



Bruce Butler

This past year Glendora Friends Church took a twenty-one-week journey through the entire story of Scripture, from creation to consummation, in order to understand God's ultimate story and how our own stories fit in with his purposes as he builds his kingdom. Our challenge is always to let Jesus reign as King of our lives. Like the characters in the Biblical record, we *usurp* God's authority and claim it for ourselves to build our own kingdoms. In this series of devotionals we will look at seven key points in Scripture that reverberate throughout the Bible to tell the story of God.

I live and pastor in Glendora, California, in the shadow of Los Angeles and the San Gabriel mountains. Hospice chaplaincy takes up one day of my week. I build relationships at the gym, read books, watch English mysteries and cowboy movies, and hang out with folks. My three adult children live in three different states. I am pictured here in February, 2014, while on an Operation Christmas Child shoe-box distribution in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

BIBLE READING: Genesis 3:1-10

In the past I didn't think I had a very compelling testimony, but recently I changed my mind. What makes my testimony gripping is the realization that I actually have a good story to tell. Mine is a story of overcoming the problems of growing up in the home of an alcoholic and dealing with the accompanying shame issues and endless search for affirmation from others. Jesus rescued me and gave me dignity.

All good stories involve characters overcoming daunting problems—alcoholism, abandonment, pride, deprivation, abuse, selfishness, loneliness, addiction, self-righteousness. My guess is every one of us has a compelling testimony because we faced significant problems in our lives, drawing us to Jesus' power and offer of rescue.

The one problem we all have is the problem of sin. Like Adam and Eve, we easily fall prey to the devil's lies that tempt us to doubt God, question his authority, reject him as untrustworthy, and think he is not really good. We begin to believe our own delusional press, thinking we can determine for ourselves what is good instead of trusting God's word. This results in broken relationships with God, with ourselves, with one another, and with the world around us. But God had a plan in mind (Genesis 3:15) and even offered an immediate help for Adam and Eve's sin-shame (Genesis 3:21).

The story begins with God not only judging, but also repairing the damage done to his good creation by our sin. We are invited into the Bible's grand narrative of how he rescues all of us from our usurpation and rebellion.

SONG: Just As I Am, (Without One Plea)

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, I confess my rebellion and usurpation of your authority and receive your forgiveness and acceptance. I will follow you, my King.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: Genesis 15:1-6

I've noticed that good things happen in my life when I get specific. I never would have become debt-free unless I planned for that particular outcome by budgeting my income. I never would have graduated from college or seminary if I didn't have a particular curriculum plan and graduation deadline. As I prepare to go on vacation to see family I know that an itinerary will result in less drama and more happiness.

Particularity helps us focus. Particularity helps us make decisions. Particularity keeps us on course. We can rely on the particular giftedness and skills of others to help us get things done faster, often cheaper, and almost always better.

In today's text, God decides on a particular man out of all the people in the world on which to focus his attention. God covenants with Abram, asking him to leave country, culture, and kin to go to a particular place on planet earth in order to be a particular blessing to Abram and through Abram to all of us (Genesis 12:1-3). God places a particular call on Abram's life, offering Abram particular promises to trust. God was looking for a particular response, and Abram doesn't disappoint. "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (v. 6). Abram had his own struggles with usurping God (see Genesis 16), but through the attitude and act of trust in God's promise we all receive the blessings of righteous relationship with God.

Let's strive to be like Father Abraham, to believe God's particular promises to bless us in order to be a blessing to the rest of our world.

SONG: The God of Abraham Praise

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, I am amazed that you would choose me to be part of your salvation family. May I receive this blessing for the sake of others.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: Exodus 19:1-8

I am a bit more introverted than extroverted. Going places where there will be lots of folks I don't know can be challenging, especially if I don't have a purpose to serve there. But if there is purpose to my presence, I can weather unfamiliar crowds with comparative ease. This has made weddings, funerals, and community events a joy rather than a burden.

We all want a purpose to serve, a job to do, and a reason to be where we find ourselves. This is true in our faith as well. Some of us struggle with the purpose of our faith. We want our faith to mean something more than personal happiness and blessings.

God told Abram that he was blessed to be a blessing. But after 400 years in Egypt, Abraham's descendants had all but forgotten God's purposes for them. When their misery was too great they cried out to God for rescue. God led them out of slavery by his mighty hand. Caught between army and ocean the people witnessed God's ocean-splitting, army-drowning power to bring them back to the land he promised to Abraham. Now at the mountain God renews the covenant with his people, intending them to "be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (v. 6). As Christians we remain "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). Our kingdom purpose is to declare God's glory and to witness to Christ's saving power.

Share your thoughts with the writer and other readers in the *Fruit of the Vine* community. Use the simple sign up at www.myFriendsCommunity.com to join the conversation.

SONG: Rise Up, O Men of God

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, today I embrace your kingdom purposes for me. Help me witness to my family and friends about Jesus' grace, forgiveness and acceptance.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: 1 Samuel 8:1-9

“Who died and left you king?” This was a common retort of mine as a kid to the bossiness of others. There were times, though, when I wanted someone to lead me because I didn’t know what to do or where I was going.

I imagine we are all like this. While valuing our independence in decision-making, we find there are times when we need someone to lead us out of tight spots or through unfamiliar waters. So we appoint leaders for government and church and booster club and give these leaders our support.

Generations after arriving in the Promised Land, Abraham’s descendants continued to usurp God’s authority and go their own way, forgetting God’s great Exodus rescue and not living according to God’s purposes. “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). God himself was their King but the people lived as if they had none. After their usurpations got them into trouble, they routinely cried out to God for rescue and God raised up judges to deliver them. Eventually rejecting this system the people asked for a king “such as all the other nations have” (v. 5). God saw it as a rejection of him (v. 7), but nonetheless used it as an important reminder to the people about their own kingdom purposes. God anointed the archetypal King David, who would be used by the prophets to rally the people through generations of corruption to the coming Messiah, King Jesus.

Our task as Christians is to willingly submit to the righteous rule of King Jesus.

SONG: O Worship the King

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus Christ, I kneel at your feet and submit my will to yours. I have no king other than you.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: Luke 24:1-8

As a hospice chaplain I work around dying and death all the time. Sometimes in hospice we say that death is the final part of living, but there's no mistaking that a person's death is final. A body will not reanimate because the person is gone. That certain light in a person's eyes will never reappear in a dead body.

We live in a world that doesn't easily deal with death. We work hard to avoid it, of course. When a loved one dies, we work hard in our grief to process its implications. Death is part of our living that must be faced with courage and love.

Utilizing the powerful imagery of King David (Luke 1:32-33), the gospel writer, Luke, heralds the birth of a new King. But this King is unlike any previous king. Born in humble surroundings, his progenitors being God himself and a virgin maiden, King Jesus was ushered into a world full of usurpation and sin, a world of disease, war and rebellion against God's ways. God's special kingdom of priests had forgotten their kingdom purposes once again. Roman overlords cared only about power and trounced all rivals. Neither recognized King Jesus for who he was, and so they crucified him, not realizing this King died the death we all deserved. Through God's power, King Jesus rose from the dead, proving that death is not final and recreating life over again for all of us usurpers who believe.

We know beyond doubt that we have life through the resurrected Jesus Christ. This is our sure hope and the hope of the entire world.

SONG: Jesus Lives, and So Shall I

PRAYER SUGGESTION: King Jesus, I gratefully live your resurrected life, victorious over sin and death, humbled to be used by you this day for your purposes.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: Acts 2:15-24

There is a script genre that has caught on like wildfire in the last fifteen years or so wherein many seemingly unrelated stories involving multiple characters finally come together in the end as related and congruent. After wondering the whole movie long what each part has to do with the other, the viewer is finally clued in to the connections and a surprising and satisfying “Aha!” is achieved.

Confusion and chaos are not very satisfying. We want to know how things connect and make sense. In movies we crave a compelling plot and we want to know the reasons for this particular action or that sudden turn of events. The same is true with God’s story in the Bible. How do sixty-six books written by more than forty authors over 1,400 years relate to one another and what does it all mean?

The New Covenant authors do a masterful job of connecting the Old Covenant dots. They had their own “Aha!” moments as they experienced the resurrected King Jesus and realized that all of God’s revelation in the Bible is one grand story. Luke tells the story of Peter on the day of Pentecost who, after receiving the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, quotes the prophet Joel’s words about this very day, about this twist in the plot of how God through Christ would call us from our usurpations to salvation in order to proclaim God’s word about our death-defying Savior.

Acts reminds us of the God who sends us out empowered by the Spirit to tell everyone the compelling good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

SONG: I Love to Tell the Story

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, I offer myself today to your service as we go out on mission together. Use my words to point others to you.

—Bruce Butler

BIBLE READING: Revelation 21:1-7

Not long after moving to Glendora, I noticed an older home being remodeled. A little more work was completed each week—a window here, siding there, a bit of landscaping. My kids went through grade school then high school without this home being finished. I was fascinated by the methodical work of the owners but frustrated by the slow pace. I ached to know what it would finally look like and simply had to trust that the owners knew what they were doing. It turned out beautifully.

Sometimes life in Christ is like that for us. We are under God's constant construction, but often the slow pace of progress is frustrating. As we strain toward completion, we wonder what it will all look like and simply must trust God that he knows what he is doing.

John had no doubt that God knew what he was doing. He is shown a vision of consummation that echoes God's creation, except the garden becomes an eternal city constructed of Old Covenant tribes and New Covenant apostles. What Adam and Eve's usurpations destroyed, God will recreate and make new. God's original intentions will return: no exile, no separation, no tears, no death, no crying, and no mourning "...for the old order of things has passed away" (v. 4). The endless waters of life will be ours (v. 7 and 22:1). No temple is needed because God Almighty and the Lamb will be the temple (21:22). Nations will be healed, sin's curse will be banished, and God's people "will reign for ever and ever" (22:2-5).

SONG: Is My Name Written There?

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus Christ, may my living in this present age be governed by your kingdom age to come.

—Bruce Butler