

A Love Story: Your Story

Acts 10:1-6(NKJV) ¹There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ²a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. ³About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" ⁴And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?" So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

Series Introduction

Love stories involve people. A man falls in love with a woman, the woman falls in love with the man and then they are in love. We have all heard stories of how a man's love caused him to put his life on the line and conquer insurmountable obstacles to be with the woman he loved. Or we have heard the stories of the sacrifices of parents who loved their children in ways others can't explain. These stories inspire us and make us want to love and be loved like that.

The greatest love story ever told is the story of God's love for us. It's the story of a God who loved a people who were not worthy of his love. And still, he loved us so, that he sacrificed his life to save us. The beauty of the story is that it is still being written today. Each of us has a story to add to the praise and glory of our God.

For four weeks, we will explore God's love story. His love story has four chapters; Your Story, Their Story, His Story, and Our Story. It is my hope that God's love story will inspire each of us to be used by God to share the story with others. Today we will begin with Your Story. In this message I will share my story, Peter's story, and your story. Then we will conclude for the day.

My Story

I grew up in the church. As far back as I can remember, I was in church. It was never an option. In my grade school years I attended First Baptist Church Hooper City, in Birmingham. Rev. J. E. Davidson was the pastor. That's where I learned about God. I attended Sunday School, sang in the choir, served as an usher, participated in plays and Vacation Bible School. That's where I was baptized up in the choir loft.

In my junior high and high school years I worshipped between three churches. I still attended First Baptist Hooper City, but I would go visit my grandparents more on the weekends and went to church with them. So I attended First Baptist East Lake where Rev. Craig was pastor with one grandmother and Galilee Missionary Baptist Church where Rev. Dr. Samuel Matt was pastor.

Eventually I moved my membership to Galilee. There, I served as a Junior Usher and eventually became president and I was the Junior Superintendent of Sunday School. Between the three churches I attended, I don't remember missing church. I know I did miss some Sundays but I can't remember why.

After all of those years of being in church it still surprises me today that the church wasn't in me. Out side of church I wasn't faithful to God. I sinned just like everyone else I knew. When I got to college I virtually forgot about God and did my own thing. Sunday became the day I recuperated from whatever I did on Saturday night. It wasn't until God spoke to me at an Auburn University Gospel Choir concert at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church, in Auburn that I gave my life to him. That Wednesday night, I was saved.

Since that day, I can't tell you how many times I let God down. I can't tell you how many times I sinned or how many times I disappointed him. I can't tell you how many times he spoke to me and used me to touch the lives of others in spite of myself. There are very few of you in here today who have committed sins that I haven't committed at some point in my life. There isn't enough time for me to recall it all.

And yet, God still called me to be a husband to a wife who deserved better. He has given me a chance to be a father to children who don't get enough of my time. He has called me to be a minister of his gospel even when I have fallen over and over again. Every moment of my life makes up my story. My story isn't perfect, but my story is precious to God. Every day of my life, God is using me to add to his love story.

Peter's Story

Peter had a story too. In our passage of scripture today, we find that God is about to perform the miracle of salvation in the life of Cornelius. So he sends an angel to instruct Cornelius to send for Peter.

Sometimes we think God can only use perfect people. We believe God can only use people who have it all together. But Peter has a story that reveals to us how God is no respecter of persons. God will use anyone who is willing.

You see, Peter didn't have it all together. When we review his life, we find that his story is full of highs and lows. First of all, when we look at the scriptures, Peter always has something to say. That can be good if you always say the right thing, but Peter seemed to always put his foot in his mouth.

Matthew 16:21-23(NKJV)

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

In one verse Peter is used to reveal Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. A few verses later, Jesus is calling him Satan. If I were trying to send someone to Cornelius, it probably wouldn't be Peter. Peter was seriously flawed. It was Peter who had forgiveness issues. He was the one who asked how often should I forgive my brother?

Peter had material issues. It was Peter who said "Lord we gave up everything to follow you. What will we get in return?" Peter is the one who promises to never leave Jesus but Jesus tells him before the cock crows he would deny Jesus three times. Peter had prayer issues. When Jesus was praying in the garden he found the disciples sleeping but he spoke directly to Peter and said "you couldn't pray with me one hour?"

Peter had violence issues. He cut off the ear of one of the men who came to take Jesus. Peter had a foul mouth. He cursed out the people in the courtyard when they asked if he knew Jesus. Peter had commitment issues and he abandoned and denied Jesus.

Peter didn't always have it right. Peter didn't know as much as some of the others. Peter wasn't as committed as some of the others. Peter didn't have as much self control as some of the others. Peter didn't have it all together. Peter's story had many ups and many downs. But God's story of love, grace, and mercy was written on every page of Peter's life.

When the enemy wanted to sift Peter as wheat, Jesus prayed for him. When Peter's faith grew weak while walking on the water, he began to sink but Jesus lifted him up. When Jesus was with the disciples by the sea shore, he gave Peter a chance to reaffirm his commitment by telling him to feed his sheep. When God sent the Holy Spirit, he allowed Peter to preach the first church sermon. When God needed a witness to share his story with Cornelius, he sent for Peter.

Your story is no different.

Your Story

If you are alive today and have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of your life and Savior of your soul, you have story to tell. In God's eyes, you have a story that's worth telling.

God knows who you are.

Acts 10:5-6(NKJV) ⁵Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

You are not a number with God. You are unique and special. You are not just another Simon. You are who God made you. God loves the world but he also loves you. God loves you enough to know your name. God knows the number of hairs on your head. God knows what you've done and loves you anyway. God is not ashamed of you. God wants to share you with others.

Illustration: Still Wonderful

Irving Berlin was one of America's greatest composers. In addition to familiar favorites such as "God Bless America" and "Easter Parade," he wrote, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," which still ranks as one of the all-time best-selling musical scores. In an interview for the San Diego Union, Don Freedman asked Berlin, "Is there any question you've never been asked that you would like someone to ask you?"

"Well, yes, there is one," he replied. "'What do you think of the many songs you've written that didn't become hits?'" He said "My reply would be that I still think they are wonderful."

Your story is still wonderful to God. You may not be a hit but you are still his child. Your story may have flaws and tales of defeats. Your story may have times when you disappointed God or failed to please him. But he knows this about you already. He knows who you are and he knows where you are.

God knows where we are.

Acts 10:5-6(NKJV) ⁵Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”

God knows what city you are in. God knows who you are with where you are. God knows what’s going on where you are. God knows where you live. He knows where you abide and where you spend your time. God knows exactly where you are at all times.

God knows where you are physically.
God knows where you are spiritually.
God knows where you are emotionally.
God knows where you are mentally.
God knows where you are socially.
God knows where you are financially.

Psalms 139:7-16(NKJV) ⁷ Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*. ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall [£]fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me; ¹² Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You*. ¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I will praise You, for [£]I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.

God knows where you are at all times. There is no place where you can hide from him. There is no way we can get to a place where God can’t find us or see us. It doesn’t matter if you are in Joppa or Tuskegee, God knows where you are.

He knows where you are because he has a plan for you.

God knows his plan for you.

We don’t always realize it, but God is behind the scenes working his plan for us. Put yourself in Peter’s shoes. Here he is at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea

shore. While he is going about his life, he has no idea that God is talking about him to Cornelius.

Peter is not aware of it but God has a plan for them to meet. God had already determined the day and time. God had already planned the travel arrangements. God had already planned who would be in attendance. God already knew what the end result would be. God knew that Peter's story was the right story to fulfill his purpose that day.

Your story is no different. God has a plan for your story.

There are people who are looking at their lives trying to find meaning.

There are people searching for answers.

There are people in this world who are crying out for help from God.

There are people who are yearning for an abundant life.

There are people who are longing to have a relationship with God but are afraid of the church.

There are people looking for answers.

There are people looking for hope.

There are people who are trying to make a change but don't know how.

There are people who are desperately searching for something to believe in.

There are people who are questioning if God really loves them.

Song Example: You're Loved

On his album entitled "The Power of One" Israel Houton has a song called "You're Loved". In this song he talks about making bad choices and wishing you could take them back. He talks about how the words of others can hurt. He talks about having to overcome hard circumstances like missing fathers in the home. He talks about how people will say we won't amount to anything. Then he sings the chorus:

"You are loved no matter what you do, no matter where you're from or where you're going. You are loved no matter what they said, no matter what they did. You gotta know this; you are loved." In the bridge he adds "We've got to come together. It may be stormy weather. Don't buy that junk they sell ya'. Love will make it better."

You're loved and God has a plan to show the world his love through you. It doesn't matter what you've done or where you've been. You are loved by God and your story is precious to him. God wants to tell his story through you. God wants to send you to tell your story of how he loves you and accepts you and has changed you.

God wants to share your story of how he has cleansed you.

God wants to share your story of how he healed your body.

God wants to tell your story of how he forgave you time and time again.
God wants to tell your story of how he has given you new mercies every morning.

He desires to tell your story of how you were able to overcome.
Your story is a story of victory.
Your story is a story of hope.
Your story is a story of restoration.
Your story is a story of healing.
Your story is a story of deliverance.
Your story is a story of love so strong that God would send his Son to die for you.
There is not a better story to tell than your story.
There is no better example of God's grace than the grace he has showered on you.
There is no greater story to tell than the story of how God saved your soul.

Conclusion:

Romans 5:6-8(NKJV) ⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The greatest story ever told is a love story. It's not the story of a man and a woman. It's not the story of a parent and child. It's the story of a God who had a love so strong he would sacrifice his most precious gift to redeem a world that was lost. That story isn't over. It is still being written today. Every day we live, we are experiencing the love of God.

So share your story. It may be filled with drama and suspense but share your story anyway. Your story may be filled with trials and tribulations but God has a plan for someone to hear it.