that one desires release and relief from.

The loss of story in culture is indicated by a personal and corporate failure of imagination. Wendell Berry, in *Imagination in Place*, says that: “Though you may get a new life, you can’t get a new past. You don’t get to leave your story. If you leave your story, then how you left your

⁶ Stroup, 431.

⁷ Ibid.

story is your story, and you better not forget it.”⁸ Berry suggests that you cannot or should not try to escape or deny your past; if you do, your story becomes a story of denial and escapism. Living out of a story that does not deny one’s past requires an imagination, for without an imagination one cannot live creatively. For Stroup, it is in the realm of the biblical narrative that one’s imagination is stirred, inviting the possibility of new paradigms of redemption and transformation. Our stories must give meaning and purpose to our experiences, these stories must address all areas of experience and observation: body, soul, mind, and spirit. Good stories do not avoid one’s past or gloss over present realities; they factor in all of our life. Bruce points out that good stories enter the diversity and complexity of life, respecting the diversity and differences while searching for meaning in the complexity by remaining open to patterns as they present themselves.

This desire for redemption or reinvention is not uncommon; according to Ann Rice and F. Scott Fitzgerald, they are the only two themes in all of literature. It is this desire for redemption and reinvention, or transformation, which should define the mission of the Church. Robert Jensen sees the core task of the church to be one of telling “the biblical narrative to the world in proclamation and to God in worship, and to do so in a fashion appropriate to the content of the narrative; that is, as a promise claimed from God and proclaimed to the world.”⁹ Christ is promised, Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, is what the Church is to be about. While Jensen does not include ‘Christ is promised’ in his summary of the Gospel but there is a growing awareness of Jesus within the Old Testament among biblical

⁸ Berry, 91.

⁹ Robert W. Jensen, "How the World Lost its Story: as our changing culture struggled to define itself, the theologian Robert W. Jensen mourned the missing narrative of a universe gone postmodern and mad," *First Things* (2010), no. 201: 31. Joshua 5 and 6 provides an example of such a narrative.

scholars. It is this story of promises being fulfilled, where redemption and transformation are being realized that the church needs to portray in word and deed, offering hope to a world longing to be found in a story that makes a difference.¹⁰

CULTURE

In the world that was modernity, it was assumed that one lived in a ‘narratable world,’ where stories could be shared that were authentic to it. As Jensen says, in modernity it was understood “that the reason narratives can be true to the world is that the world somehow ‘has’ its own story, antecedent to, and enabling of the stories we tell about ourselves in it.”¹¹ In modernity, Boyd helps us see how stories depended on an understanding of events and the sequencing of those events before we place them within a narrative. He goes on to say that narrative in modernity depended on the “capacity for Meta representation: not only to make and understand representations but also to understand them as representations.”¹² But we can no longer assume to begin by asking, do “you know the story you think you must be living out in the real world? We are here to tell you about its turning point and outcome . . . [When] the church does not find her hearers antecedently inhabiting a ‘narratable’ world, then the church must herself be that world.”¹³ I understand that part of what Jensen is getting at is that we can no

¹⁰ Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012). For more on unpacking the soteriology implications see N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (San Francisco: Harper, 2010) and Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: the Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life: a Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) for more on the doxological import.

¹¹ Jensen, 33.

¹² Boyd, 129.

¹³ Jensen, 34.

longer begin conversations with, ‘you are a sinner; let me tell you how to be forgiven.’ As there is little narrative context of sin, there is little need for understanding the need for forgiveness; but if we as the church inhabit a place in the community that practices redemption and transformation, it once again becomes a story others wish to become a part of.

The power of the story must be released; the re-membering must begin. It has been forgotten that Jesus was a storyteller who engaged people by telling stories. As Don Miller points out, “nowhere in Scripture does God step in and say now here is the point . . . The point is the story itself.”¹⁴

In an iTGIF (iPad, Twitter, Google, Instagram, Facebook) environment, we need to offer a storied world back to the world, and one of the ways we do this is by acknowledging that everyone can tell stories. It is with social and mobile media that many are telling their stories and trying to make sense of the world that they live in. Annette Simons in *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins* observes that many are floating “in an ocean of data and disconnected facts that overwhelms them with choice . . . in this ocean of choice a meaningful choice, a meaningful story can feel like a life preserver that tethers us to something safe, important, or at the very least more solid than disembodied voices begging for attention.”¹⁵ The Gospel, like any momentous story, is a story that requires a narrative world. “If the church is not herself a real, substantial, living world to which the gospel can be true, faith is simply impossible.”¹⁶ One begins by

¹⁴ Don Miller, “How Narrative Shapes Culture,” (lecture Q: Austin 2007, April 2007). <http://www.qideas.org/video/narrative-expressions.aspx> (accessed November 22, 2011). This does not deny that the narrator of a story provides interpretation of the truth; the narrator helps tell the story so one understands what occurred in the story, otherwise the story catcher may miss an important detail within the story.

¹⁵ Annette Simmons, *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins: How to Use Your Own Stories to Communicate with Power and Impact* (New York: Amacom, 2007), 5. For more on overwhelming choice see Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

¹⁶ Jensen, 34.

acknowledging that the twenty-first century belongs to those who will tell the best stories. It is in the story arts that people are finding a way of imagining how to live their life and these stories are shaping many of today's dreams and expectations. But this will be no easy task. Paul Auster points out that:

The prospect of building congruent, life-giving narratives in this day and age, however, are highly debated. Postmodern theorists like Jean-Francois Lyotard argue that the 'master narratives' that shaped the modern, Enlightenment society—like historical progress, the rational self, and the enlightenment science—have ordered or collapsed. Parallel changes in religion—like the decline in biblical literacy, authority, and confessional traditions—confirm that the 'grand narratives' of denominations and congregational life no longer hold the power they once did. Because these master, framing narratives are weak or missing, people are bombarded by an endless stream of images, vignettes, and emotional moments in this postmodern culture, to the point that many become 'saturated selves' without agency or purpose.¹⁷

Kenneth Gergen highlights this crisis of 'saturated selves' because the biblical narrative has fallen silent, and with no story to remember we forget who we are. This saturated selves dilemma leaves us with an uneducated imagination, scrambling to find a narrative or god that can help us make sense. Northrup Fry, in his little book *The Educated Imagination*, concludes that stories do not reflect life and neither do they escape or withdraw from life: "it swallows it. And the imagination won't stop until it's swallowed everything. No matter what direction we start of in, the signposts . . . always keep pointing the same way, to a world where nothing is outside the human imagination."¹⁸

The pursuit of our rational obsession has led the our modern church to give up on the storied imagination as the way of knowing truth, as there is no way of reconciling the paradox. The reality of God must be presented and proclaimed in terms of narrative, for that is the way

¹⁷ Larry A. Goleman, "Reclaiming the Story: Narrative Leadership in Ministry," *Congregations* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 8. Quoting Paul Auster, *The Locked Room* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986). See also Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1979).

¹⁸ Northrup Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1993), 33.

God chose to prepare for and reveal the Incarnation to humanity. Eberhard Jungel states this in a very helpful way; “If thinking wants to think God, then it must endeavor to tell stories.”¹⁹ A return to story catching and storytelling that places us within the paradoxical stories of God’s activity of redemption and transformation is needed to offer our world a space where the possibility of hope can be grasped. That is why this book focuses on the role of narrative in identity formation, the biblical narrative must be allowed to play a key role in Christian identity and faith formation.

WHAT IS A STORY?

With an argument for stories presented it will be helpful to define what it is that we mean by referring to stories or narratives. There are a variety of definitions that spring to mind, yet, simply understood, a story is the arrangement that orders and gives meaning and significance to information. Stories contain plots, themes, characters, change, and locations. In understanding story, it is helpful to agree with Polkinghorne that narrative and story in the broadest everyday sense are synonyms.²⁰ When thinking about stories it is important not to restrict oneself to the use of words, as narratives are not dependent on the exclusive use of words. As Boyd suggests a narrative “can be expressed through mime, dance, wordless picture books or movies.”²¹ In fact a

¹⁹ Eberhard Jungel, *God as the Mystery of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. Trans. Darrell Gruder, 1983), 303.

²⁰ Stephen Denning, *The Secret Language of Leadership: How Leaders Inspire Action through Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 229. See also Hoffman, 235, and Denning, *Leader’s Guide*, xxiii – xxiv. It is the practice of this paper to use the terms story and narrative interchangeably.

²¹ Boyd, 130-1.

story “gains impact through enactment or the emotional focusing that music offers in dance, theatre, opera, or film or the visual focusing in stage lighting, comics or films.”²²

While we primarily depend on language to express ideas and concerns, there are a variety of tools used to communicate these ideas and concerns. Yet, the communication of ideas in conversations and speeches provides information, they are not stories. Stories have a power that is unique to them --they can open wallets and spur hearts, minds and feet into action, moving people in the direction of the storyteller. By their very nature a trace of strategy will always be discernable in stories. As Denning has outlined:

The most effective stories usually include: The story of what the change is, often seen through the eyes of some typical characters who will be affected by the change. The story of how the change will be implemented, showing in simple steps how we will get from ‘here’ to ‘there.’ The story of why the change will work, showing the underlying casual mechanisms that make the change virtually inevitable.²³

Stories involve change – change that has happened, change that needs to happen, and change that can happen.

As Bobette Buster observes, all successful films tell one of three stories: Cautionary tales, stories of fear faced and overcome (redemption), or stories of finding the courage to become fully alive (transubstantiation). Perhaps, Josipovich is headed in the right direction when he:

Places narrative above theology, reality above consolation. It does seem so, to me, because it recognizes that in the end the only thing that can truly heal and console us is not the voice of consolation but the voice of reality. That is the way the world is, it says, neither fair nor equitable. What are you going to do about it? How are you going to live so as to be contended and fulfilled? And it contains no answers, only shows us various forms of response to these questions. And from Adam to Jesus it is constant in its reliance not on teaching, not on exhortation, not on reason, but on the human form that we convey the truth that we are more than we can ever understand, the only form that is open, the form of pure narrative.²⁴

²² Ibid., 159.

²³ Denning, *Secret Language*, 36.

²⁴ Josipovici, 23.

We are all part of a community, members, tied together by our stories. It is the act of telling honest stories and participating in the rituals of these stories that we become community. Healing becomes possible as the trauma and pain we remember is shadowed and salved by a larger storied world that we live in. This is why the biblical narrative is so critical for Christian identity formation – we are a people invited into participating in the story of redemption, restoration, and transformation. We are, as Tom Wright puts it, a people “being remade, judged and remolded by the spirit” through the biblical narrative.²⁵

As we ask questions regarding our identity, who am I, why me, what am I here for? I suggest that we need to ask, what do stories offer? How do stories assist with these big questions? What is it that we need to know to live well? We need to know many things for a variety of reasons. Berry comments:

For the time being and say that we need to know who we are, where we are and what we must do to live. These questions do not refer to a discreet category of knowledge. We are not likely to be able to answer one of them without answering the other two. And all three must be answered well before we can answer well a further practical question . . . How can we live without destroying the sources of our life?²⁶

With a story “you reach for reality inaccessible merely to observation or perception but that also requires imagination, for imagination knows more than the eye sees, and inspiration, which you can only hope and pray for.”²⁷ Stories offer clarity without oversimplifying. Stories express human character and the revelation of that character in crisis and stress-filled situations.

²⁵ N.T. Wright “How Can The Bible Be Authoritative” http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Bible_Authoritative.htm (accessed September 12, 2013).

²⁶ Wendell Berry, *The Way of Ignorance and other Essays by Wendell Berry* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2005), 59.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

WHAT KIND OF STORIES?

Our twenty-first-century world no longer lives in the ‘realistic narrative’ world of Jane Austen, Edward Gibbon, and James Baldwin or for that matter our local newspaper or soap opera. The modern way of telling a sequence of events is characterized by the notion that:

Sequential events are understood jointly to make a certain kind of sense—a dramatic kind of sense. Aristotle provides the classical specification of dramatically coherent narrative. In a dramatically good story, he said, each decisive event is unpredictable until it happens, but immediately upon taking place is seen to be exactly what ‘had’ to happen. So, to take the example of Aristotle’s own favorite good story, we could not know in advance that Oedipus would bind himself but once he has done it instantly see that the whole story must lead to and flow from just this act. Second, the sequential dramatic coherence is of a sort that could ‘really’ happen . . . With this kind of narrative, the question of whether the story depicts something beyond itself, and if it does how accurately, are therefore subsequent and independent questions.²⁸

As Denning points out, the “stories that are most effective in modern organizations do not necessarily follow the rules laid down in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. They often reflect a different tradition in storytelling, in a minimalist fashion, which is reflected in the parables of the Bible.”²⁹

Timothy Martin is on to something when he suggest that “choosing religious stories and narrative forms that appeal to the cultural life-world of the students offer even greater potency for a ‘fusion of horizons.’”³⁰ ABC’s TV series *Once Upon A Time* is a popular example of how this fusion of horizons is practiced, fusing the world of fairy tales with a place identified as Storybrook, Maine, 2011. It is this type of ‘fusion’ story that emboldens the post-modern person for what lies ahead of them.

²⁸ Jensen, 32-3.

²⁹ Denning, Stephen. *Leader’s Guide*, xvii.

³⁰ Timothy Martin, “Illuminating the Landscape of Religious Narrative: Morality, Dramatization, and Verticality,” *Religious Education* 104, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 394.

To demonstrate the value of a narratable world, Herbert Anderson tells of what occurred in the early '90s when a women psychologist was brought to a refugee camp, in Tanzania, to address the women's inability to sleep:

The women, who had witnessed unspeakable atrocities, had been told not speak of the rape and slaughter they had seen. Memories of the horrors haunted them, and they could not sleep. In response to the situation, the psychologist created a story tree—a place of safety where the women could speak of their experiences. Every morning, the psychologist went to the edge of the refugee camp and waited under the huge canopy of the shade tree. The first day no one came. On the second day one woman appeared and told her story and left. The next day another came, and then another, and another; within the span of a week, scores of women were gathering under the shade tree each morning to listen and share their terrifying tales of violence and death. Finally after weeks of the ritual of the story tree, it was reported that the women were sleeping.³¹

We need stories to give voice to otherwise unspeakable suffering. We need rituals to express “what cannot be captured in words. They make the invisible visible.”³² Storytelling practices are “a vehicle for liberating us from narratives that confine and for retelling stories that liberate. We tell meaning laden stories with our lips; we also perform them with our bodies in ritual form.”³³

You cannot move culture unless you move its heart. If redemption or transformation is to occur, “They [the hearers] have to discover it for themselves in the form of a new story.”³⁴ It is not merely a new story that is generated, it is a credible story to live by that is capable of being lived into, and lends understanding to life.

The newly emerging narrative is constructed both from the ongoing stories of the people and their organization, and from the new story put forward by the leader. It is born in the listeners mind as a more compelling version of their ongoing life stories. The listeners themselves create the story. Since it is their own story, they tend to embrace it. What the

³¹ Anderson, 42.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Denning, *Secret Language*, 34.

leader says is mere scaffolding, a scaffolding to a creative process going on inside the listeners.³⁵

When I read this I felt that Denning had torn a page out of Jesus' narrative playbook and appropriated it. We in the Church need to live into the Gospel narrative allowing a more compelling version of our life to be born out of the new story put forward by Jesus, the Christ. The question never was were you born or will you die but how did you live? As William Wallace says, in the movie *Braveheart*, facing execution, "All men die. But not all men truly live." (Matthew 25:31-46) As the story of life unfolds, each character has the opportunity to practice a sense of purpose, participating in the action. "It will be convincing but not overwhelmed with unnecessary detail. It will include plenty of detail to ground it to some plausible reality. It will leave the audience with no doubt that the organization narrating it has what it takes to make it real. All this takes skill and imagination."³⁶

This is the kind of story that engages the mind, touches the heart, and inspires hope. In creating stories, we are participating in the possibility of a different future, even if the story is about the past or a future that we may desire to be a part of, even if one cannot imagine participating in it.

³⁵ Denning, *Secret Language*, 35.

³⁶ Brown and Kätz, 137.

CONCLUSION

The rich tapestry of human life certainly bears witness to the variety of ways the good life exists. Although happiness may be one important thread, the fabric of life is more than silk and spun gold. Surely, bad days and bad times are part of the good life.

(Laura King)

Our common responsibility as humans is “to imagine [a] humanity the heart can recognize.”³⁷ To do this we must acknowledge that global culture of the twenty-first century is returning to orality, using the language of narrative and metaphor. We have to let go of our stranglehold on the biblical story, insisting that there is only one right way to tell the story. In narrative we unearth a toolbox filled with tools, each devised for a particular purpose, yet suitable for use in many circumstances of yesterday, today and tomorrow. As we use these specifically designed devices in different circumstances and experiences a beautiful narrative tapestry is woven.

What I am encouraging is more than simply a call for stories, better communication, or a re-ordering of information but a narrative intelligence that encourages, a whole new way of looking at things. We must learn to live with the ambiguity that our stories and other people’s stories cannot be completely known or told. By entering a narrative way of knowing, we are living into the great story, where our worrying is defused and in doing this we release others and ourselves from simply living instrumentally.

³⁷ Berry, *Way of Ignorance*, 85.

Story provides the framework giving structure and meaning in a demanding and changing culture. It is a good story that offers meaning and context to the givenness of life; narrative makes it possible to accept and be released from our past; gives purpose and strength to our present, no matter what the circumstances are; and offers hope for the future. Narrative allows one simply to be.

And this the exact opposite of the place where we left Jenny as she was struggling to make sense of her experience, wondering what the point is of continuing. But Jenny's story does not end here, nor is this simply her finding a new story that gave her meaning and purpose and she lived happily ever after. This is no fairy tale; this is real life. Come summer, with her belly beginning to bulge, a few of the older women in the community begin befriending her. And she begins listening to their stories, learning of their failures and the struggles they faced. Her new story is beginning; with their encouragement, she begins going to NA, not for herself but for her unborn child. She's working through the steps, discovering that someone outside of her cares and gives her the strength to stay clean.

BIBLICAL STORY

The massive success of the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises demonstrates the enduring power of a story, well told, that explores the limits beyond rationalism. Eugene Peterson, when speaking of the centrality of story, observes that the North American Church does not know what to do with these stories, or really any stories. As we get acquainted with this language that comes in the form of story we do not "know exactly what is going to take place or

who it will let in, or how it will end . . . A story is not a script to be copied”³⁸ nor is the ending to be manipulated or controlled by the protagonists, and that is difficult to accept, especially using the leadership and programmatic models popular in many churches today.

Yet, this submitting to the story does not nullify the importance of endings, particularly happy endings, but places them outside the sphere of the protagonist. Happy endings are not fantasy, or escapist, or fugitive, nor do they “deny the existence of *dycatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure; the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance;” says J. R. R. Tolkien. He continues to say that happy endings deny “universal final defeat, and in so far is *evangelism*, giving a fleeting glimpse of joy, joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief . . . When the sudden ‘turn’ comes we get a glimpse of joy, and heart’s desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of the story, and lets a gleam come through.”³⁹

It is this gleam that makes stories so influential, taking the particular and breathing life into it, even in a postmodern environment. One forgets that postmodernism is not anti-modernism but rather a perspective that maintains a greater degree of openness to the mysterious or unexplainable, that is neither naïve or gullible. As Le Grys argues, now “is time to challenge the modernist [rationalist] stranglehold on factual models of the Bible, and allow Scripture once again to tease the mind.”⁴⁰

But how does one enter the biblical narrative so that it becomes one’s story? Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace* tells of the time when Jürgen Moltman asked him, at the conclusion of his lecture on loving your enemy, “Can you embrace a *cetnik*?” As Volf struggled

³⁸ Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 118.

³⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien *Tree and Leaf and The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) 68-70.

⁴⁰ Alan Le Grys, “*Shaped by God’s Story: Making Sense of the Bible*” (Thesis, King’s College London, 2008), 123.

to answer, ‘what would justify the embrace? Where would I draw the strength for it? What would it do to my identity as a human being and as a Croat?’ Volf knew what he wanted to say. “No, I cannot, but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to.”⁴¹ How does one become able to? How does one allow God’s story to shape one’s identity, becoming a lover of one’s enemy? Or, how does one begin to permit the Biblical Narrative to function as a transformational narrative?

One can begin by allowing the sun to set on reading the Bible as a Rorschach inkblot, where one projects one’s own values and ideas onto the Bible “instead of being swept away into the Bible’s story, Rorschach thinkers sweep the Bible into their own story. Instead of being an opportunity for redemption, the Bible becomes an opportunity for narcissism.” Scot McKnight continues, saying that, “reading the Bible becomes patting ourselves on the back and finding our story in the Bible, instead of finding the Bible’s story to be our story. Instead of entering into that story, we manipulate the story so it enters into our story.”⁴² This is a dangerous situation indeed as this displaces the God of the biblical narrative, thereby divesting the narrative of its transformational power, turning the narrative into a pragmatic how-to manual.

THE STORY OF SELF

As we look at the biblical narrative whole, Scot McKnight warns that we must guard against a functional pragmatic approach that is characterized by a stripping of the narrative of the

⁴¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9. A *četnik*, a variant spelling of Chetnik, refers to a Serb nationalist and monarchist paramilitary organization. Croat refers to a South Slavic ethnic group whose homeland includes Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁴² Scot McKnight, *Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 49.

first two (Genesis 1 and 2) and the last two (Revelation 21 and 22) chapters of the story, effectually, having the story begin in sin and end in judgment instead of revealing the story that goes from good to good (from engagement to consummation).⁴³ Within the Creation narrative, one learns the story of one's life as one is drawn into a way of understanding one's identity and life: An understanding that acknowledges the vulnerability of humanity being the only creature given a garden for sustenance and clothes to cover one's nakedness. To deny this vulnerability is to deny one's image-bearing, sin-scarred identity. Humanity's vulnerability and interdependence has led to the majority of conflicts within and beyond the Biblical narrative. Yet it is this hostility that makes the biblical narrative so great, as great stories are told in conflict. To embrace the potential greatness of a story requires that we not resist the conflict that we find our self in. One resists by refusing to identify God as unjust, as this causes a distortion and disorientation within the narrative arc. Instead one starts by embracing God as a master storyteller, who can be trusted as just and merciful.⁴⁴ He is the one who created the garden for man and he is the one who gives life to man by his breath. We must establish the dynamic tension of the Bible where on the one hand 'it is all about us' and on the other 'thou art dust and to dust shalt thou return.'

As one hears of this God-shaped, God-breathed life, one is introduced to an understanding of man's breathing as breathing God's breath. As *pneuma* is breath, one "cannot not breathe, you [one] cannot not pray."⁴⁵ If one begins with the Creation narrative's understanding of man as one made in the image of God, one is able to appreciate God's Spirit as life-sustaining breath. Thomas Altizer, continuing this thought, says that one needs to declare His

⁴³ Ibid., *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

⁴⁴ Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 31.

⁴⁵ Peterson, "Prayer." For more on 'cannot not love,' see Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

name to name oneself. “For the God whom we have been given has named Himself in us, and named himself in such a manner that we cannot dissociate His identity from our own.”⁴⁶

Recognizing with Michael Foucault that man made in the image of God is by necessity a ‘theological conception.’ This image of God-bestowed identity opens one to a world charged with possibilities, giving man an identity (*imago Dei*) and a vocation (to conserve and create) gratified by the activity of God. Being “created in the image of God, the human subject reflects divine subjectivity. The self-conscious individual reflects the self-conscious God.”⁴⁷ Echoing Buber’s assertion, “I become through my relation to the Thou,”⁴⁸ that declares one knows and is known in relationship.

This kind of relational understanding enables us to see God as a person, not as a book or words written on paper, but God who is before, above, and beyond the Bible, which helps one to see that the Bible is the story-filled revelation of God who is madly in love with his creation and wants to be loved as a person, not as an object to be venerated, or an institution to be sustained. For in relationship there is conversation where we tend to each other, taking time and attention, which also involves a flight from self-perception, leading to a flight one to another, thereby enabling one to enter the history of human life, as we truly do have everything that we need: we have each other. The reality is that, as Miller says, “if the character doesn’t change, the story hasn’t happened yet.”⁴⁹ One cannot assume one is living a storied life unless one is witnessing change in one’s life and change around them. The two necessary elements for engaging in a storied life are that “the thing a character wants must be difficult to attain. The more difficult the

⁴⁶ Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Descent into Hell; a Study of the Radical Reversal of the Christian Consciousness* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 37.

⁴⁷ Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 40.

⁴⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (New York: Scribner, 1958), 11.

⁴⁹ Miller, *Million Miles*, 68.

better.” And “the ambition has to be sacrificial. The protagonist has to be going through pain, risking his very life, for the sake of somebody else.”⁵⁰

Thinking in terms of story means thinking in terms of change and character development. One begins to realize, with Charlotte Gordon and many others, that the biblical characters, particularly those of the First Testament, have populated imaginations for centuries, and while never denying their imperfections, religious practices, or desires, these protagonists are part of how one measures oneself. As one aspires to understand who one is, and why one strives for particular dreams, or why is it that one prefers some things to other things that cause strong adverse reactions, one needs to engage the stories of the Bible.

When looking at the Biblical narrative it is helpful to remember that:

A historian might guide you on a search for the ‘real’ Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar and help you explore the actualities (the socio-economics, diet, customs, marriage practices, etc.) of the people of the second millennium B.C.E., the period when these figures lived. A theologian could help you uncover many of the religious meanings of this story, its impact on your faith and your view of God. With an archeologist, you might get to go on a tour of the ancient sites and look for the evidence that these peoples or people like them, existed. And, finally a Bible scholar could help you understand when this story might have been written down and the politics and historical stratagems that helped shaped the narratives.⁵¹

The difficulty is that these professions keep the text in the hands of experts. While these professions are helpful and informative as to the nature, context, and meaning of the text, they remove the story from its *primary objective of revealing God with his people*. For some it seems an impossible task as all these professions lock the text into what was, leaving one with a ‘that was then’ understanding and shedding little light on how one lives into the story today. The transformational character of the biblical text requires the present, active tense. A challenge that

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵¹ Charlotte Gordon, *The Woman Who Named God: Abraham's Dilemma and the Birth of Three Faiths* (New York: Little Brown, 2009), xvi.

almost seems impossible as Kevin Kelly asks, how can one “restore a 2,000-year-old religion so that it no longer rejects, no longer chases, but actually leads a modern, pluralistic culture running at the speed of Twitter?”⁵² That is the challenge one faces when the reading the biblical narrative as a transformational narrative. Bonhoeffer is helpful in wrestling with this as he sees the Revelation placing the “I into truth,” seeing it as “a contingent occurrence which can only be welcomed or rejected in its positivity—that is to say, received as a reality—but not elicited from speculations about human existence as such.”⁵³

This professionalization of the text has removed the essential character or story questions from the hands of the reader. Non-professional readers are not encouraged to ask: “Who were these characters as individuals? Why did they do what they did? Did they change over time? What do[es] the Bible . . . suggest about their personalities, strengths, and flaws?”⁵⁴

What has happened to the biblical narrative Ralph Underwood likens to the ‘squiggle game’ devised by Winnicott to assist his work with children. Winnicott would draw a few lines on a piece of paper that had no particular meaning, and the child would be asked to take over and complete the drawing. The initial squiggle came from the unconscious, but in the response made by the child, and through conversation that accompanied the exercise, both participants would negotiate meaning in the drawing as their relationship developed. The meaning that emerges from a seemingly random event is thus multidimensional; it is certainly a response to the squiggles, but it is also a response that evolves through negotiation. While it is not a free for all, because the initial squabble imposes constraints on the possibilities or development, there might

⁵² Gabe Lyons and Norton Herbst, *The Next Christians: Following Jesus in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), dust jacket.

⁵³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being* (New York: Harper, 1962), 80.

⁵⁴ Gordon, xvi, xvii.

even be agreed social constraints, in that some versions of the game begin with an agreement between both participants about a set of ground rules. Even so, each response displays both ‘intentionality and creativity.’ Underwood suggests that any biblical text taunts a reader with “what are you going to do with me?”⁵⁵ Gordon states that, “it is our responsibility to seek out this book [the Bible] and reevaluate who we are in relationship to the past. Otherwise we are left with an inert document of apparently contradictory messages that antagonists can deploy, mining the text for one new weapon after another, defending arguments of hate.”⁵⁶

One needs to begin to understand oneself as a protagonist in the text, living in a world full of meaning. Our language is pregnant, carrying a range of meaning based on history and expectations. Gadamer argues that tradition plays a large role in determining meaning, making tradition and social context partners in meaning making. But since the crafting of our story is an ongoing process, our preconceived notions continually evolve as we strive to continue to make sense of ongoing events, thus completing the circle of a living tradition.⁵⁷

One must come to the place where words matter, simply because words flow out of people. Alan Jacobs in *A Theology of Reading* formulates a theory of reading where he makes these two important observations:

1. Written words are personal communication from one person to another.
2. The proper relationship of a Christian to a person’s communication is to love that person by listening to their words.

⁵⁵ Le Grys, 113.

⁵⁶ Gordon, xvii.

⁵⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 268-310.

Listening is an art form not often considered when thinking about reading or love, but as Klyne Snodgrass points out, even in Scripture the biggest complaint “is that people do not listen to God. There is a freely chosen deafness.” Choosing not to listen contradicts the *Shema*, “Hear O Israel . . . Love the Lord your God.”(Deuteronomy 6:4-5) Klyne Snodgrass in his article *Reading to Hear* in *Horizon in Biblical Theology* reaches this insightful conclusion: Israel is commanded to love God but before they are commanded to love they are charged to hear. Jacobs extends this notion of listening and loving in his hermeneutic of love to include not only living persons but also includes the books and authors of the Bible as neighbors. In effect, this brings the old, old story into the present. Treating these authors and books as neighbors involves listening to them and hearing the challenge of the common contemporary assumption of man’s identity, of who is in charge. The Biblical narrative clearly draws us into a story of participation where we are not in charge of, the Triune God is.

BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

When we read the story of King David and Bathsheba, we are alarmed at the double moral failure of a great king. How could he? Robert Alter in *The David Story* points out this decline is anticipated several chapters earlier and this incident is the finale of David getting completely out of touch with who he is in the sight of God. The story is about what happens when one believes that they are the worshiped one. The biblical narrative always tells the story of how mankind is designed to flourish as a worshipper. Donald Miller makes the same point when he says that, “the main way we learn story is not through movies or books; it’s through each

other. You become like the people you interact with.”⁵⁸ Our passions and desires are shaped by stories. What one values and sees as important is determined by the stories that have permeated one’s life. One lives into the stories one has absorbed.

For too long one has been deceived by a rationalist account that says one can think for oneself, assuming ‘one is what one thinks.’ But sociological, psychological, and anthropological research does not seem to support the rationalist premise that it is thinking that initiates action. There is a growing body of research indicating that it is one’s primed/storied orientation to the world that initiates action. One needs to be captured imaginatively, but how does one capture the imagination? As James K. A. Smith said at a lecture I attended, “We live at the nexus of body and story; we are narrative animals.” One needs to accept that “the gospel is a design project and worship is the design studio . . . Liturgies are tactile stories that capture our imagination.”⁵⁹ In other words, we become what we worship.

BIBLICAL IMAGINATION

Stories help one to not only recall the past, but also assist one in imagining a different future, a new direction.⁶⁰ If we are to develop a biblical, personal narrative, one must also develop a hopeful imagination, seeing the world with fresh eyes. Miller describes this imaginative world as being in that place where “God sat over the dark nothing.” He put us

⁵⁸ Miller, *Million Miles* 160.

⁵⁹ James K. A. Smith, “*Imagining the Kingdom*,” (Lecture, Q, Andrew Mellon Auditorium, Washington, D.C., April 11, 2012. For more see, James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* and David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011) for more on narrative animals.

⁶⁰ Barbara Doerrer-Peacock, *Space, Symbol, and Story: Windows to Transformation* (Dissertation, Pacific School of Religion, 2008), 17.

explicitly in the story “with the sunset, and the rainstorm as though to say, enjoy your place in my story. The beauty of it means you matter, and you can create within it even as I have created you.”⁶¹ Resonating with that is what C. S. Lewis said in response to why he wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Perelandra*:

I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say. Then of course the Man in me began to have his turn. I thought I saw how stories of this kind steal past a certain inhibition, which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the suffering Christ? I thought that the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.⁶²

One develops an imagination to get over one’s conscious and unconscious constraints. It is only as one begins to live imaginatively into one’s own story that one can see that “the whole point of the story is the character arc. You didn’t think joy could change a person, did you? Joy is what you feel when the conflict is over. But it is the conflict that changes the person.”⁶³ Or if one prefers more traditional language, “‘Being in Christ’ means the possession of the new direction of will.”⁶⁴ It is as one takes the hope-filled, determined, and imaginative posture of Job and stops expecting God to put an end to all of life’s troubles that one can be truly surprised at how spending time with God is something you want to do. That Jesus eliminates all our conflicts and struggles is a cruel lie. Allowing the Bible to achieve its storied intent of transformation through relationship requires courage. It is as one allows the biblical narrative to be absorbed

⁶¹ Miller, *Million Miles*, 59.

⁶² C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 37.

⁶³ Miller, *Million Miles*, 180.

⁶⁴ Bonheoffer, 105.

into one's "imagination as a story, not a manual," that gives one room to respect each other's formation in all of its unique particularities. With a healthy imagination, the bible becomes "a story to enter not a blueprint to follow."⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

As one begins to grapple with what it means to live a storied life one realizes that while the whole story begins and ends with great goodness, abounding. It is not humanity's task to make the return of Christ happen, or to make sure that His kingdom is established. Our charge is to become a people fully alive participating in His kingdom making activity. Character transformation is not only the purpose of a story, it is the point of life. Remembering always that "a good storyteller, . . . invites other people into the story . . . giving them a better story too,"⁶⁶ helping one to realize this most gracious narrative reveals that all God really wants from us is to live in a divinely made "body he made and enjoy the story and bond . . . through the experience."⁶⁷

Living in Prince Albert means living in a town where violent crimes are on the rise. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, in 2010 we were ranked third among cities its size for violent crimes; in 2009, we were fourth. In 2011, in a city with just over 40,000 residents, there were almost 10,000 drunk and disorderly arrests, and violations causing deaths have risen 150% from 2010 to 2012. Likewise, from 2010 to 2011, reported sexual assaults were

⁶⁵ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 120.

⁶⁶ Miller, *Million Miles*, 236.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

up 26% and prostitution arrests were up 93%,⁶⁸ both of which, former Police Chief Dale McFee believes are a result of alcohol or drug problems. It is estimated that over 80% of the crimes in Prince Albert are drug or alcohol related.⁶⁹

These statistics demonstrate that Prince Albert is in crisis and conflict. This is not an imagined reality and how one responds or participates in the crisis can make the difference of life or death. As a pastor in Prince Albert, with the help of my increased understanding and appreciation for the power of the Biblical Narrative, I am encouraged. Great stories are shared in conflict while I live in a place of great opportunity to participate in the transformational narrative of Scripture. Specifically, how can I continue to live as a follower of Jesus here in this place, at this time?

For me, this begins with being encouraged by Job's tenacious refusal to curse God or to give up. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I'll return to the womb of the earth. God gives, God takes. God's name be ever blessed. Not once through all this did Job sin; not once did he blame God" (Job 1:22-23). Job shows one "how to push through protests in the face of suffering and get through the pain to a more intensely lived faith."⁷⁰ I never deny that this is not the safest place to raise a family, but this is the place God has called me to. This gives me the freedom to agree with Miller when he calls out the escapist, protectionist lie that Jesus Christ will make everything better. He doesn't. 'Jesus is not a get out of jail free' card; yes, ultimately Jesus does realize His kingdom, but it is not my responsibility to bring about the return of Christ or to establish His kingdom, it is His. My task is to become fully alive person, living in the story

⁶⁸ <http://papolice.ca/Portals/CrimeStat/PAPS/CrimeStat.2011.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2012).

⁶⁹ <http://www.panow.com/node/178868> (accessed February 6, 2012).

⁷⁰ Peterson, Eugene. *The Message Study Bible: Capturing the Notes and Reflections of Eugene Peterson* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress Pub Group, 2012), 718.

of Christ's kingdom making activity. God ordered the world so that the local, personal, relational human body is the primary place one gets to know God. I need to stop reading the Bible for answers and continue falling in love with Scripture, opening up myself to the transformative activity of God, reading Scripture and engaging in this place with pregnant expectation, trusting the master storyteller, learning to enjoy my place in the story.

Over the last few years with the community I worship with, we have been learning together what it means to enjoy our place in the story of God's redemption activity in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. We ask ourselves, what is the ministry God has equipped and called us to join him in? We were a typical congregation, struggling to make the finances work, struggling to see our way forward. So we asked ourselves not what it is that we wanted, but asked ourselves what it is that we have to offer to God for his use in the kingdom? We had a few women who enjoy knitting, a few amazing cooks, a few parents longing for their children to return to church, a few bringing their children or grandchildren to Sunday school, and a building mostly unused during the week.

We are still a typical congregation that is challenged financially: we had to replace our roof in 2013, and we are struggling to see our way forward. But we have been invited into some amazing opportunities. The women who love knitting have begun knitting prayer shawls and giving them away to people facing health and this group is now teaching others how to knit. The group that loves cooking and serving food is participating in feeding over 100 hungry people one Saturday a month and the number of people who are participating in this ministry is growing. A few who have a heart for prisoners are picking up inmates, so that they can attend public worship. A few men heard of a need for wooden cross necklaces at the maximum security prison have hand-crafted over a thousand black walnut cross necklaces, to be given away at the Maximum

Security Prison in town. 12-step recovery groups now use our building 4 to 5 nights a week. A Bible study group birthed a suicide prevention initiative that has been used throughout Saskatchewan, resulting in suicide prevention officers and social workers being hired.

What does reading scripture and engaging in your place with pregnant expectation, trusting the master storyteller, look like in your place? I don't know. What I do know is that God has uniquely placed you in your worshipping community. Do you see yourself participating in God's Story of redemption and transformation? What part God's redemption story have you been prepared for and are you participating in?

As Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said in an interview with Nicky Gumbel, "We are what we are before God and nothing more . . . it's all grace . . . We need to be a risk-taking church . . . there is no safety in Christ, there is absolute security . . . there is a big difference between knowing we are in his arms and knowing that he calls us to do risky things . . . we cannot live for our cause to win, we have to live for his [Jesus'] cause to win."⁷¹

⁷¹ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5059/watch-we-need-to-be-a-risk-taking-church-archbishop-opens-international-christian-conference> (accessed October 19, 2013).

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