

The Power Of Story

Just Walk Across the Room

Jesus was a master storyteller. Years after he had told his stories, people remembered them. In Luke's Gospel chapter 15, we have record of three of his stories, all with the same theme. Each story is about something or someone that was lost. The first two stories don't have a lot of immediate impact for us because our culture is different. A story about a shepherd who lost one of his hundred sheep, or a woman who lost one of her silver coins doesn't connect with us so much because none of us own sheep. And if we do lose a coin, for most of us it's no big deal. Although for this woman, that silver coin represented one tenth of her total wealth. Having been through the recent recession, a story where a person loses 10% of their total wealth does get our attention. The main point of these first two stories about lostness is the persistence of the owner in wanting to find that which was lost. I'll come back to that point later.

Here's the third story as [Jesus told it](#).

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " (Luke 15: 11-32 NIV)

Good story about a kid who demands his share of the inheritance, takes off and wastes it in wild living, then comes home and asks to be taken back into the family. That one rings bells for some of us, because that still happens today. We all know of people who have wasted a fortune. And if we think about this story a bit more, we realise that Jesus is talking about people like us. People, who take off from our relationship with God and finish up eating pig food. People, who finally come to their senses, and come back to a relationship with the Father and ask for forgiveness. Great story, but with a surprise ending. If you and I were telling the ending, when the son came back home, he would have received a whack around the ears, a blistering tirade of abuse, a boot in his rear end, and be sent out to the back of the farm to work off his debt. But he didn't. He got a party. He got acceptance. The father was so pleased to see him back, he put a flash ring on his finger and a cloak around his shoulders. It's a story of grace and acceptance back into the family, rather than punishment and rejection.

The Power of Story

Good stories have power. When my kids were very small I made up this fictional character called "Marvin the donkey". As a special treat, I would tell the kids stories of this amazing donkey Marvin, and all the adventures he had. Now, with my grandsons, it's "Thomas the tank engine". They sit and soak it up, and the amazing thing is that they remember. Stories have a way of getting in to our imaginations and our memories in a way nothing else can. I don't know about you, but I've sat through hundreds of sermons and talks. I've listened to deep teaching on the scriptures. But the thing that makes it all come alive for me, are the stories. Stories have power to get around our defences.

Getting Under The Radar.

Think about this story from the Bible. The most powerful and popular King the nation has ever known has committed adultery and arranged for the woman's husband to be killed in battle. This King is incredibly bright intellectually. He is a brilliant military tactician. He a musician and a poet. He's wealthy and powerful, even though he was once a shepherd in his youth. Nathan the prophet is told by God that he has to confront this very bright King about his adultery. If Nathan confronts him head on, it's liable to turn into an intellectual argument, which he will lose. If he waves an accusing finger, the King is probably going to deny it or get really mad. What does the prophet do? He tells the King a simple little story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man has more sheep and cattle than he can count. The poor man has only one little ewe lamb which he loves so much he even sleeps with it in his arms. When a traveller comes to town and needs to be fed, the rich doesn't kill one of his own sheep, but takes the poor man's one and only little ewe lamb and feeds the traveller with that.

The King hears this story and he is livid. He's so mad about this rich man's treatment of the poor man that he says "The man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for this lamb four times over because he had no pity!" What a reaction! Even though he is very bright and perceptive, the King is completely captivated by this story. It's opened up his heart in a way that nothing else could. Then when the King is completely undone by the story, Nathan the prophet looks King David straight in the eye and says "You are the man". The story is about you David.

Why was it that King David was so captivated by this story? It was because it was about poverty and riches. He had been poor, and now he was fabulously rich. It was about a man with a ewe lamb. He had been a shepherd, and he knew what it was like to lose a beloved sheep. It was about the misuse of power. David had been on the receiving end of the abuse of power when he was on the run from King Saul. If anything were to press his buttons, it was a story about injustice and abuse of power. The story took him right in to the point where his heart was engaged. And then in only four words, Nathan the prophet made the connection between the story, and King David's own sinful misuse of power. "You are the man" The story is about you.

Now I'm not suggesting that all of us have to act like Nathan the prophet. But this incident from the life of King David demonstrates how a story can captivate people and open up their hearts to spiritual truth in a way nothing else can. Jesus didn't tell religious stories. When he called fishermen to follow him, he talked about fishing for men. When he talked to farmers he talked about sowing seed. To people in business he told stories about shrewd management. To labourers he talked about being hired in a vineyard for a day's wage. He used images that connected with the people he was talking to. The Anglican evangelist David Watson once asked an Olympic track and field athlete why he spent his life running around in circles.

The Power Of Your Story

The way God has worked in your life, is your story. And it's powerful. Now you may think you don't have a story. You may think your life is terribly dull and boring. Each of us have heard stories of people who were drug addicts or hopeless alcoholics, or really nasty people who have been wonderfully changed by Gods power, and we feel that our story is unbelievably dull in comparison. Many of us here came from Christian families where God was real to us right from the time we were little children. We didn't have a flashing lights in the sky conversion experience, and we think we have no story to tell. But if you just give a little thought to what life was like before you really began to trust Jesus, and think about the changes he has made in your life, and the changes he is still making, then that's a story you can tell.

And here is the deal. You need to be able to tell it in less than 100 words. Your story is not your life story. It's the story of one of the ways God has been at work in changing you. Here's my story in less than 100 words.

"When I was a kid at school, I always wanted to be liked. I tried to be part of the "in crowd". That need to be accepted led to a drive in my life to be successful, for people to think well of me. It took a long time for me to realise that it's what God thinks of me that really matters. That his love for me isn't dependant on my performance. He loves me anyway. That realisation has made a huge difference to the way I live. I have a peace now I didn't have before". That's it. 98 words. I want to challenge you this week to write down in less than 100 words one of the ways god has been at work in your life. That story may be enough to help someone else begin to follow Jesus.

As I finish today I want to tell you a story that I've never been able to shake from my memory.

Desperately Seeking Diana.

In 1997 Diana Routley went missing when she was backpacking through India. At 26 years of age, she was a bright and bubbly person who regularly kept in touch with her parents when she was travelling. She made contact from Varanasi in India, then just disappeared. Her father Alan loved his daughter very much. He sat down with his other children and told them that if he had to spend every last cent of his savings and their inheritance, he was going to find Diana. He couldn't get any information out of the Indian authorities, so he printed up hundreds of posters with Diana's photo and details in Hindi and English, and went to Varanasi. He pestered the police. He put up posters everywhere. He asked hundreds of people if they had seen his daughter. For weeks he trudged the streets of Varanasi in 40 degree heat looking for his lost daughter. He wouldn't give up until he found her. Sadly, he did find out what happened to Diana. She had been murdered by some men who had stolen her money.

Tell Your Story – God's Story In Your Life

But the point of this story that has stuck with me, is that you and I have a heavenly Father who loves his lost children so much he is prepared to go to the ends of the earth to find us. God has posters up all over the universe containing the photos and details of his billions of missing children. He will spare nothing to get us back, not even his only son Jesus. He will exhaust every possibility to find us so that he can let us know how much he loves us.

And God wants those of us that know him to be involved in his search for his lost children. Tell your story. It may result in one of God's lost children being found.

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