

THE COMPELLING POWER OF NARRATIVE

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Acts 17:24-27

“Human authors may build fiction around a plot they have devised, but only God can shape history to a real and ultimate purpose.” —Dr. Edmund Clowney, Westminster Theological Seminary

PEOPLE ARE CAPTIVATED BY GOOD STORIES

“Night after night, through years of performing and directing, I’ve stood in awe of the audience and of its capacity for response. [Once the story begins] as if by magic, masks fall away, faces become vulnerable, receptive. Movie-goers do not defend their emotions, rather they open to the storyteller in ways even their lovers never know, welcoming laughter, tears, terror, rage, compassion, passion, love, hate . . . this ritual often exhausts them.” —Robert McKee

WHY DO WE FIND THE MEDIUM OF STORY COMPELLING?

1. Stories are universal.
2. Stories mirror the way we think.
3. Stories define who we are.
4. Stories have the power to motivate us and build community
5. Stories help us make sense out of life.

GOD WIRED US WITH A NEED TO SEEK MEANING TO OUR EXISTENCE

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Screen-writing structure: Acts > Sequences > Scenes > Beats or moments

Acts 17: 24-27 *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and . . . gives everyone life and breath and everything else.”²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.*

GOOD STORIES ARE HARD TO FIND

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: ²a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ³a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, ⁴a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, ⁵a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, ⁶a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, ⁷a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, ⁸a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. ⁹What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

Acts 17: 24-27

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Ephesians 2:10:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DEVOTION:

1. When was the last time you found yourself lost in a good story? What was the story about and what made it so compelling to you? Typically, what are the types of stories you enjoy and why?
2. What are some of the stories you’ve heard that have shaped you as a person? What stories do you remember from your parents? Your teachers? A good friend?

What stories have you heard, either from an authority figure or even from a film or book that have motivated or inspired you?

3. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11. It is commonly known that King Solomon wrote this book after turning from the Lord and seeking to find meaning in the world “under the sun.” Among his observations is chapter 3, where there’s a time and season for everything. What do you think Solomon’s point was in these verses?
4. Sometimes it seems that life just seems to have a mind of its own, moving in whatever random direction it chooses. Friends all love you one day and they’re fickle the next. The days seems enjoyable for a time but then the bottom drops out. What is the lesson that teacher in Ecclesiastes wishes to say to us? How does knowing that God is a God of story help to make sense out of life?