

Recently, when I shared my story at CR, I began with my father's story. Abandoned as an infant he lived in fear of rejection for the rest of his life so he worked hard to succeed and drank hard to dull any possible feelings of failure. He passed on to his three sons two unspoken rules: don't fail and don't feel (just in case you break rule #1). All of us have a story and it doesn't start at the moment of birth. We are born into someone else's story. Our family story often informs our decisions in life. For example, children of alcoholics often become alcoholics. Children of abusive parents often abuse their children. I was sad Friday when I read about the son of Dana Plato a child actress on the T.V. show "Different Strokes." Ten years ago she took her life. This past Thursday her son took his. One of the best ways to break out of destructive patterns is to get a new story.

The Bible is God's story. We are all born into this story. It is critical to understand this story because it answers the ultimate questions in life like, "Where did I come from? How did it get so crazy? Who will fix it? Where am I going?" Our Heavenly Father has given us answers to these questions – they're hidden in plain sight. More importantly He invites us to be part of His story. This glorious story ends happily ever after.

So let's begin at the beginning; Genesis. Genesis does not read like a scientific tech manual, it reads like a story. Life is not a mathematical equation, life is story. The story begins with God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Gen. 1:1 is a declaration with no explanation. Moses spends no time at all arguing for the existence of God. God is assumed. As the story begins I want to point out four early clues about the nature of God and how God addresses our deepest needs.

1. **God speaks...so we can understand.** The first indication of what God is like is found in the phrase, "**Then God said.**" (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14) God speaks. God, who existed in the beginning, chose to reveal Himself and communicate with His creation. The personal God wants to be known. If God chose to remain silent we would know as much about Him as an ant knows about the people who live outside the ant hole.

Notice the power of God's word. His word turns chaos into order. The first three days He forms what is formless. He speaks and transforms the chaotic formlessness into perfect temporal and spatial order...Light (3), the sea and sky (6), the fertile earth (9). The second three days He fills what is empty. Lights to govern day and night (14), creatures to govern the sea and sky (20), creatures to fill the earth (24).

Just in case we didn't get the memo God's greatest word to man is described in **John 1:1-3**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being...And the Word became flesh," says **John 1:14**, "and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." God paid a visit to earth to make sure we heard Him. God is invisible. Jesus is God's incarnate word, His word with skin on.

John 1:18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained (exegeted) *Him*."

God is personal and wants to be known. How do we know? If you don't want to initiate a

relationship with someone there is an easy way to avoid it; just don't talk to them. If they call, don't answer. If they write, don't respond. Your actions are clearly saying you do not want to pursue a relationship. God not only speaks to us but...

2. God calls...so we belong. There is a second clue about God in chapter one that gives us insight into the God narrative, "**And He called...**" 1:5-10. God's calling reveals more important aspects of His character. First, calling implies authority. In the Ancient Near East the one who names demonstrates authority over the one named. It's not so different in our day. When a child is born the parent has the privilege of naming their child. Before you leave the hospital someone will ask, "What do you plan to call your child?" So God calls the first man Adam, then God confers authority on Adam by bringing the animals to him to see what Adam will call them. (2:19) God then allows Adam to name the first woman Eve and together they are to rule over every other living thing.

God's calling also imparts identity. He called the light day and the darkness night distinguishing between the two and describing their function. All this is prelude to God calling out a people who will pursue His purposes. He calls a man named Abram and renames him. He calls him Abraham. From the loins of Abraham God calls out a people. They shall be called Israel. Whatever God calls something it is. If God calls it "wrong" nothing can make it "right." If God calls it immoral even a 6-3 vote by the Supreme Court cannot make it moral. The essence of confession - saying the same thing God says.

God calls us His children to accomplish His purposes. **Romans 8:28-30** ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. The early church was called "ekklesia," the "called out ones." And what do you suppose Jesus calls you? Did you know He has a name for you? It is "friend." No matter what you have been called by anyone else, what matters is how you are called by Jesus. He calls you to be His disciple and then He calls you "friend." **John 15:15** ¹⁵ "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."

God has called you out of the darkness and into the light and He placed you into the company of the called out ones called the church. You belong to the family of God.

3. God breathes...so we experience life. When you get to Genesis 2:4 it reads like a repeat of chapter 1. Some have taught that there are two accounts of creation written by two different authors. But the beauty of these early verses is that Moses begins with a wide angle lens in chapter 1 and then, beginning with 2:4, repeats the story from an up close and personal perspective. In fact, chapter 1 refers to God as Elohim while chapter 2 uses the personal name for God, Yahweh.

"Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." **Gen. 2:7.** We are not told what Adam was

before God breathed into his nostrils but the implication is that God formed him but he was not really alive. The breath of God imparted life to Adam.

The breath of God imparts life to the scriptures. **2 Timothy 3:16**, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

John 20:21-22, “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” God can breathe life into you or your dying marriage or your hopeless situation.

4. God rests...so we have a destiny...Gen. 2:2-3. God blessed what He brought into existence and then he rested. Why? Is He worn out? I would think creating a universe and everything in it would take a lot out of you! He rests not because He is tired but because He is finished.

Wherever God rules, rest is His reward. In fact, Rev. 14:11, 13 tell us that in the end believers will rest and unbelievers will have no rest. When man became disconnected from God one of the first gifts forfeited was rest. Man became fearful and anxious and restless. He no longer rested in God’s rule but wore himself out looking for places to hide. In the NT the Sabbath, which was to reflect God’s rest, was perverted by religious leaders. **“What was meant to serve people ends up demanding tribute from them. What was meant to restore people was turned into their drudgery. What was meant to be a gift turned into a kind of punishment. What was intended to be our handmaiden became our despot...and now we’re all tired. Now we dream of a day when our work will be done, when we can finally wash the dust of it from our skin, but that day never comes.” Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, pp. 219-220**

The Bible proclaims that day will come. God “sanctified” the seventh day as a pattern for what was to come. There scriptures, promise rest, celebration and thankful enjoyment. **Hebrews 4:9-10**says, **“So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.”** God’s people will enjoy a permanent rest. The God who created the universe and everything in it, the God who created you, has also initiated a plan for our redemption and restoration. You cannot earn His favor anymore than you can create the universe. But God, in His infinite wisdom and His almighty power has made it possible for us to possess the righteousness of Christ and to enter His rest. How can I find rest?

Jesus is the Sabbath rest promised to those who follow Him. He invites us to enter into His rest,

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28 - 12:1

Our world experiences constant chaos. Why is that? It is because God speaks but humans refuse to listen. God calls but fallen man contradicts God’s assessment and redefines

everything. God breathes but man refuses to inhale the grace of God. God rests but we work ourselves to the bone trying to counteract our own sinful choices and create peace and prosperity by our own cleverness. The narrative of this world is that we must do all we can to alleviate the pain, chaos, confusion, violence, and uncertainty that dogs us every day. It's up to us to make a better world.

The narrative of God is that it's up to Him to take us to a better world. Only God can rescue us

“Give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” **Colossians 1:12-13**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen. **Galatians 1:3-5**