

The Storyteller Paradigm

Knowing God Better
Through Analogies

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Andrew Bernhardt

Also by the author:

Seeing Jesus—A Disciple's Perspective

How To Gain Victory Over Sin

Fifty-Five Questions For Skeptics

The Storyteller Paradigm : Knowing God Better Through Analogies **FREE SAMPLE**

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First, I give all honor and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. If someone had told me years ago that I would publish several books, I wouldn't have believed it. I'm on the autistic spectrum, which makes verbal communication difficult. Writing essays in grade school always gave me great anxiety. Even today, I'm not comfortable filling out greeting cards. But knowing God delights to show His power and glory through weakness, I offered myself, weaknesses and all, for Him to use, and this book is the result. May He use it to further glorify His name!

I would also like to recognize my beta and proofreaders: James Attebury, Nathaniel Evans, Carol Senary, Robert Stallworth, and Heide Thomson. Your assistance and helpful suggestions are much appreciated.

PREFACE

There's nothing like a good analogy to help explain something that is otherwise difficult to understand.

I'm a bit of a nerd. I've been interested in science and technology since I was a child. In high school, that interest narrowed down to the field of electronics. I would ask for electronics experiment kits for Christmas so I could make cool things like blinking lights, amplifiers, and radios. All of these came with an instruction book that explained how each circuit worked. One book used an analogy of water flowing through pipes to describe the operation of various electronic components such as resistors, diodes, and transistors. This analogy helped me understand basic electronics principles, which eventually led to my career in electronics.

Jesus also used analogies. Most of His took the form of parables through which He portrayed the character of God. The Jews already knew God is all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal, and so on. But they misunderstood His justice, His love, and His mercy. So Jesus used parables, such as the parable of the prodigal son, to teach them about God's love for sinners, and that He welcomes them back when they return to Him. This was a shocking idea at the time, especially among the religious elite. They thought God hated sinners and wanted to destroy them. Jesus used parables to correct their misconceptions.

Today, people also misunderstand God's nature, so I wanted to find an analogy that would help in that area as well. But I had a problem: All of God's attributes are infinite, while everything we're familiar with is finite. What picture could I use to convey the infinite nature of God? I wasn't satisfied with merely comparing God to the most extreme example of something, like thinking of Him as the most powerful magician in the universe. While such a being would be unimaginably strong, it would still be finite and measurable. God's power truly has no limit, so my analogy had to go beyond that.

Then it occurred to me that the control a storyteller or author has over his story serves well as a picture of God's omnipotence. Seen from the per-

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spective of the story, an author's power is infinite. He is free to do whatever he wants, and no character or situation in the story can stop him. He can even do something that contradicts the natural laws of his story world. So a human author's control over his story works quite well as a picture of God's infinite power and sovereignty.

It wasn't long before I found thinking about God this way helpful in understanding other aspects of His nature. Human storytellers are also, in a sense, preexistent, omniscient, and omnipresent in relation to their stories. In fact, the analogy could be used to portray almost all of God's nature attributes. The only ones that would not fit are His eternality and His immutability: A human storyteller has a beginning, while God does not, and a human storyteller can change over time, while God does not.

This analogy also helped my walk with the Lord. My faith grew stronger as I came to appreciate the absolute control God has over His story, including my small part, no matter which way that story may seem to be going at the moment. I also found the analogy helpful in answering questions believers and nonbelievers have about God.

I'm going to share this way of thinking about God so you can better understand and appreciate the different aspects of His nature. I'll also show how it can be used to answer various questions and objections you may encounter.

Afterward, we'll look at some of the parables Jesus told. As the Master Storyteller, Jesus often taught the crowds using these helpful analogies in story form. We'll begin by looking at the reasons Jesus taught in parables, and we'll learn some important principles to keep in mind when reading them. Then we'll examine ten of His parables in detail.

Finally, I've included a mix of unrelated articles that use memorable analogies to bring to light various biblical concepts.

I have found the best way to grasp who God is is through analogies. Theological doctrine can teach us much about Him, but analogies bring that knowledge deeper into our hearts. May this book help to increase your understanding and appreciation of God and deepen your faith.

THE STORYTELLER PARADIGM

Introduction

As a child, I enjoyed watching the 1960s television series *Batman*, starring Adam West and Burt Ward. The show wasn't dark and serious like the DC comic. It was bright, colorful, and over-the-top silly. As with many television shows of that era, once you saw one episode, you knew the basic premise of the others because they all followed the same pattern. If you never saw that show, here's how a typical episode would go.

The story would begin with one or more arch-villains wreaking havoc on Gotham City. Maybe it was the Penguin distributing exploding umbrellas, or the Joker stealing golf course holes. Commissioner Gordon would get wind of their antics and call Batman on the red Batphone. Bruce Wayne would answer the call in his mansion. After getting the particulars, he would grab Dick Grayson, and the two would go into action. They would go behind the bookcase, slide down the Batpoles into the Batcave, somehow change into their tights on the way down, jump into the Batmobile, and race out of their secret headquarters to stop the villains. In the end, they *always* stopped the villains. This was in the television era when the good guys always won, and the bad guys always lost.

But at some point in each episode, Batman and Robin would find themselves in some ridiculous, usually certain-death situation. Once, the Riddler had them suspended on a rope, with their wrists tied back-to-back, descending into a vat of hot wax. If you never saw that episode before, you'd think, "It's impossible! They can't get enough swing to avoid the vat. They don't have a knife to cut the rope, and even if they did, they can't use it because their hands are tied. There's no way they can escape!" But some-

how you *knew* they would. You knew they would live to bring the villains to justice. How did you know?

I'll tell you how I knew. I knew Batman and Robin wouldn't die because I knew the scriptwriters needed them for the next episode, so they always wrote a way out of their predicament. It didn't matter how much power the villains had over the Caped Crusaders; They were completely powerless against the scriptwriters!

God is like a scriptwriter, a teller of stories.

Well... that's not right. Let me rephrase:

A teller of stories is like God.

What's the difference? Isn't that just another way to say the same thing? No, not really. The difference is that God is the standard to which a storyteller is compared, not the other way around. Here's what I mean:

Suppose you met someone who had lived his whole life on a desert island and had no concept of an automobile. You show him a toy car and say, "A real car is like this, only bigger." What have you just done? You have made the toy the standard to which a real car is compared. So if he's not particularly bright, he might think, "If a toy car must be pushed by hand to make it move, a real car must also be pushed by hand." If the toy car has no working engine, transmission, brakes, lights, power steering, sound system, air conditioning, "rich Corinthian leather" seats, and so on, then the real car doesn't have them either. Using the toy as the standard limits the person's understanding of the real thing.

But if you say, "This toy is a small imitation of a real car," then he knows the real car is the standard, even though he has never seen a real one. He knows any differences between the toy and the real thing are due to *limitations in the toy*.

If I say God is like a human author, then the human author becomes the standard to which God is compared. This leads to objections, such as "Story characters don't have consciousness or free will," and "Story characters can only do what the author dictates they do." The analogy actually limits God.

But if I say an author is like God, then the limitations are placed on human authors. An author's characters don't have free will because the author is human. He can only imitate God, just as a toy car can only imitate a real one.

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All analogies for God are like this, even the ones Jesus used. God is not like a human father; a human father is supposed to be like God. The Church's relationship with Christ is not like a marriage; a marriage is supposed to reflect the relationship between the Church and Christ.¹ And God is not like a storyteller; a storyteller is like God. How so?

We consider the ability to tell a good story a creative gift. J. R. R. Tolkien gave us Middle-earth, C. S. Lewis gave us Narnia, and George Lucas gave us the Star Wars universe. These authors not only invented the worlds they wrote about, they also created the characters and histories of those worlds. They have or had absolute control over those story worlds. Their characters could do nothing to thwart their author's purpose. So when you think about it, those authors are like the gods of their story worlds.

Of course, the analogy isn't perfect. Human authors aren't gods. Their fictional worlds aren't real. Their characters don't exist, nor do they have the ability to think, speak, and act on their own, apart from what their authors wrote. Human authors are only able to imitate some of God's qualities, and that only in the world of their own stories. In the real world, they are just as powerless as those who can't write.

God is the original Author. He created our world and filled it with characters (that's us) and a storyline of which we only know the historical parts. Unlike a human author, what God creates is real, and we, His characters, are free moral agents. We have real conscious choice over what we think, speak, and do. Yet God is still, like an author, in complete control of His universe. A human author is only sovereign over the story he writes, but God is truly sovereign everywhere.

We're going to explore the nature of God using this picture of Him as the ultimate Storyteller so we can better understand Him. As we come to appreciate the control He has over His story, our faith will increase. We won't worry about what the future holds, because we know an author always gets his way in the story.

We will also have another way to share our knowledge of God with non-believers so they can understand and believe as well. Many are not open to the gospel message because they have false ideas of what God is like. By showing them what the Bible says about God using easily understood analogies such as this one, the door can be opened so the good news of Jesus Christ can be heard.

The Nature Of God

God's attributes, the qualities that describe Him, can be divided into two categories:

- His nature attributes describe what makes Him God. These include His eternality, preexistence, transcendence, omnipotence, and so on. God as the Creator is usually included in this category as it is an expression of His omnipotence.
- God's character attributes describe how He relates to His creation. These include His holiness, righteousness, goodness, love, wisdom, patience, and so on.

You can think of God's nature attributes as defining *what* God is, and His character attributes as defining *who* He is. We're going to focus on the attributes that define what He is, so let's get started.

Understanding God's Preexistence

God existed before the universe of space, time, and matter. Therefore, I think it's appropriate to begin with this attribute.

Everything we see and know had a beginning. That's the nature of the universe we live in. Everything in the universe, even the universe itself, came into being. But that is not the nature of God. He didn't have a beginning because He is eternal.

The word "beginning" implies the existence of time.² But time is itself something God created because it is part of the universe. Our minds can't wrap around this because living in time is all we've known.

While we can't comprehend how God never had a beginning, we can understand how He existed before everything else by means of the Storyteller analogy. Just as God existed before the universe, human storytellers also exist before the characters and worlds of their stories:

- Before Luke Skywalker, before Obi-Wan Kenobi, and before Yoda, before the entire Star Wars universe, there was George Lucas.
- Before Robinson Crusoe, there was Daniel Defoe.
- Before Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, there was Herman Melville.

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- And before Daffy Duck, there was Tex Avery.

These characters (and in some cases worlds) exist in our imagination only because their authors existed first. Obviously, if there was no Tex Avery, there would be no Daffy Duck.³ So the stories and their characters owe their existence entirely to the preexistence of their authors. This dependence is one-way, for authors never need their story worlds to exist. If George Lucas had never written *Star Wars*, he would still be.

Before George, Herman, Daniel, or Tex, before there was anyone or anything, there was God. He existed before any of us. If God did not exist first, we would not be here. We wouldn't be anywhere, nor would there be a place for us to exist in if we did. Our entire universe is dependent on the preexistence of God.

Moreover, just as Daffy Duck serves as evidence for his creator, the universe itself, and everything in it, is evidence for the existence of its Creator. Scientists conduct experiments to determine why things happen because they believe in the principle of cause and effect. If there is an effect, they know something must have caused it, for an effect cannot cause itself. If the universe came into being, there must be an ultimate Cause for that coming-into-being *from outside itself*. Such a Cause would have to be of an entirely different nature because the universe cannot cause its own existence, just as a story character cannot cause his own existence. That Cause must be God.

The Bible tells us God created everything.⁴ It also tells us the instrument by which He created everything was Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Speaking of Jesus, the Bible says:

All things were made through him. Without him was not anything made that has been made.

(John 1:3)

He is before all things, and in him all things are held together.

(Colossians 1:17)

For Jesus to have created everything, He must also have existed before everything; hence, Jesus is not a created being. You can think of Him as the Author who has inserted Himself as a character into His own story.

Jesus spoke of His preexistence when He prayed:

Now, Father, glorify me with your own self with the glory which I had with you *before the world existed*. (John 17:5)

He also declared His preexistence to His fellow Jews:

Jesus said to them, “Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, *I AM*.” ...⁵ (John 8:58-59)

The phrase “I AM” refers to the eternal self-existing nature of God who exists outside of time.⁶ So Jesus, in calling Himself “I AM,” claimed to be the preexistent God. Before He entered His story, the ultimate Author already existed.

Understanding God’s Transcendence

Closely connected to God’s preexistence is His transcendence or separateness. God is not by nature part of the universe because He existed before it. He therefore exists outside of it.

In 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Gherman Titov orbited the Earth seventeen times. Titov was an atheist and a member of the Communist Party. The following year, while in Seattle, Washington for the Century 21 World’s Fair, some reporters asked how his time in space affected his philosophy. He replied:

“Sometimes people are saying that God is out there. I was looking around attentively all day but I didn’t find anybody there. I saw neither angels nor God.”⁷

The Soviets then took what Titov said and used it in their anti-religion campaign.

Many people assume if God exists, He must somehow be perceptible to the senses. He must have a physical appearance; He must take up space; or He must be detectable through scientific means. They assume God is part of the universe. But He is not, for He existed before it. You can understand the nature of God’s transcendence by considering how human authors are separate from the fictional worlds they create.

Have you ever considered how Bilbo, Frodo, Aragorn, and the other characters of Middle-earth relate to J. R. R. Tolkien? Each of these characters knows others in the story, yet none of them are aware of their author. They are oblivious to his existence. If the people of Middle-earth are de-

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pendent on Tolkien for their existence, why are they unaware of him? Because he is not a part of their story world. He exists outside Middle-earth, outside of Arda. He is separate from the world he created. So anything that happens in the world of his story has no effect on him. If Middle-earth fell to Sauron or Melkor, or Eru Ilúvatar was permanently defeated, it wouldn't affect Tolkien in the slightest.

God also exists outside the story of His universe. He has to, for the universe isn't big enough to hold Him. At the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon acknowledged:

“But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain you; how much less this house that I have built!”⁸

(1 Kings 8:27)

Because God is not a part of the universe, we cannot know He exists *unless He intentionally reveals Himself to us*.

Imagine if Sir Arthur Conan Doyle somehow created Sherlock Holmes as a real person in his story. As intelligent as Sherlock is, he would have no way of knowing his author exists, nor would he know Doyle is the source of his crime-solving ability. There is no experiment Sherlock could perform to prove he is a character in Doyle's story.

Stan Lee created many of the characters in the Marvel universe, and he appeared in many Marvel movies, but his appearances were always incognito. No character in the movies recognized him. He didn't let them know who he was, or tell them he held their lives in his hands.⁹

Because God is separate from His creation, we cannot know anything about Him on our own. There's no scientific experiment we can devise to discover God, for science can only tell us about things within the universe. All knowledge of God must come through His intentional revealing of Himself to us.¹⁰ But God has done this. He has gone beyond most or all human authors in that He has placed Himself in His own story to reveal Himself to man, ...and His appearances were *not* incognito.

For thousands of years, God revealed Himself through the Old Testament prophets. Whenever He did, He always identified Himself so there would be no mistake:

God spoke to Moses, and said to him, “*I am Yahweh*; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *God Almighty*...” (Exodus 6:2-3)

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“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

(Deuteronomy 5:6)

Later, God came in human flesh to speak to us directly:

God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds.¹¹

(Hebrews 1:1-2)

It’s amazing that our Author would choose to reveal Himself to us. But what’s more amazing is that He became a character in His own story. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is our Author in human form. He came to reveal God to us.

- ▶ His way of life showed us God’s integrity, personality, and desire to fellowship with us.
- ▶ His miracles showed us God’s love and power.
- ▶ His teaching showed us God’s wisdom and will.
- ▶ His death showed us God’s love, willingness, and desire to do whatever it took to restore us to Himself.
- ▶ And His resurrection showed us God’s power and proof of all He claimed to be.

As this character, Jesus portrayed God so well that when Philip asked, “Lord, show us the Father,” Jesus replied, “Have I been with you such a long time, and do you not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How do you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”¹²

But just as the Marvel movie characters didn’t recognize their creator, most of Jesus’ people didn’t recognize Him. When He revealed Himself to the Jews, many of them willfully disbelieved:

Jesus said to them, “Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM.” Therefore they took up stones to throw at him...

(John 8:58-59)

He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own, and those who were his own didn’t receive him.¹³

(John 1:10-11)

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What was true back then is still true today. Most people think Jesus was just another man, if He existed at all. They reject His claims to be God in human flesh. But as the ultimate revelation of God, Jesus is the only One who can impart to us the full, true knowledge of God. He told His disciples:

“...neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him. (Matthew 11:27)

While there is no experiment we can perform to prove God exists apart from His intentional revealing of Himself, we *can* ask God to do so. If Sherlock Holmes were real, he could not prove his author exists on his own, but he could ask Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to prove himself. Doyle might do so by revealing to Sherlock what happens later in the story, or he could fulfill one or more exceedingly unlikely requests. The same is true for God. While an atheist cannot prove God exists on his own, he can ask God to prove Himself. Many have done so and have come to faith as God answered their prayers.¹⁴

One more thing: While Jesus is transcendent by nature, when He entered His story, He subjected Himself to the world's ills within the story. Like any other character, He could suffer hunger and thirst, heat and cold, physical pain, and ultimately death. Those things affected His body within the story, but they did not affect His eternal nature. If a human author inserted himself as a character into his own story, his character could suffer all kinds of things, but such would not affect him in the real world.¹⁵

Understanding God As The Creator

God created everything in the universe from nothing. Theologians call this “creation *ex nihilo*.”

Everything we make is made out of other things. Houses are made of concrete, lumber, nails, and the like. Concrete is made of calcium silicate, water, and aggregate. Water is made of hydrogen and oxygen. These practical examples follow the law of conservation of mass and energy, which states that the total amount of mass and energy in the universe remains constant. Mass can be converted into energy, and energy into mass, but

neither can be added to or removed from the system. So if you want to make something, you have to make it out of something that already exists. Of course, this does not take into account God who, being separate from the universe, created everything, including this law.

God created everything from nothing because at first there was nothing to create it from. (Materialists also believe everything came into being from nothing, but they don't provide a plausible cause for that nothing turning into something.) How could God make the building blocks for His universe out of nothing? How did quantum particles, stars, planets, and everything else come into being? The Bible tells us they came into being when God spoke them into existence.

God created everything out of nothing but words. You might compare this to a magician creating things by magic, but a better way to understand it is to think of God as a storyteller who makes everything in his story out of nothing but words.

When J. R. R. Tolkien put together his epic history of Middle-earth, he did not first find some silmarils, rings, swords, elves, dwarves, hobbits, and men, and build his story around them. No, Tolkien invented the raw materials of his world out of nothing but his own imagination, and he wrote them down. It took no more effort to create things large and powerful, like Minas Tirith or Barad-dûr, than it took to create things small and fragile, like the plants Elanor or Athelas. It didn't weaken or physically exhaust him in the slightest to create these things. But Tolkien was just imitating God who created the real universe out of nothing but words:

By Yahweh's *word*, the heavens were made;
all their army by the breath of his mouth. (Psalm 33:6)

By faith, we understand that the universe has been framed *by the word of God*, so that what is seen has not been made out of things which are visible.¹⁶ (Hebrews 11:3)

When God said, "Let there be...", they came into being. We have light because God said, "Let there be." We have trees because God said, "Let there be." He just said it, and it happened. It did not exhaust God or weaken Him in the slightest to create everything. For one thing, you can't exhaust infinity.¹⁷

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A human author creates his story world in the form of written words, but the Bible tells us God created everything through Jesus Christ, who is Himself the *living Word*:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. *All things were made through him*. Without him was not anything made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

In other words, all matter, energy, and time exist because Jesus created them. He also created the laws that govern matter and energy. He did it by merely speaking it all into existence, just like a storyteller!

You've heard the saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Well, the living Word is mightier than the written word, or anything else. Never underestimate the power of God's Word! If He says something is so, it is so!¹⁸

For as the rain comes down and the snow from the sky,
and doesn't return there, but waters the earth,
and makes it bring forth and bud,
and gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth:
it shall not return to me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please,
and it shall prosper in the thing I sent it to do. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Understanding God's Omnipresence

God is everywhere. But being everywhere does not mean that God is everything or that everything is God. That's pantheism; He's not like that.

It also doesn't mean God is some kind of force or energy that permeates everything, like the radio station signals that constantly pass through your body without your awareness. Omnipresence does not mean He physically occupies the same space as everything else, for He is separate from His creation. He is not physical. To understand God's omnipresence, think of how a storyteller relates to his story.

A human author is effectively present everywhere in his story. He sees everything. Nothing escapes his eye. None of his characters can hide from him to prevent him from moving the story along. An author will never complain about his story characters, "Where did that prince go? I need him

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to rescue the princess *now!*” No matter where the characters are, if they need help, the author can write a way out of their situation... even a miraculous way. And if an author chooses to make himself part of his story, he can talk to his characters and listen to what they have to say at any time and place in the story. He is always close to them.

Like a human author, God is everywhere. He is not physically present, but He is present nonetheless. God sees everything. Nothing escapes His eye. No one can run away or hide from Him. Jonah tried to do this and failed because God was present in the big fish to hear his prayer!¹⁹

Where could I go from your Spirit?

Or where could I flee from your presence?

If I ascend up into heaven, you are there.

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, you are there! (Psalm 139:7-8)

Am I a God at hand, says Yahweh, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Don't I fill heaven and earth? says Yahweh. (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

Yahweh's eyes are everywhere,

keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, while Frodo and Sam were in Mordor on their way to Mount Doom, they may have seemed alone, but in a sense, Tolkien was with them in the midst of their sufferings, protecting them and guiding them to their goal. He was working it all out for their good. When you seem to be alone in your troubles, remember: God is always there, watching over you.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for *you are with me*. ... (Psalm 23:4)

Thinking of God's omnipresence this way can help you understand something Jesus said to His disciples:

“No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, *who is in heaven*.” (John 3:13)

How could Jesus be on earth and in heaven at the same time? It seems like an impossibility. But if you view Jesus as the Author who has inserted Himself in His story, the problem goes away. An author who places himself in his story does not cease to exist in the real world. He is present in both

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places. The way I see it, Jesus was simultaneously present on earth and in heaven. His story body was subject to the same physical limitations as the other characters in the story, while His eternal self remained unlimited and all-powerful.

Understanding God's Omniscience

Just as God knows everything, a storyteller also knows everything about his story world.

George Lucas' knowledge of the Star Wars universe is complete. Not the smallest detail can surprise him. His characters can hide no secrets from him. If George doesn't know it, it's not really part of his universe, and none of his characters can know it either.²⁰

George also knows his characters in great detail, even though they know nothing about him. He knows their history, their personality, what they're going to say or do, how long they're going to live, and more. He knows them better than they know themselves.

God also knows everything about His universe. He knows how big it is. He knows its history, including what we call the future. He knows in utmost detail how everything works, from the largest galaxy clusters down to each quantum particle. He knows everyone's personality, what we're going to say and do, and how long we're going to live. He knows everything, and therefore nothing in the universe can surprise Him.

Yahweh, you have searched me,
and you know me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up.
You perceive my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
but, behold, Yahweh, you know it altogether.
You hem me in behind and before.
You laid your hand on me.
This knowledge is beyond me.
It's lofty.
I can't attain it.

(Psalm 139:1-6)

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Great is our Lord, and mighty in power.

His understanding is infinite.

(Psalm 147:5)

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!

(Romans 11:33)

Even though God's omniscience is one of His most well-known traits, sometimes we act like we don't really believe it. Maybe we interpret His silence as a lack of awareness and concern for us. We might echo the psalmist:

Wake up!

Why do you sleep, Lord?

Arise!

Don't reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face,

and forget our affliction and our oppression?

(Psalm 44:23-24)

Maybe we think God has got more important matters to deal with than our situation. As a result, He's unaware of what's going on in our lives:

Why do you say, Jacob,

and speak, Israel,

"My way is hidden from Yahweh,

and the justice due me is disregarded by my God?"...

But God knows what's going on, and He's always aware of what we're going through:

...Haven't you known?

Haven't you heard?

The everlasting God, Yahweh,

The Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint.

He isn't weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

(Isaiah 40:27-28)

Again, that last phrase means His understanding is immeasurable: literally infinite. He knows what you are going through, and He cares for you.

"Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows.

(Matthew 10:29-31)

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Nothing can happen in God's story outside of His own knowledge and will. If He knows what happens to each sparrow and how many hairs are on each of our heads, you can be confident He knows everything about your life. While the story contains many mysteries to us, it contains no mysteries for Him.

Understanding God's Omnipotence And Sovereignty

God is all-powerful and in complete control of His universe. These two attributes go together. God not only has power, He uses it to control His story. A human author is a picture of this because he also has complete control of his story world.

I mentioned the *Batman* television show earlier. In each episode, the Caped Crusaders would seem to be in danger of losing their lives, but they would always come out of that danger. I also watched classic *Doctor Who* back in the 1980s and 90s. Those stories followed the same pattern. The Doctor would find himself in some hopeless predicament at the end of each episode, but I never thought he would die because the storywriters needed the Doctor for the next story. On the level of the story, the Doctor was in danger of losing his life. But on a higher level, he was never really in danger because the storywriters were in complete control of everything that happened. They had god-like sovereign power over their fictional universe.

The power of an author over his story is a small picture of the power God has over the universe we live in. His power is truly limitless, and He is *always* in complete control. We can see this throughout the Bible.

In Genesis 18, Abraham and Sarah were well advanced in age. Abraham was approaching his one hundredth year, and Sarah her ninetieth. God had promised to make of them a great people, but so far, they were childless. Then the Lord God appeared to Abraham.

He said, "I will certainly return to you when the season comes round. Behold, Sarah your wife will have a son."

Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age. Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old will I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

Yahweh said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Will I really bear a child, yet I am old?' *Is anything too hard for Yahweh?*

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At the set time I will return to you, when the season comes round,
and Sarah will have a son.”

(Genesis 18:10-14)

One year later, Abraham and Sarah had their promised miracle child and named him Isaac. Nothing is too hard for God. Nothing. The things we think are impossible are possible with Him.

In the first chapter of Luke, a greater miracle happened. An angel visited Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, and said she would bear the long-expected Messiah without her having been with a man. She would give birth as a virgin. When Mary asked how this shall be, the angel said, “Nothing God says shall be impossible.”²¹ In other words, if God says something will happen, it is not only possible, it is certain. God’s word makes the impossible possible.

Jeremiah prophesied God would bring the king of Babylon to Jerusalem to capture it and lead its people away captive for seventy years because of their wickedness. No one believed Jeremiah, and he was persecuted by his own people for telling them what God would do. But all those prophecies came to pass.

Then, while Jerusalem was under siege, God told Jeremiah to buy some land that was about to be lost to the Babylonians. This didn’t make sense to him. He said:

“Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth
by your great power and by your outstretched arm; *there is nothing
too hard for you...*”

(Jeremiah 32:17)

Jeremiah knew it in his head, but he had a hard time believing it. He tried to show God the unreasonableness of buying such land. He protested:

“Behold, the mounds, they have come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what you have spoken has happened; and behold, you see it. You have said to me, Lord Yahweh, Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh: *is there anything too hard for me?*”

(Jeremiah 32:24-27)

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God then confirmed that the city would be taken and burned, and the people scattered around the world. However, in verse 37, He promised to bring His people back so they would possess the land again and live in it in peace and prosperity. God commanded Jeremiah to buy the plot of land as a sign that He would fulfill this promise. This prophecy, and others like it, lay dormant for thousands of years before they were fulfilled recently in 1948. Nothing is too hard for God. If God said He is going to do something, He will do it.²²

But our God is in the heavens.

He does whatever he pleases.

(Psalm 115:3)

But if God can do anything He wants, why does He allow evil in the world? How can a good God allow evil to continue? Let's look at this through the lens of a storyteller.

One of the main characters in Marvel's *X-Men* comics is Charles Xavier. Charles can't walk because he's a paraplegic. What if someone told him Stan Lee is in complete control of everything that happens in his world—would he believe it? Wouldn't he have doubts? Charles could say Stan is either cruel or not in control because he made him a paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair. He might say Stan is cruel or not in control because of all the suffering and death Stan wrote into his world. He might even deny the existence of Stan Lee because of these things ...and he would be wrong on all counts.

All good stories have five elements: setting, characters, plot, conflict, and resolution. The bad things that happen in a story belong to the conflict element, and they are as essential to the story as the other parts. A story with no conflict and eventual resolution is not a good story. It won't hold interest, and it won't sell. If Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson spent all their time reading the newspaper or playing tiddlywinks because there were no villains and no need for Batman and Robin, the show would not have lasted an episode.

The fact that bad things happen in all good stories does not reflect on the existence or character of the author. In fact, some of the worst characters and situations occur in some of the best books and movies. The movie

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Speed would have been a box-office flop if Howard Payne (Dennis Hopper's character) hadn't been there to plant bombs. But because he was so evil, everyone looked forward to the resolution. We wondered how Jack Traven (Keanu Reeves' character) would prevent the various disasters from happening. *That* was the focus of the movie. It was not about the conflict (i.e., a guy planting bombs), it was about the resolution.

Conflict is a necessary part of God's story. But His story is not about the conflict: It's about the resolution. We get focused on the bad stuff, but we should be looking forward to the eventual resolution God will surely bring about.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

In a story, it takes time for the resolution to occur. It doesn't happen at the beginning, nor immediately after the conflict starts. It happens at the end. Unlike the stories we write, the ultimate resolution of God's story will take place in eternity, after the story of our world is over. We have no guarantee that life will be good and fair here on earth. We should be looking forward to the good God has for us after we die instead of the good we may not receive in this life. To put it in a more familiar way, we should set our minds on things above, not on earthly things.²³ Let's think beyond the level of the story to the higher, eternal level.

For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17)

As Tolkien developed his mythological history (of which *The Lord of the Rings* is a small part), he put together a detailed chronology spanning many thousands of years. He defined the beginning and ending of different ages and the time periods for various kingdoms. He wrote a complex storyline. He raised up kings, and then took them down. But Tolkien was only imitating God who did it all first.

While at the Areopagus, Paul told the Greeks:

"[God] made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, *having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings, ...*" (Acts 17:26)

God decided who would reign, where, and for how long. He did this before history began.

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When Daniel spoke of God to King Nebuchadnezzar, he said:

He changes the times and the seasons; *he removes kings, and sets up kings*; he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding; (Daniel 2:21)

Later, he told the king:

“... the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will, and sets up over it the lowest of men.” (Daniel 4:17)

Nebuchadnezzar thought he had only himself to thank for the greatness of his kingdom. God proved him wrong by taking him off the throne and removing his sanity. Seven years later, God restored his mental health and gave him back his power. Through this experience, the king discovered God really is in control. Afterward, Nebuchadnezzar said:

“...he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or ask him, What are you doing?” (Daniel 4:35)

When it came time for Nebuchadnezzar’s reign to end, God raised up his son and then his grandson to be the last rulers of Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied of this decades before it happened.²⁴ God had already set the bounds for the kingdom of Babylon.

While it may be hard to believe, there is no one in power today, good or evil, that God has not raised up, because...

...there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. (Romans 13:1)

Jesus told Pilate, who gave the order for His crucifixion, “You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above.”²⁵

What those in power do with their power they will have to answer for. We rarely know why God makes certain people rulers, but He has His reasons.

Remember Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. When God told him to “Let my people go,” Pharaoh said “No,” and increased the sufferings of the Hebrew slaves.²⁶ On the surface, it may appear Pharaoh was obstructing God’s will, but according to Exodus 9:16, God raised up this particular obstinate person so He could show His power and declare His name throughout all the earth. God could have picked someone kinder and more sympathetic to

the Hebrews, but this evil man was best suited to His purposes. God also hardened Pharaoh's heart even more so He could show His power.

...He turned their heart to hate his people,
to conspire against his servants.²⁷

(Psalm 105:23-25)

From within the story, things may seem uncertain, out of control, or impossible. But on the higher level, God is always in control. We'll see this in more detail when we examine God's story.

Practical Applications

Thinking of God as the ultimate Author can also help us recognize flaws in the arguments non-believers have against His existence.

I browse various atheist blogs and internet forums at times, looking at their objections to the existence of God. Sometimes they'll take scripture out of context to malign God's character. They'll destroy a straw man, a distorted caricature that is not the God of the Bible. I'll give you an example.

We know nothing is impossible for God. Atheists have come up with seemingly impossible riddles to counter this. You've probably heard this one: "Can God create a rock too heavy for him to lift?" How would you answer this? Would it stump you, or would you recognize the fundamental problem with the question?

This puzzle assumes God is the strongest being in the universe, but for all that, He is still a part of the universe and bound by its laws. It's a misunderstanding virtually all atheists have. Can God create a rock too heavy for Him to lift? Of course not! A rock is part of creation, but God is not. He is not physical, He is spirit. As the ultimate Author, God can do anything He wants in His story, even if it is physically impossible.

If I were a science fiction writer, I could create a spaceship in my story that goes faster than the speed of light, even if the natural laws of my story world forbid it. In Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* universe, it's impossible to reach or exceed warp factor 10. Yet that limit was surpassed more than once in the original series. Gene Roddenberry did the impossible. As the storyteller, he could do anything he wanted in his story. He was not limited by his story world's natural laws. This is a picture of the sovereignty of God.

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He can do anything He wants in His universe. He can even create a rock that is infinitely heavy (a physical impossibility) and still lift it. God's only limitation is that He will not act against His own nature and character.

Viewing God as the ultimate Storyteller can also benefit our walk as believers. Most, if not all of us, have had doubts at times about God's power and sovereignty. Like Jeremiah, we know it in our heads, but all it takes is a difficult, painful personal situation, or some scary event happening in the world, and we doubt God can either completely resolve it or bring us through. Perhaps, like the non-believer, we only see God as the most powerful being in the universe.

When I look at God as the Author who is in complete control, not only of the universe, but of my own personal story, my faith increases and my worries decrease. The strongest man may stumble, but an author always gets his way. I am able to trust God in any situation I find myself. I know everything that happens to me, good or bad, pleasurable or painful, even extremely stressful and depressing, is a necessary part of God's story, and works for my good and ultimately His glory.

We know²⁸ that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

With this understanding, I can be more patient under long-term adverse circumstances. I can have real hope as I look forward to the resolution of the story.

Answering difficult questions and building your faith are two of the practical ways this analogy can help us. You can probably think of others. Next, we'll turn our attention to the story God has written.

God's Story

Earlier, I mentioned the five elements of a good story: the setting, the characters, the plot, the conflict, and the resolution. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

- The setting is where the elements of the story take place. In God's story, the setting is planet Earth, although it also includes the backdrop of the rest of the universe. Earth is where God has revealed Himself to His characters.²⁹

The setting also includes the laws that govern how things in the story function. In God's story, we have natural laws such as the law of gravity, the laws of thermodynamics, and the law that each living thing reproduces itself in kind. We also have spiritual laws, such as "Be sure your sin will find you out," and "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."³⁰

- The characters are all the people who have parts in the story. In God's story, this includes men and women, animals,³¹ angels, demons, and even God Himself. One thing that sets God's story apart is that His characters are real. Sherlock Holmes exists only in the world of fiction. The simulated characters on *Star Trek: Next Generation's* holodeck could only live on the holodeck, which is itself a fictional device in a fictional story with fictional characters. But we are real, and we'll continue to exist with the Author after the setting of the universe is no more. We are more like actors on a stage who get to go to their real home after the play is over.
- The plot is what the story is about. It contains not only the main events in the story, but also subplots, smaller stories, within the main story. In God's story, the main plot is about His redemption of fallen man through Jesus Christ. There are also subplots which include what happens in the lives of individuals. All of the subplots, however, work together, directly or indirectly, toward the main plot.
- The conflicts are the elements in the story that appear to oppose the goal of the plot. In God's story, one source of conflict is Satan working through man, but it also includes man rebelling against God, man

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walking in the flesh, and the consequences of his sin. Conflicts are essential to a good story, but a good story is not about the conflicts.

- The resolution is how the author's goal is achieved in the story in spite of the conflicts. This is where the author's character is best seen. An evil author concludes his story with evil triumphing over good. In God's story, good will triumph over evil in the end, because God is good.³²

In some stories, the conflict plays an important role in the resolution. In God's story, He used His people's rejection of their Messiah to make the reconciliation of man to Himself possible. On one level, Israel was working against God, but on the higher level they unknowingly fulfilled His purpose.³³ God uses conflict resolution to bring glory to Himself.

Before we look at God's story in more detail, let's look at one more aspect of His nature, seen in how a story is written.

Outside Of Time

When an author writes a story, he doesn't necessarily write it in the order it will be read. He might write the ending first, the beginning next, then fill in the middle. After the first draft is completed, he might go anywhere in the story to tweak the details or do a partial rewrite. An author can do this because his timeline is not the same as the story's timeline. He can change anything at any time in his story, therefore he effectively sees everything in his story as the present.

As characters in God's story, we cannot change the past or the future, and we have only minimal control over the present. But God's timeline is not the same as ours. He sees our past, present, and future alike. It's all present to Him. God may not even have a timeline the way we understand it. This is why we sometimes make a distinction between our perspective of time and God's perspective of eternity.

There are subtle clues to this found throughout the Bible. For example, Jesus' statement, "Most certainly, I tell you, before Abraham came into existence, I AM,"³⁴ sounds like bad grammar to our ears. But He was just letting us know He's from outside our timeline.

Another clue to God not being in time is seen when He answers our prayers before we pray:

It shall happen that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

(Isaiah 65:24)

Dr. Helen Roseveare (1925-2016) experienced the truth of this verse while a missionary in the Congo. In her book, *Give Me This Mountain*, she recounted an incident where the mother of a two-year-old child died giving birth to a premature baby. Helen needed a hot water bottle for the infant because their last one broke. When she told the other children at the mission about this need, one ten-year-old boldly prayed for a hot water bottle to be sent, along with a doll for the two-year-old. Helen thought that prayer a bit bold... why would someone send a hot water bottle to Africa? But a package arrived *that same day* containing (among other things) a hot water bottle and a doll. The package had been shipped from England five months earlier! God had answered before they asked!

God's timelessness is also shown in His complete foreknowledge of our lives. He knew the entire story of your life before you were conceived. He knew every word you would say, every joy you would experience, every struggle you would go through, and every sin you would commit. Interestingly, the Bible describes God's knowledge of our lives using a picture of an author recording it in a book:

Your eyes saw my body.

*In your book they were all written,
the days that were ordained for me,
when as yet there were none of them.*

(Psalm 139:16)

Before Adam was created, God knew he would, of his own free will, eat the forbidden fruit, and by that unleash the consequences of sin and death.³⁵ With that foreknowledge, and before the world was created, God planned His story with the end in mind: the restoration of man to Himself. This resolution would cost Him dearly. This He also knew:

All who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.*³⁶

(Revelation 13:8 ESV)

Your translation may read a little differently, but it implies the same thing: God knew before anything was created that He would have to send His Son, the Lamb of God, to die to redeem us from sin to restore us to Himself. Jesus' death and resurrection to pay the penalty for our sin was not Plan B. Unlike a human author, God did not need to revise or adjust His story to

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compensate for our choices. He knew what they would be and wrote His story taking that into account. His first draft is the final story.

Seeing The Story In The Bible

We, on the other hand, don't see God's story as a timeless present. As characters, we experience it from the inside as a sequence of events moving from the past to the present. Everything beyond the present is unknown to us apart from what God has prophetically revealed. So we usually don't know how the events we experience contribute to the overall plot. To us, they seem random and limited. How does working every day in a low-end job, getting robbed, or being diagnosed with terminal cancer fit in with God's story? I don't think we are meant to know while we are still in the story. But the Bible provides plenty of examples of how ordinary people fit in with the plot of His story. Perhaps the clearest example of this is seen in the life of Joseph, told in the book of Genesis.

Joseph's father was Jacob, who was later known as Israel. Before Jacob raised a family, he worked for his uncle Laban.³⁷ Jacob fell in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, and agreed with his uncle to work seven years for her. But when the seven years were up, Laban tricked him and gave him his oldest daughter, Leah. Jacob wasn't pleased, but he agreed to work seven more years for the girl he loved.³⁸

Leah provided six children to Jacob, but Rachel was barren. Four more children were born to Jacob through his concubines before God opened Rachel's womb. She conceived and bore Joseph.³⁹ Because Rachel was Jacob's favorite wife, Joseph became his favorite son, to the chagrin of his older brothers. Their resentment increased when Jacob gave him a tunic of many colors.⁴⁰ To top it off, Joseph had dreams of his family bowing down to him, and perhaps unwisely let them know what he had dreamed.⁴¹

One day, while Joseph's brothers were tending their father's sheep far from home, Jacob sent his favorite son to check on them. As he approached, they saw him and immediately plotted to kill him. Reuben didn't agree, so he tried to rescue his younger brother by suggesting they cast him into an underground cistern. Reuben intended to bring Joseph back to his father unharmed.⁴²

When Joseph arrived, his brothers stripped him of his tunic and threw him into the cistern. Then a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants came by.

They were on their way to Egypt to sell their goods. Judah said, "Instead of killing him, let's make a profit. After all, he is our brother."⁴³ So they sold Joseph to the merchants. Afterward, they killed a young goat and dipped the tunic in the blood to make their father think his favorite son was killed by a wild animal.

When the caravan arrived in Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph worked for his master honorably, and God blessed Potiphar's house.⁴⁴ Recognizing the blessing, the captain raised him up to a position of trust, but it was not to last. His master's wife tried to seduce him, and when he refused, she swiped his clothes as he fled. She then accused Joseph of attempted rape. In anger, Potiphar threw Joseph into Pharaoh's prison.⁴⁵

While in prison, Joseph gained the warden's respect, who also put him in a position of trust. Then Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker were thrown into prison with him. They each had a dream, which Joseph interpreted for them: The cupbearer would be restored to his position, but the baker would be executed.⁴⁶ Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him before Pharaoh when he was restored. Shortly thereafter, it happened as foretold. The baker was executed, and the cupbearer was restored... but he forgot to tell Pharaoh about Joseph.⁴⁷

Two years later, Pharaoh had a couple of disturbing dreams that no one could interpret. Then the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh how he had foretold his restoration by interpreting his dream. Pharaoh immediately summoned Joseph from the prison who interpreted the dream for him: There would be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of drought. Egypt must prepare for this. Seeing that he was wise, Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of all of Egypt to oversee the preparations.⁴⁸ During the years of plenty, Joseph stored up the harvested grain. When the famine struck, he doled out the stored grain to the people.

The famine also affected Jacob and his family in Canaan. So he sent all his sons, except Benjamin, to Egypt to buy grain. When they arrived, Joseph knew them, but they didn't recognize him.⁴⁹ They bowed down to him, unknowingly fulfilling his prophetic dream.⁵⁰ Joseph did not reveal himself right away. Instead, he accused his brothers of being spies. They denied it and spoke of their situation in Canaan. They also mentioned their youngest brother, Benjamin, who was not with them. Joseph put them in prison for three days. Then he freed all but Simeon, gave them grain, and sent them

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back to Canaan. He told them not to come back unless they also brought their youngest brother. Joseph also secretly returned their money in the sacks of grain, which they didn't discover until they arrived home.⁵¹

When their grain ran out, Jacob begrudgingly sent his sons back to Egypt for more. This time, Joseph, after feasting with his brothers and acting as a gracious host, gave them grain. But before they left, he snuck his silver cup into Benjamin's sack to test them.⁵² They hadn't gone far before Joseph sent his steward to confront them about stealing his cup. They denied it until it was found in Benjamin's sack. They returned to Joseph and pleaded for mercy. Joseph then revealed himself to them.⁵³ At first, they didn't believe, but when they did, they rejoiced.

Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan one more time to bring the rest of the family to live in Egypt. Jacob saw the son whom he thought had died years earlier.

When their father died, the brothers were afraid Joseph would retaliate for their previous treatment of him, but he said:

“Don't be afraid, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

(Genesis 50:19-20)

Throughout the story of Joseph, we see God controlling the details just as a human author would...

- Laban's trickery, Rachel's barrenness, Jacob's favor, and the dreams: They all worked to make Joseph despised in the eyes of his brothers. It may have seemed like bad luck to him, but God was orchestrating it all so He could send Joseph to Egypt to save his people and fulfill His promises to Abraham.
- The brothers' plot to kill Joseph, Reuben's rescue, the caravan's arrival at just the right time, and Judah's profit motive were also part of God's plan to bring Joseph to Egypt. God used the brothers' fallen propensities for His own purposes.
- Potiphar recognizing his house was blessed because of Joseph, his wife accusing Joseph of attempted rape, Joseph being cast into prison, the baker and cupbearer offending Pharaoh, their subsequent imprison-

ment and dreams, and the cupbearer forgetting about Joseph were intended to make Joseph ready to meet Pharaoh at just the right time.

- Pharaoh's dreams of subsequent years of plenty and famine, and the cupbearer's forgetting Joseph until that time, were intended to raise Joseph to the highest position of authority in Egypt. This made it possible for Joseph to bring his father's family to live in the best part of Egypt, where they would grow into a great people.

God used all the characters in His story to work toward His goal of doing the best good for His people. The results reach even to the present day. God's purpose in this story was not just to bless Joseph or Israel, but to bless us. Pastor and commentator David Guzik summarized it well:

"...if Joseph's brothers never sell him to the Midianites, then Joseph never goes to Egypt. If Joseph never goes to Egypt, he never is sold to Potiphar. If he is never sold to Potiphar, Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape. If Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape, then he is never put in prison. If he is never put in prison, he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh. If he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never interprets their dreams. If he never interprets their dreams, he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream. If he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he never is made prime minister. If he is never made prime minister, he never wisely administers for the severe famine coming upon the region. If he never wisely administers for the severe famine coming upon the region, then his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine. If his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine, then the Messiah can't come forth from a dead family. If the Messiah can't come forth, then Jesus never came. If Jesus never came, then you are dead in your sins and without hope in this world. We are grateful for God's great and wise plan."⁵⁴

Seeing The Story Today

God has done something no human author has ever done: He has revealed to His characters what happens later in His story. These revelations are evidence that God has written our story before it happened:

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- 120 years before God destroyed the world with a flood, He told Noah He would do so.⁵⁵
- Many years before Joseph rose to power in Egypt, God revealed what He would do through Joseph in his dreams.⁵⁶
- More than six hundred years before David, and sixteen hundred years before Jesus, God revealed that the kings of Israel would come through Judah.⁵⁷
- God revealed to Moses what would happen to Israel over a period of thousands of years.⁵⁸
- God revealed Jesus to David as seen in the Psalms.⁵⁹
- Jesus told His disciples they would be persecuted for His sake. He even revealed to Peter how he would die.⁶⁰
- And in the book of Revelation, Jesus gave the apostle John a glimpse of how the story would conclude.

Prophecy is God's way of telling the characters in His story what's in store for them later in the story's timeline. Each prophecy was written to describe an event that would definitely take place. The proof of this is in the fulfillments, for no biblical prophecy has ever failed. This proves God is in control of His story, and His purposes will be accomplished. We'll look at this in more detail later when we examine the evidence for our being part of God's story.

Abraham knew God was in control. He willingly offered his son Isaac on the altar, confident God would either stop him or raise his son from the dead.⁶¹

The apostles also recognized God's control of history. Peter told his audience God purposely gave Jesus into the hands of lawless men to have Him crucified.⁶² Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Jews were gathered together in Jerusalem "to do whatever your hand and your council foreordained to happen."⁶³

But most people in the Bible were not convinced God was in control. Even the apostles weren't at first:

A big wind storm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so much that the boat was already filled. He himself was in the stern, asleep

on the cushion, and they woke him up, and told him, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are dying?” He awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”

(Mark 4:37-40)

After rebuking the wind and waves, Jesus rebuked His disciples for their lack of faith.

Looking at their circumstances, it’s easy to see how the disciples could think they were in danger. I would have been afraid as well. But they knew Jesus was the Messiah. They knew the things the Old Testament said He would accomplish, so they should not have been afraid. Jesus would not die at that time because He had to die later on the cross to fulfill God’s purpose. They also would not die because they were being trained to spread the gospel after Jesus rose from the dead.

The great story continues today, and like most people in the Bible, we are generally unaware of it. We see the conflict element most clearly; it’s usually the only thing we do see. Like the disciples, we tend to conclude God is not in control. But we also have signs of God’s hand in the story available to us if we would look for them. Again, these signs come in the form of prophecy and fulfillment.

- Jesus foretold many would come and say they are Him,⁶⁴ and many have done so.
- Paul accurately foretold the condition of the hearts of men today,⁶⁵ which is considerably worse than in his time.
- Jesus foretold Christians would be hated and killed of all men.⁶⁶ Unjust suffering should not surprise us.
- Israel’s return as a nation in 1948 was directly foretold in the Bible thousands of years earlier.⁶⁷
- Jesus foretold that He would return after the gospel had been preached throughout the whole world.⁶⁸ This prophecy is on the verge of completion.

As we see these fulfillments, we also see the evidence that we are in God’s story. Not only that, as we look back and see God’s work in our own lives, we see His hand in our part of the story.

GOD'S STORY

In 1850, a nominal Christian teenager was on his way to his Congregational church in a snowstorm. Seeking shelter, he took a side street and entered a Primitive Methodist chapel. The regular preacher was not there. In his place was an inexperienced substitute. The lay preacher read from Isaiah 45:22: "Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth..." Having nothing else to say, he repeated the scripture, then repeated it again. The teenager later recalled what happened:

"He had not much to say, thank God, for that compelled him to keep on repeating his text, and there was nothing needed—by me, at any rate,—except his text. ... Then, stopping, he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, 'That young man there looks very miserable.' I expect I did, for that is how I felt. Then he said, 'There is no hope for you, young man. or any chance of getting rid of your sin, but by looking to Jesus:' and he shouted, as I think only a Primitive Methodist can. 'Look! Look, young man Look now!' And I did look⁶⁹ ... Then I had this vision—not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Savior Christ was—Divine as well as Human! ... Now I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than I also understood what it was to believe, and I believed in one moment!⁷⁰ ...as the snow fell on my road home from the little house of prayer I thought every snow-flake talked with me, and told of the pardon I had found; for I was white as the driven snow through the grace of God."⁷¹

God orchestrated this incident, with its snowstorm and seemingly inept preacher, to save Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who then led thousands to Christ. God orchestrated Joni Eareckson Tada's accident that left her a quadriplegic to later grant help and hope to thousands of disabled people around the world. He also orchestrated Richard Wurmbrand's suffering under torture to later start *The Voice of the Martyrs*, a ministry to help the suffering church.

We generally don't see God's hand immediately in the events of our lives. But when we do, we gain confidence that He is in control. We can trust Him

with everything that happens in our lives, even when He seems absent. And as our faith grows, our fear dies.

You can count on your Author. He works everything in His story for good to those who put their trust in Him.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Next, let's see how this analogy can be used to answer a few theological questions.

Why Did God Write His Story?

To put it another way, why did God create you and me? For what purpose did He create the universe? You could ask a human author similar questions about his book, and you might receive a response like:

- "I need to earn a living—to put food on the table."
- "I want to become rich and famous."
- "I want to help people. I want others to know what I know."
- "I want to promote change."

Many authors write to make a name for themselves. They spend most of the story building the conflict element. They develop one or more situations into seemingly impossible crises (such as keeping a bus moving above a certain speed to prevent a bomb from exploding). Then they write a way out of the crisis that their readers hopefully will not anticipate. This is a key feature of many good stories, and the unforeseen, creative resolution brings praise and fame to the author.

In the forward to *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien gave his reason for writing his book. It wasn't to become rich or make a name for himself. It was merely to entertain.⁷² The time and effort he put into writing his book was a labor of love.

To accomplish his goal, Tolkien gave his characters a different, exceedingly difficult internal goal: destroy Sauron's ring in the fires of Mount Doom. He intentionally wrote conflict elements into his story to make this goal seem impossible, so his ultimate goal would be realized.

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What if *The Lord of the Rings* contained no conflict elements, or those elements were mere minor nuisances? What if Frodo destroyed the ring at home in his fireplace? That would fulfill the story's internal purpose, but Tolkien would have failed to attain his ultimate goal. His story would not have held his readers' attention, amused them, delighted them, excited them, or deeply moved them. His book would have been quickly forgotten, and his name would have remained obscure. (Frodo wouldn't have received honor in the story either.) The conflict elements within the story were necessary to the success of the story's external purpose. Tolkien had to make it as difficult as possible for Frodo to destroy the ring to fulfill his higher purpose. The characters and events in the story that opposed the internal goal were necessary for the story's success.

Tolkien didn't struggle against the bad characters or events. He used them to make his story great. And we, his readers, trusted the author to bring both the internal purpose (the destruction of the ring) and the higher purpose (a good story) to pass.

What is true of human authors is also true of the ultimate Author: God has a purpose for His story. He didn't create the universe because He was bored. Obviously He didn't need to earn a living. He didn't have bills to pay or food to put on the table. His motivation was not merely to entertain. God's purpose was to bring glory to Himself.

God's Self-Revelation

The glory of God is what reveals who He is to His creation. The universe exists to show God's power, His holiness, His love, and so on. As an artist expresses himself in a painting, God expresses Himself in and through His creation. His story reveals who He is, not just to those of us within the story, but to those looking on from outside: the heavenly host, and even the demons. Simply put, God wants to be known personally.

We can see clues to this purpose throughout scripture. For example, Paul wrote:

But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:8)

THE STORYTELLER PARADIGM - FREE SAMPLE

The word “commends” means God exhibited and thereby proved His love to us by sending Jesus to die for us while we were still His enemies. He did this before you and I ever had an opportunity to accept or reject Him. That’s how we know He loves us. The apostle John put it this way:

By this God’s love was *revealed* in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

(1 John 4:9-10)

God displayed or showed His love for us through His actions. He didn’t just tell us He loves us. He didn’t send us an “I Love You” greeting card. He proved it by having Jesus enter His story to die for our benefit, so we, the characters within the story, and all the heavenly host looking on from outside, can see God’s love in action. This helps them and us know who God is. His love is not just described: It is *shown*.⁷³

There’s more to God’s character than love. We have a habit of simplifying Him in our minds—of making Him to be what we imagine Him to be or what we’d like Him to be. To some, God’s only character attribute is love. To others, it’s only wrath. But just as you and I don’t fit other people’s stereotypes, God refuses to fit our stereotypes. We love, but we also get angry and sad. The same is true of God:

What if God, willing to *show* his wrath, and to make his power *known*, endured with much patience vessels of wrath made for destruction, and that he might *make known* the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory...

(Romans 9:22-23)

In other words, God does not immediately *show* His wrath on the wicked so He can *show* His patience with sinners. The wicked do not get what they deserve right away. Some have foolishly shaken their fist at God and dared Him to prove Himself by striking them down dead. They usually don’t get struck down because God endures the wicked with “much” patience. This delayed justice shows His self-control. It also shows His mercy because He’s giving the wicked time to repent. His merciful patience is the reason why any of us are saved. Those of us who have believed in Jesus to salvation are called “vessels of mercy” here because we used to be vessels of wrath: We deserved eternal punishment just as much as everyone else. But God

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saved us because He wants to show His mercy as well, and He wants to display the riches of His glory.

What else does God want to reveal about Himself? Ephesians 2:4-7 says God made us alive with Christ and seated us with Him in heavenly places so that He might *show* the immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. In other words, even after the story of this world is over, God is going to continue to show His grace on those of us who are in Christ Jesus.

God wants everyone on earth and in heaven to know Him, so He takes an active role in His story to reveal the different aspects of His character. He has revealed Himself indirectly through what He has created:

One called to another, and said,

“Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies!

The whole earth is full of his glory!”

(Isaiah 6:3)

The heavens declare the glory of God.

The expanse shows his handiwork.

Day after day they pour forth speech,

and night after night *they display knowledge.*

There is no speech nor language,

where their voice is not heard.

Their voice has gone out through all the earth,

their words to the end of the world. ...

(Psalm 19:1-4a)

The apostle Paul wrote:

...because that which is known of God is *revealed* in them, for *God revealed it to them*. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are *clearly seen*, being *perceived* through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; ...

(Romans 1:19-20)

Anyone can see the evidence of God’s power and divine nature by closely examining creation. Theologians call this general revelation.

God has also revealed Himself to us by speaking through the scriptures...

Every Scripture is God-breathed...

(2 Timothy 3:16a)

...meaning God controlled what was written in the Bible so it contains exactly what He wanted it to say... so we can know what He is like. Some have a hard time believing God could use imperfect men to write a book that is

without error and infallible. But remember, the Author is in complete control of His story. The most bungling characters in the story can't stop their Author from accomplishing His purposes. He saw to it that the Bible was written without error.

God also revealed Himself to us directly through His Son, Jesus Christ:

God, having in the past spoken to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has at the end of these days *spoken* to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds.

(Hebrews 1:1-2)

Jesus spent His ministry years on earth doing and saying only what His heavenly Father had commanded Him.⁷⁴ He did this so those around Him could see what God is like.

God also uses man to reveal Himself, and He doesn't limit Himself to godly people. He uses ungodly people as well, such as the king of Egypt at the time of the Exodus.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might *show* in you my power, and that *my name*⁷⁵ *might be proclaimed in all the earth.*"

(Romans 9:17)

God used someone with a hard heart to bring glory to Himself—to *show* Israel and us who He is. The most powerful ruler in the world at the time could not hinder God's purpose in the slightest. By delivering Israel from slavery, God not only revealed His power, He revealed His compassion for His people, and He showed His faithfulness by fulfilling the promises made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.⁷⁶

God chose Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners, to preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles to *show* His wisdom to the heavenly beings. Paul wrote of himself:

To me, the very least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men *see* what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now through the assembly [i.e., the church] the manifold wisdom of God might be *made known* to the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord...

(Ephesians 3:8-11)

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And the story still goes on. Even today, God continues to reveal Himself. It might not seem like it the way the world is today. God seems hidden or absent much of the time, but we are looking at things from the perspective of characters within the story. Remember: When everything seems dark and hopeless, our Author is still in complete control. He even let us know ahead of time that the world would get like this—and get much worse⁷⁷—before He brings His story to its exciting and worth-waiting-for conclusion.

Fulfilling Your Purpose In God’s Story

So what about you? What is your aim in life? Does it match up with God’s purpose for creating you?

If you were to ask Bruce Wayne, a.k.a. Batman, what his life’s purpose is, you would probably get an answer like “To fight crime,” or “To make Gotham a safe place to live.” But if you were to ask Bruce Wayne’s creators, Bob Kane and Bill Finger, what Batman’s purpose is, it would not be to fight crime. They knew you can’t fight real crime with a fictional character. If they thought otherwise, they’d be shocked to find, over eighty years later, that crime has only increased. No, they created Batman to capitalize on the financial success of Superman.⁷⁸ It was all about the money.

Just as Batman’s opinion of his purpose had nothing to do with why Bob Kane created him, your opinion of your purpose may not be what you think it is. You might think your purpose centers around yourself or others, but ultimately, it centers on God—especially if you’re a Christian:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may *proclaim* [i.e., show] the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

(1 Peter 2:9)

You and I were saved to bring glory to God: to reveal who He is to the world. We’re privileged to have a willing and knowing part in this purpose. Most people don’t realize that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.⁷⁹ They don’t know God’s purpose for them. But we do if we read our Bibles.

Glorifying God is not just a matter of speaking words of praise. It’s not about doing great things for God that would draw attention to ourselves.

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It's about living in such a way that the world can see, witness, and even experience what God is truly like. It's letting Him display His character and nature through us, even in spite of our weaknesses.

Before he was saved, Paul had a well-deserved reputation as a zealous persecutor of Christians. Many believers were afraid of him and the power granted him by the Jewish authorities. But God saved Paul and humbled him.

Once, he had a vision where he was caught up to heaven. He heard things said he was not permitted to tell us. Such an experience might have made him proud, but God did something to stop that from happening. Paul wrote of this experience:

By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted excessively, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, that I should not be exalted excessively. Concerning this thing, I begged the Lord three times that it might depart from me. He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong.

(2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Paul could have been puffed up because of his supernatural experience. He could have written a New York Times bestseller, *My Heavenly Vision*. But God did not want him proud. The focus was not to be on Paul but on Jesus. Paul was to get none of the glory. When he recognized God's purpose, he willingly accepted God's gift of a "thorn in the flesh." He even delighted in it! Because it made him weak, he would be a fit conduit for Jesus to show his power through. All the glory would go to Jesus. That's what Paul wanted.

This should be our desire as well. We should live in such a way that all the glory goes to God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son, not us.

- ▶ Jesus told us in John 15:8 to bear much fruit as His disciples so God would be glorified.

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- Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do it to the glory of God.
- John the Baptist's motto, "He must increase, but I must decrease,"⁸⁰ should be ours.

Glory is what reveals God's character and nature. God wants people to *know* Him: He wants us to have a relationship with Him. The world today is full of ignorance, misinformation, and slander about God. You and I were saved not just to know Him, but to counter this slander and proclaim who He really is and what He's like. In other words, God saved us so as to reveal different aspects of his character to the world. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul said he received mercy from God so Jesus Christ might *show* His perfect patience as an example to those who would believe. Colossians 1:27 says God saved the Gentiles to *show* the riches of His glory to the saints.

Whatever we might think our earthly purpose is, it's time to fulfill our real God-given purpose—to make that the priority. The world needs to hear about Jesus, but it also needs to see God's love, grace, and mercy in action, His patience with sinners, His faithfulness to His promises, and so on. The world needs to see His glory.⁸¹

Thus says Yahweh, Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, don't let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh.

(Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Make this your purpose in life: not only to know God but to make Him known... to display His character. That's what God made you for. You will find your greatest fulfillment in life when you make God's purpose your priority.⁸²

...in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been fore-ordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will; *to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory*, we who had before hoped in Christ...

(Ephesians 1:11-12)

This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that you may approve the things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offense to the day

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of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, *to the glory and praise of God*. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, *to him be the glory in the assembly* and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

END OF FREE SAMPLE

If you have found what you've read profitable, feel free to pass this on to someone else. I also invite you to buy the complete book, available from Amazon.com, Google Play, and other booksellers. It concludes the Storyteller Paradigm by answering the questions, "How can we know we are in a story God has written?" and "What about free will?" The book then gives insight into many of Jesus' parables.

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NOTES

- ¹ Romans 7:4, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:23-27.
- ² By ‘time’, I mean the continuous, one-way, orderly progression of events that happen from past to present to future.
- ³ If Daffy Duck did exist apart from Tex Avery, it would be because someone else created him—and he wouldn’t be the same Daffy we know and love today.
- ⁴ Genesis 1:1, Exodus 20:11.
- ⁵ In John 10:33, the Jews recognized that Jesus claimed to be God, but they wanted to stone Him for it.
- ⁶ Exodus 3:14. Jesus’ preexistence is also spoken of in Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2.
- ⁷ From the article “Soviet Cosmonaut Gherman Titov begins a two-day visit to Century 21 Exposition on May 5, 1962,” by Alan J. Stein on historylink.org. (<https://www.historylink.org/File/10104>).
- ⁸ The Jews spoke of the universe as the second heaven, the first being the sky, and the third being the location of God’s throne.
- ⁹ Technically, Stan did not write the stories for the movies, but you get the general idea. Similarly, Alfred Hitchcock and M. Night Shyamalan appeared incognito in their movies, and their characters didn’t recognize them for who they are either. (A fictionalized Spiderman meets Stan Lee story can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1N9TivIEnpA>)
- ¹⁰ Theologians call this “special revelation.”
- ¹¹ In Greek, there is no word “his” in verse 2, meaning you should read it like this: “...spoken to us by Son.” John Darby explained: “The absence of the Greek article here is important, though difficult to render in English; ... It is God himself who speaks; not by another; not as the Father nor in the person of the Father; not merely by the Holy Spirit using a person not divine, but as himself a divine person, and that person the Son.”
- ¹² John 14:8-9.
- ¹³ Those who knew the truth of the identity of Jesus always had that knowledge supernaturally revealed to them. No one figured it out on their own.
- ¹⁴ You can hear many of their testimonies on the ex-skeptic podcast at <https://exskeptic.org/podcast>.
- ¹⁵ The Bible tells us Jesus not only created the world, He sustains it (Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:17). When He entered His story, He continued to sustain everything. Even when He died on the cross, the universe did not fall apart. Some have asked how this could be. It’s simple: only His earthly body, His character, died. His eternal nature as the Son of God was unchanged by what

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happened to His physical body. When Jesus became a man, He didn't cease being God. He merely added humanity to His nature.

¹⁶ See also Colossians 1:16, where even the things not seen were created by God.

¹⁷ God rested on the seventh day, not because He needed to recuperate, but because His work was completed.

¹⁸ God created the world in six days. I believe those days to be literal 24-hour days. Some think there's a gap in time between the first two verses of Genesis—in other words, after God created the earth, it somehow became "void," and the first day of creation began after that. I see nothing in scripture that promotes or rules out such a gap in time. If it exists, there may have been a previous creation that was wiped out, and then the universe was put into a kind of stasis. If so, perhaps the earth was first occupied by the angels. But a gap in time is not necessary. God can create the world with what we consider the appearance of age.

God created trees in Genesis 1:11-12 as mature trees because Adam and Eve would have eaten from them three days later. If you had cut down one of those newly created trees, you would find rings because that's the nature of trees, but you wouldn't be able to use those rings to determine the age of those trees. When God created Adam, he formed him as a man, not a zygote. He had the appearance of age. He may even have had a navel.

Fictional stories written by men have an implied history not written in the story. The events in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series took place over thousands of years. Yet the series is less than a hundred years old. Perhaps God made our universe with an implied history. In other words, all of the appearances of great age may not be real. When He created the universe, He made it so the light from distant stars and galaxies reached Earth right away. As the all-powerful Storyteller, He was perfectly able to do this.

¹⁹ Jonah 1:3.

²⁰ If George chose to keep something in his story world a mystery such that even he didn't know it (for literary purposes), then technically that something couldn't really exist because no one created it.

²¹ This is a literal translation of Luke 1:37.

²² When you become aware of the sovereignty of God, you realize no seemingly impossible situation is really impossible if God says otherwise. Likewise, no seemingly possible situation is really possible if He says otherwise.

²³ Colossians 3:1-4.

²⁴ Jeremiah 27:5-7.

²⁵ John 19:11.

²⁶ Exodus 5.

²⁷ This was not unfair because it was what Pharaoh wanted. His heart was already hard. God never hardens someone's heart against their will.

²⁸ Greek *oida*, meaning perceptual knowledge. As we see God work situations out for our good, we gain awareness that He always does so.

²⁹ This is not to say there can't be intelligent life playing parts in the story elsewhere in the universe. The Bible does not speak of life elsewhere, so it is not to concern us.

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- ³⁰ Numbers 32:23, Galatians 6:7-8.
³¹ Numbers 22:21-30.
³² Just as there are subplots, there can also be subresolutions. We see these scattered throughout the Bible. One example is the Jews' triumph over their enemies in the book of Esther after Haman tried to exterminate them. Seeing God work the subresolutions helps us to trust He will eventually bring about the main resolution at the right time.
³³ Acts 2:23, 4:27-28, 1 Corinthians 2:8
³⁴ John 8:58.
³⁵ Don't confuse foreknowledge with predetermination. God's foreknowledge of Adam's sin did not cause it to happen, just as my knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow does not mean I will cause the sun to rise.
³⁶ See also Matthew 25:34 and Ephesians 1:4.
³⁷ Genesis 27:43-44, 29:15-18.
³⁸ Genesis 29:26-30.
³⁹ Genesis 30:22-24.
⁴⁰ Genesis 37:3.
⁴¹ Genesis 37:5-11.
⁴² Genesis 37:21-22.
⁴³ Genesis 37:26-27.
⁴⁴ Genesis 39:2-3,5.
⁴⁵ Genesis 39:20.
⁴⁶ Genesis 40:5-19.
⁴⁷ Genesis 40:23.
⁴⁸ Genesis 41:40-43.
⁴⁹ Genesis 42:8.
⁵⁰ Genesis 42:6.
⁵¹ Genesis 42:35.
⁵² Genesis 44:2. Joseph did this to test his half-brothers: to see if they would treat his full-brother as they had treated him.
⁵³ Genesis 45:3.
⁵⁴ <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-50>
⁵⁵ Genesis 6:3,7,13,17.
⁵⁶ Genesis 37:5-11.
⁵⁷ Genesis 49:10.
⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 28, 30.
⁵⁹ Psalm 2, 22, 110.
⁶⁰ John 15:20, 21:18-19.
⁶¹ Genesis 22:2,5,8, Hebrews 11:17-19. Interestingly, before Abraham's faith fully matured, he thought God needed his help to move the story along. That's why he fathered his first son, Ishmael. God didn't need Abraham's help, but He still incorporated what Abraham did into His story.
⁶² Acts 2:23.
⁶³ Acts 4:27-28, Luke 22:22.
⁶⁴ Mark 13:5-6,22.
⁶⁵ 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

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- ⁶⁶ Matthew 24:9.
- ⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Isaiah 11:11-12, Jeremiah 3:18, 16:14-15, 23:7-8, Ezekiel 20:33-44, 36:1-12, 36:22-24, and Zechariah 10:6-8. These passages refer to a literal return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. Detailed reasons for believing so are given in my article *Who Is The Israel Of God?* (<https://dtjsoft.com/who-is-the-israel-of-god-full-article>).
- ⁶⁸ Matthew 24:14.
- ⁶⁹ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-life-look>
- ⁷⁰ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons41.ix.html>
- ⁷¹ <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/footsteps-of-mercy>
- ⁷² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Foreword, page 10. (I'm using the page number from the single-volume 1991 edition (ISBN 0 261 10230 3) published by HarperCollinsPublishers.)
- ⁷³ God had revealed His love for man long before Jesus died. After Adam and Eve sinned, God sacrificed an animal in their place so they wouldn't have to die right away (Genesis 3:21). He hinted at Jesus' permanent solution to sin in Genesis 3:15. He also foretold of Jesus' death for our sin in Isaiah 53:5,10. But the fulfillment of these prophecies was the ultimate proof of God's love.
- ⁷⁴ John 5:30, 6:38, 7:17, 8:26,28, 12:49-50.
- ⁷⁵ God's name refers to His reputation, not what His name sounds like. To proclaim His name means to glorify Him.
- ⁷⁶ Genesis 15:12-14. Each character in God's story (including you and me) serves God's overall purpose for His story. Unlike human authors, God does so with people who have free will. But, even though we have consciousness and free will, He somehow works it out for His glory.
- ⁷⁷ John 16:33, Acts 14:22, 1 Thessalonians 2:3-12, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12, 4:3, Daniel 7:20-25, 11:36-45, 12:1.
- ⁷⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman>
- ⁷⁹ Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:9-10.
- ⁸⁰ John 3:30.
- ⁸¹ We're not to merely tell people about Jesus; we are to show who He is through our lives ...or rather, let Him show Himself through us via His Holy Spirit. If we tell people about Jesus but live like the world, if we tell the truth through our lips while lying about Him through our actions and attitudes, we make Jesus look bad. This is why Paul wrote in Philippians 3:17-19: "Brothers, be imitators together of me, and note those who walk this way, even as you have us for an example. For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things."
- ⁸² God's purpose is being fulfilled in each one of us, whether we like it or not. But He would rather we willingly and intentionally seek His glory. We were created in His image for this purpose: to proclaim Him through our words and actions. This is the ultimate meaning of our lives.

Strive to know God better yourself (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Study your Bible and pray with this as your primary purpose. Make Moses' prayer yours: "Show

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me your glory!” (Exodus 33:18). Ask this not only for yourself but for others: your spouse, your family, your friends, your coworkers, and even your enemies. (Whatever good you pray for yourself, pray the same for your enemies.)