

Washing Feet

The gospels devote nearly an entire third of their length to the final week of the life of Jesus. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the betrayal by Judas, the sorrow and anguish of our Lord's prayers in Gethsemane, the trials, and the cross of Calvary hold the overshadowing impact in the life of Jesus. Jesus spends these precious days with his disciples teaching them many things about the kingdom of God, preparing them for all that is to come, and praying for them.

After the fanfare of Jesus' welcome into Jerusalem as Messiah, Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples, knowing how he was about to fulfill the Passover feast. Fittingly, he begins this momentous week in church history with an act of servanthood in a poignant display revealing the true nature of the kingdom of God to a worldly human race thoroughly enmeshed in values of success, prestige and power. God's kingdom has diametrically opposed values. Our Messiah, knowing he had overcome the world (John 16:33), knowing that God had put all things under his power (John 13:3) - the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, stripped off his clothing, and began washing his disciple's feet - "a task considered so degrading that a master could not require it of a Jewish slave."¹ Later, as the disciples argued among themselves as to who would be the greatest, Jesus gently reminds them that the greatest among us is the one who serves - as Jesus was among them as One who serves. During his earthly ministry, Jesus asked us to do three things: to make disciples (Matthew 28:19), to share the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:24-26), and to wash one another's feet (John 13:14) - to be among each other as servants.

¹ Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Zondervan, 1995, 191.

As we spend this precious time we have together considering how we might best serve one another here and in our home churches and communities, we do well to remember that all in the body of Christ have functions and gifts for the benefit of the body. We want to find and develop these gifts. But some gifts are universal. We are all witnesses to the saving power of Jesus in our lives; we are all to be disciples who grow and mature and produce other disciples.

We have a Bible study book that we read this year as we prepared for this festival. (*Developing a Servant's Heart*) In a section called "The Greatest Service of All," Charles F. Stanley writes that part of God's purpose for our lives is to be his witness to his saving power – to live and die in a way that will display for others God's plan for forgiveness – and that service cannot be separated from witness or ministry. He notes that "true service always has an evangelistic aspect that is borne of a vision for what God desires to do on the earth." (p. 83)

In order to help us develop skill in fulfilling the great commission, I invite us to contemplate why the gospel is good news to us, and how it is that Jesus makes such a huge difference in our lives. The biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation presents a format that also fits our individual lives. This format can be used to tell others our own gospel stories.

In **creation**, we talk about our background, early shaping influences, and how that formed our identity. Creation is about identity. What is our origin and purpose? What made us who we are and shaped us? Where did we find our identity – parents, work, fitness, appearances, possessions?

The second movement of our life story is the *fall*. This is about our brokenness. What has destroyed our identity and purpose? Why are we not as we should be? Why is the world not as it should be? Who or what is to blame for our brokenness? Who or what is the problem in my life?

Do we blame someone else? Our parents? Our culture, friends, coworkers? Ourselves? The gospel informs us that the real problem is sin. We looked somewhere other than to God for our identity. This rebellion destroys us. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Our sinful beliefs have led to sinful behaviors. If we seek the approval of man, we have replaced God with man. Some people have been abused. We need to move beyond giving abusers power and control over us – to taking ownership of how we respond to abuse. If we responded to abuse by trying to be perfect, or at least hide our imperfections, we can blame others for our problem. But then we would still be enslaved as a victim to sin. We need to come to the place where we realize that we have let other people have too much power in our lives. Those people have become our image of God instead of Jesus. We have to turn to Jesus, and not blame anyone else. We need to worship Jesus instead of others or ourselves.

If we fail to confess our sins in our stories, we fail to show our need for a savior. Jesus won't be the hero of our story if we don't really need a Savior for our sin. This leads to the third movement in our stories.

Redemption. This is where the rescue and deliverance happens. We all need to be rescued and delivered. Who or what do we look to to save or rescue us? Who or what is our Savior? Is it better friends, spouses, children, or grandchildren? Exercise and diets? Work or money? These all fall short. The one we really need is Jesus. Only he can and has dealt with the real problem of our sin. Our life story lessons will teach us that we did not find deliverance from whatever or whoever we sought it from until we turned to Jesus. He is the better Savior, who rescues and

redeems us from sin and our slavery to it. When we seek to please people, they will let us down. When we seek to perfect ourselves in our own eyes, we will always fall short. Only Jesus has the power to resurrect us from the death that our sinful gods lead us to. Only Jesus has paid the debt for our sins so that we could be free to follow the one true God and have abundant life. Only he can heal us and free us to forgive ourselves and others for their sinful destructive behaviors. Only Jesus can give us a new birth and make us new.

This brings us to the final act: *New Creation*. We all have a deep longing for change. We want transformation, for all things to be made new. We have hope for a happy ending. This is the part of our stories where we share what has changed for us, and what further changes we look forward to. What has changed and what will change? We were created for something different than this, something more. We can feel it in our bones. Something is terribly wrong in our world, in our families, and in ourselves. What is this new creation that we long for?

The gospel tells us that the new creation is a new you, and a new heaven and a new earth, ruled by the King of Kings, Jesus. In this new kingdom, there will be no more sin, suffering, or brokenness. We will be made perfect and complete. Heaven and earth will be new and united, and we will all worship Jesus forever. We are saved and we will be saved forever. God is changing us day by day into his image. This is the part of our stories where we acknowledge how God has freed us from caring about what others think, and released us into the freedom of looking only to him for approval. In this part of our stories, we acknowledge that God is continuing this work in us, bringing it to our attention when we fall back into the flesh and the world, into our previous ways. When we fail, it becomes easier to repent because we know he forgives us, loves us, accepts us, and hasn't given up on us. As we become more like him, we

glorify him more and more. We eagerly await the day when we will see him face to face and be made complete, and no longer struggle with sin.

One of the most effective ways of showing love to one another is listening. This is also a powerful tool in evangelism. This same format can be used in connecting with unbelievers, and showing them how Jesus can be the answer for them.

Creation: Where do they find their *identity* or sense of purpose or significance?

Fall: What is the *problem* in their lives? Why are things not as they should be?

Redemption: What will solve these problems?

New Creation: What is their ultimate hope for the future?

I am going to give you an example of how to tell a creation, fall, redemption, new creation story by telling you mine. After that, I will give you 10-15 minutes to jot down notes for your own creation, fall, redemption, new creation story. Then we'll spend the rest of our time this hour sharing our stories with the others at our tables. This can help us develop our skills at sharing Jesus with others through our own stories. This exercise will also help us build community as we get to know each other better and have some new conversations. We can help each other understand our own stories and life journey with Jesus.

Here's mine:

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Creation

I was raised in Presbyterian churches and active in my high school youth group and choir. In these places I heard and sang about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am grateful for this background which acquainted me with Christian fellowship, ideas and culture.

Fall

After graduating from high school, I moved out on my own, worked and went to college. Church was forgotten. Sex, drugs and rock and roll were the earmarks of the youth culture of the 70's in which I found myself seeking love and fulfillment in all the wrong places.

Redemption (Rocky)

One summer during college, I set out on a hitchhiking trip with a girlfriend, headed for California. We went south to Atlanta where we found ourselves hanging out with street people who lived in abandoned buildings. The place to go on Wednesday night for a free dinner was the local Baptist church. After dinner, the gospel was preached and I gladly received it, went forward, and was baptized. They gave me a Bible and I read it. When we left Atlanta, I excitedly shared the Bible and the gospel with truck drivers who gave us rides. It was an amazing salvation experience when my eyes and ears were opened to the simple way of accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior. It was so astounding to me. I sometimes wonder if I had ever heard the gospel before. I'd have to guess that I had, but I hadn't *really* heard it before. The divine experience of the Holy Spirit's opening my deaf ears and blind eyes made all the difference.

I believe I was saved then, but Satan was after me more than ever. Without church fellowship and growth, I was in a dangerous position, vulnerable to all the flaming arrows of the evil one. I became mentally unstable and even tried to kill myself. Floating above my body in a sea of tortured souls, a spiritual being came to me and showed me that poor girl laying on the floor. I thought that girl needed help and went to her, returning to my body by the grace of God, with a new compassion for myself that I had never had before. I tried to do better, to get better.

Even though I didn't know God yet, he knew me. He was watching over me, and helping me to move in a better direction. I got some better friends and met my first husband.

Recreation (and Renewal)

When I was pregnant with our first child, we moved to Catalina Island for a job. There we met a couple from the Calvary Chapel ministry who held a Bible study in their home. After years of spiritual starvation, I finally started learning about my faith and getting fellowship and encouragement. We found churches in the various places where we lived to grow and learn in during our civilian and military life. Experiences of service in teaching Sunday school, leading Vacation Bible School, leading a youth dance choir, and homeschooling my children fed and strengthened me richly.

Then disaster struck as my husband's problems led him to leave home with our oldest son, leaving me, my daughter, and the younger son. The marital problems we never seemed to be able to solve left me bewildered. My pastor at the time became senile and had to be retired. He could not help me. I drifted away from the church, sometimes visiting one here and there, but never seeming to find good Bible preaching and teaching and the presence of the Holy Spirit. But God did not abandon me, and during this time I found some help to get more healthy in twelve step groups.

Five years later I met nudism and Lee on the same night. Almost two years later, we moved to Lake Como. We visited a few churches around here, without finding what we were looking for. They just didn't seem to be a good fit for us or the right place to be. Then I met Christian naturism. What a perfect match. Lake Como seemed to have everything we needed except a church. The Bible study we started here accelerated my spiritual growth like nothing

else ever had, and God continues to amaze, challenge, and astound us with the work he is doing here in Garden of Eden Church.

Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation

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¹ This idea from Jeff Vanderstelt, [*Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 60-69.