

The True You: Creation (Gen. 1:27-28, 31)

Chris Altrock - 4/29/18

Lisa Wingate's novel *Before We Were Yours* is based on the true story of the Memphis-based Tennessee Children's Home Society. From the 1930's to the 1950's, a woman named Georgia Tann stole or purchased children from the poor or from single mothers and then placed them in an orphanage where they were neglected and mistreated. She then sold the children to wealthy families.

Wingate tells the story through the eyes of a fictional woman named Avery Stafford. The Staffords are a wealthy and influential family in South Carolina. Avery has been groomed to serve in high society and to carry on the family legacy. But when her grandmother's health fails, Avery discovers that her family has a forgotten connection to the Tennessee Children's Home Society. Her grandmother was one of those children stolen from a loving family and adopted by another. This new information about her past changes the way Avery sees herself. As she learns this revelation about her past, it alters her perspective on herself and her life in significant ways.

A lot of people these days are digging up information about their past. Many of them are doing this intentionally, not accidentally. We seem to be hungry for more of our story.

For example, there's been a tremendous rise in the number of people purchasing and completing genetic testing kits. More than 12 million people did so in the last year.¹ Large genealogy companies like Ancestry.com and 23andMe are advertising widely. They are telling the stories of customers who have discovered the countries of their ancestors, filled in the gaps in their family trees, and have been reunited with long lost relatives. These companies are promising to help you discover the real you.²

The more we learn about our stories, the more it alters how we see ourselves and our lives--hopefully, for the positive.

In fact, according to James Bryan Smith, author of *The Good and Beautiful God, getting our story right is the key to getting our life right*. The more we really understand our story, the better our life will go. Smith writes this:³

We are storied creatures. Our stories help us navigate our world, to understand right and wrong, and to provide meaning...We are shaped by our stories. In fact, our stories, once in place, determine much of our behavior without regard to their accuracy or helpfulness. Once these stories are stored in our minds, they stay there largely

¹ <https://geneticdirection.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Screen-Shot-2018-02-16-at-5.23.31-PM-768x448.png>

² <https://geneticdirection.com/2018/02/16/genetic-testing/>

³ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*, 25.

unchallenged until we die. And here is the main point: these narratives are running (and often ruining) our lives. That is why it is crucial to get the right narratives.

Smith goes on to write that we learn life-shaping stories from three sources:

1. *Family narratives* - these are the stories we learn from our immediate family. They often address key questions like Who am I? Why am I here? and Am I valuable? If you grow up and basically learn the story, “You only matter if you get good grades,” that story will shape you in powerful ways.
2. *Cultural narratives* - these are the stories we learn from growing up in a particular part of the world. They inform what we think is important, what is successful, and a host of other values. If you grow up in a culture that teaches you the story, “A successful person is a wealthy person,” that story will affect you.
3. *Religious narratives* - these are the stories given to us from the pulpit, the classroom, podcasts, social media and religious books. They shape the way we think about God and what God wants of us and how we ought to live to please him. If your religious sources teach you the story, “God only cares about what you believe not how you live,” that story will shape you.

But the Bible, we Christians claim, is the ultimate story. It’s where we learn the real truth about who we are, who God is, and what life is truly all about. It trumps what we learn about ourselves from digging into our history or our DNA. It overshadows what our family tells us, what our Facebook or friends tell us, and what our preacher or podcast tells us.

And the good news is that, according to the Barna organization, last year the vast majority of Americans owned a Bible in some form.⁴ We’ve got our fingers on the right story.

The sad news is that a third of Americans last year never read, listened to or prayed with the Bible.⁵ Still, more than half of us say we wish we read the Bible more.⁶

Getting our story right is the key to getting our life right. And the Bible is the right story. It’s not a collection of commands. It’s a story--about God and about us. And when we allow the Bible’s story to become our story, that’s when we really understand the real us and that’s when we really understand what life is all about.

That’s why we’re launching a series this morning called “The True You: Sixteen Verses That Reveal the Real Version of You.” We’re basing it off a book by Chris Bruno who summarizes the story of the Bible using 16 texts in the Bible.⁷ We’re borrowing Bruno’s sixteen texts and covering them over the next eleven weeks. Our hope is that through these sixteen

⁴ https://2lmj59j584i4bt4f7487fdy-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Barna_ABS_charts_v312.jpg?w=1208

⁵ https://2lmj59j584i4bt4f7487fdy-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Barna_ABS_charts_v38-1024x453.jpg?w=1208

⁶ <https://www.barna.com/research/state-bible-2017-top-findings/>

⁷ <https://www.crossway.org/books/the-whole-story-of-the-bible-in-16-verses-tpb/>

texts you'll gain a clearer understanding of the basic story of the Bible and how that story reveals who you truly are and who God truly is.

We've created cards with each of these texts on them and put them in sets. We've got about 500 sets available if you'd like one. Use them as memory cards. Use them to share this story with others. This story is the one true story that makes all the difference in the world.

We begin our series with two texts in Genesis chapter one:

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Gen. 1:31 ESV)

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:27-28 ESV)

We first notice this foundational truth:

everything that is-- has been made--by God.

Nothing has happened by chance. This includes you and me.

Everything that is--has been made--by God.

And generally, things made, are made with design, purpose and intention.

Here, we learn that design, intention and purpose is "very good."

God surveys all that is--he's made all that is--and calls it "very good."

Say this out loud: *I am made by God and I am very good.* This is your story. This is the truth about you. What makes you very good is not the work you're doing, the number of children you have or don't have, whether you are married or not, what school you attend, what clothes you wear, or your religious track record. What makes you very good is that you are made by God.

This is a story we need all our lives. There's hardly a time in our lives when we don't need this story. For example, recently, I've been trying to find a publisher for a new book I've written. Publishing a book, if you don't know, is an exercise in rejection. One publishing agent replied in this curt way: "Thanks for your inquiry. We're not interested in your proposal. You're platform is too small." What he meant is that my social media presence is too small. My church is too small. And my potential for selling books is too small. Do you know what story undergirded all of that? "You aren't good enough?" How many times during our lives do we hear that story? But here's the story of Scripture: I am made by God and I am very good--and it has nothing to do with the size of my platform. That's a critical story for me to keep in mind about myself.

And about others. Say this out loud to the person next to you: *You are made by God and are very good.* This is part of everyone's story. And how critical this is for us to know in this

world that is increasingly diverse. As we interact with people whose political background, whose race, whose citizenship status, whose sexuality, whose gender, whose religion differs from ours--as we post things on social media-- we need to remember this--they too are made by God and are very good.

All things, in fact, are made by God and are very good. Say this out loud: *All things are made by God and are very good.* In his book Chris Bruno reminds us that we have a tendency to divide the world into “spiritual” and “physical.” The people in the ancient world did this as well. And they believed that “spiritual” things were very good but physical things weren’t.

Sometimes we get the same idea. In fact we see this in this text:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, (1 Timothy 4:1-4 ESV)

Notice how strongly the apostle Paul reacts to this idea--this idea that some things are bad because they are “unspiritual,” like marriage or like certain foods. Paul points back to this verse in Genesis and reminds us that God saw everything he made and called it very good. Everything created by God is good--and God has made all things. And these created things are meant to be received with thanksgiving. That is, they are part of our relationship with God. They are part of our spirituality.

We are to receive the sunset, the rushing river, the fresh salad, the juicy steak, the giggling baby, the stunning piece of art, the stirring piece of music, the rainstorm with thanksgiving. They are all very good.

This is what Shauna Niequist gets at when she writes this:⁸

“Many of the most deeply spiritual moments of my life haven't happened just in my mind or in my soul. They happened while holding my son in the middle of the night, or watching the water break along the shore, or around my table, watching the people I love feel nourished in all sorts of ways.”

Our spirituality includes the ordinary and seemingly secular parts of our lives, not just what happens when we go to church. These, too, were made by God, are very good, and are meant to be celebrated.

Even more, the second text reminds us *we all are made in the image of God.* In the ancient world, the king alone was thought to be made in the image of God. The king represented God to the rest of humanity. The king was the only visible representation of the deity. The king alone ruled on behalf of the gods.

⁸ Shauna Niequist, *Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way*

But the Bible declares something radical--every human being represents God to the world. Every human being is a visible representation of God. We all have the opportunity to rule on behalf of God. The text reminds us that no matter who we are, male or female, we are all made in the image of God. Both genders are of equal value. Both genders are royalty and are given divine purpose in the world.

And, as Jerry Hill from The Ranch reminded us two Sundays ago, this text teaches that each person has God's DNA. It's the ultimate genetic testing kit. It's the ultimate family tree. We might trace our family tree back and find our ancestors were from here or there, and that narrative might impact our self-identity. But if we go all the way back, every one of us winds up in Genesis 1 with the truth that we're all made of God's DNA. We're all royalty. We're all made in the image of God. And that is to have the ultimate impact in the way we see ourselves.

And in the way we see others. Anne Lamott is famously known for saying something like "You can safely assume you've created God in your image when God hates all the same people you hate." But God has created all of us in his image. And this means that we love all the people he loves.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, killed by the Nazis, in part, for refusing to hate the Jews, once reflected on how this truth changes the way we treat others:⁹

"God did not make this person as I would have made him. He did not give him to me as a brother for me to dominate and control, but in order that I might find above him the Creator. Now the other person, in the freedom with which he was created, becomes the occasion of joy, whereas before he was only a nuisance and an affliction. God does not will that I should fashion the other person according to the image that seems good to me, that is, in my own image; rather in his very freedom from me God made this person in His image."

Think back over this last week. Who was a nuisance? Who was an affliction? Do you realize that person was made in the image of God? This too is our story.

I urge this week to engage in the "Making His Story Your Story" spiritual exercises. These are designed to help you absorb these texts and allow them to more fully inform your story.

The Bible made an unfortunate list recently. The editors of GQ wrote a piece entitled "21 Books You Don't Have to Read." The piece claimed that some of the great pieces of literature really aren't that great--including the Bible. The Bible, the article claimed is "repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned." The Bible can be hard to read. It can raise some questions. But what we want to show in this series is that it is *the* one story that makes sense of all our stories. These 16 texts in the Bible can shape our lives in profound ways if we give them a chance. I hope you will.

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*

