

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

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ARTICLE

THE STORY WE LIVE IN

We all live inside of a story. Some pay attention to it, while others do not. As followers of Jesus, we ought to live into the story of God and His people (Kingdom), but if we reflect a little, we might be very surprised to see how much we are actually influenced by and living into a different story – the story of the way of the world.

Do you remember *The Karate Kid* movie back in the '80s. 'Daniel-son,' the student, is doing chores around the yard for Mr. Miyagi, the teacher. 'Paint the fence' was one, for which Daniel had to use a certain motion. 'Wax the car' was a second, again using a particular motion. Daniel also had to wash the cars and scrub the deck as well – and it was a huge deck.

Daniel was getting more angry by the hour. He explodes at the teacher that he is nothing more than a slave for him. The scene is filled with incredible tension. Miyagi begins to relieve tension through showing Daniel that he had the wrong perspective or story. When Miyagi shows him that what he has learned, Daniel is wide-eyed. He had been living in the wrong story and lacked discernment as to what was really happening.

Many live like this. Convinced they are living with the right perspective, they pay little attention to the reality that they may well have been seduced into the comfort of another story. This other story is not from the king, but from the deceiver.

Since WWII, those in the West have been living into what Alan Roxburgh has called “the 75-year story.” Jacques Elul, Phylis Tickle, and many more have suggested the same. Coming out of the enlightenment, secularism has painted an attractive picture for us. In the technological age, we have lived into a story that embraces the idea that “if we do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, we will get the right results.” Bigger is better, and efficiency is supreme. But many are now beginning to see that this is just not true. It relies on mankind's agency and not God's and presumes that we have done a masterful job on a strategic plan. Many of us are so deeply entrenched within this story that we do not even recognize the difference between the technological story and that of God's Kingdom.

It is crucial that we explore which story we are living in. As we help to disciple the people of God, the last thing we want is to be captive to a culture that is shaping us, not in ways that look more and more like Jesus, but in ways that actually bear false witness to Him.

I would invite you to explore both the 75-year story and also ways in which we may have inadvertently been living inside of it for years without even knowing. For more on this 75-year story, see the resources below.

STORY

“ANNA” AND THE KING (AND HER NEIGHBOUR)

The Regional Ministers and the Executive Team were recently in Romania, where I had the privilege to preach three times on a particular Sunday – morning, afternoon, and evening. The morning and evening gatherings were full of people excited about their faith, and I was greatly encouraged to be in a place I had not been for almost forty years, since before the fall of communism. But it was the afternoon gathering that made my day.

While driving, the pastor/driver was painting a picture of what I would experience. It was a smaller and older congregation that had once been a vibrant church, pastored by many well-known Romanian pastors. He was beginning to make excuses for what he was asking me to do – preach for 45 minutes – in the context he was asking me to do it in.

I arrived, as did the congregation – all five of them. The average age was close to 80. Preaching for 45 minutes was the furthest thing from my mind, but the pastor kept encouraging me. Hmm. I needed a new plan. So I sat down and asked the congregation to tell me their story of how they met Jesus and how He had made a difference in their lives. That was one of the best things I have done in ministry for a long time. Any of the five stories would be worth retelling, but it was Anna’s story that had a huge impact on me. This delightful woman in her eighties told of how over thirty years ago she had been sick and taken to hospital. She was likely going to die.

Anna had a neighbour who had deeply impressed her. She learned that this person was a Christ follower, even in spite of the communist system that had been in place for so long. When Anna got sick, it was this neighbour who took the time to go to the hospital to visit her. Things were not looking good for Anna.

That is when the neighbour prayed for her to get well. The doctors had not been optimistic, but now that she had been prayed for, Anna started to rally. The neighbour continued to pray and to share the good news of the King and His Kingdom. One night, Anna prayed to God and asked that He spare her life. She wanted to follow Him.

Anna lived – now both physically and spiritually. She got better and went home. She devoted her life to following Jesus, and one by one her sons and their families began to come to know Jesus. The

grandchildren also believed in Christ, and as of when I got to hear her story, her great-grandchildren also. That Sunday, I got to preach to four generations of Anna's family (they all went to another church I preached at in the morning and the evening). But it was the Spirit of God preaching to me through Anna that was the best that day.

Being a good neighbour can have greater implications than we could ever imagine. Being a good neighbour does have greater consequences than we may ever know.

RESOURCES

1. BOOK – *Pastoral Song* by James Rebanks
2. PODCAST – [Life with God: A Renovaré Podcast – “Dallas Willard – The Role of Faith in Prayer”](#)
3. WORKSHOP – The Tasting Table: This five-session, online workshop invites us to reflect on the story we live in, on biblical examples of how God has worked in times of disruption, and on the kind of leadership we need to invite our people into mission in these disruptive times. Email Cam to sign up: croxburgh@nabconf.org.
 1. Group 1: Fridays – Jan. 17, 24, 31, Feb. 7 and 14
 2. Group 2: Thursdays – Feb. 13, 20, 27 and March 6 and 13
4. ARTICLE – Alan Roxburgh, “The Story We Find Ourselves In.” This article is based on the 75-year story. Feel free to email croxburgh@nabconf.org for a copy of the full article. You will not be disappointed.