

FOREWORD BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

You can
trust God
to write
your *Story*

*Embracing
the Mysteries
of Providence*

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth
& Robert Wolgemuth

FOREWORD

Before you begin . . .

*D*uring a recent trip to Maryland, I drove beyond our family farm to visit the campus of Western Maryland College. I wanted to meander the commons and courtyards of this old Methodist college I originally planned to attend. Had much changed since 1967, when I would've been a freshman? As I wheeled past the brick buildings, I kept thinking, *how different my life would've been had I graduated from here*. My goal was to become a physical therapist, but who knows? Maybe I would've changed my major, left school to marry, or even wandered away from my fledgling Christian faith.

All I know is that Jesus had a much better design for my life. I paused on a hill overlooking the athletic field and smiled. Yes, I got into physical therapy . . . but as a quadriplegic from a diving accident just weeks before my college orientation! *Never, ever did I dream I would come to this school as a visitor in a wheelchair.*

And a very contented visitor. I felt no hint of remorse or regret. Not once did I envy the girls on the athletic field, practicing lacrosse. To be honest, I couldn't wait to get back in the van and continue the drive to our Joni and Friends' Family Retreat just north in the Pennsylvania mountains.

God has made His design for my life abundantly clear—for

the past forty years, I have led a Christian ministry that is reaching for Christ hundreds of thousands of disabled people and their families across the US and around the world. We hold retreats for special-needs families across the globe and deliver thousands of wheelchairs to needy kids with disabilities overseas. To give hope and help to hurting people? I can't think of a happier story that God could've written for my life.

And God is heaven-bent on writing satisfying stories in all our lives. You'll discover that in this remarkable book *You Can Trust God to Write Your Story*. God may design some chapters

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in our lives to be long and delightful; others, far too short, and sometimes painful. But we only see the meaning of our story when it fits into the context of a bigger, far greater story of Jesus Christ Himself. My best life-chapters were not the easy, breezy days of being on my feet; they were the deep ones when I was suffering and groping for the arms of my Savior.

The authors of this book, Robert Wolgemuth and his wife Nancy, could say the same. I met them both decades ago when Nancy Leigh DeMoss was single and focused on her international teaching ministry. Robert was an executive at Word Publishing, happily married with two children. Their stories seemed easy to read and almost predictable. Anyone could easily guess how God would write their future chapters. But then, the mysteries of God's Providence came into

play, forcing them both in uncharted and new directions. Like me, their stories turned out *far* different than originally planned. But that's the glorious part of God's mysterious ways!

So, it's wise to leave our storyline to the best Storyteller of all. If God seems to be writing an unusual story in your life, don't resist His penmanship on the pages of your days. Don't balk against the bumps and bruises He writes into your script. I will be the first to confess that His Providence can, at times, read like a mystery novel, but in the end, His storyline for those who trust Him is *always* wise, specific, and good. Good for you and for others. Best of all, good for the kingdom.

You hold in your hands an amazing book whose title says it all: *You Can Trust God to Write Your Story*. For if you are a follower of Jesus, every day of your life—whether you feel like it or not—is weighted with kingdom purpose, eternal significance, and a royal destiny filled with joy and contentment. Get ready to let my dear friends, Robert and Nancy, help you embrace the mysteries of the Lord's Providence. For when it comes to happy endings, you can't find a better Author than the God of the Bible.

Happy endings are His forte—turn the page, trust Him, and discover it for yourself.

JONI EARECKSON TADA

Joni and Friends International Disability Center

INTRODUCTION

Once Upon a Time

What Makes a Great Story?

People are looking for stories
that really mean something—
stories that are redemptive, inspiring,
and bigger than an individual.

SCOTT HARRISON



Who doesn't love a good story?

When my (Robert's) daughters were little, I'd sometimes take them with me on Saturday morning to pick something up from Home Depot. And during the drive they'd often say, "Daddy, tell us a story." Their favorites were the ones about them when they were very small and the stories of my own growing-up years.

Of course, stories aren't only for children. Whatever our age, we relish being caught up in a good yarn, whether it's told in person, in a good book, or on a screen. Good stories entertain us; they teach us; they engage our imagination and creativity.

They also connect us with God, the original Storyteller and the ultimate Author of our individual life stories.

This is a book filled with stories. They're all true—though in

some cases we've changed names and details to protect people's privacy.

You'll read

- parts of our own stories—some from our growing-up years, others more recent;
- selected scenes from some of our friends' lives, representing various seasons and challenges;
- a few stories of people who lived a long time ago and who continue to inspire us today;
- several accounts of characters found in the Bible, set apart as “interludes” throughout this book. These are real men and women whose lives included unexpected twists and turns and even upheaval at times, just as your journey and ours do.

This is also a book *about* stories. More specifically, it's about the overarching, eternal, often-unseen Story that God is writing in this broken, fallen world. We'll explore what His Story has to do with our individual stories and how it intersects with our unanswered questions and pain.

Before diving into all of that, let's take a moment to rehearse what makes a great story. (Robert: this takes me back to my freshman English class with Miss Kilmer.) For sure, it's more art than science. But behind the beauty and drama of a compelling tale are some essential ingredients. Like unseen two-by-fours inside a wall, they're what make the story stand straight and true.

Let's start with the people in the story . . .

THE CHARACTERS

The Protagonist

Every good story has a protagonist—a character who goes on a journey and is somehow changed. In almost every story, the protagonist is also the main character, the one we focus on from the beginning. And in most stories, the protagonist is also the hero—the one who ends up saving the day. Think the square-jawed Mountie in his scarlet uniform rescuing the damsel in distress or the courageous nurse on the battlefield, dodging mortars and bullets, risking life and limb to save wounded soldiers.

When I was a young boy, weekend television included heroes like Mighty Mouse and Lassie. If this were an audiobook, I'd probably sing, "Here I come to save the day." That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way" or I'd whistle Lassie's theme song. These were heroes who captured my imagination as a child. (If you're too young to remember them, you can find them on YouTube!)

The Antagonist

On the other side of the coin is the bad guy. He's the one that makes the audience boo when his image hits the screen . . . or when his name appears on the page. He's the person who gunks up the story. He makes life miserable for the good guy or those he cares about—or even threatens lives.

Everyone loves to hate this guy.

Other Characters

Most stories involve more than two people, of course, so you will also have different characters playing various roles. They may provide help (a sidekick), motivation (a love interest) for the protagonist, or wisdom to guide him or her along the way. They may contribute to complications or plot turns, and in some cases they may act as a witness or narrator for what happens.

And then beyond the people is . . .

THE PLOT

An Inciting Action

We have the players. Now we need an event, a circumstance, a challenge, or a tragedy that sets the characters in motion. This could be a natural disaster or something caused by other people—perhaps the antagonist. “What are they going to do now?” the reader wonders.

A well-conceived story grabs our attention right from the start, giving us a reason to care about the people we’ve just met. Now something goes wrong, which creates . . .

Conflict

This is where “the plot thickens.” A struggle of some sort is introduced to the narrative. Tension builds between the protagonist and the antagonist, and this is what makes the story riveting. Page turning. It’s what keeps our attention. The more intense the tension, the less likely it is that we’ll be distracted or doze off.

And then all of this comes together so there’s some kind of . . .

Climax and Resolution

This is the place in the story where the conflict comes to a head and something is decided. The hero conquers. The villain stumbles and fails. This is what the adventure has built toward from the beginning. The viewer or reader or listener is satisfied with the outcome, and all that remains is to wrap up some details and unanswered questions.

Now, this may not happen quickly. In fact, quite a lot of story may follow the climax. But once we get to the climax of a story, the resolution is just a matter of time.



Not every story, of course, is as simple and straightforward as we have just outlined. In fact, the bigger the story, the more complicated it's likely to be. Sometimes the protagonist and the hero/heroine will be different characters. Heroes may be flawed, and villains may be misguided or confused rather than evil. Side characters may have their own subplots woven in to add interest or texture to the primary story.

The action may take unpredictable twists and turns. But all of this typically makes a story even more riveting.

Alex and Stephen Kendrick spend their time looking for and telling great stories. You may have seen some of the films these brothers have produced: *Facing the Giants*, *Fireproof*, *Courageous*, *War Room*. We've watched them all and have shed more than a few tears in the process.

In a conversation about what makes a compelling story, Stephen pointed out that if someone tells a story about a man who, say, gets up, has breakfast, goes to work, comes home, has dinner, and goes to bed, everyone says, "That's boring!" No one likes a dull story. We want it to have intrigue, action, conflict, twists and turns, problems to be solved.

But when it comes down to our lives, we tend to think differently. That "boring," tidy, uncomplicated story—no muss, no fuss—is the way most of us want to live. We want our story and the stories of those we love to have predictable, Hallmark movie endings where everything gets tied up neatly in ninety minutes, the good peo-

Situations that seem confusing and chaotic to us are actually plot threads God is weaving together to create a story . . . a beautiful, compelling work of art.

ple fall in love and live happily ever after, and the bad people go away and are never heard from again. So when the unexpected, unwanted twist or turn happens in our own personal life story—when we receive that troubling medical report, open the pink slip, lose the baby, or learn that a friend has been gossiping behind our backs—we may feel disappointed, betrayed, or even devastated.

But God rarely writes neat, tidy, sanitized (boring) stories. In fact, many of the accounts we find in Scripture are pretty messy. The Bible arrests our hearts, changes our lives, and advances His kingdom with stories like Joseph being falsely accused and thrown

into prison for refusing the advances of his boss's wife . . . or Daniel being tossed into a lair of lions because he resisted the king's edict outlawing prayer.

This is no less true in our lives. Situations that seem confusing and chaotic to us are actually plot threads He is weaving together to create a story . . . a beautiful, com-

PELLING work of art. Incidents and events that make no sense at all now will one day make perfect sense—if not in this life, then in heaven—as we see the masterpiece He had in mind all along.



The stories found in this book have protagonists, antagonists, actions, and conflicts. Some have resolution, others not yet. But none of them are finished. God is still writing His story in and through each of us.

Your life and your story actually matter. They have meaning as you view them against the backdrop of God's ultimate Story.

Our hope is that as you read these accounts you'll be encouraged and inspired to trust Him with *your* story. But here's something else that's important to keep in mind: *each of the stories in this book is part of a bigger, grander, eternal Story God is writing.*

And that's true of your story, too.

This should comfort and encourage you—to know that your life is not just a speck drifting on an ocean of time, lost among the billions of other people who have ever lived. Your life and your story actually matter. They have meaning as you view them against the backdrop of God's ultimate Story.

That grand Story is unlike any other ever written.



“In the beginning”—once upon a time, that is, a long time ago, in fact, before there was such a thing as time or anything else, for that matter—“God . . . ” (Gen. 1:1).

This Story opens with God on center stage.

Only God. Apart from Him, nothing. Complete darkness. This is not just a stroll in the country on a moonless night. This is terminal vacancy.

And then a voice. His voice. And for six consecutive days, this voice speaks everything into existence. Mountain ranges and molehills. Stars and sand. Leviathans and lizards. This week of creation—turning nothing into everything—concludes with the forming of a man and a woman.

God's Story continues in a garden.¹ Perfect, pristine beauty. Made for the couple He had created to enjoy unending pleasure and relationship with Himself.

The Protagonist? God Himself. He is the Main Character, the Author, the Hero. This Story is by Him, about Him, and for Him.

Then . . . enter the serpent, the antagonist of all antagonists.

The villain of all villains. His mission is to destroy what God had created, to crush the flawless beauty of the garden (called Eden) and its residents. And the antagonist succeeds in this effort, wreaking havoc not only on the garden and that first couple, but on the entire planet and every human (save One) who would ever set foot on it.

That's the inciting action. And in no time at all, there's conflict. Jealousy between the first two children born to the first parents results in history's first homicide. One brother murders the other and then, like his dad, tries to hide his sin from the Creator.

For the thousands of years that follow, smaller stories unfold inside the grand Narrative. We encounter champions and criminals. Luminaries and losers. Medalists and miscreants.

And then the Protagonist steps into the scene once more. The unseen God who fills heaven and earth becomes visible and is held in a mother's arms. The almighty Creator of all flesh is wrapped in frail flesh. Unto us a Savior is born—the second Adam. And with that birth God's great Story surges toward a climax. This groaning, shackled earth is about to be released from its bondage. History—past, present, and future—is about to be rewritten.

There's a lot more to the story, of course. We are still living in the long resolution of God's great Story, as the plot threads are being tied together and all history is moving toward the final, satisfying ending—that Day when all things will be made new.

No story ever told could compare to God's great Story. None other is as compelling, transforming, or hope-giving.

And your story and our story are part of it.