

A Love Story: Our Story

Acts 10:44-48(NKJV) ⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. ⁴⁵And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” ⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Series Introduction

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 the month of February we are exploring God's love story. His love story has four chapters; Your Story, Their Story, God's 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. In the first week we began with Your Story. Then we talked about Their Story. Last week we shared God's Story. Today we will conclude this series with Our Story.

Our Story begins with Salvation

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At this point in our passage of scripture, Peter has shared his story with Cornelius. Cornelius has shared his story with Peter. And now, Peter has shared God's story with everyone in Cornelius' house. So we have Peter's story, Cornelius' story, and God's story all coming together. What happens next is God pours out his spirit on Cornelius and the other gentiles in his home. Salvation has come to the house of Cornelius because of God's love story.

When the people received the Holy Spirit, Peter recognized a change. He recognized they gentiles (who they had no dealings with) had become just like the Jewish believers. “Them” and “they” became “we” and “us”. Their story became our story.

People are saved one **person** at a time. It’s not one **sermon** at a time. God speaks to them through the messages but the strongest sermon is in the pews. I believe our stories could be more powerful if we understood how we are all related in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-29(NKJV) ²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

When we accept Christ, we are all sealed with the Holy Spirit. We are all brought into one family by spiritual adoption. We are all children of God. We are all bought with a price. We are all brought out of darkness into his marvelous light. We are all part of one body in Christ Jesus. We all have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

In the body of Christ, there are no barriers. There are no divisions. There are no Jews and Greeks, slaves or free, male or female, rich or poor, liked and disliked, better or worse. There are no big I’s and little you’s in the church. We are all heirs according to the promise. The ground is level at the cross.

We need to understand this because sometimes we make the mistake of isolating ourselves and insulating ourselves in the church.

We isolate because we don’t want others to know our business.
We isolate because we don’t like the way certain people dress.
We isolate because we don’t want to be seen with certain kinds of people.
We isolate because we don’t want anyone to point out our flaws.
We isolate because we believe some people are beneath us.

We have members in all of our churches who have isolated themselves from the rest of the church. They stay in their own little corners and never truly interact with the other members.

But that’s not all.

We insulate to protect ourselves from the church. We are padded because we are bracing for impact.

We insulate because people might talk about us.
We insulate because we don't want to get our feelings hurt.
We insulate because we don't trust our brothers and sisters.
We insulate because we are insecure in our faith walk.

Some of you have been truly hurt by people in the church. I don't want to discount or down play those feelings. Some of you have had members talk about you behind your backs. Some of you have had people say some brutal things about your children. Some of you have been criticized about the way you dress. Some of you have been scorned by people who voted you out of positions and you were hurt. Some of you were hurt because the leadership made certain decisions that you didn't agree with. Some of you were hurt because you felt like those people took your money and did something with it that you didn't like.

People in the church have let you down.
People in the church wouldn't help you when you needed help.
People in the church rubbed your sins in your face instead of helping to restore you.
People in the church ostracized you because of what you did.
People in the church never accepted you because of your past.

I know these things happened. I know that they hurt. I pray that all of you will allow yourselves to heal from those wounds.
Here is something I want to teach you that will help you handle those situations in the future.

“Our story involves you, me, and God.”

You and I might not be able to get along without God. God is the anchor that holds us. He is the person who helps us put things in the right perspective. We do everything as unto the Lord and not to men. We love because he first loved us. We give because he has commanded us to give. We serve because God wants us to be a blessing to others. We overcome sin because God wants us to be holy as he is holy.

We need to remember that the Holy Spirit lives in each of us. When we deal with each other, we need to remember God. When we work together we need to remember that we are doing the will of God.

God gives us the ability to stop looking at ourselves and see a greater purpose in our lives together. He is able to give us understanding when we don't know what to do.

God gives us a way to evaluate our feelings and learn to trust him for our safety and security.

Regardless of what our stories have been, God is able to rewrite the story.

Our Story is perfected with discipleship.

⁴⁸And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Cornelius and the people at his house knew they needed to learn more from Peter. They asked Peter to stay a few days.

How many of you would like to spend a few days with Peter?

How many of you will admit you could benefit from spending time with a more mature believer? How many of you could get your questions answered if you could just spend a little time with a spiritual leader?

Some of our young ladies have questions about raising kids. Some of our young men have questions about loving their wives. People want to know how to pray better. Folks want to know how to forgive and get over their hurts. Everybody needs to know something. What we are saying is we need discipleship. We need people who have overcome to show us how to overcome. We need people who have learned how to trust God to show us how to trust God.

Let's take a look at the great commission.

Matthew 28:19-20(NKJV) ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.

Jesus commanded us to teach new believers to "observe all things" that he commanded. That means we must not only tell new believers how to be Christians, we must show them how.

Discipleship is about binding others to us so we can show them how to have faith.

Gary Cobb from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association defined discipleship this way.

Discipleship is the process of giving continued attention to a new Christian until he/she is daily walking with God, is at home in the local church, is developing his/her full potential for Christ, is making disciples for Jesus Christ, and helping to build Christ's church.

Doesn't that sound familiar?

The Purpose of Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

To communicate the Gospel Message: compelling people to commit to membership, seek spiritual Maturity, display evidence of authentic Worship, engage in Christian Service, and fulfill their purpose in life Missions.

Making disciples is what we are all about. How do we go about doing that? I'm glad you asked.

1 Peter 5:1-4(NKJV) ¹The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but [£]willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; ⁴and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Peter admonishes the elders to shepherd the flock of God. The King James Version says "taking the oversight thereof".

When a shepherd takes oversight of sheep, he is able to develop the sheep in a way it won't develop on it's own in the wild. Within the confines of the herd, a shepherd can ensure the sheep eat properly to grow fuller. He can feed the sheep in a way that increases the amount of wool the sheep can produce. Through breeding the shepherd can cause his herd to grow stronger and better in quality. Once the sheep are in the fold, the shepherd can make the sheep better.

Peter likens the church to a sheep fold and tells the leaders, the elders to shepherd the flock of God. What he is saying is, get involved in their lives. Get closer to them and lead and guide them.

I am the product of discipleship by three people. The first was Chauncey McGlatheworthy.

Chauncey taught me how to feed myself. Without Chauncey deliberately seeking me out and making sure I spent time with him, I would have easily just gone back out into the world. My salvation was able to stick because he acknowledged my salvation, then taught me how to read, pray, and live for God. He shared stories about how God had made a difference in his life. He shared his struggles trying to live holy on a college campus. He showed me a picture of godliness using his own life. I only had Chauncey pouring into me for about three months. But when he left, I was able take his place teaching Bible study.

The second was William McCain. Cain taught me how to prepare a meal for others.

I have only met two other people in my life who knew scripture as well as Cain. The depths of his knowledge and his understanding of scripture were off the charts. But Cain was also a powerful and life changing teacher. Some of you say you enjoy the way I make the word plain. Thank God and thank William McCain. It was God who led Cain to challenge me and make the statement that governs my preaching. He said "if you can't break it down so that a five year old can understand it, then you don't know it." Cain was all about service in ministry. He always encouraged us to do what we could for God. At least four of the guys in that group are in the ministry today.

The third was Frank Centrallo. Centrallo taught me how to run a restaurant.

When I got to Friendship I could already cook. I had been teaching the Bible for almost four years before I came here. But what I didn't know was how to truly function in the established church. I knew how to handle myself as a member but not as a minister. There are many expectations of how I have to conduct myself and what my role is in the church. Everybody has an idea of what it means to be a minister and a pastor, but nobody knows how it affects your life and family. Sometimes church life can be so disturbing and so limiting that Andy Stanley once said "some of us have to leave church to do ministry."

Who is going to teach you how to minister to four different generations in every sermon?

Who is going to teach you how to honor the past and still press toward the future?

Who is going to teach you how to maneuver in and out of the circles of ministers locally, in the district, in the state, and even on the national level?

Who teaches how to be active in the community while maintaining your integrity?

Who teaches how to lead people who sometimes don't want to be led?

Without somebody to disciple me I wouldn't be who I am today.

Without someone to challenge my faith, I would still be very carnal and worldly in my lifestyle.

Without somebody teaching me how to look at the scriptures I wouldn't be able to rightly divide the word of truth.

It took men who were willing to pour themselves out to me to make me a better Christian.

It took men who were willing to sacrifice their time and energy to make me strong in my faith.

There were men in various stages of my Christian life who prayed for me.

They helped to shape me.

They helped to mold me.

They rebuked me.

They chastised me.

They challenged me.

They held me accountable.

All of us need somebody to show us the way. We all need somebody to help us mature in our relationships with God.

We all need somebody to ask us the tough questions.

We all need somebody to look in on our decision making.

We all need somebody to challenge our faith until we are able to stand on our own.

We need each other. We need to lean on each other sometimes.

We need people who know about our situations who can pray for us.

We need people who can lend us a helping hand.

We need people who can warn us when we are going astray.

We need people who can restore us in the fear of the Lord.

We need people who can give us a word to carry us through our tough times.

We need people who are willing to stay by us when we are hurt and crying.

We need people who are going to love us and hate our sin.

We desperately need people in our lives who will drive us back to God and point us toward heaven so we can have all that God has ordained for us.

I'm glad that God sent Jesus to show us the way.