

Hey, try this web search on for size when you have a spare hour this Saturday: google the phrase “the art of storytelling,” you’ll get some pretty interesting options to look at. Turns out, lots of folks are interested in good storytelling!

And why wouldn’t we be? An award-winning moviemaker like Francis Ford Coppola directing *The Godfather* or a timeless novelist like Willa Cather telling us about *My Ántonia* can hold us spellbound—we are amazed at the powerful narratives that Cather and Coppola have implanted into our hearts and minds, often for a lifetime of reflection and reaping.

You know, of course, that good storytelling is an irreplaceable element of every family’s inner-dynamic and every culture’s observances. These stories can become an anchor to hold to in bad times and a guiding light to celebrate in good times.

And then there’s the Bible: story after story about God and humanity—and every one of them astute, of course. Sometimes the stories are seemingly obscure, but others are very well-known—you know, like Adam and Eve...or David and Goliath...or Daniel in the lions’ den.

But in the Bible, there’s always a sort of “telescoping” where a story *does* stand alone, to be sure, but the story also fits into the much larger narrative. You see, the Bible is the most integrated of all narratives—layer upon layer of meaning and God’s purposes. Nowhere does the infallibility of God become more apparent than the Spirit of God coming upon the authors of the 66 books of the Bible.

Even more startling is the further embedding of the parables told by Jesus—every parable a treasure of instruction and meaning—and integrated into each gospel writer’s overarching story about the Kingdom.

The truly weird experience is this: the longer we study these Bible narratives...those stories...those parables—well then, the more we truly understand the overwhelming, overarching, sweeping story of God and His relationship with humanity. You and I can never get fully “*there*,” of course, at least not on this side of the fullest revelation in heaven by God Himself—because that’s when He will tour us in person in our glorified bodies, looking backwards from the vantage point of all of history. So, in fullness then, in part now: an understanding of the overarching, sweeping story of God and His relationship with humanity!

So, you ask, *what in the world are you talkin’ about? That’s not always there for me when I read the Bible.*

Well, first, that makes me chuckle a bit because, when I was growing up, I just detested the way some of my English and literature teachers would have us students read some passage and then have some wild interpretation that wasn’t clear and plain at all to the normal reader—that is, they would claim that some passage meant something that wasn’t clear at all upon a basic simple reading. You know, the teacher’s message was something like “don’t believe your own eyes and brain, let me tell you what this really means!” It was kind of positioned as an elite literary club: if you could agree to read something weird into the writing, then you somehow got some kind of mystical gold star for being a person of high culture. Heh.

No, that isn’t what I’m talking about. I’m talking about the fact that you don’t have to be a PhD or a member of the local literature club or speak with a lofty European accent to understand the Bible. After all, in the parables, Jesus was speaking to plain ol’ ordinary people...with great benefit to every listener!

Just how does that happen? Well, true understanding of the Scripture uniquely comes with the power of the Holy Spirit. You see, I grew up in a mainline church pretty much focused on the overriding importance of approved behavior and outward appearances, so the living Word meant very little to me. But when I came to believe in Christ in my 20s, suddenly the Bible’s words became truly alive and deeply meaningful, providing guidance in magnificent ways. And I don’t mean that it’s just about a traditional understanding of “theology”—no, God’s Word actually changed it all: my business life, my relational life, my inner life.

That's because the Word of God becomes truly magnificent by the quickening of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Romans 12:2 commands the believer to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

But, still, even a hearing of the Word of God is not always what it could be or should be. Jesus sometimes accentuated what He said with these words: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Indeed, Jesus said this a number of times. But not everyone has the same God-desired takeaway from Jesus' words. No, it requires something deeper: a clearer hearing, a mind ready to be renewed, a real Spirit-led awareness.

Why is it, for example, that a person will claim something like: "I never saw that in the Bible before now, but I know I've read that passage a hundred times!" And why is it that, even though some people can describe a rote catechism of grace, they never really truly "get" the depth of God's applied grace?

Nowwww, we're to the nub of the issue. Unlike Copolla or Cather, not all of us are going to be great at the art of *storytelling* in our families, in our churches, in our workplaces. Sure, storytelling is a skill we can work on, but, let's face it, we don't always spend every day working on the craft of telling stories to others.

But...each of us is called to be great at the "art of storyhearing!" That's right, the art of storyhearing! Tell me, when you take in one of the parables of Jesus, do you glean startling insights that not only encompass the clear meaning of the story but also launch you into the deepest understanding, the full integration of God's wisdom? That is the applying of spiritual discernment to the words of Christ! Of course, that's an application—your application—of "he who has an ear to hear, let him hear!"

Let me be blunt. If you've heard or read the Word of God often during the last few months and you haven't responded often with absolute wonder and an awareness of lots of important intellectual and spiritual growth, then you simply are not positioning yourself to glean the fullness of what God has for you. But it goes well beyond even *that*, too! When a newscaster gives a report or someone at work says something seemingly routine or mundane, do you suddenly become aware of how that fresh data fits into the big picture in a very special way? Well, that's simply an even fuller discernment that comes from God!

You see, God is using His Word, of course, but He is also using the activities of every person around you to speak into your life and to build up the well of wisdom and understanding that He wants you to tap into every day of your life. I remind you again of Jesus' words: "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear."

So, are you intentionally, continuously developing a highly formed art of storyhearing? Are you doing that in your reading of the Bible...asking the Holy Spirit to lead you in integrating individual stories into a greater understanding of God's big-picture plan? And are you integrating *all* that you hear and read and glean and store into a cohesive understanding of how the world works and, more importantly, how *your* world *should* work?

See? God wants us to hear very, very well and, accordingly, to renew our minds very, very effectively. And that's all in the service of our various stewardships: that is, our families, our churches, and our workplaces. In short, effective storyhearing is a key foundation of Kingdom living at its best, at its most leveraged.

You *are* connected to God—you know that He indwells in you. And, unless you're a hermit, you're connected to others, even if it's just a Zoom level. Hey, this is all about *your personal expectation and reaping*: do you expect that God is ready to expand your understanding, your wisdom, each and every day? If that's your personal expectation, God will surely do that. God does not withhold wisdom from you!

And, sadly, if you have no such personal expectation, your personal math is made both quantitatively simple and spiritually simple: *what you had before...plus zero...equals what you had before*. Here's Jesus again: "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." *That* is every believer's opportunity, every day. There is no limit on you by God with regard to this. Just how developed is *your* art of storyhearing?

A&A: Application & Action

1. How's your storyhearing skill level? Be specific about your methods and experiences of adding to your store of wisdom.
2. Jesus said, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." How can a disciple of Jesus grow in having "an ear to hear?" And how often are you proactively choosing to grow in this area?
3. Two of the ways God helps us grow in hearing His voice is through personal discipleship and teaching. Can you name three of your routine personal influencers who expect to hear God's voice in their daily lives and believe you should expect it in yours? If so, call them and thank them and share your latest gleanings. If not, write down the names of influencers you should seek out (for personal discipleship or for teaching content) who can help you grow in this area. Then do it!