



## The Lost Foundations – Whose Story is It?

### Introduction

I was not surprised the day I became a part of my company's reduction in force. The Lord had prepared me. I was expecting it. The surprise came when I finally realized that God wasn't moving me on to something I thought was better. Among other things, I learned that His purpose for my life was not so much about me.

The nation of Israel was not surprised that the Messiah had come. They had been anticipating His arrival for hundreds of years. Their surprise was in the fact that it was not so much about them. God had a bigger plan.

One of the tragedies of a self-centered story is the loss of perspective. It is scary to think what I would have lost if God had settled for my plan; and it is sobering to recognize that I did not have a clue how much less I was fighting for Him to give me.

Tragically, most of the nation of Israel has settled for less; and they still don't have a clue. In fact, not having a clue is the primary affect of their self-centered perspective.

*But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2Corinthians 3:14-17*

Not only have God's original people lost the New Testament, but the Old now lies behind a veil. The Lord and the Spirit are hidden from them; and they have no liberty – the law is still their measure.

Much of the Western Church is in much the same danger; and we don't have much more of a clue. It's not that we are lacking for clues. Jesus spoke often of the dangers: the rich young ruler, the prodigal son and the wicked, lazy servant, to name just a few. All were looking at the story from a self-centered perspective.

It is ironic that the most obvious thing can be the very thing we get wrong. So, let me ask you: Who is the Bible really about? Who is the writer, the producer and the director? Who is the main character?

Of course, you will say, the story is about God. It is about what He wants and what He is doing. I cannot imagine any Christian would disagree. Certainly, no one would say, "The story is about me." Right?

But is that not the way we live our lives, here in the Western Church?

Think about it; and be honest with yourself: Why did we pray that first prayer? How do we motivate others to pray it? Why do we pray at all? Who is the main character of our prayers? Are our prayers for God, or are they for us?

What if I said, "The story is about God's people?" That sounds better. Feels better, too. But still, it's way off the mark.

Just a little more soul searching: What is our motivation for reaching the lost, and for serving those in need? Is it for Him, or is it for them? Who is it really about?

I think you understand where I am going with this, but let me say it clearly: The church in the West has become self-centered; even humanistic. Consciously or subconsciously, with intent or not, we have come to think, believe and live like the story is about us.

We don't have a clue just how much less this "about us" story is; we have lost sight of God's greater narrative. As much as God loves to bless His children, He is up to something much greater than we can think or ask.

So, how do we shake off this deception and began living like the story is about Him? How do we begin changing hearts and minds (including our own)?

I believe the transformation we need is found in the answers to three basic questions:

1. What is God doing (His purposes)?
2. Why is God doing what He is doing (His motivations)?
3. How is God doing it (His ways)?

I hope you will join me in searching out the answers to these questions. God will reward our search with the renewal of our minds and the enlightenment of our hearts. Furthermore, we will be equipped and encouraged to join the greatest story ever told.

## His Purposes

Suppose you had an employee that thought, believed and lived like your business was solely for his purposes. What would you do? Isn't he right to think your business is for him? After all, you hired him, you are paying him a salary, and you are providing him with benefits. It's about him; right?

Of course it's not! Every wise business owner would fire such an employee (short of that employee having a significant attitude adjustment).

But, what if that employee was not so selfish? What if he thought your business was there for his family's pleasure and purpose – that it was predominately about them?

Same result: "Change the way you are thinking, believing and working; or pack up your desk." Am I right?

What if your employees thought you and your company should be subject to the interests of the community; that you should give your products away, regardless of the affect it has on you and the legacy of your company? Well, that would be socialism; and strong sign that something has gone drastically wrong!!

Last set of questions: Does a good and wise business owner (or king) allow the story of his business (or kingdom) to be primarily about any other individual or group? Is it wrong for him to insist that the kingdom be centered on him and his purposes?

Do not underestimate the paradigm shift required for this to become a reality in our individual and corporate lives. To overcome this mindset, we must become passionately diligent for the renewal of our minds; for indeed, our place in God's story is dependent on it.

At the beginning of God's story, we find Him creating a place for a people; and creating a people that would be for Himself. Then those people introduced a major detour into God's story. We call it "The Fall".

As a side note, I find it interesting how we minimize things by the descriptions we give them. "The Fall" was much more than a fall. It was nothing less than out right rebellion – mankind deciding that their story was more important than God's.

God's people lost much in their rebellion. That loss has become the primary focus of our religion – getting back what we lost. We ruminate and regret our own reduced state.

"Woe is me! I have to toil for my living."

"Woe is me! I have to labor in childbirth; and submit to this man."

We come to God for strength and relief in the toil. We want to know He is close when we need Him. We want the security of a future in heaven; and protection from our enemies. We want a lot!

***But what about God!?!***

Have you ever considered what God lost in the Garden of Eden? Shouldn't we be concerned about His loss? As with anyone else we love, shouldn't we be interested in Him getting it all back? After all, He is the Master of the kingdom we call home – the place of our stewardship to the King. It just might be that Him getting back what belongs to Him is the best thing that could happen to us.

The purposes of God's story are found in the restoration of what He lost in Mankind's rebellion. To understand, we go to the end of the story (The Revelation of Jesus Christ). You see, the Bible may be the only book written that is not spoiled by reading the end of the story first. In fact, it is encouraging and edifying to know what God is after, because we know that He will get whatever it is.

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:1-4*

Oh, what a glorious day! It is the day we long for, when "all things are made new". It is the grand finale of God's great story (at least the part He has revealed). In John's description of this great day, we find a tight synopsis of His restorative purpose. And it's not verse four – as wonderful and well quoted as it has become.

The greatest purposes of God are found in verse three (underlined):

1. "He will dwell with them" – It was always God's intention to inhabit His people. Jesus spoke of its beginning, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23) This is the spiritual reality of that which will be physically manifested in the New Jerusalem.

**God will restore the habitation He intends to have with His people.**

2. "They shall be His people" – We can only imagine the depths of intimacy God had with Adam and Eve in the Garden – and His loss in their rebellion. God sent Jesus to make a way for the restoration of His relationship with us. Jesus prayed the will of the Father back to Him in John 17:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (v. 3).

... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us (v. 21).

Intimately knowing God and Jesus Christ is eternal life; and the Father is answering His Son's prayer, not as much for us, but that He might gather us to Himself.

**God will fully restore the intimate relationship He intends to have with His children.**

3. "God Himself will be... their God" – The third thing God lost in the Garden was His reign in the hearts of His people. Before they disobeyed God's command regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve determined that they were better suited to make decisions for themselves. They determined to be their own kings. They rebelled against God in a futile attempt to become like Him.

In response, the Father sent Jesus to preach the gospel of His kingdom, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15) This began a new age in God’s story, whereby...

**God will fully restore His reign in the hearts of His subjects.**

Graciously and gloriously, God has invited us to participate in His story of restoration. The impact we have for God’s kingdom – our being His faithful stewards – is directly proportional to our submission to His will. In these three purposes, He has given us the way to find the center of His will – a triangulation, so to speak.

From the center of His will, we can know what His will is for each day of our lives – even for every moment. This is critical to our participation.

*Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Matthew 7:21*

*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 1John 2:17*

Our very salvation depends on finding the center of God’s will – in His story. It begins with our surrender – to be made partners and instruments in the restoration of all that He lost in our rebellion.

Our participation in His story begins here; but there is more we must understand and believe before we can be effective participants. We must continue to turn our perspective of His story, inside-out.

## His Motivation

There is no other God like our God, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him (Isaiah 64:4). His Son did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Clearly, God loves and desires to serve His creation.

It is easy to understand why we have assumed that God’s ultimate motivation is His love for His people. It has been so engrained in our religion that, even now, you are struggling with what you suspect I am about to say. To be honest, writing it doesn’t come easy, either.

But, as we know, the Scriptures do not lie. As hard as it might be to face the facts, we must come to understand – and believe – that the chosen of God are to be a people for Himself; and what He does with and for those people, He does – primarily, not secondarily – for Himself.

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. Deuteronomy 14:2*

*Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him. Isaiah 43:7*

*For My name’s sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off. Isaiah 48:9*

*But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. Ezekiel 20:8-9*

*Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,” says the LORD God. Ezekiel 20:44*

It is interesting to note that God withheld His judgment against a rebellious nation, not because of His mercy, but for the honor of His name. Moses interceded with God for the children of Israel many times during their

Wilderness journey. He never asked God to have mercy on them for their sake. He always reminded God that their destruction would reflect negatively on Him and His name.

The same “for Himself” was passed on by God to His Son.

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14*

*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:6-8*

Jesus gave Himself for us! This is our wonderful hope. But, let’s be careful to recognize that our redemption is secondary to His higher purpose: That He might have for Himself His own special people; that He might have a perfect wife.

As much as we would like to think that the story is about us having Him; the truth is: It is about Him having us. And that is a very great thing!

So, why is this so hard for us to grasp? Perhaps we are more the product of our “of the people, by the people, for the people” kingdom than we think.

Anticipating such a proclivity for self-centered humanism, the Holy Spirit used Paul to write:

*For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36*

*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. Colossians 1:16*

Notice that the first of these passages is speaking of the Father; and the second of His Son. This is no coincidence. What can this mean except that God has delegated the rule of His kingdom to Jesus Christ, the resurrected King?

*... which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places... and He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:20-23*

The kingdom of God is by Him, through Him, and for Him. It is about Him (or Them)! Anything less is a counterfeit kingdom; void of the Author’s true kingdom, power and glory.

Furthermore, the Father gave Him (Jesus) to be head... to the church. This brings us to an exciting point of transition. Totally subjected to His Father’s will, Jesus sets out to make disciples that will participate in the restoration work; and then He gives us the way to partner with Him.

*So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” John 20:21*

*All authority has been given to me... Go therefore and make disciples... Matthew 28:18-19*

## His Way

We have been sent by Jesus Christ, as He was sent: to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might (Ephesians 6:10) – to do greater things than He did (John 14:12). I've often wondered, "What was He thinking? Me? Us? How could He have even imagined such a thing?" He certainly knew (and knows) something we have a hard time understanding and believing.

But, it must be true; right?

Searching out the Ephesians 6:10 passage, we find a sign that will lead us into the way God intends to make this happen. The "power" of His might is from the Greek word, *kratos*. It means dominion, the right to reign, and authority.

God's way for our participation in His story is through the exercise of His Son's authority. So, how do we do that?

*Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.* Matthew 18:5

*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.* Matthew 18:20

*For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.* Mark 9:41

*If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.* John 14:14

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.* John 14:26

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ is powerful indeed! We find security and comfort in the power of His name. We sing praises to the power of His name. But what does it mean to receive, gather, give, ask and send in His name?

Most of us close our prayers with, "In Jesus' name." What do we mean? Are we using His name to add power to our prayers? Or, is tacking on "in His name" simply another way of saying "Your will be done"?

I wouldn't say these reasons – or a few others I have heard – are necessarily wrong. They are the truth, but not the whole truth. They lack the understanding and belief required to exercise Jesus' full authority.

Here's a word picture that may help. Imagine you are an ambassador from the United States, sent to New Zealand. As such, when you go to consult and transact with the leaders of New Zealand, you do so in the name of the President of the United States. You go with his agenda and instructions in mind.

Your sole purpose is to present and represent the purposes of the United States. You dare not receive, gather, give, ask or send anything for yourself. All you do is done for your sovereign. Your mission – the story of your life – is about his desires and purposes. All you say and do is by him, through him and for him.

Why do we do this (i.e., subjugating our own will)? First, and most importantly, we understand and believe that the purposes and plans of our sovereign nation are more important than our own. Second, it is simply our responsibility as an ambassador. It is what we do. Last, and preferably least, we recognize that there are benefits for those that live in humble submission to their sovereign.

This, of course, is easier said than done. To receive, gather, give, ask or send in Jesus' name is to exercise His authority. This is not possible for those that have not come under His authority. This is a key principle of the kingdom of God.

It is important to recognize – and remind ourselves, as followers of Jesus Christ – that our Master also humbly subjected Himself to His Father's will.

*I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.* John 5:30

And the same is true of the Holy Spirit.

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.* John 14:26

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.* John 16:13

The purposes of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identical – because the Son and the Holy Spirit have subjected themselves to the Father’s will. The Father sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit to redeem and prepare a people for Himself – a holy and purified people to serve His ultimate purposes.

The purposes of God will not be withheld from Him (Job 42:2). This we know is true. And now we know that His purposes for Himself are far above His purposes for His children. Furthermore, we know that our stories are much smaller by comparison; that we are simply blessed to be a small but significant part of His story.

Regrettably, there are people who have chosen, at their peril, to live their story outside of His. There are also those who desire to enter His story but have not found their way through the narrow gate (Luke 13:23-24). Those that know the way are commissioned to lead others fully into the kingdom of God.

This raises a number of serious questions:

How well do you know His story?

Have you been careful to subject your story to His?

Is your focus on His agenda, or have you compromised His story with yours?

These questions are for both personal and corporate reflection; and they demand our response. Jesus condemned the religious leaders for refusing to enter into the kingdom; and, worse, preventing others from entering (Matthew 23:13). Those whom God has raised into positions of influence and authority will give an account of their stewardship (Matthew 25:14-30).

God has placed His desires for restoration in the heart of every follower of Jesus Christ. Surrender to Him, and He will give you those desires (Psalm 37:4). May we all be found faithful.

## Working It Out

The most important thing about this exercise is spending time with God – asking Him questions that He is eager to answer. It is about fellowship with the One that has been orchestrating events to bring you (and those around you) into this understanding.

1. Review the Bible passages and their meaning. Share them with those in your spheres of influence. Sharing will build your faith; and the truth you share will make them free.
2. Ask the Lord to show you how each portion of your story aligns with His ultimate purposes. Thank Him for His grace in these areas. Make note of the areas that are not aligned.
3. Seek His restoration in those misaligned areas. This will take time, so start now. Transformation is a process. Do not allow for discouragement. God is working in you to will and do to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

## **Recommended Reading**

The following are some of my favorite books on this subject. Most can be found at your local Christian book store, or at one of the many online distributors.

***Crazy Love*; Francis Chan**

***Humility and Absolute Surrender*; Andrew Murray (combined set)**