

## The Story Continues

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Rich Nathan  
March 2 & 3, 2019  
The Story Continues  
Genesis 1:26-28

Over the past three years, we here at Vineyard Columbus have done three discipleship campaigns during the Lenten season. The season of Lent runs from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday – about six weeks. We did a discipleship campaign called

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The Good Life logo

In 2016.

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Fully Alive logo

In 2017. And

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The Real Jesus logo

In 2018.

This year, our discipleship campaign will be titled

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The Story Continues logo

Like the previous campaigns, we will be focusing upon discipling every person in the church from preschoolers to empty nesters. And like the previous campaigns, we'll be urging every Vineyard attendee to join a small group. You have until next Sunday, March 10, to join a group.

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Join (with info about joining a small group)

You can find out about joining a small group in the lobby or by going online. There's also an opportunity to host a group. Like the three previous campaigns, we have free videos to show in your small group. In addition to the discipleship component, this year,

our campaign will also have a capital component to it. This is our first capital campaign in 14 years. This year, we aim to raise money to

Slide (transition)

- Start new campuses
- Raise up new leaders
- Build new buildings
- Send out new missionaries

You'll be hearing a lot more about the targets of our campaign in the next few months.

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Why do we do discipleship campaigns?

Jesus gave his followers one big command before he ascended into heaven. He said, "Go into all the world and MAKE DISCIPLES!" Every church on earth who takes the words of Jesus seriously, struggles with this one big command of Jesus to make disciples. Every disciple-making church has different methods of trying to fulfill Jesus' commands. We have Bible memory programs and accountability groups and men's groups and women's groups and small groups and cell groups and home groups and home churches and Sunday School classes and service projects and short term mission trips and retreats and spiritual directors and summer camps.

But everywhere, every church struggles with uneven disciples. People who serve, but never pray. People who are in small groups, but do not give financially. People who give financially, but who are terrible employees. People who love church but do not love their spouses or their kids very well.

I think one of the main problems that we have especially in the contemporary world is that we have neglected the importance of story, of individuals needing to fit their lives into a bigger narrative, a grand narrative that gives our lives a sense a meaning, a sense and purpose. People need to understand why these individual items are so important. How do these things all fit together? They're not just pearls thrown on a table and I can take four or five. They're pearls on a string. There's a big story that ties all of these discipleship elements together into one beautiful piece of jewelry.

Every traditional society offered to people a big story into which the individuals in that society fit their lives and made sense of the world, made sense of their responsibilities and made sense of death and suffering. Every traditional society offered to people answers to the big questions of life. Where do we come from? What's our origin? Who are we? What's our identity? What are we supposed to do with our lives? What's our purpose? What's wrong with the world? How can the world be fixed? How can I be

fixed? How can the world be fixed? How can I be fixed? Where am I going, especially when I die?

Of all the cultures that have ever been – modern, contemporary society offers the least amount of help in answering the big questions of life. Contemporary society offers people no big story, no great narrative into which we fit our own little lives. Instead of the gigantic story told to us in the Bible, what are the smaller stories that we tell in 21<sup>st</sup> century America to make sense of life?

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What stories do we tell to make sense of life?

Certainly, one story that we tell in 21<sup>st</sup> century America is

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The story of hyper-individualism

What do I mean by hyper-individualism? I mean the emphasis in our culture upon personal freedom and self-expression. The idea is that the goal of life is for individuals to find their own personal fulfillment. I just need to be me, my best self, my most authentic self. The goal of life is NOT to serve mankind, to make a difference in a child's life or to serve our nation. The goal of life, according to hyper-individualism, is for each of us to carve out our own path. You do you and I'll do me.

The result of hyper-individualism is displayed every day in the growing numbers of suicides in our country, the rates of depression, the number of people who are growing old alone and in isolation. Hyper-individualism creates a culture of fear, distrust, tribalism, isolation, fragmentation and desolation.

Stories have implications. One of the other little stories we tell in 21<sup>st</sup> century America to make sense of life is

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The story of politics

Any of you old enough to remember Mad Libs? There used to be books in which you got to fill in the blank. For example,

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I was walking down the street with my \_\_\_\_\_ when I heard \_\_\_\_\_

I feel like the political story we tell to make sense of our lives in 21<sup>st</sup> century America is like living inside of a Mad Lib.

Slide (the bracketed words shouldn't appear on the slide)

I am a good person. My country is being destroyed by [and then fill in the blank]. Hollywood elites, Republicans, illegal immigrants, the Dems, the ultra-rich. They are [and then fill in the blank] greedy, murdering us, immoral, anti-Christian, animals. The only solution, of course, is to [Fill in the blank] raise taxes, build a wall, lock them up, elect me, make college free!

Christians not understanding the power of story and not understanding that we followers of Jesus have been invited to live in a very different story, try to hook the Christian story onto the hyper-individualistic story or the political story. It's almost as if we tried to put Christian shingles on the side of someone else's house. We say, "See, this is Christian" because we have a covering of Christianity.

If it's not the hyper-individualistic house or the political house, we may try to live in a story told by the marketers that the good life is found in the abundance of our possessions and experiences. We all are caught up in this consumption game where we compete with one another for ever bigger and more expensive things and more expensive experiences because that's what marks us off as someone who's lived a successful life.

Over and over again, we Christians try to live Christian lives in someone else's house. We don't inhabit the story of the Bible, the story of God's activity in the world.

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The story of the Bible

The Bible plunges us into a very different story than the hyper-individualistic story of contemporary America or the political story or the consumer story or any of the other little stories that we try to live in as followers of Jesus.

I want you to picture three concentric circles.

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When we as individual Christians move into the house of God's Word, God's big story, we start understanding who we are and why God made us, what's wrong with the world and what God is up to in the world. And then, we discover what God is up to in the church – in this church, Vineyard Columbus. Our own personal stories start to make sense – following Jesus with our finances and our sexuality and our relationships and our forgiveness and our worship and our obedience and our Bible reading and our prayer. Our whole life, our wholehearted discipleship, only makes sense if we tie it first into God's Big Story in the Bible and secondarily into the story of what God is up to in the church.

We named this campaign "The Story Continues" because we wanted to communicate the basic idea that God is not done working out his purposes in the world and God is not done with what he wants to do in and through Vineyard Columbus. And God is certainly not done, friends, in what he wants to do in you and with you and through you.

I've called this first message in this year's discipleship campaign "The Story Continues". Let's pray.

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What makes a story great?

When you read the elements of a great story or you hear movie directors talk about why they're excited about a particular movie they're working on, they'll tell you that every great story has a hero.

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Every great story has a hero

Storytellers call this the protagonist, the main character in the story. The protagonist is the lead or the main subject, the hero. Now, part of the problem with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that we don't know who the main subject of life is. We think it's us. We're the heroes. We're the protagonists. We're playing the lead in the story of our little lives.

But the Bible opens with these words,

Slide Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

These are some of the most important words ever written. The seven words in the original Hebrew are packed full of meaning. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. If a church is serious about making disciples, it will try to live out the

implications of these seven words. If we want people to inhabit a different house in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not the house of hyper-individualism or politics or consumerism or professional advancement or whatever, but the house of God's Word, we need to understand the big story of the Bible and who the hero is, who plays the lead.

Who is the protagonist in the story of life?

The hero of the Bible is God. God created the heavens and the earth. The main subject of the Bible is God. You want to know what the Bible is about? It is the story of God and his dealing with men and women. From the opening sentence, the Bible tells us that God is the theme of life. We find God at the beginning of the Bible. We find God at the end of the Bible. And at every point along the way, between the beginning and the end, there is God. In all the twists and turns of people's lives, in all the various journeys of God's people, there is God dealing with people, blessing people, judging people, answering people's prayers, hearing about their little cares and anxieties.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* reminds us of the basic truth that God is the theme of life. He is the starting point of all good thinking. He is the lens through which you look at all of life. To miss God is to miss the point of life, the center of life, the meaning of life.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* tells us that everything in this universe must be ultimately related to God – your marriage, your child, your trials, your difficulties, your suffering, your losses, your success, your joy, your sorrow, your family, your dating, your sex life, your job.

When you realize that everything comes from God, that he is the theme of life, then you recognize that in all of life basically what you are doing is wrestling with God. You think you are wrestling with another person, but you are really wrestling with God. You think you are wrestling with your health, but you are really wrestling with God. You think you are wrestling with a decision, work frustrations, a choice of a major, but ultimately you are always grappling with God. What is God up to? What is God wanting to do in this situation and just as importantly in you and with you and through you.

Every great story has a hero. Let me ask you a personal question. Do you say looking at the story of your life, that God really is your hero? That he's the lead, he's the center, he's the director? That you try to relate everything in your life to God? Do you constantly ask, "What is God up to in this disappointment, in this success, in this promotion, in this conversation?" Is the way you make sense of the world is by connecting it up with God? Not perfectly, not always, but is that the house you live in? Do you live in God's house? Or is God a bit player, standing off in the wings of the stage while you occupy center stage? Or your job does. Or your kids. Or an addiction –

alcohol, drugs, sex, work, money, food. What is it? Who is it that you're trying to build your life around?

Every great story has a hero and

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Every great story has a supporting cast

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Frodo Baggins pic

Frodo Baggins who is the protagonist, the hero, in *The Lord of the Rings* has his trusted companion, Samwise Gamgee.

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Samwise pic

Along with

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Gandalf

Slide

Aragon

And many others. Superman has his supporting cast.

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Superman

Slide

Lois Lane

Slide

Jimmy Olsen and Perry White

From the Daily Planet.

T'Challa, the Black Panther has his supporting cast

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Black Panther

has his sister Shuri and his friend Everett K. Ross

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Shuri

Slide

Everett

And his girlfriend

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Nakia

And God has a supporting cast. Here's what we read

Slide Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

If you want to inhabit the big story of the Bible, if you want to figure out what life is about, first you have to understand that God is the hero. God is the lead actor. He's the protagonist. He's the main character. Everything needs to be related to him – but incredibly we are the supporting cast. Amazingly, God invites us – you and me – to be part of this big story. He could have been the only actor in the drama, but God decided, in love, to have other cast members. So three times Genesis says:

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God made mankind "in his image".

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Being made in the image of God has been interpreted in various ways throughout the history of the church. Certainly, a part of the meaning of being made in the image of God that we share some of the qualities of our Creator. Our personalities reflect the fact that our Creator is not an impersonal force like the Star Wars Force. The fact that you are a person is a reflection

of the truth that you were created by a personal being, in fact, a tri-personal being – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Your personhood came from his personhood. Your ability to make moral choices reflects the fact that God is moral.

We can and do make choices toward doing right or doing wrong. This reflects the perfect moral reasoning of our God.

We have a capacity for holiness, a capacity for relationship, a capacity to love and to be loved, a capacity to show mercy. We create and in creating we reflect the image of God, who is a Creator. So when you paint, when you write an essay, when you write a poem, when you come up with your own recipe for something, when you make curtains, or build a bookcase, or redecorate your house or write a lesson plan for school or a financial plan for a client or a weight loss plan for a patient you are reflecting God's image as Creator.

Because we are made in the image of God, we have extraordinary value. You have worth regardless of your age, regardless of your mental abilities, regardless of your station in life, regardless of your bank account, your net worth doesn't have to determine your net worth. You have worth because you reflect God who is of infinite worth.

But there's another way to interpret the meaning of the phrase "the image of God" and that's to read it in context with a slightly different translation of the preposition.

Slide Genesis 1:26

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Many recent translators translate the phrase not as

Slide

"Let us make mankind in our image"

But rather,

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"Let us make mankind as our image"

In other words, it's not the fact that we share some of God's character or some of God's attributes like personality or creativity that makes us the image of God, we literally ARE

the image of God. In the ancient world, Kings would mark off the boundaries of their kingdom by putting images or statues of themselves at the borders of the territory they controlled. The image of the king marked out the extent of the king's reign. So, after a king conquered a city, he would place a statue of himself by the city gate. That reminded people in the city that though the king himself might live in some far off place, our city is under his rule. The image represented the rule of the king.

When God made us human beings as his image bearers, we read:

Slide Genesis 1:28

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

We're commanded to fill the earth. God sent us human beings out into the world to be a reminder of his reign to all living creatures on the planet. To be an image bearer of God means we were created to demonstrate to the rest of Creation that the Lord God is King and the Lord God rules.

Think about this with me for a moment. Who you are and who I am, our basic identity below all the roles that we have – I'm a pastor, you're a manager, a homemaker, a student, a mom or dad, a coach, an athlete, an artist, the owner of a business – below all of these roles, our basic human identity is that we are image bearers of God. We exist to represent God's good and kind rule wherever we go. Is that the story you tell yourself? Is representing God's good and kind rule the story you try to live into?

Friend, at your job do you ever say to yourself, "I exist at this job to represent God's grace. I am in this school to represent God's restoring grace to kids and staff who need to be loved and guided in life"? Do you ever say, "I was put in the middle of this family mess to bring God's healing presence to my family. Because I've been given the grace to understand that I am made in the image of God, I am the one in the family who needs to reach out to that brother or sister, that son or daughter, that relative who is alienated, who is far away, and who is the black sheep." We represent the rule of King – our Lord God – his desire to reconcile relationships, his desire to make peace.

Slide

- Every great story has a hero
- Every great story has a supporting cast

And

Slide

Every great story has a conflict

Frodo has to deal with the evil power of Sauron and Gollum

Slide  
Gollum

And Superman has a conflict with Lex Luthor.

Slide  
Lex Luthor

And Black Panther has Erik Killmonger

Slide  
Erik Killmonger

And God's story also contains a conflict – with the intrusion of sin and rebellion in Genesis 3, this perfect world God messed up.

There was a film out some years ago called "Grand Canyon"

Slide  
Grand Canyon pic

In this film this immigration attorney tries to break out of a traffic jam and follow some side route. His side route takes him into a progressively more dark, more deserted area of town. And then, predictably, his very expensive car breaks down on a street where there are five young hoods with their guns and their expensive sneakers. They surround the car and surround him, threatening to beat him. Just in time this tow-truck driver pulls up. The tow-truck driver is a good man. The young thugs get into an argument with him, asking him, "What are you doing?", because the tow-truck driver is about to take away their meal for the evening.

What the tow-truck driver says to these kids raises all kinds of issues of philosophy and life. He says,

Slide  
"Man, the world ain't supposed to work like this, maybe you don't know that. But this ain't the way it's supposed to be. I am supposed to be able to do my job without asking you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you ripping him off. Everything is supposed to be different than what it is here."

This is a profound statement. The world ain't supposed to work like this. The opening pages of the Bible describe the way the world is supposed to work. You read Genesis 1 and 2 and you see the world working according to its created design. A world in which men and women, husbands and wives, connect deeply, intimately, lovingly without hurting each other and without dominating each other, without using each other, without abusing each other. In the opening pages of Genesis, you see a world without violence, a world without disease, a world without miscarriages, a world where people love God and live with a clear conscience before him. In the opening pages of Genesis we read of a world where not only do people understand what is right to do, in addition they love doing what is right.

The prophets in the Old Testament looked forward to a day when people from every race and every country would live in this world as one harmonious human community – not Jew against Arab and Indian against Pakistani and Protestant against Catholic and White against Black – but as one human community. They looked for a day when people would be knit together in true brotherhood and sisterhood. The prophets looked forward to a day where people would walk again with God and they would lean on God, trust in God and obey God. And most of all, people would love God. They would love God's ways.

But this is not the world we live in. We live in a world of violence and divorce. An officer in the Coast Guard was allegedly stockpiling weapons in order to start a race war. He calls himself a neo-Nazi, a white nationalist serving in the armed forces, but he allegedly said that his desire was to kill almost every human being on earth.

We don't live in a world of relational harmony. We live in a world of divorces. Young people sent to prison. Domestic violence. Addiction. We live in a world of psychological and emotional problems. Cancer and disease. And, most importantly, the world in which people do not have God as the hero of the story of their lives. A world that's turned its back on God and push God off the stage. A world in which people struggle to believe in God. A world where people run from God.

Slide

- Every great story has a hero
- Every great story has a supporting cast
- Every great story has a conflict

Finally,

Slide

Every great story has a resolution to the conflict

In the *Lord of the Rings*, Gollum loses his balance and falls with the ring into the lava, destroying the ring and Sauron's power. God doesn't leave the world the way it is. God's last word to the world is blessing.

Slide Romans 5:20-21

<sup>20</sup>The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And in 2 Samuel 14:14 we read:

Slide 2 Samuel 14:14

<sup>14</sup>Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.

God is always plotting, he's always strategizing. He's always looking for ways to invite you into his story. He's always trying to show mercy and grace to a person who is far from him. He wants to do that in your life. He wants you to experience deep joy and rest as you trust in Christ. Brothers and sisters, you are God's image bearers. You who know Jesus understand that in a way that some of you do not. God wants to use Vineyard Columbus and us as individuals to spread the blessing of his restoring rule and reign in the world. God wants to use you to bring God's healing and restoration into your family, into your workplace, your neighborhood and school and dormitory. During this campaign, we're going to explore God's story, our church's story and our individual stories as God continues to use us to write the story of his restoring grace. Let's pray.

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## The Story Continues

Rich Nathan  
March 2 & 3, 2019  
The Story Continues  
Genesis 1:26-28

- I. Why do we do discipleship campaigns?
- II. What stories do we tell to make sense of life?
  - a. The story of hyper-individualism
  - b. The story of politics
  - c. The story of the Bible
- III. What makes a story great?
  - a. Every great story has a hero
  - b. Every great story has a supporting cast
  - c. Every great story has a conflict
  - d. Every great story has a resolution to the conflict