

NDH 10 – Little Stories, Big Stories, the Gospel Story

We are at the end of our series, The Need of the Hour. We have identified four great needs in the world:

The world desperately needs:

1. Christians who know the Truth – this gives stability to those who are unsure about what to turn to in life
2. Christians who change their lives based upon the Truth – this gives hope to those without hope and people can see there is a better way of living.
3. Christians who apply the Truth, not just to their personal lives, but to everything in life based upon the Creator and His creation. They understand what it means to have a worldview and apply that worldview to life – this provides a comprehensive set of concepts to guide every facet of life. It answers all the big questions.
4. Christians who apply the Truth to their Story – this gives purpose, shows what the purpose of history and life is, and helps people fit in with God’s plans.

I want to talk with you today about changing the stories of the world.

First, we must recognize two levels of story in the world. I call these micro stories and macro stories. Micro stories are the small stories people live by. They are personal and they relate to their life experiences, the choices they have made, and the values they live by. Macro stories are the big stories that control families, communities, and nations. Most people in the world are connected to some type of macro story and most people live a mixture of the two. First, let’s look at the micro stories of the world. Most people will have some type of Significance Story. By this, I mean that people will live for some type of goal or purpose. I have discovered four of them. They are:

1. Possessions – people focus on acquiring the necessary things of life. Nothing, of course is wrong with this. But often, the story takes a strange twist and people start living for the accumulation of possessions and become controlled by the desire to have more.
2. Power – people focus on getting ahead of others. Again, this does not have to be wrong. Some people are natural leaders with a highly competitive nature. But the twist comes when getting ahead means putting others down. In its worst form, some people become tyrants. It may be tyranny in the home or tyranny of a nation.
3. Pleasure – people focus on the enjoyment of life. God has given us all things to enjoy. He is a God of pleasure and He created us to enjoy the pleasures of His creation. The twist in this story is when people place the enjoyment of created things above pleasing God. Created things become central and people become swallowed up by a never ending thirst for entertainment.
4. Prestige – people want to be known, affirmed, valued, and recognized, and this does not have to be sinful. But people often cross a line where one side involves having legitimate relationships and affirmation and the other side descends down a steep slope toward a never ending hunger for attention.

Everyone has a mixture of these four drives and how we go about fulfilling these drives creates the values and the story by which we live. People can fulfill these natural drives in a God-pleasing way, or they can fulfill them in selfish, sinful ways and their story then becomes twisted and complex with consequences that bring pain, confusion, and a search for a remedy from the pain and confusion.

Many also live out what I call Wound Stories. Wound stories come from the consequences of the wrong things others do to us. The wrong things could be words or actions. The things parents or peers say to children can penetrate deeply into that small soul and fill it with poisonous lies such as feelings of unworthiness, shame, worthlessness, and contamination. Often, these feelings will rise to a place of domination over a person's personality and will highly influence the choices a person makes and the direction a person takes in life. Sometimes, people experience unspeakable atrocities that set them on a course that results in a sad, painful tale. Just as with the Significance stories, people seek for relief from the misery of their wounds and they can turn to a thousand different remedies that promise help.

Every person is a jumble of Significance stories gone bad and Wound stories. Layer upon layer of stories fills them and sometimes people are only faintly aware that they are living these stories. Many are like fish in the ocean that are not aware of the water in which they swim. Some have lived within their stories for so long they may now take them for granted and believe them to be the reality they must live by or the "true story" for their lives.

I believe this is what Ephesians 2:2 is about; unbelievers walk according to the course of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air. The world and the devil have woven a destructive web of lies that appeals to a person's desire for significance or healing from a wound. Sometimes, people live in them so long that they have made an uneasy peace with their web of lies and trudge through life as best as they can.

Then, we come along with the Gospel with the goal of cutting through the layers of their false stories with a different Story. Our task is to intersect their false story with the True Story and to lead them out of their web of lies into the freedom that God provides.

Most people in the world also live by Macro stories. Macro stories are the large stories that can weld people into communities, tribes, and nations. Or, they can dominate a culture so that a highly individualized culture, like the West, can have a certain way of thinking that influences and shapes it. I would like to mention three Macro stories that are wielding great influence in the world today.

1. The Secular Story – this story says that peoples religion or faith is OK, as long as they keep it private and to themselves. They must never impose, in any way, their views upon others. The reason for this is that all religions are matters of faith and opinion and not rooted in empirical knowledge. They are incapable of being proven by scientific measures and one grasps them only by a "leap of faith." This does not mean they are invalid or even wrong but only that one's story has just as much validity as another's. What is true for you may not be true for me, and vice versa. Therefore, while I am happy that you have "a truth", I have my own which probably differs from yours, and we'll just all agree to disagree and keep our faith private. We will leave matters of government and social ills to the political and social leaders who make their policy decision

from the facts of science and reality. That's the secular story.

2. The Mysticism Story – this story finds fertile ground in the Secular Story. If religion is a private matter with little to no bearing on society, then the best form of religion is the eastern form where a person discovers his link with an other-worldly divine force. A person need not attend highly structured religious communities because the goal is not a social goal but only a personal goal. The goal is not the restructuring of earth but the escape from earth to ascend to higher levels of spirituality in “heavenly realms” be this “heaven”, “nirvana,” or some kind of “astral plane.” The goal is the full realization of one's own divinity and the merging of the person into the great Oneness of the divine. Buddhism, Hinduism, and all New Age beliefs are different ways of advancing this story in the world.
3. The Islam Story – this story, strangely, cuts across the grain of the first two, and I believe it does because of its concreteness. People can grow tired of too much privatization and mysticism and look for something that has order and discipline for this world. Islam presents itself as the solution for this world's problems and as the culmination of God's great story. The one true God, the creator of the heavens and the earth has always spoken through prophets. His next to last prophet was Jesus and the final prophet is Mohammed who spoke the ultimate words of God for the world. All should heed these words, submit to Allah, and perform the five pillars of Islam. One day the entire world will become Muslim. So they say.

Today, two billion are Muslims and billions more hold to a form of mysticism, and at least hundreds of millions have bought into the Secular Story.

When we add this layer of a big story on top of every person's micro story which is a jumble of small stories of Significance and Wound stories, we can feel overwhelmed. How can we hope to penetrate into people's hearts? Such a task can feel overwhelming. It feels that way because it is that way. But this is why Paul asked believers to pray for him in the preaching of his gospel, that he would make it clear to people. And this is why Paul's statement in Romans 1:16 is so powerful – I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is *the power of God* for salvation.

God's Story is more powerful than any other story in the world, and when we learn to present it humbly, clearly, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we will find our Story penetrating and replacing the false stories in which people find themselves.

God loves the world and He intends for every person to hear His Story. He said He would be with us and that He would give us the power of the Holy Spirit. He also commissioned us to go into all the world and to make disciples, which implies that we can change the stories of people by His grace.

This is the need of the hour in the Church – the need is for God's people to learn the One Story of the Bible and to take that Story to the world which is living by false stories. The need of the Hour is for God's people to live by a biblical worldview. The need of the Hour is for God's people to live faithfully according to the Word and be a bright light for Him. The need of the Hour is for God's people to return to

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the truth of His word. May God bless you and help you to be a person who fills the needs of world in this hour in which we live.