

Autumn 2022

# THE BIBLICAL STORYTELLER

A Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. Publication

Preaching the Story

Stories of Fragility  
and Provision



See, the Lord's hand  
is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.  
Rather, your iniquities  
have been barriers  
between you and your God.

Isaiah 59:1-2

# FESTIVAL GATHERING of Biblical Storytelling

**EPIC TELLING  
OF THE  
BOOK OF ROMANS**

**WORKSHOPS  
For Everyone!  
Beginners  
through  
Master Storytellers**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**Raymond Aldred, ThD**  
Vancouver School of  
Theology - Director of the  
Indigenous Studies Program



**NBSI**  
NETWORK OF  
BIBLICAL STORYTELLERS  
INTERNATIONAL

**Wed., Aug. 2 - Friday, Aug. 4, 2023**

**Maritime Conference Center Near Baltimore, MD and BWI**

**REGISTRATION: [WWW.NBSINT.ORG](http://WWW.NBSINT.ORG)**

THE BIBLICAL  
STORYTELLER

The Biblical Storyteller is a publication of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l., an ecumenical, international, non-profit organization of scholars, clergy, and laity whose mission is to encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories. We provide and develop resources for telling biblical stories through audio, video, and computer technologies as well as telling them face-to-face.

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## The Strength of Fragility

Hummingbirds are very special to me. As pollinators, they're important to the continuation of plant life as we know it, so I feel almost smug about liking them. I wish I could tell you that's why they're so special to me, but it's not. But no, it's the stunning three-punch combination of their fragility, beauty, and strength.

Hummingbirds make their fierce treks to and from the US, Canada, Mexico, and Central America ALONE.

With hearts beating up to 80 times a minute, unlike other migrators, they make their journey in the daytime, flying low to the ground to better spot nectar sources for refueling along the way. The last leg of the migration is across the Gulf, where they face storms and headwinds, without stopping.

One sweet female returned to the feeder on my deck for five years. She'd tap the window when she arrived to encourage to me fill her feeder and then hover at the window to visit me in my office.

When she left last year, she spent an entire day saying goodbye. She gulped down nectar for the journey and perched on the wrought-iron heart outside next to my desk. We communed together that day.

It was absolutely breathtaking to sit with such a stunningly beautiful creature. And, it was the kind of intentional communication only another solo traveler would understand. It broke my heart, because I knew it meant she wasn't coming back.

**Things that are fragile  
are often surprisingly strong.**

Other examples spring to mind. Like my grandmother's bone china tea set. She brewed her tea in a proper teapot,



adorned with sprigs of pink roses, and sipped from delicate matching cups with gold handles.

Bone china is so thin, you can see your hand through it when you hold it up to the light. Yet it's also strong, durable, and stunningly beautiful.

### FRAGILE, YET STRONG

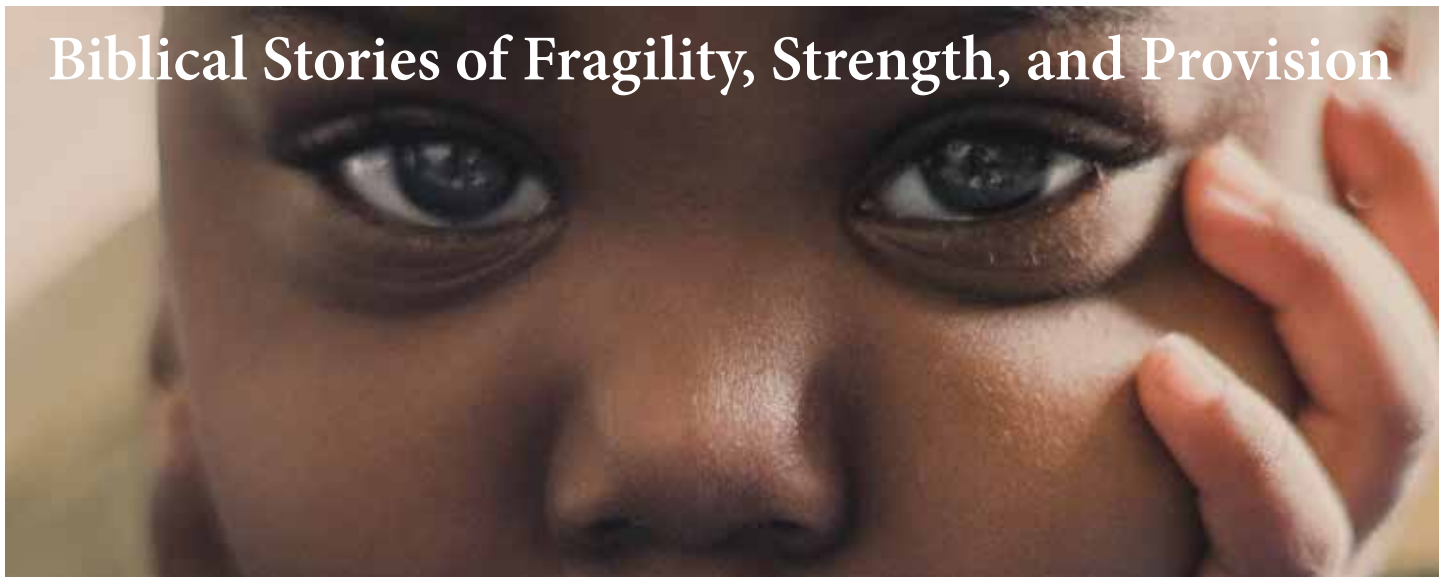
Your emotions are another example. You can get your feelings hurt, and still know that emotional fortitude will get you through just about anything.

Then there is young Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist who has stood before world leaders and demanded change. She has told it like it is again and again. She's stood up to the men who have ridiculed her as young, naive, and overtly emotional. She's called them out for what they are: Pathological liars; robbers whose greed has stolen her future, and that of my son's generation.

**Fragile, yet strong.**

So in this issue, some of our members explore the Bible's stories of fragility, strength, and God's provision. It seems a fitting use of space as another year around the sun comes to a close and we continue to draw ever closer to climate catastrophe.

# Biblical Stories of Fragility, Strength, and Provision



## The Widow and the Lost Coins

Mark 12:41-44

Pam Faro

With the theme of “fragility,” I was struck by the cover image of the hummingbirds. They are fragile; so small, such fine bones and tiny bodies. And yet—they are also ferociously territorial: “For their body size, hands down, the most aggressive bird is the Rufous Hummingbird,” says Emma Grieg from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Appearances, first impressions, and expectations or assumptions can be deceiving.

Which makes me think of the widow and her two coins in Mark 12. Poor, alone, to be pitied; definitely in a fragile position in society. And yet—“*more than all the others she gave...For all those others, out of their excess, they gave some. She, however, out of her destitution, she gave all, as much as she had. She gave the whole of her life,*” said Jesus of Nazareth, with approval and compassion. (Adapted from Richard Swanson’s translation.)

Even when fragility is real, so can there be real strength, capability, blessings, and resolve, especially so when we have relationships and community for supporting each other in our fragility.

## The Healing of the Deaf Man

Mark 7:32-35

Jim Kulma

*“They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”*

### What’s it like to have the universe trying to send you a message and you cannot hear it?

Sometimes, God or our loved ones are trying to tell us something important but it just won’t sink in. Your doctor says to lose weight, or change your eating. Your spouse says to stop drinking and it just bounces off your ears. What’s it like to have something deep within you that longs to be said, and it just gets choked off as it starts to enter the throat? We long to say, “I love you,” but it just won’t come out. We want to speak a word of forgiveness and we can’t bring ourselves to be that vulnerable. I know I should say,

“I was wrong.” Yet the blushing shame inside is more than I can face.

There’s something about the presence of Jesus that opens our life. What happens when Jesus takes our ears into his hands that allows us to hear things that are difficult to bear? There’s something about the breath of Jesus that opens our voice and allows difficult things to be said! Thank heaven for the compassionate touch of Jesus that covers our vulnerability and strengthens our frailty. Amen!

## The Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 26-27

Dina Ferguson

This had been their entire life—trudging through the Wilderness with everyone else. And just as they all came to the edge of the Promised Land, the Lord commanded a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites. All were counted, assigned, and given a place by name and by clan by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who “enrolled the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho.” And the Lord said to Moses, “To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance according to the number of names.”

It was clear. It was fair. It was obvious. And the daughters of Zelophehad

had no place, no land, no inheritance because Zelophehad had died without a male heir—only daughters. After traveling with them for 40 years in the wilderness, the daughters of Zelophehad had no place among the whole congregation. At least that’s what the Law said. And so that was what Moses said.

But the daughters came forward—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah came forward to stand “before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting” and make their case. It was tenuous. It was unprecedented. It was unheard of. Until the Lord heard the cry of the daughters and gave them a place. The Lord held up the daughters of Zelophehad as heirs of Israel and heirs in the Promised Land.

**I Have Called You by Name**  
**Isaiah 43:1-7**  
Debbie Weir

Isaiah’s words, reminding me of God’s role in my creation, redemption and eternal care have always given me comfort. But, the reassuring feeling was cerebral, lacking any emotional buy-in.

As I told these verses several years ago during a Bible study session, my eyes locked with a friend.

**“I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar...”**

Tears welled in our eyes at the promise of bringing our sons back. My youngest was fighting an addiction, hers mental health issues. Our sons were, in a way, far away from us. They were unreachable and as much as we wanted to solve their problems, we couldn’t. But God could. And did.

Now, as both of our sons are thriving, these providential words have been embraced wholly as truth and a fulfillment of the promises. At one time I thought of God’s comfort from a rational perspective, but God’s care is not rational. It is proof of the Lord’s unfailing love and attention.

**The Barren Fig Tree**  
**Luke 13:6-9**  
**and the Beautitudes**  
**Matthew 5:3**  
Janet Stahl

I recently learned that duck poop is a wonderful fertilizer. My sister has ducks and she gives us bags of the “used” pine chips for mulch in our garden. My flowers and shrubs have never looked so lush and vibrant! However, when the sun is out, our yard smells like duck poop.

Jesus told a parable in which the gardener offers to give special care and extra fertilizer to a fig tree that has not had any fruit for three years. I can see myself as the fig tree at times, in danger of being cut down for not bearing any fruit, which makes this message a joy, because I know I may be given extra chances and special care from the gardener. It reminds me of the first group to be called blessed in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3):

*[NLT] God blesses those who are poor (in spirit) and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

I see a connection in my life when I am poor in spirit, when the fruit of my life is sparse, or not delicious. Then, I am certainly not someone who is recognizable as part of the kingdom of heaven.

I don’t think it is coincidental that needing special care involves extra fertilizer (or even slimy, smelly duck poop). The not-so-pleasant events in my life can potentially bring about the best fruit in my life. And of course, all of this directly impacts the garden or the community around me. I need fertilizer in my life to be a part of the kingdom of heaven here on earth that is welcoming and caring for all.





## The Joy of Being Together in Story: Reflections by NBSI Founder Tom Boomershine

The notices of the decline of the Network of Biblical Storytelling are premature!

I cannot remember a Gathering, in recent memory, where there was so my energy! So much life! So much joy! The most striking thing to me about this Festival Gathering was the level of energy that was present in the group and in individuals. I've been to a lot of worship services, conferences, and various gatherings, but there was a higher level of energy in this gathering than anything I've recently experienced.

I was struck by that, and by the high quality of the workshops (thanks in no small part to the work of the Academy for Biblical Storytelling), by the plenary sessions led by Tracy Radosevic, the dean of that program, and the worship.

Then there also was the international presence that we had: 5 women from South Korea, 3 folks from Australia, and the family from India. This lent an energy of the recognition to the way in which the biblical stories are truly becoming an international development. Their presence was a reinforcement of the international work being done by the Network, and the name of NBSI.

Biblical storytelling is increasingly becoming an international experience and an international development. I

was just talking to a friend who is a Roman Catholic priest in the Order of St. Thomas the Apostle in India, who has been impressed with the importance of teaching the stories and storytelling as a central component of the study of the gospels in seminaries in India. This is a another reinforcement of NBSI's impact internationally.

The NBSI Seminar this year was outstanding. There were brilliant people at the seminar, making significant sacrifices to be there. There was new leadership, a transition in leadership, that again seems to be seamless and filled with scholarly energy.

This magazine, *The Biblical Storyteller*, is another great example. It has grown into a significant resource about biblical storytelling, one that includes quality writings from both Seminar scholars and members.

Biblical storytelling continues to be both a source of fascination and surprise for me. I remember the first time of telling the stories, the first workshop. It seemed a little strange at the time. I was in unknown territory and had no way of knowing if it would amount to anything.

I've been steadily surprised over the last 50 years by the degree of energy that is present in the telling of the

stories. I don't really feel like it's something that I've done, but rather something that I've participated in from 2000 years ago, by being connected with the origins of the Gospel and the origins of the biblical traditions.

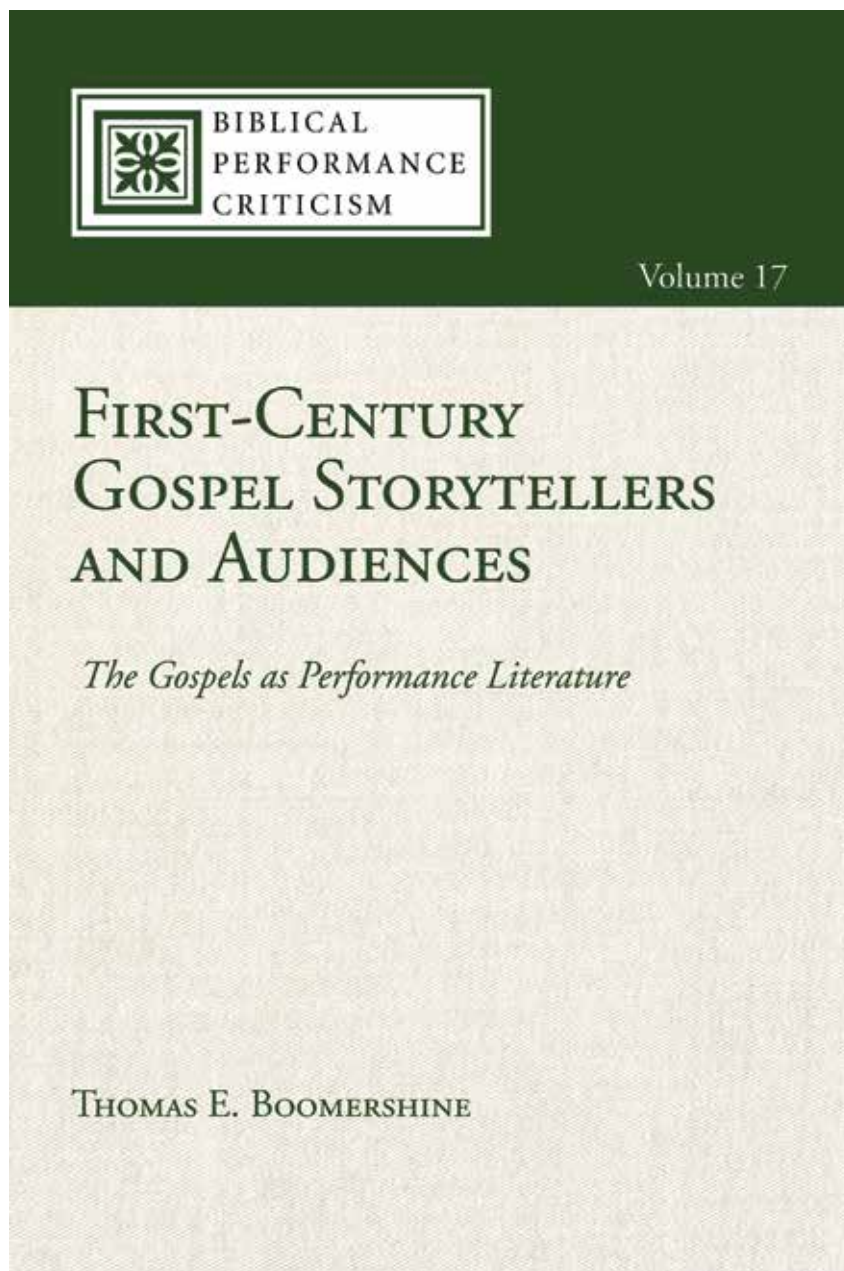
Every Festival, every new discovery, every new piece of information or scholarship reinforces this energy.

All of this makes me happy and grateful with a kind of awe and surprise that this continues to happen! I didn't know, if after two years hiatus, this might be the last Gathering, with a small group of people. Because of the effects of COVID, we only anticipated 75 people and yet we drew twice that. They came from all over the world, risking COVID. I know some people thought the Network's most energetic days were behind us, as the founder and previous leaders have moved on. But I didn't feel that at all in this Gathering! It was, in all ways, a more diverse group—there were many young people and pastors. I thought "this is just the beginning!" Now, I can imagine drawing a thousand people.

The research and development on the part of the Network has energized the research and scholarship that is reflected in my new book, *First Century Gospel Storytellers and Audiences*.

These essays were written over the course of forty years, and they explore the reconception of the Gospels as first-century compositions of sound performed for audiences by storytellers rather than the anachronistic picture of a series of texts read by individual readers. The new paradigm implicit in these initial experiments is based on the recent realization that the majority of persons (85 to 95 percent) were illiterate and experienced the Jesus stories as members of audiences. When the Gospels were told at one time from beginning to end, they invited the listeners to move from being peripherally interested or initially opposed to Jesus to identifying themselves as disciples of Jesus and believers in him as the Messiah.

“Every great artist eventually puts together a collection of their greatest hits. The essays in this volume are no different. This ‘best of Boomershine’ includes recent reflections on the state of performance and several of the influential studies that have marked Boomershine’s trailblazing career.” Kelly R. Iverson, editor of *From Text to Performance*



*Editor’s Note: A formal review of Tom’s new book, by renowned scholar and NBSI Seminar member Joanna Dewey, will appear in the Outreach issue of TBS.*

*Your Gift*  
will let  
biblical  
storytelling  
continue  
to shine the  
light of God  
to future  
generations.

Please  
include the  
Network of Biblical  
Storytellers, Int’l  
in your will or  
estate planning.

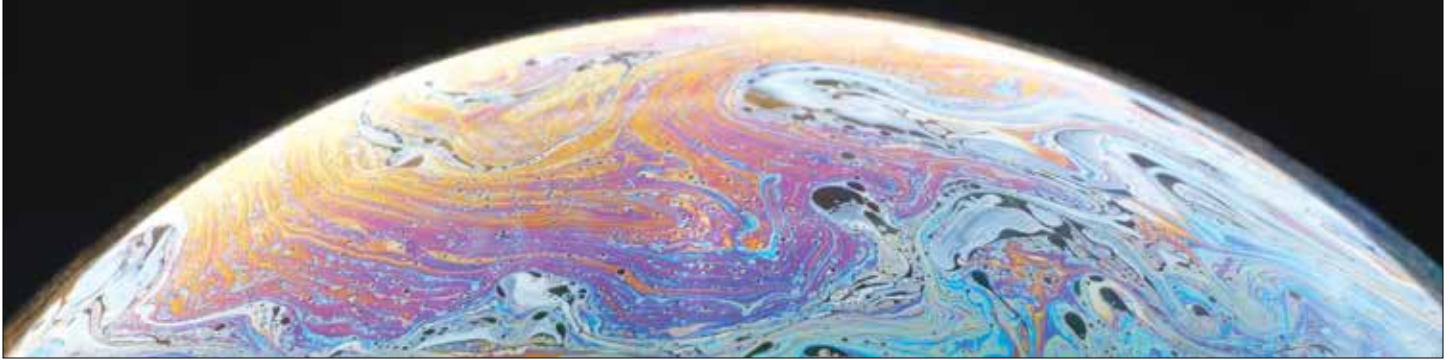
*Thank You!*



# As I Was Saying:

## Follow-up Thoughts on, and a Recap of, the '22 FG Keynotes

by Dr. Tracy Radosevic



Our FG theme this year was “Patterns, Pathways, and Play: the primacy of story for life, growth, and community.” Because of the multi-faceted turmoil in which we live, and have lived for multiple years now, I was more interested in the part of the theme that came after the colon—the life, growth, and community part. Could examining these three areas help us live more healthily and faithfully in the world, especially during these anxiety-ridden, deeply divided, and uncertain times?

### Day One: Patterns

The book that sent me down this path of inquiry was Kendall Haven’s *Story Proof: the science behind the startling power of story*. In it, he summarizes a massive amount of data across a number of disciplines that all point to the power of story and he provides the hard science to back it up. One big point he makes is that our brains are hardwired to understand the world and our experiences in it as story. In fact, we’ll make most anything into a story of some kind or another in order to better understand it, and a key way we do this is by recognizing patterns. I chose three points to focus on:

1. **Experience builds expectation.**
2. **Narratives need to make sense.**
3. **Narratives/events need to have meaning.**

These neural mechanisms served our ancestors well but our biological evolution hasn’t kept up with the break-neck pace at which culture seems to be evolving these days. For many people, the breakdown of experience no longer leads to a predictable expectation, which means that the narratives/events don’t always make sense, and that makes it very difficult to find meaning. Therefore, some people may not be as uncaring, bigoted, or close-minded as they seem. It might just be that a new experience that defies all previous patterns simply does not compute.

Because the mind uses hardwired, fixed templates (neural maps) to guide the process of constructing raw input into story form, the mind creates any key information missing from the raw input. Neuroscience has proven that the brain can’t really tell the difference between reality and imagination.

This works really well for us during stressful situations when we can close our eyes and imagine ourselves in a peaceful location. This can literally trick the brain into lowering our heart rate, relaxing our muscles, and deepening our breathing, all of which calms us down. Where it’s not so helpful is when the brain fills in the gaps using information from past patterns that have some similarities, but aren’t identical, to the current situation.

This is how stereotypes develop. Stereotypes don’t come into being in a vacuum. Over time, enough people of a particular demographic act in a certain way to create a recognizable pattern. The problem, of course, is that we often use that pattern to fill in the gaps when encountering someone from that demographic. Brené Brown refers to this unfortunate default of stereotypes and using past experiences to fill in the gaps as “the stories we tell ourselves,” meaning we make assumptions, rather than rationally thinking things through or having a frank conversation with another, who may not even know they’re involved!

We looked at Saul’s anointing as a way to establish an expected pattern for Israel’s new chapter of having kings instead of judges. The problem is, the very next anointing of a king—David’s—was very different from Saul’s. God doesn’t seem to follow a set pattern. Are we okay with messiness, ambiguity, surprises, and a seemingly fickle God?

Is it time to start breaking out of established, expected patterns (in our everyday lives or in our understanding of God and the Bible), especially if those patterns don’t particularly serve humanity well, and start looking for another pathway forward?



## Day Two: Pathways

Not all patterns are bad. The problem is when we blindly accept them with no conscious discernment or questioning about whether they're helpful and faithful. (Ironically, "opposing" people and issues are often the flip side of the same coin!) Here are three types of binary thinking and suggestions on how to address your use of them:

- 1. Truth Binary. Use probabilistic thinking. Trade 100% certainty for "I'm 70% sure that ..."**
- 2. Goodness Binary. Use grey thinking instead of black and white: What's good and bad about each thing?**
- 3. Identification Binary. Use multi-factor thinking. Ignore labels and wonder what traits actually have a blending of multiple categories.**

Look for the third way when confronted with a "this or that" scenario!

If you think about it, there are no bad characters. There are antagonists, sure, but from the character's perspective, no action or decision on their part comes from a place of negative or bad motivation. Their decisions may have negative impacts on others but they're being made from a place believed to lead to positive results for themselves and those they care about.

This viewpoint gives a whole new meaning to "walking in someone else's shoes." I've also found this to be invaluable for exploring biblical characters in the stories I tell as well as for chipping away at the wall of my frustration, anger, and fear that I feel toward so many in the world today (a good number of them fellow Christians) as I attempt to find a third pathway forward to understanding, reconciliation, and community.

Shiphrah and Puah's story appears very binary with clear "us/them" delineations between the Egyptians and the

Hebrews. And the dilemma of their path forward seems equally binary—either follow Pharaoh or follow God. They choose God and are rewarded. But the story doesn't end there. Serious peril still exists, especially for the baby who will go on to deliver all the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, but only if he survives. Enter Pharaoh's daughter and the third way: The merging of two cultures in a way that eventually ensures success for Moses and his fellow Hebrews.

One approach to finding the third way? Genuine conversation. At the wedding of a good friend, the pastor told the couple that they were officially beginning a life-long conversation. He went on to explore some of the aspects implied by true conversation: listening, respect, taking turns, mutuality, level playing field, an environment safe for intimacy and vulnerability, trust, grace, patience, openness, compassion, forgiveness, and yes, even love.

What if we extended those same qualities to anyone we happen to be conversing with. Imagine playing around with that! Civil conversation rather than vitriolic fighting or complete avoidance—and the subsequent possibilities for our polarized climate.

## Day 3: Play (around with)

Paul's passage in Romans 7 about not doing the things he wants to do and doing the things he doesn't want to do resonates with me, almost like it's the theme of my life! While that's not my experience with all that Paul offers, I am on board with the fact that community, Spirit, and grace are key for Paul. Other scholars sum up his main theological trajectory this way:

- 1. Belief (in a crucified and resurrected Jesus).**
- 2. Behavior (being transformed by that belief so we "bear fruits worthy of repentance").**
- 3. Belonging (taking up residence in a new community as a result).**



NBSI member, Weldon Nisly, commented that maybe the reverse is truer: We are first invited (called, as in Jesus calling the disciples) to belong; then in the Church we learn how to behave (orthopraxis), which finally leads us to good, right believing (orthodoxy). A belonging – behaving – believing order begins with story (the biblical narrative and the narrative of our lives and the church in the midst of and in contrast to culture) which inspires personal and communal behavior and belief. Amen!

Paul appears to have a lot of binary thinking patterns (no doubt aided by the way his brain was hardwired and by how many people in his day understood God and the world). As a result, he can be a bit of a downer, a condemning voice focused on the negative. Plus, because he was granted a lot of real estate in the Bible, his words and views carry extra weight and a "Word of God" stamp of approval. I realize that opening the canon would open the proverbial can of worms but how sad that a closed canon doesn't allow other equally deserving thoughts, views, and words to carry as much weight, authority, and influence.

So, in the name of "playing around with" this constraint, we might imagine a canon that included what may have actually been the original intent of John's gospel (see Elizabeth Schrader's work on this) with Mary Magdalene—Mary the Tower—being a

continued on page 10

role model along with Peter the Rock as the only two confessors of Jesus as the Messiah. What if the canon included the Gospel of Mary Magdalene with its message of deep and radically self-emptying love? And what if we could consider as true “gospel” (i.e. good news) modern stories like that of Antoinette Tuff who may very well have prevented yet another mass school shooting when she calmly talked with the gunman, went to bat for him with the police, and assured him that she loved him? Maybe if these sorts of “Word of God” examples were included in a 3-year lectionary-type rotation, the world really could know us as Christians by our love.

FG Coordinator Shelley Gnade read a UCC devotional that “played around with” the idea of changing our focus from believing IN Jesus (which implicitly sets up the binary believer/nonbeliever, good person/bad person) to simply believing Jesus.

I ended my final keynote with the playful suggestion of starting a new faith movement, one where we considered ourselves WayWord, as in, following the Way of the Word (understood as the words/stories of the Bible as well as Word=Jesus/logos). Not that this pathway is easy. By no means!

As biblical storytellers, we can embody these stories in a W/word-made-flesh kind of way, and maybe model for the world a third way. We can model a way that breaks out of the hardwired binary patterns that too often tend to rule our perceptions and as a result invite those we encounter into healthier and more faithful life, growth, and community. And that might then result in the need for a fourth “P” in our theme title: PURPOSE.

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but as my college roommate liked to retort: Satisfaction brought her back.

I was recently introduced to a podcast that has become a favorite: *Cautionary Tales with Tim Harford*. In the episode “The Data Detective,” Tim referenced the toxic polarization we’re currently experiencing here and across the world, and offered an antidote, one with the power to break patterns and potentially draw people closer together. What could this secret elixir possibly be? Scientific curiosity.

**One thing that provokes curiosity is a perceived gap between what we know and what we want to know. This is called the “Information Gap Theory of Curiosity.”**

If we know nothing, we ask no questions; same thing if we know everything. The trick is to make people aware that they lack desired knowledge, which requires knowing enough to know how much they don’t know.

In an experiment, people were shown everyday objects: bicycles, zippers, and flush toilets and asked to rate their understanding of each on a scale from 1–7. Then, they were asked to explain how each worked, with as much detail as possible. Would it surprise you to learn that most people didn’t actually understand these items as well as they thought? When asked if they wanted to adjust their initial ratings, most were more than OK doing so, readily admitting, “Hm ... I guess I don’t understand toilets as well as I thought.”

The gap between what we think we know and what we actually know is called the “Illusion of Explanatory Depth.” This is a curiosity killer and trap. Why? Because if you think you already understand something why go deeper? Why ask questions?

Another group of researchers replicated this same experiment but, instead of everyday objects, they used policy

issues: a cap and trade system for carbon emissions, a flat tax, a proposal to impose unilateral sanctions on Iran. Same thing happened. Most found that they didn’t actually understand these policies as well as they had initially thought and when asked if they wanted to change their rating, they did.

But even more fascinating is that when their illusion (of explanatory depth) began to fade, so did their political polarization. This happened, in part, because participants weren’t asked if they were for or against an issue; they were simply asked to explain it. They weren’t judged afterwards for their lack of understanding either!

To be clear, this isn’t a guaranteed magical fix-all. For starters, people have to acknowledge their gaps and then desire to learn what they don’t know! But I find great hope in the relative ease and simplicity required for beginning this kind of reconciliatory process, one conversation at a time.

Brian McLaren, our 2013 FG keynoter, encouraged us to avoid exacerbating an already volatile situation by saying, “Hm ... I see things differently ...” and dropping it.

Harford is suggesting an approach that takes Brian’s one step further. Rather than asking our opponents to justify themselves, simply ask them to explain the policy or position in question: “Hm ... that’s interesting ... what exactly do you mean by that?” By doing this, both sides might find that they understand a little less, and agree a little more, than initially assumed.

Link to four keynote-related handouts (including the list of resources quoted and cited): <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UMFkRf5UMLJTZcb-P88BkuZwfvYYMAgSR>

The recordings for all three keynotes (and the Epic Telling) can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCb0gKuX6nQospl8c8R1nByw>



# Preaching as Storytelling

by Ray W. Mendenhall



My contention in this article is that preaching in this present day should adopt a narrative rather than lecture or essay form. It should adopt and adapt a storytelling form to convey the message and the meaning of our faith. In this the Bible itself may be the best example. It has remained prominent across the ages sharing the essence of faith through story. The point is to use the vivid and creative form of story to share the most important story the world needs to hear. Storytelling empowers the Word.

One of the ways the church has referred to the Bible from time to time is to say the “Bible is story.” Yet it seems as soon as it is said we forget that it’s true. More often when we come to the biblical text, we treat it as a puzzle to be solved, ancient words to be deciphered, or a mystery to be unraveled. In other words, we fail to treat it simply as story to ponder and tell.

**Story is the bedrock of all human communication.**  
**Storytelling is a basic, natural and effective way for humans to communicate and therefore a good model for preaching.**

The preaching task is, to put it simply, to “tell the story.” Hebrews and Christians have done it for centuries. The vast majority of scripture is in narrative or story form. These stories can be told in a particular way to bring out their meaning and to connect them to the larger story of scripture.

To approach “story” preaching is to tell the story itself. To tell the story is more

than just reading the text. To “tell” the story is to bring it to life again. In Old Testament thought, to remember is more than recalling the facts. It means to bring forward the power and the effect of the past into the present; in essence to “reanimate” the memory held in the story in the experience and the minds of those living in the present. The connection of this way of thinking to storytelling is obvious. A large part of storytelling is “re-enactment.”

In approaching any retelling of scripture or any storytelling sermon, it is good to keep in mind the four parts of a good story. These four parts are the bare bones of story preaching:

**CONTEXT or SETTING:** this establishes time and place and introduces the characters.

**CONFLICT:** this is the tension in the story. The crisis or situation, the problem or dilemma to be resolved.

**CLIMAX:** where the tension is resolved.

**CONCLUSION:** comments or reflections on how things turned out. (Often thought of as the “moral” or meaning of the story.)

## **Story Sermon Development Process:**

A. Establish the theme of the story to be told.

B. Construct the setting: The time, place, character. This may be a physical setting, the setting surrounding the story, or its setting in the larger story of the Bible.

C. Discern the “sticking” point of the story: The crisis, tension, dilemma or problem, or what the “hitch” is in the story.

D. Articulate the outcome, point, or message of the story; the proverbial “happy ending” or obvious point or consequence flowing out of the story and what the story exists to tell us.

Here’s a model for constructing a biblical story sermon: Discern the theme or main point of the story. Establish the characters of the story and their characteristics, their place and function in the storyline. Develop the setting and all the aspects of its pertinence to the story. Identify the tension or “problem” in the story, the conflict.

Begin shaping the trajectory of the story the way it will begin, progress and end, where and how the tension will present itself, where the emphases will fall. Remember, everything should point to the meaning, message or theme of the story.

## **Stories Well-Suited for Story Sermon**

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Zacchaeus (Luke 19)

The Great Catch (John 21:1-14)

Paul and Silas in Prison (Acts 16:16-40)

Jonah and the Great Fish (Jonah 1-4)

Jacob’s Betrayal of Esau (Genesis 27:1-40)

The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-29)

The Birth of Jesus: (Luke 1:26 – 2:20) or monologues from the viewpoint of Mary or Joseph, the shepherds, the Magi, the Angels, bystanders, or King Herod.

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